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## Enhancing the First-year Experience Program for Community College Students: Creating a Cohort Model to Encourage Success, Engagement, and Sense of Belonging

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**Enhancing the First-year Experience Program for Community College Students:  
Creating a Cohort Model to Encourage Success, Engagement, and Sense of  
Belonging**

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Community colleges have a mission to offer academic programs that provide skills training to students in preparation to obtain a job, qualify for a new position or career path, or transfer to a four-year college or university. As such, community colleges across the United States play a critical role in the development of the workforce and the economic vitality of the municipalities they support. Nationally, community colleges have been suffering from declining enrollment, and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has become an enrollment crisis. To combat low enrollment, community colleges must develop innovative methods to retain students through initiatives that support the successful completion of academic goals.

Research data provided by organizations such as the National Center for Education Statistics have established that more than 70% of students who enroll at a community college intend to transfer to a four-year institution, yet only half accomplish that goal. The objective is to determine the best way to increase student completion as the typical community college student needs academic and personal support but also has limited availability to seek available support systems. These students often work full-time or have more than one job as well as obligations or responsibilities at home that compete for their time and attention. Research has revealed that First Year Experience programs not only contribute to higher grades, increased persistence, and increased retention of students but also increase student satisfaction and positivity concerning their college experience.

The research conducted in this study aimed to evaluate a success, engagement, and retention-to-completion strategy by implementing a cohort-driven, 2-semester first-year experience course and identify if it had an impact on at-risk populations. This chapter will provide an introduction by presenting the problem, purpose, research questions, and theoretical framework of the study. The historical background of the problem, the role of the community college, and the local contextual perspective will also be discussed.

### **Problem Statement**

There is a persistent enrollment crisis at community colleges that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Shapiro, 2023). The drops in enrollment from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020, Spring 2020 to Spring 2021, and Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 were much larger than year-over-year changes over the last two decades (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). According to Bulman & Fairlie (2022), when looking at year-over-year changes by semester back to 1992, the changes in student enrollment during the pandemic were large outliers (p. 5). Community colleges understand that an increase in retention will lead to an increase in enrollment. To improve retention and therefore enrollment, student success practices must be reevaluated. A student's first year in college will influence the rest of their college career, yet most first-year experience courses have a duration of one semester. Rethinking the first-year experience model could alter student success.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of creating cohort groups and a 2-semester first-year experience seminar sequence to increase student

success and retention at a medium-sized community college in the Midwest.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the difference in student success (course success, course completion, semester-to-semester retention) between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format, and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?
2. What is the difference in reported student engagement between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?
3. What is the difference in reported student sense of belonging between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In a review of the body of research and evidence of the positive impact a student's sense of belonging has on outcomes such as persistence, engagement, and retention, Goodman and Pascarella (2006) noted that students from all demographics and backgrounds benefit from programs that intentionally foster belonging through faculty, staff, and peer relationship building. These researchers deduced that the research on first-year experience (FYE) programs has revealed additional benefits in addition to persistence and retention (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). Their study



suggested that students became more involved in campus activities, were more satisfied with their college experience, and not only perceived themselves more positively, but also achieved higher grades (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).

Hatch et al. (2018) argued that improving confidence, making personal connections, and finding a sense of belonging are as important, or more important, than any specific academic skills students gain from an FYE program. Community colleges must put their creative resources to use and develop programs that entice students to hang out before and after class if truly vested in the outcomes of retention, persistence, and academic success that result from their students' genuine feeling that they belong at their institution.

Belongingness, the state or feeling of acceptance within a particular group, ranks third in Abraham Maslow's motivational hierarchy of human needs developed in 1943. Once physiological needs (food, water, sleep, and warmth) and safety needs (financial security, health & wellness, and injury protection) are met, social belonging (love, friendship, and intimacy) serves as the foundation for the final two needs, esteem (sense of accomplishment) and self-actualization (personal growth and fulfilling potential). Maslow's theory presented a shift in psychology from behaviorism to humanism (Taormina & Gao, 2013). As a humanist, he believed that people have an innate desire to contribute to the world and as such feel most fulfilled when using their skills and talents to do the best of their capabilities.

Those who achieve self-actualization at the peak of Maslow's needs hierarchy are most concerned with personal growth and fulfillment of their potential. A lack of self-esteem and a feeling of inferiority compared to others builds a barrier to self-

awareness and the ability to envision success. Therefore, esteem and social belonging levels combined represent the psychological needs for achievement. It follows, then, that the first four levels of needs represent the category of deficiency needs in that a person deprived of them experiences unpleasant circumstances or feelings. In contrast, self-actualization needs represent a set of growth needs that seek opportunities to improve as a person along a continuum of achievements (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Eventually, in 1970, Maslow added cognitive (knowledge of persons, places, and things of the world), aesthetic needs (creative expression and appreciation of beauty and form), and transcendent (spirituality and helping others) needs as three more growth needs on the original hierarchy resulting in an 8-level model.

Though Maslow's theory and categorization of human needs are well-known and accepted beyond the field of Psychology, research supporting the hierarchical nature of those needs is minimal (Cherry, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2022). A 2011 study by researchers from the University of Illinois affirmed that self-actualization/growth needs were important despite a person's deficiency in physiological and safety needs. This suggests that belonging and esteem serve as powerful motivators of human behavior but are not valued hierarchically over more basic needs (Taormina & Gao, 2013).

Published in 2020, a nationwide study of college students found a positive link between a sense of belonging and student happiness and overall well-being (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). The study asked students to indicate their level of agreement with the statement "I feel that I am a part of [college or university name]" on a scale from 1 to 5. The study measured average responses against key characteristics of both the

institution and the student. Examination of data revealed trends among 2-year and 4-year colleges. Student factors studied were gender/sex, underserved or racial minority (URM), and first-generation students (FG). The study further explored the relationship between a sense of belonging and academic success factors such as persistence after 2 and 3 years, use of campus services in year 3, and mental health in year 3. The use of campus services and mental health data validity was dependent upon student self-reporting and the analysis of those factors was controlled for comparable first-year belonging outcomes (Gopalan & Brady, 2019).

Overall, with both 2-year and 4-year colleges, students stated that they felt they belonged, and the sense of belonging was positively associated with higher levels of persistence and mental health. The concerning discovery was that URM and FG students at 4-year colleges admitted having a lower sense of belonging than their peers. The information revealed among 2-year colleges is most relevant and interesting for this discussion. As expected, students' sense of belonging at 2-year colleges is lower than at 4-year colleges but there was no significant association between belonging and the core outcomes of persistence, using student resources, or mental health in the 2-year college data. Surprisingly, URM, FG, and female students at 2-year colleges reported higher belonging than their peers. This national study disclosed that "it may be that belonging both increases and is more associated with outcomes [persistence, use of resources, and mental health] when structural barriers have been sufficiently addressed" whereas 2-year colleges face unavoidable structural barriers (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). Researchers recommended further studies to explore contextual factors such as efforts by the institution and individual faculty and staff. Other suggestions

included rigorous field experiments testing interventions aimed at building belonging across various contexts to gain a better understanding of how a student's belonging can impact overall wellness and success in their academic pursuits.

In his research on improving student retention by creating a sense of belonging, O'Keeffe (2013), identified first-year students and FG students as being at elevated risk of non-completion. Those two categories of students make up a significant percentage of the community college population. Researchers must address how retention strategies for these groups, as well as URM, will need to adapt as the world evolves and changes, especially in a post-pandemic environment. O'Keeffe recognized that a sense of belonging is a critical factor in determining student retention and encouraged the implementation of strategies to celebrate diversity and difference, improve relationships between students and professors, and increase awareness of campus resources including counseling. The FYE program is the most practical placement for these strategies.

First-generation students often come from strongly connected and interdependent communities with a firm sense of belonging and struggle to adjust to a college campus culture promoting independence and critical thinking skills (Aruguete & Katrevich, 2017). Aruguete and Katrevich (2017) claim that colleges and universities must continue taking holistic approaches to evaluate programs that account for challenges FG students face academically and culturally (p. 43). One example would be utilizing FYE programs to construct a student sense of belonging while deconstructing the stigma surrounding the use of campus resources thus preparing FG students to advocate for themselves to ensure the most successful college outcome.

Another intervention to foster a sense of belonging is to apply attributional retraining, a simple technique developed by Dr. Gregory Walton (Hall, 2014). The idea is to shift perspective from students feeling like they are to blame for their college success shortcomings to understanding that they are not alone and that students of all backgrounds share the same experiences. Attributional retraining can incorporate role-playing or informational videos where peers share stories of their first-year challenges and the strategies they employed to overcome them. Emphasizing that college struggles are more common than not and that the student is in control of their efforts, academic routines, and the quest to find the unique keys to success for each course instills student empowerment and perseverance toward favorable outcomes.

Student engagement is a particular challenge for community college students' sense of belonging. These students are most often commuter students rather than dormitory residents (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005). Designing mandatory FYE programs intentionally to offer approaches to connecting with the unquities of community college students more intensively is the goal.

These students strategically schedule back-to-back classes and spend the least amount of time on campus as possible. Typically, they have chosen a commuter school or two-year option so that they can engage in other demanding responsibilities in their lives (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005, p. 23). For students of all backgrounds, but first-generation students especially, Gillen-O'Neel (2021) insists that a "daily sense of belonging" appears to influence the motivation and confidence required to improve student engagement in and outside of the classroom.

In addition to a sense of belonging, student development theories

reinforcing this study include Sanford's (1966) challenge and support, Astin's (1984) involvement theory, Schlossberg's (1989) marginality and mattering, and Rendon's (1994) validation. These theories are fundamental factors within educational environments, when used as an intentional tool they have the power to influence student development (Evans et al., 2010). Environmental factors influence student development, or lack of, in the college setting.

Past research states students experience too many challenges when starting college and lack support to feel successful (Sanford, 1966; Bowman et al., 2019). As one of the first to look at how students interacted with their new college environment, Nevitt Sanford suggested three conditions: readiness, challenge, and support. The required ratio of challenge and support to grow varies between students. Their life circumstances and characteristics should be taken into consideration (Evans et al, 2010, p. 30).

Alexander Astin (1984) urges that academic performance is correlated with student involvement, which can be defined in several ways. According to Astin (1984), there are five basic assumptions of psychosocial and physical energy (p. 519):

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student's experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a

given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.

Astin's Involvement Theory supports engagement environments found inside and outside of the classroom to support students' development (Evans et al., 2010, 31). Providing a variety of involvement opportunities offers a variety of students to engage.

Nancy Schlossberg (1989) states students need to know that they do matter. Before a student can get involved, and reap the benefits of involvement, they first need to feel that they matter. This is the responsibility of the institution (Evans et al., 2010, 32). Marginality can be a permanent state or refer to a temporary experience in a new circumstance such as being a first-time student on a college campus. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) originally found four aspects to mattering: the attention of being

noticed., the importance of feeling cared for, ego-extension through the empathy of triumphs and tribulations, and the dependence of being needed. Schlossberg (1989) added a fifth aspect by including the feeling of appreciation by others (p. 4).

Schlossberg (1984) researched a second student development theory regarding transition. A transition is defined as an event or non-event where change takes place. She revealed that change is only a transition if defined by the person experiencing it (Goodman et al., 2006; Evans et al., 2010, p. 215). Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) highlights three aspects and a framework of "four S's". An anticipated transition can be predicted while an unanticipated transition is not scheduled or foreseen. A nonevent is something that is desired and anticipated that did not happen. Every individual's situation is carried out according to factors such as trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, and assessments. Self refers to one's inner strength for coping with transition. Support can be composed of types, functions, and measurements. The fourth S is strategies; these coping responses can either modify the situation, control the meaning of the problem, or aid in managing the stress in the aftermath. This theory is not environment-based but can apply to understanding and aiding a student through transition.

Rendon (1994) affirms that students need to feel validated in their decision to pursue educational goals. Evans and colleagues (2010, p. 32) summarize students from diverse racial or ethnic and cultural backgrounds found themselves uncertain of their academic capabilities and concerned for their success. Validation is needed to motivate doubtful students. Validation can take place inside or outside of the classroom. It should enable, confirm, and support academic and interpersonal development.



Validation should be seen as a process and not the end goal; it can be most beneficial in the beginning of a transition. For example, the first few weeks of a new school semester.

These theories apply to the sense of community new college students seek out during their initial year of higher educational study. The theorists stress the importance a new environment and the people within the environment can have on development, engagement, and success. Implementing a cohort first-year experience model that keeps a group together for their entire first year could benefit student success, engagement, and retention.

## Literature Review

### Historical Review of National Enrollment Decline

For several years, enrollment decline has been a growing concern among community colleges across the United States. Although this crisis was a concern prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the public health crisis and economic and social upheaval that began in 2020 have contributed to the trend in downward enrollment; a trend that has deepened for many colleges ever since. Based on a study conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, public two-year colleges reported an enrollment drop of approximately 15% from fall 2019 to fall 2021 (Anderson, 2022). Historically, community college enrollment surged in the wake of economic recessions. However, that was not the case following the COVID-19 pandemic (PR Newswire, 2021).

The pandemic had a particularly dismal impact on community colleges, as research has revealed declines in both enrollment and persistence (Sutton, 2021; Anderson, 2022). The California Community College system conducted a study that identified that although all racial/ethnic groups demonstrated declines in enrollment, the largest enrollment declines were among African American and Hispanic students (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). Additionally, Bulman & Fairlie (2022) noted that first-year students at the community college experienced the largest enrollment decline. In fact, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center published a special report that indicated a 13.2% immediate decline in community college enrollment by high school graduates during the fall of 2020 (Causey et al., 2021). Community colleges not only serve as a gateway to 4-year institutions but also provide critical workforce training.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact community colleges and the national higher education landscape (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022).

Increasing enrollment will involve improved recruitment and admission efforts and maintaining current enrollments through degree or certificate completion.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 71% of incoming first-year students declare an intent to transfer to a 4-year institution, but approximately half accomplish that goal (Hlinka, 2017).

Although extensive research has been conducted about retention strategies, Hlinka (2017) notes that “substantial improvements in retention rates remain elusive.”

Practices must be tailored to address the characteristics of the institution. For instance, the prospective student population may face challenges due to things like race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status (Hlinka, 2017). An institution should consider its surrounding environment when attempting to address faltering retention.

As institutions continue to address the enrollment crisis and student success and retention improvement, they must consider strategies that fellow institutions cite as effective as well as strategies that address current social and environmental changes.

According to the *2021 Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion Report*, 70% of two-year public institutions are using programs designed

specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program) to increase student success, engagement, and retention (RNL,

2021). Additionally, 100% of participating two-year public institutions reported a

focus on academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring) to bolster success.

Taking the COVID-19 pandemic into consideration, two-year public colleges

identified virtual student life programs and activities (60%) as well as virtual career services programs (68%) as new student success strategies (RNL, 2021).

Adopting strategies to increase overall student success at the community college level is important, recognizing that some subgroups of the student population struggle more than others. According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, by 2050, “minorities” are projected to account for 47% of the population (Szelenyi, 2001). These trends should also be apparent in the enrollment patterns of American colleges and universities, particularly in community colleges, whose open-door policies and reduced costs are desirable to a diverse student body (Szelenyi, 2001).

However, community colleges are seeing a steep decline in total enrollment. According to The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, that decline has been particularly significant among historically underserved populations (PR Newswire, 2021). According to Bauman et al., (2017, p. 2), “theory and research on college student retention, including the foundational work of Tinto (1993), provide guidance for the recruitment and retention of diverse college students.” In fact, an important aspect of Tinto’s framework indicates that the retention of underrepresented students hinges on how the student views the unification of their social and academic lives (Bauman et al., 2017). In his research related to improving student retention by creating a sense of belonging, O’Keeffe (2013) identified first-year students and first-generation students at high risk of non-completion. Those two categories of students comprise a significant percentage of the community college population. Researchers must address how retention strategies for underrepresented students should be adapted as the world evolves and changes, especially in a post-pandemic environment.

Additionally, the employment landscape needs to change as the workforce evolves in the wake of COVID-19. “As people adjust their educational and career paths accordingly, community colleges will have to respond to these prospective students with unprecedented levels of agility and engagement” (PR Newswire, 2021). The Interim Chancellor of the Maricopa County Community College District commented (Targeted News Service, 2021), “During this uncertain time, it is vital to provide the training and skills needed to obtain family-sustainable wages, careers, and personal success” [Press release]. The news release pointed out that earning a workforce education could be a direct avenue to in-demand jobs for those impacted by the pandemic. “Workforce education also goes hand-in-hand with Career and Technical Education (CTE), or specialized training in various trades to equip students with core academic, employability, technical, and job-specific skills. CTE is recognized as the solution to strengthening the economy and workforce, as it prepares students to fill industry demands, reduce talent shortages, and contribute to the state's economy.” The retention of workforce students through goal completion is increasingly important as colleges prepare to educate for pandemic recovery. Our nation is urgently attempting to increase the percentage of college graduates and workforce-ready students it produces. Community colleges throughout America are under intense pressure to increase student completion rates (Bailey et al, 2015).

In the aftermath of the pandemic, America is suffering a labor shortage that has hampered the nation’s economic recovery (Dewey, 2022). The legislature in several states is expanding workforce training programs while other states pay tuition for students who pursue in-demand workforce occupations (Dewey, 2022). The debate

regarding the provision of a skilled workforce has consumed considerable space in higher education discussions.

The perceived value of post-secondary education is increasingly correlated to well-paid careers (Collins, 2021). The decrease in the workforce of prepared students is not a technical skills problem with a quick solution. Community colleges need to address this adaptive problem by altering the overall system (Collins, 2021). Colleges must restructure career services to improve their ability to prepare students for the rapidly growing and changing labor market (Collins, 2021). “Historically, career services have been housed in student services, and students primarily utilized the resource only in their final year, when they were actively on the job market” (Collins, 2021, p.10).

Georgia State University graduates the second-highest number of black students in the nation. In 2019 they began a College to Career initiative in which students were introduced to career readiness during their first year (Collins, 2019). In sum, the most effective way to increase the number of prepared students entering the workforce is to provide rigorous integrated support services, financial assistance, proactive advising, and career services. Workforce training programs perform better, increase student retention, and lead to gainful employment when they provide a recognized industry credential and lead to an in-demand high-paying job (Dewey, 2022). The implications for students to secure a sustainable career and achieve a better life are significant. Community colleges are well prepared to partner to create workforce solutions that advance regional and local economies. Several states in 2020 and 2021 used successive rounds of federal stimulus funding to design workforce programs to meet employment

needs in industries with acute labor shortages. When the need arises for a skilled local workforce, community colleges must respond (Dewey, 2022).

As public health emergencies further exacerbate national enrollment and retention crises, community colleges will need to continue to adapt. Community colleges will be required to change and meet the needs of today's students and the workforce needs in the area. Much of the information discussed thus far examines this literature at a macroscopic level. However, practices need to address the institution's characteristics, the students, and the local climate. Therefore, it is important to explore the changes and trends occurring at the state level.

### **A Closer Look at the Role of the Community College**

Community colleges are bridging the gap to access and success for lower-income students, but several barriers remain. Cost remains a significant barrier to community college students (Spina, 2021). Confusing admission requirements and financial aid deadlines are also significant barriers for lower-income and marginalized students (Spina, 2021). "Rural community college students, in particular, continue to face obstacles in accessing postsecondary education, as these students are challenged by living in areas with weak economies, traveling long distances to get to schools, poor educational preparation, and inconsistent access to technology" (Miller, 2015, p. 1). Community colleges typically provide open-access admissions with few, if any, thresholds for enrollment whereas four-year universities tend to require standardized test scores, grade point averages, or a combination of threshold requirements for admissions.

As gateways to education, community colleges are the safety nets for

developmental support and the key to vocational training that enhances the economic vitality of a region, and they must find innovative ways to support students. The pandemic depleted several of the low-wage jobs community college students and their families held and millions of these students and families entered poverty (Spina, 2021). FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) completion rates dropped 12% among high school seniors in 2021 (Spina, 2021). An analysis of U.S. Census data by the Community College Research Center in the fall of 2020 determined that “40% of households that included members with community-college plans were canceling them, more than double the rate for households with four-year college plans” (Gardner, 2021, p. 2).

Gardner (2021) explained that many community college students left school to care for loved ones, others did not have access to a computer or reliable Wi-Fi and many of them did not believe they would do well in online learning courses, yet stronger student success initiatives did not improve retention. Community colleges are embracing technology to support students, but it is not helping either. While technology is a crucial tool to aid students who have reduced their course load and are questioning whether they should continue in their studies, it is also creating a barrier to in-person relationships (Galizio, 2021). Many students are now experiencing social isolation and Galizio (2021) has argued that human connection and contact far outweigh technology. Basko (2021) indicated that students continued to identify financial, academic, social, and family barriers as reasons that they could not enroll or stay in school despite institutional outreach efforts.

Discussions surrounding community colleges and their role in economic



development are happening in political environments everywhere. From the White House to Governor's Offices to local and state legislatures, the impact and influence of community college education is debated. Workforce shortages impact economic development, and workforce training is a central focus of community college service (Swanger, 2016). It is evident that community colleges must remain a vital component of the educational system in order for their communities of service to thrive during uncertain times.

To understand the role of community college education today, it is important to review the history of higher education. The foundation of education is grounded in a workforce and economic development mission. The early days of society created formal education structures that provided selected youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill a specific role in society; education involved only the wealthy and privileged and met a specific societal need (Swanger, 2016).

By the mid-20th century, the need for an educated workforce to serve local industries and the vocational emphasis in education reemerged. The 1948 Truman Commission Report made a bold statement in support of vocational education. A major shift from educating the elite and wealthy opened the door for more practical education and community colleges were created to revolutionize post-secondary education access for a larger group of students.

The Truman Commission Report written in 1948 stated:

If the ladder of educational opportunity rises high at the doors of some youth and scarcely rises at all at the doors of others, while at the same time formal

education is made a prerequisite to occupational and social advance, then education may become the means, not of eliminating race and class distinctions, but deepening and solidifying them. It is obvious, then, that free and universal access to education, in terms of the interest, ability, and the need of the student, must be a major goal of American Education.

Although the Truman Commission Report was written over seventy years ago, it was intended to promote open access to vocational and workforce training. Unfortunately, major portions of the current educational system continue to create barriers for students and when COVID -19 impacted the educational landscape in 2020, open access momentum was almost halted. Of the 2.5 million first-time college students enrolled in institutions across the United States in 2019 (pre-pandemic) over 2% of them could not persist. That might not sound like much but statistically seventy thousand students were lost (Herder, 2021). The pandemic has decreased persistence even further and retention is at an all-time low in community colleges across the country. Herder (2021) identified where the disruption is most severe when they stated:

Two-year public institutions and community colleges saw both their persistence and retention numbers drop. First-time student persistence dropped by 3%, part-time student persistence dropped by 5%. Part-time students saw worsening levels of retention and persistence at every higher education institution except private for-profit four-year schools (para. 8).

As a country, we need community colleges to support the communities in which they reside. Community college success is linked to a stronger workforce and

increased economic vitality, yet few community colleges are meeting workforce and labor market demands. Community colleges must rethink the recruitment and retention of students (Gardner, 2021).

A decade of declining enrollment followed by additional declines precipitated by the pandemic, are forcing community colleges to take overdue actions. Colleges must create an FYE that encourages career exploration, explains financial aid literacy, provides wrap-around student support services, and promotes retention of the most vulnerable populations.

### **Local Contextual Perspective on the Problem**

Academic research identifies the challenges first-generation college students face both nationwide and in the state of Missouri. Katrevich and Aruguete (2017) surveyed FG college students and determined that poor academic integration, as well as poor social integration, were significant challenges for FG college students. They suggested that it is the very culture of the college campus that is a stark contrast to the cultures and lifestyles of FG college students. First-generation students often transition from communities that are strongly connected and interdependent with a firm sense of belonging and social support to a new culture on a college campus that emphasizes independence and critical thinking skills (Katrevich and Aruguete, 2017). Katrevich and Aruguete (2017) also suggested that colleges and universities must continue “to design, implement, and test holistic intervention programs that address both the social and academic challenges of first-generation students” (p. 43). According to Petty (2014), “colleges and universities should escalate the process of creating bridge programs that link higher education to secondary education. These experiences provide

academic and social pathways that assist first-generation students to overcome inadequate preparation for college” (p. 133).

The Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (MDHEWD) is giving attention to the needs of underrepresented and marginalized students in higher education. The Community in Action Summer Bridge Program is one example of a statewide program that will be implemented to address success and retention rates for minority students, FG students, and adult education learners. Six state colleges and universities were selected to participate in the Community in Action Summer Bridge Program. With the assistance of a mentor from MDHEWD, these colleges will receive guidance in preparation for a robust summer bridge program that will address many of the challenges in education that this dissertation also aims to address through the cohort model of the first-year experience program.

The statewide Workforce Development programs will also provide significant funding to colleges and universities that incorporate transition programs with components related to workforce development. The primary rationale provided by all students for pursuing higher education across all sectors has been to enhance employment prospects (O’Banion, 2016). Workforce education is receiving massive amounts of support from federal and state governments and support for workforce education has become a key policy for the United States. “Yes, there are other legitimate, widely recognized reasons for pursuing a higher education degree, but contribution to employability is the single most influential driver in the higher education marketplace, and it looks like it will be so into the foreseeable future” (Hentschke et al., 2014, p.4). For this reason, no other aspect of higher education has

been as fully embraced or supported as workforce education. Many other nations have established work-based training systems that increase in-demand employment skills, but the community college system in the United States remains the most important source of workforce and workplace training. Jacobs & Worth (2019) believe that it is an explicit goal of community colleges to provide, “open door relevant occupational education and training to a diversified workforce, thereby reflecting the combination of responsiveness to employers’ skills needs and students’ concern for employment” (p. 1).

Community colleges in America enroll over 40% of all undergraduates. Open-door admission policies and low cost for attendance make postsecondary education more available for students who would not otherwise be able to continue their education (Jenkins, 2021). Community Colleges have expanded access to higher education for over 60 years, but enrollment and completion rates have not kept pace with expanded access. Significant gaps in achievement remain in racial, ethnic, and lower-income student populations (Jenkins, 2021). The broad accessibility of community colleges places them at the forefront of providing avenues that increase post-secondary enrollment and number of skilled individuals entering the workforce.

While community colleges are ideally situated to meet the increased labor needs of their communities, innovative organizational practices will need to be implemented. Jenkins (2021) says, “Innovative organizational practices have the greatest impact on performance when they are implemented in concert with one another and are well aligned to achieve organizational goals” (p.2). Implementing a well-designed 2-semester success seminar could increase student retention and completion rates and

therefore help meet national, regional, and local workforce labor demands.

The Baldrige National Quality Program, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, gives awards to organizations that meet rigorous standards. Baldrige practices increase employee knowledge and motivation and empower employees to use their skills to improve organizational performance (Baldrige, 2009b). Community Colleges that improve student outcomes have strategic, well-focused instruction that is inclusive of others (Jenkins, 2021). The first principle of the Baldrige National Quality Program is effective leadership that allows open communication, ethical behavior, and high performance (Baldrige, 2009a, p. 7). Many community colleges have tried to emulate the Baldrige principles in the areas of assessment and improvement. Another model for strengthening organizational improvement that is important to review is the Achieving the Dream initiative. The four principles of Achieving the Dream (2009) are leadership, use of evidence, broad engagement, and systemic institutional improvement. These four principles will be included in the creation of a cohort-based, first-year student success seminar at the postsecondary institution under study.

Community Colleges throughout America offer advising, tutoring, career services, and other student services that are specifically designed to improve student success. This literature review explains that these same community colleges lack the necessary resources to provide every student with individualized intensive support. Students are often required to independently identify support services, and students who leverage their use are not the students who need them most. It is important for students seeking post-secondary education to eventually gain employment and earn a

prevailing wage. As the national economy should reflect an increasingly skilled workforce, community colleges must expand beyond open access to ensure that students persist, complete, and enter the workforce.

### **Defining the First-Year Experience**

First-year experience programs in higher education date back to the Civil Rights Movement. Following significant unrest in the 1970s, the University of South Carolina designed a program intended to build relationships between students and the university with the first official University 101 course being offered in 1972 (Freer, 2016). In 1982, the course concept was shared with others in higher education and was reintroduced as The Freshman Year Experience, and in 1986 the first international conference on the FYE was held in the United Kingdom (Freer, 2016). This led to the development of a national resource center to provide information and training related to collegiate FYE. What began at USC as a new course design developed into a national and international field of study and practice, now known as the FYE movement. (Freer, 2016, p. 21).

FYE programs that feature cohort models or learning communities have grown in popularity over the past decades. The cohort model has increased in response to "a decline in student retention and graduation rates" (Lei et al., 2011, p. 497). Cohort models are smaller groups of students, often identified to have similar demographic characteristics, who begin an educational program together and ideally complete the program together (Lei et al., 2011).

The Complete College America (CCA) organization was founded in 2009. According to their June 2022 publication "No Middle Ground: Advancing Equity

Through Practice”, CCA “builds movements for scaled change and transforms institutions through data-driven policies, student-centered perspectives, and equity-driven practices. CCA has connected a national network of forward-thinking state and higher education leaders and introduced bold initiatives that help states and institutions confront inequities; close institutional performance gaps; and increase college completion rates, especially for historically excluded students.” CCA uses several terms to refer to populations of students about racial and income equity. They use the term BILPOC to refer to black, indigenous, Latinx, and people of color, and they use the term under-resourced to refer to low-income populations.

The FYE is one strategy that serves as a component of the first of CCA’s 4 pillars of success (Complete College America, 2022). These 4 pillars consist of purpose, structure, momentum, and support. Within the pillar of purpose, CCA indicates that when designing FYE programs, colleges should “focus on the needs of historically excluded students, including BILPOC students, FG students, and students from under-resourced communities.” They urge that FYE programs extend their objectives beyond typical familiarity with campus resources. FYE programs should also promote a student sense of belonging, reduce the stigma associated with the use of campus resources, and envelope students in preparation for college success. As such, these FYE programs should be comprehensive, including events that drive students toward advisory services, summer bridge programs, and interactions with instructors beyond the classroom. They should also teach a growth mindset to combat negative student beliefs regarding their academic abilities to demonstrate how cognitive abilities can be strengthened to reduce academic challenges. Finally, FYE programs should be



mandatory to ensure that all students have access to and familiarity with all available resources.

Community college students face many challenges when they enter college. "Many of these students are inadequately prepared for college-level work; they need developmental learning courses and, most often, extensive academic and emotional support" (Bonet & Walters, 2016, p. 224). The challenge for the community college is the successful implementation of an FYE program for students who enter college academically ill-prepared. These are primarily commuter students who work while pursuing their degrees and certificates, and they typically only spend two to three years in the institution. There is conflict for the student who needs additional academic and personal support while also being unavailable to seek it. There is an opportunity for a dynamic FYE program crucial for persistence, retention, and completion at a community college.

### **How First-Year Experience Programs Can Make an Impact**

In a summary of the body of research related to the evidence of the positive impact of first-year seminars on persistence and retention, Goodman and Pascarella (2006) note that students from all demographic backgrounds benefit from these programs.:

Researchers at the University of Maryland, College Park used a true experimental design to study the impact of seminar participation during four semesters. They concluded that first-year seminar participants were significantly more likely to persist than similar students who did not participate in the seminar (p. 27).

Goodman and Pascarella also noted that the research on FYE programs has revealed additional benefits in addition to persistence and retention. Students became more involved in campus activities, were more satisfied with their college experience, and not only perceived themselves more positively but also achieved higher grades. Mayo (2013) recommends that FYE programs “include elements that contribute to the support of personal contacts” (p. 766). Mayo reported that this will aid in the development of self-confidence, personal goals, and value development, and it will result in the student’s commitment to the college which she argues will increase student retention rates (2013). Community colleges are under pressure to produce more graduates while also experiencing steep enrollment declines. Bers & Younger (2014) conclude, “First year experience programs have never been so needed” (p. 91).

According to Keup and Barefoot (2005), their research revealed that "students enrolled in FYE courses outperform their peers who do not participate in FYE courses" (as cited in Smith et al., 2008, p. 11). Supported by social integration theory, FYE courses and cohort models improve the student experience. Students in FYE courses "benefit from the content and experiences in the courses, as evidenced by lower dropout rates and higher grade point averages" (Smith et al., 2008, p. 11). Smith et al. (2008) went on to suggest that "it is important to implement and study the FYE across diverse settings with diverse students" (p. 11). That is what our research study hopes to address.

In their study on an FYE program at a community college, Smith et al. (2008) hypothesized that "students enrolled in an FYE course would exhibit greater gains than students in the control group" (p. 11). They found that students in their experimental

group scored higher on knowledge of resources and academic responsibility and reported meaningful gains on items measuring knowledge, including Career Services resources, Academic Advising Services, and Office of Student Life engagement (Smith et al., 2008). This meaningful engagement extended into additional academic areas of classroom participation, study skills, familiarizing themselves with other students, and meeting with an academic advisor (Smith et al., 2008). Most notably, the students in this study who enrolled in the FYE course had "significantly higher raw GPAs than students not enrolled in the course after controlling for all other variables in the model" (Smith, 2008, p. 12). While their study indicates the importance and efficacy of an FYE course at community colleges, they note in their discussion "a need for further research on the impact of FYE courses in the community college setting" (Smith et al., 2008, p. 13). This research will add to the already existing and growing body of research on FYE courses at community colleges.

A robust FYE is an essential step toward meeting the needs of a current student's political, economic, social, and physical climate. Guided pathways, the collaboration between academic support services and student support services, and the implementation of parent education programs, particularly for first-generation and underserved students, are also important considerations in improving student success and retention at community colleges.

### **The Value of Learning Communities**

Learning communities are an ordinary student success tool that merits refinement in the community college setting (Mayer et al., 2013). Learning communities typically consist of students with similar academic goals who enroll in

the same courses. Students within a learning community live together on a residential campus, but extracurricular engagement is not commonplace in a community college setting. Engagement derives from the four program components that Mayer et al. described as linked courses and cohorts, faculty's role, instructional practices, and student support involvement.

Bailey and Alfonso (2005) noted that “learning communities appear to have the most support grounded in research. The learning community model’s positive effects on persistence and graduation are consistent with the most influential theoretical perspectives used to study retention” (p. 1). There is encouraging empirical support for learning communities as a strategy to address student success and retention. Learning communities offer the opportunity for more student-to-student engagement, which is a particular challenge for community college students who are often commuter students (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005). “Bailey and Alfonso (2005) also noted, “thus, learning communities offer an approach to connecting more intensively with community college students, who often spend little time on campus outside of class” (p. 23). For FG students especially, not only a sense of belonging but a “daily sense of belonging” appears to provide those students with additional motivation and confidence to attend class and participate in classroom conversations (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021).

Hatch (2017) discussed using a first-year seminar as a high-impact practice for student success. He found that curricular tools “were only marginally related to engagement,” meaning the academic skills and planning stressed to students are only mildly helpful. He discovered that Advising and Student Services staff involved in the

FYE served as a crutch for students to utilize instead of learning how to accomplish tasks independently; that intrusive involvement did not lead to service utilization.

Hatch (2017) identified that the FYE only lasting one semester was a limitation to the engagement opportunity with first-time students. The learning communities that Mayer et al. (2013) followed at six different community colleges also only lasted one semester. Short-term options may not be long enough to create the desired outcome that colleges are looking for regarding student success and retention.

A more defined structure for first-time college students helps build success.

Colleges must remove the idea that students should arrive with the social expertise and knowledge capital to succeed (Noy et al., 2016). Guided pathways can assist students in finding structure and resources early on. Intentional interactions with helpful faculty and staff should create a natural environment for student cohort utilization. Noy et al. (2016) created a framework for colleges to follow as they implement and navigate the guided pathway model. Noy et al (2016) noted, “Researchers may use this framework as a guide to examine structure in career and technical programs, and its relationship to student outcomes” (p. 280).

Noy et al. (2016) indicated that future research should focus on how structure connects to student success (p. 280). Joyner-Matos and Islam-Zwart (2021) created a student cohort program to serve underrepresented students in STEM fields. They concentrated on four support services for students: library resources and information literacy, career services, professional development, and community engagement. The program model also included social activities and faculty mentoring. They found that the student's attitude towards the program and activities depended on how staff laid

the groundwork and expectations ahead of time.

Creating learning communities upon entry into college may not be enough. Sperry (2015) suggested that there may be several potential variables identified before the start of a college career that may be predictive of student success. In their research, Sperry hoped to identify pre-college variables that were predictors of retention or probation status for first-year students in learning communities. While Sperry found that several of the variables were useful for predicting retention and probation status, the variables changed based on the learning community being examined (2015). Therefore, the intentional design of learning communities can, based on the research by Sperry, level the playing field for students who might otherwise not be retained or end up on academic probation.

Hatch et al. (2018) found that “an important aspect of student success courses is found in their ability to facilitate a low-stakes rehearsal space for developing a college-going identity...” (p. 33). As important as any specific skill students in FYE courses gain, or more important, is gaining confidence, making personal connections, and finding a sense of belonging on campus (Hatch, 2018). Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera (2016) conducted qualitative research with community college students who participated in first-year experience programs and found that in terms of a first-year experience course or program “the whole is greater than the sum of each of the individual parts” (p. 78). Like the research by Hatch et al., Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera’s (2016) findings reveal the importance of making personal peer connections and the importance of cohorts that are formed in these courses as critical to student success. They recommend “that community colleges offer courses that teach college

navigational skills and foster student communities” (p. 80).

The intention of creating learning communities at the community college level is, to some degree, to mimic the experience of a four-year institution. Residential campuses with students invested in their educational journey for four years or longer create a different sense of belonging than what can be achieved at a commuter community college. Morrow and Ackermann (2012) investigated the persistence and retention of first-year students at public Ph.D. granting institutions in the United States. They found “that peer support was a significant predictor of second-year retention” (2012). Although these findings were confounded when both faculty support and peer support were included in the analysis, the importance of peer support remains a common theme in research in this area. Morrow and Ackermann (2012) noted that their findings may only be generalizable to similar institutions while also suggesting more research is needed on retention predictors as well as other interventions that may increase student retention. They mentioned learning communities as one such intervention.

## **Conclusion**

The research in this study focused on using cohorts and a 2-semester first-year experience seminar sequence to investigate student success and retention at a medium-sized community college in the Midwest. Community colleges play a vital role in providing developmental support and vocational training that enhances the economic vitality of their region. Community colleges are responsible for discovering innovative ways to support students. First-year experience programs should be comprehensive and promote a sense of belonging to prepare students for academic

success. Learning communities, like student cohorts, encourage engagement and persistence for students to be retained and complete their educational goals.



## Chapter 2 – Methodology

### Introduction

This qualitative research study implemented a comparative case study design to examine how the introduction of a cohort-driven, 2-semester first-year experience (FYE) course (known as the College Seminar Course, or COL-101) impacted student success of certain student groups. The populations included students drawn from the college's Men of Color Student Success Program (MOC), students enrolled in a pre-nursing workforce development program, and a non-affinity baseline group. Individual student grades and course completion data were collected along with course pre-and post-assessment survey results to evaluate student success, engagement, and sense of belonging. Additionally, focus group data was collected to further detail this course's impact. The analysis of this data described the impact the course had on each group and the differences between groups.

This chapter outlines the research design of this study, including information on the selected populations, data definitions, the data collection process, and the data analysis procedures chosen. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research limitations, validations, ethical considerations, and a methodological summary.

### Research Questions

This study investigated the impact of a 2-semester FYE course on student success, engagement, and belonging. The sense of community theory was the theoretical framework for this study. Additional student development theories that guided this study include Sanford's (1966) challenge and support, Astin's (1984) involvement theory, Schlossberg's (1989) marginality and mattering, and Rendon's (1994) validation. The

application of these theories influenced student development (Evans et al., 2010). A nationwide study published in 2020 found a positive link between a sense of belonging, student happiness, and overall well-being (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). Gopalan and Brady (2019) recommended further studies to explore contextual factors such as efforts by the institution and individual faculty and staff. Other suggestions included rigorous field experiments testing interventions to understand better how a student's belonging can impact overall wellness and success in their academic pursuits. This qualitative case study examined cohort groups as a belonging-building intervention.

The following research questions guided this study.

1. What is the difference in student success (course success, course completion, semester-to-semester retention) between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?
2. What is the difference in reported student engagement between students who took the COL-101 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?
3. What is the difference in reported student sense of belonging between students who took the COL-101 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?

### **Purpose & Design of the Study**

The College Success Seminar (COL-101) is the FYE program at this community college and has existed in some form since 1993. The program has had several starts and stops and significant revisions. Initially, the course was a 16-week course that met weekly, and the course then went dormant for several years. When the program was re-established, it was a course that met before the start of the fall and spring semesters. The course met in a five-day format as well as a nine-day format. Because of the difficulty retaining pertinent course information throughout the semester, the course format changed to a 16-week course. Beginning in Fall 2019, COL-101 was offered in person for the first eight weeks and then transitioned to online for the second eight weeks. The course utilizes the Learning Management System (LMS), Canvas, to deliver the course content and assessments. This format served the college well during the pandemic as the redesign pushed all the course content into the LMS with Zoom links so students could still participate in the class meetings for the first eight weeks with little to no disruption to the course format.

The potential issue with the format established in the Fall of 2019 was that the “first-year experience” course only lasted one semester, not an entire year. The literature shows that students need support through their entire first year. As such, we implemented two pilot sections of a 2-semester format of the COL-101 course. The first semester continued to be known as COL-101, and the second semester became COL-102. Those pilot courses began in the Fall of 2022 and gathered student success measures to evaluate differences between populations and course formats. Measures included course success rates, course completion rates, retention rates, and reported engagement.

### **About the Researchers**

We completed this study in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Education program requirements. In addition to our graduate work, at the time of conception of the study, all of us worked at the college serving as the research site. We held the following roles at the college: Dean of Institutional Research, Sociology Professor and Program Chair, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Computer Science Professor and Program Chair, and College Recruitment Manager. This research helped us understand how to better serve our students.

### **Participant Profiles and Sampling**

The college that was studied is just west of the largest metropolitan area in the state. It serves a growing diverse student population and is committed to increasing its faculty and staff diversity to prepare students for a global society. The number of students identifying as a race or ethnicity other than White has been increasing over the last several years. The college surpasses the county in the proportion of the population that identifies as diverse, with college data from the Fall of 2022 indicating that 24.1% of the student body identifies as a race/ethnicity other than White. Additionally, this college values community and innovation and has been putting much effort into expanding the workforce and technical programs to help students get to work in the community and address the employer needs in the area. Fall 2022 college data showed that 25.0% of the credit student population were enrolled in a career/technical program as their primary major.

The main population of students examined in this study was students enrolled in COL-101 in Fall 2022 through Fall 2023. For the affinity groups, students enrolled as

cohorts into the pilot 2-semester sections of COL-101. One cohort consisted of students from the college's Men of Color program (Black or Hispanic, male students) while the other consisted of students from a pre-nursing workforce development program. The total combined sample size for the cohort groups in this study was 23 (8 students from the Men of Color (MOC) program and 15 pre-nursing (NUR) students). The non-affinity comparison group was composed of students who took the standard 1-semester format of COL-101. These comparison groups were appropriate for the study because they took the course during the same academic year. Also, students in the pilot sections were not required to pay additional tuition or fees and did not receive more credit than those in the traditional sections.

### **Instrumentation**

The Institutional Research professional pulled the numeric measures of success (grade data, course completion, and retention rates) for students in each of the groups mentioned above. Students completed the required course pre-and-post-assessment surveys as part of their normal coursework. Data from the pre- and post-assessment surveys measured success, engagement, and sense of belonging. The researchers served as the primary instrument to gather focus group data. The scheduled focus groups were 60-minute sessions at a date and time selected by most participants. The researchers created semi-structured open-ended questions for students who consented to participate in the focus groups and took rich descriptive notes. The researchers used audio recordings to accurately capture all dialogue, including casual conversation, which is difficult when multiple people speak simultaneously. In addition to these recordings, researchers also took detailed notes on body language and mannerisms to gauge non-verbal information

that words could not. The researchers destroyed the transcribed data upon completion of the study. Students submitted reflection writing assignments in the second-semester course to provide additional qualitative data related to their feelings of belonging and intentions to complete their credentials at the college. The researchers coded the assignments.

Definitions of these measures, as well as other important data elements, can be found below:

1. **Student success:** Student success consisted of summary data on course success, completion, and retention rates. These numeric descriptors allowed a detailed narration of how each student group performed.
  - a. **Course success rates** were the number of successfully completed courses divided by the number of courses in which the student enrolled. Successful grades were A, B, C, and P.
  - b. **Course completion rates** were the sum of the courses completed divided by the sum of the courses in which the student enrolled.
  - c. Researchers measured **semester-to-semester and year-to-year retention rates** by collecting the number of students who enrolled at the college in the spring of 2023, directly following their first semester in the COL-101 course. These were considered retained in the following semester. Students who enrolled at the college in the fall of 2023, following their COL-101 course completion, were considered as retained the following year.

2. **Engagement:** The student's level of interaction within and outside the classroom. Data were gathered from focus group results, pre-and-post assessment results, and reflection assignments.
3. **Sense of Belonging:** The level of acceptance the student feels within and outside of the classroom. Data were gathered from focus group results, pre-and-post assessment results, and reflection assignments.
4. **Gender:** Identified using what the students self-reported on the application for admission.
5. **Race/ethnicity:** Identified by what the students self-reported on the application for admission.
6. **Pre-Nursing (NUR) Students:** Students who reported an intention of enrolling in a Nursing program.
7. **Men of Color (MOC) Student:** Students who were enrolled in the MOC Student Success Program. This program was designed to provide ongoing support and scholarships for students who identified as Black or Hispanic males.

### **Data Collection**

The institutional researcher used the college's operational data store (ODS) to pull the numeric data mentioned. Statistical Analysis System (SAS) was the analytical software used to query and summarize data. Grade data were accessible once the college's grade verification process concluded each semester, and retention data were accessible once the college's Census process concluded each semester. This descriptive summary data supplemented the qualitative data gathered using course

assessments, reflections, and focus groups.

The College Success Seminar program collected course-level data each semester through pre- and post-assessment surveys for internal program improvements. Results from these surveys informed the conclusions on the impact of the 2-semester success seminar sequence on student engagement, success, and retention. The pre- and post-assessment surveys asked students to rate their knowledge regarding the course's learning outcomes as very familiar, somewhat familiar, or not at all familiar.

Students in the 2-semester pilot courses completed reflection writing assignments to provide additional qualitative data regarding the impact and effectiveness of the 2-semester college success seminar sequence on the students' engagement, success, and retention. These researcher-generated documents provided real-time information about the student experience and situation related to the 2-semester success course sequence.

After the conclusion of the 2-semester college success seminar pilot, some students taking COL-101 in the Fall of 2023 participated in focus groups to better understand student engagement and sense of belonging during a typical 1-semester implementation of the course. As described in the instrumentation section, we developed questions to ascertain additional aspects of the course that the other measures could not reasonably assess. Combining descriptive performance summaries, assessment responses, reflection assignment responses, and focus group results allowed themes to emerge clearly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Those of us who ran the focus groups worked at the institution (one of them being a College Success Seminar instructor) and took extra care to avoid any conflict of interest. These considerations were addressed in the IRB and



Research Approval applications and included holding the focus groups in settings separate from the traditional class setting, reiterating the non-compulsory nature of the study, noting that they could end their participation at any time, discussing how responses will have no impact on their course success, and explaining how the aggregated data removed the opportunity for response identification. Those of us who ran the focus groups also informed the participants that we would be destroying all recordings and transcriptions at the study's conclusion.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

We analyzed data by searching for themes in participant responses to the course assessment surveys, reflection assignments, and focus group responses. To search for patterns in the data, it first needed to be coded. According to Saldaña (2009), code can summarize and condense data making it easier to interpret. To get to a concise, measurable code, we followed Saldaña's suggested strategies and implemented the following coding plan:

- 1) **Step One:** There was a first-pass initial coding where first-impression phrases came to light to reduce the content to a manageable amount.
- 2) **Step Two:** We reviewed those first-impression phrases and determined repetitive patterns relevant to the study.
- 3) **Step Three:** We used those repetitive patterns to determine categories for analysis.

We then used the resulting group analyses of the pre- and post-assessment surveys, reflection assignments, and focus group responses congruent with the descriptive summary success measures to synthesize findings, provide the most

descriptive picture of each case, and support the comparisons between groups.

### **Potential Bias and Limitations of the Study**

Potential bias and limitations of the study included the cohort groups selected, ongoing institutional improvements, time constraints, and personal beliefs. Since we all work or worked at the institution where the sample population was studied, we needed to practice reflexivity as there can be power relationships between researchers and subjects in a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Probst and Berenson (2014) noted that researchers should acknowledge the power differential as well as take action to mitigate the potential impact of the power differential on the subjects, the outcomes of the research, and the researchers themselves.

Two cohort groups chosen for this study were the MOC cohort, which included 10 Black and Hispanic males, and the NUR cohort, which included 14 pre-nursing students. The basic limitation of the cohort method is the exclusion of additional cohorts that could expand the research. The reasons for choosing these cohorts were institutional focus on improving student success among marginalized students and strategic initiatives focused on increasing diversity and workforce completion. Future research could include a women of color cohort and other workforce technical cohorts interested in programs besides nursing.

Incorporating the MOC students in our research created the challenge of determining which had a more significant impact, the MOC programming or the 2-semester College Success Seminar.

Additionally, the college was revising its pathways program to launch an updated pathways website by Fall 2023 to help students choose degrees and plan

their academic courses. The pathways program was intended to help improve student retention by making the degree selection process more accessible and understandable. The pathway program did not overlap with research gathered in the 2-semester cohorts but might have impacted numeric student success and completion data gathered in Fall 2023.

Another potential limitation involved time constraints. This research involved tracking the pilot section students longitudinally throughout the 2-semester success seminar, locating where students struggled, and identifying solutions. Placing a time limitation of two semesters removed the opportunity to evaluate how a third or fourth semester of success seminar information could impact numerical student success data. Personal beliefs are also included as a limitation due to bias they may have imparted on the results.

Post-COVID college initiatives to increase student belonging, marginalized student success rates, and workforce completion rates significantly influenced the selection of cohorts and the pilot design. Institutional pressure to increase the number of students completing workforce programs including nursing that help meet local and regional employment demands should also be considered.

### **Validation**

We believed that the 2-semester success seminar sequence would increase student engagement, success, and retention at the community college being studied. This belief ensured the trustworthiness of the research. Merriam & Tisdell emphasized the role of trustworthiness in research conducted by professionals working in their field because, as practitioners, the researchers will directly impact the lives of their

subjects (2016). This is the case for the researchers conducting this study. We hope that the results of this study will lead to transferability and replication at other community colleges.

We employed several methods to ensure validation of the research. Multiple sources of data, or a mixed data method, were included in this research (Olsen, 2004). The various methods included focus group data, reflection assignment data, course pre- and post-assessment data, course data, and other institutional data. All these data sources were used to ensure we were creating a representative picture of the data being collected.

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) recommended that researchers use triangulation to bolster the validity of the research. We utilized investigator triangulation by having more than one of us collect and analyze data to ensure validity. The fact that the research was conducted by a team ensured there were “multiple investigators collecting and analyzing data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 245).

Lastly, we employed intercoder reliability to ensure a consistent approach to coding as a team. Each set of qualitative data was reviewed by at least two of us. Once we coded the data independently, we met to review our coding strategies and to determine whether or not they were in alignment. In cases when things were not in alignment, the researchers determined the best mutual way forward.

### **Dissemination of Findings**

Eventually, aggregated results of the study will be shared with college leadership so that they know the outcome of the 2-semester COL-101 pilot. This research contributes a new understanding of how full-year, cohort-driven first-year experience courses contribute to student learning. Data will inform stakeholders of the

best way to impact the success of the college's future first-time students. Ultimately, the goal of the study is to inform not only the community college where the study is being conducted but also community colleges nationwide.

Additionally, in tandem with the preparation of this manuscript, we are preparing a recorded summary of our research that we plan to disseminate via our professional channels. We also intend to apply to several conferences to disseminate our findings to our external colleagues.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects student information. We obtained proper permissions from the University of Missouri St. Louis's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as permissions from the community college's Research Approval Committee. All data in this report is presented at the aggregate level to protect student identity.

The most significant ethical consideration was the relationship between the researcher and the subjects (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Some of us worked directly with the students as instructors for the College Success Seminar course, and one was the chair of the College Success Seminar Program. We remained vigilant about our roles as instructors versus researchers throughout the project. Furthermore, with the use of focus groups, we addressed the ethical challenges related to conducting interviews. As Stake (2005) mentioned, "Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" (p. 459).

### **Summary**

This chapter defined the researcher's design, which included information on

the selected populations, data definitions, the data collection process, and the data analysis procedures chosen. Further, we discussed research limitations, validations, and ethical considerations. This project aimed to learn more about the impact of the education environment surrounding first-year community college students. The results of effective qualitative research are rich and descriptive data.

### Chapter 3: Data Analysis and Results

The focus of this study was to evaluate the first-year experience course of a community college and its ability to impact student success, engagement, and sense of belonging. A College Success Seminar (COL-101) course has been implemented in multiple renditions and modalities at the participating community college since 1993. We investigated the effectiveness of the current iteration of COL-101 and piloted a cohort model to inform future iterations of the seminar. We investigated how a cohort model that provided a full year of support might enhance student success and engagement and their sense of belonging on campus. To do so, we implemented a second semester of the College Success Seminar course called COL-102.

A nationwide study of college students (Gopalan & Brady, 2019) determined that there was a positive link between a sense of belonging and student happiness and overall well-being. The research further explored the relationship between a sense of belonging and academic success factors such as persistence, continued use of campus services, and mental health in years 2 and 3 of a student's academic journey. According to an Inside Higher Ed article that referenced the Gopalan and Brady (2019) study, Gopalan stated, "When underrepresented student populations do not feel a strong sense of belonging on their campus, it impacts how they integrate, perform, and persist" (Johnson, 2020, para. 9).

The interesting finding of Gopalan and Brady's study was that underserved or racial minority students, first-generation students, and female students at 2-year colleges reported higher belonging rates than their peers at 4-year colleges. This finding could be due to the higher numbers of these groups of students at community colleges than at 4-

year institutions. Still, the study did not investigate or report those demographic statistics. It is understood that students in 2-year colleges encounter more structural barriers when attending college. According to Gopalan and Brady (2019), students at 2-year colleges are balancing home life, family commitments, and a job or multiple jobs. Johnson (2020) again referenced the Gopalan and Brady (2019) study in which Brady stated, “It may be for many of those students the sort of relevant question is not ‘do I belong in this school?’ in general but possibly ‘do I belong in this major?’ or ‘do I belong in this class?’” (para. 12). Additionally, the Gopalan and Brady (2019) study noted, “It may be that belonging both increases and is more associated with outcomes [persistence, use of resources, and mental health] when structural barriers have been sufficiently addressed” (p. 3).

Goodman & Pascarella (2006) noted that students from all demographics and backgrounds benefit from programs that intentionally foster belonging through faculty, staff, and peer relationship building. These researchers deduced that the research on FYE programs has revealed additional benefits in addition to persistence and retention (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). Their study suggested that students became more involved in campus activities, were more satisfied with their college experience, and not only perceived themselves more positively but also achieved higher grades (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).

Hatch et al. (2018) argued that improving confidence, making personal connections, and finding a sense of belonging are as important, or more important, than any specific academic skills students gain from an FYE program. Community colleges must leverage their creative resources to develop programs that entice students to socialize before and after class if they hope to improve the outcomes of retention,



persistence, and academic success that result from a genuine feeling that students belong at their institution.

Belongingness, the state or feeling of acceptance within a particular group, ranks third in Abraham Maslow's motivational hierarchy of human needs developed in 1943 (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Once physiological (food, water, sleep, and warmth) and safety (financial security, health & wellness, and injury protection) needs are met, social belonging (love, friendship, and intimacy) serves as the foundation for the final two needs, esteem (sense of accomplishment) and self-actualization (personal growth and fulfilling potential). Maslow's theory presented a shift in psychology from behaviorism to humanism (Taormina & Gao, 2013). As a humanist, he believed that people have an innate desire to contribute to the world and as such, feel most fulfilled when using their skills and talents to the best of their abilities.

Our study was motivated by recent and prior research which suggested further studies be conducted to test interventions aimed at building belonging across various contexts to gain a better understanding of how student sense of belonging can impact overall wellness and success in their academic pursuits. The community college under study used quantitative data to measure the success of their programs such as student enrollment and retention, degree and certificate completion, and transfer or job placement once students leave the college. Contextual factors such as initiatives implemented by the institution as well as the effort and support provided by individual staff members and professors affect student belonging as do other dimensions of the factors used by students to identify themselves (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). However, this qualitative comparative case study enhances the field of knowledge as the researchers' examined data collected

from students currently enrolled in a first-year experience program to evaluate the impact the program had on student success, engagement, and sense of belonging. To tell the more complete story of each case, the researchers included numeric success rates, course completion rates, and retention rates of the participants in the study which were extracted by the institutional research professional. Additional data were collected through the use of focus groups, course surveys, and reflections.

Qualitative research strives to understand meaning through an inductive process and descriptive analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The case study approach aligns with the scope and purpose of this exploratory investigation as we focused only on the first-year experience courses (i.e., COL-101 and the second-semester pilot COL-102 course) at a specific midwestern community college. The research compared the differences between how students enrolled solely in the COL-101 course as well as the two cohorts of students enrolled in both COL-101 and the pilot COL-102 course viewed their experiences in relation to these research questions that guided the study:

1. What is the difference in student success (i.e., course success, course completion, semester-to-semester retention) between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format, and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?
2. What is the difference in reported student engagement between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?

3. What is the difference in reported student sense of belonging between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?

Considering enrollment concerns among many colleges and universities, the answers to these questions could offer valuable insight regarding recruitment, enrollment, retention, and success strategies during a time when community colleges are facing new and different challenges post-COVID-19 global pandemic. The community stakeholders need students who have developed persistence in that acquisition of skills and credentials that prepare them for their post-college pursuits. An investigation of success and engagement within this group of students offered an opportunity for enhanced understanding that could lead to program initiatives that better align students with the ever-changing needs of an emerging workforce.

This chapter continues with a detailed description of the study samples, research methodology, analysis, data artifacts, and findings that evolved from this qualitative comparative case study. The coding process is discussed as well as theme and subtheme development. All aspects described offer a foundation for the critical components that serve as an introduction to Chapter 4 which addresses the study findings and implications.

### **Description of the Samples**

This qualitative comparative case study examined three sample groups: a baseline group and two affinity groups. The baseline group included students who enrolled in the standard-format, 1-semester COL-101 course while the affinity groups were enrolled in

the pilot-format, 2-semester COL-101 and COL-102 courses. One affinity group consisted of students who were enrolled in the college's Men of Color (MOC) program and the other consisted of students from a pre nursing group (NUR). The study was approved through the University of Missouri—St. Louis' Institution Review Board (IRB) as well as the site location's Research Approval Committee (RAC). The site location was a community college and therefore did not have an official IRB approval process; however, the RAC served as an IRB proxy for the community college. To protect against the chance that conflict of interest would impact students, we ensured the student's typical classroom obligations were differentiated from research initiatives. For example, some classroom assignments, such as reflection assignments, have always been a typical classroom obligation and remained as such. Students were not asked to do more work in this qualitative comparison study than they otherwise would have done for the purpose of this research. Additionally, focus group recruitment took place outside of the classroom and these focus groups were conducted on a purely voluntary basis. Requests for volunteers were sent via college email to all students currently participating in the COL-101 course in Fall 2023 and students voluntarily participated in the three designated focus groups as a part of the comparison study. The only difference between Focus Groups 1, 2, and 3 was the date and time the focus groups were held.

### ***Baseline Case***

Most of the baseline data collected tells the story of the students who enrolled in and completed the standard-format, 1-semester COL-101 course in Fall 2022. The only exception was the focus group data that were collected from students enrolled in COL-101 in Fall 2023. The demographics of the baseline group of students who enrolled in

COL-101 in Fall 2022 are presented in Table 1. There were 1,480 students in this group. Approximately 54% of the students were female and 46% were male. Most of these students were 18-21 years old (90%). The race/ethnicity breakdown of the students was as follows: 73.2% White, 7.2% Black, 6.5% Hispanic, 2.4% Asian, 0.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 5.2% two or more, 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.6% nonresident alien, and 4.7% unknown. Data from this group of students was investigated in comparison to the MOC and NUR affinity groups since they all took the course in the same semester. Ideally, we would have also run focus groups in Fall 2022 to gather additional data; unfortunately, timing limitations prevented this from occurring. Instead, we were able to gather focus group data from a small group of students who enrolled in the standard-format, 1-semester COL-101 course in Fall 2023. Since the course format and offerings did not differ from Fall 2022 to Fall 2023, the data were used to provide additional insight into students who would be considered baseline. There was a total of 10 focus group participants and although demographic data were not officially collected on the participants in the focus groups, the group appeared to be comprised of one White male, one Black female, and eight White females.

**Table 1***Baseline Group Demographics*

Demographics	< 18	18-21	22-29	30-49	Total
Female	21	712	46	16	795
White	17	540	28	7	592
Black		52	6	6	64
Hispanic		50	2		52
Asian	2	17	1	1	21
American Indian/Alaskan Native		3			3
Two or More	1	32	6	2	41
Nonresident Alien		1	1		2
Unknown	1	17	2		20
Male	12	622	43	8	685
White	8	448	30	6	492
Black		39	4		43
Hispanic	1	41	2		44
Asian	1	12	1		14
American Indian/Alaskan Native		1			1
Two or More		32	1		33
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		1			1
Nonresident Alien		5	1	1	7
Unknown	2	43	4	1	50
Grand Total	33	1,334	89	24	1,480

***Men of Color (MOC) Case***

The MOC cohort consisted of eight students from the college's MOC program. The Men of Color: Student Success Program was designed to provide ongoing support and scholarships for students who identified as males of color. In particular, the program targeted high school graduates who went on to attend this community college. The program provided a student success coach who was also the COL-101 and COL-102 instructor, and the program provided enhanced, personalized support throughout their tenure at the college. The program included eight students who were enrolled in the 2-

semester pilot of COL-101 and COL-102 that was reserved for the MOC affinity group. The students enrolled in and completed the COL-101 course in Fall 2022. The students returned the following semester, enrolled in, and completed the COL-102 course in Spring 2023. The racial/ethnic breakdown of that group of students was as follows: 50% Black, 12.5% Hispanic, and 3.5% indicated that they were two or more races. Those who are categorized as “two or more,” identified themselves as being of more than one race/ethnicity, and at least one race/ethnicity being either Black or Hispanic. All of these students were between the ages of 18 and 21.

### *Pre Nursing (NUR) Case*

The original NUR cohort consisted of 15 students from the college’s NUR program. This group of students was identified at the time of registration as students who intended to pursue their credentials in the college’s nursing program. As a reminder, the intent for these affinity groups was to have them enroll in the 2-semester pilot format of COL-101 and COL-102. The COL-101 course was taken during Fall 2022 and the COL-102 course was taken during Spring 2023. Of the 15 original students who enrolled in COL-101 in Fall 2022, several students dropped that course at some point during that semester. Five students dropped before coursework began, two dropped after coursework began, and eight students completed the COL-101 course. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the original 15, 18–21-year-old students was as follows: 60% White, 6.7% Hispanic, 13.3% two or more, 20% unknown. Those who are categorized as “two or more,” identified themselves as being of more than one race/ethnicity. Approximately 13% of the students were male, and 87% were female. All of these students were between the ages of 18 and 21. Of the eight students who completed the COL-101 course in Fall 2022, 7

students enrolled in the second semester COL-102 course, during Spring 2023. All 7 of those students dropped the course before instruction began.

### **Data Artifacts**

One data artifact was collected during the Fall 2023 semester when we conducted three focus groups with students from the Fall 2023 COL-101 course. A total of 10 students attended the focus groups. Two of us conducted and recorded focus group interviews. Three of us coded the interview responses (see Appendix F).

Course pre- and post-assessment surveys, collected as a part of the program's internal assessment process, served as additional data artifacts, and were utilized in this research study. We obtained pre-assessment results from all groups in the Fall 2022 COL-101 course but did not obtain post-assessment results from the MOC affinity group in that semester (see Appendix A and Appendix B for COL-101 pre- and post-assessment surveys). We obtained pre- and post-assessment surveys for the Spring 2023 COL-102 course but were unable to collect Spring 2023 COL-102 post-assessment results from the NUR affinity group because the cohort did not continue in the Spring 2023 semester (See Appendix C and Appendix D for COL-102 pre- and post-assessment surveys).

Lastly, another data artifact that was collected for the COL-101 program was a reflection assignment. We were only able to collect data from the MOC affinity group for the reflection assignment (see Appendix E), due to the NUR affinity group's decision to discontinue the course sequence during the Spring 2023 semester. Additional information about the data artifacts obtained is described in the following Research Methodology and Analysis section.



## **Research Methodology and Analysis**

This comparative case study utilized descriptive statistics as well as qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative data were gathered through focus groups, course assessments, and course reflection assignments. Regarding the descriptive statistics, the institutional research professional on our research team used the college's operational data store (ODS) to pull the numeric course success, course completion, and retention data. Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software was used to query and summarize data. Grade data were accessible once the college's grade verification process concluded each semester, and retention data were accessible once the college's census process concluded each semester.

As a reminder, course success rates were measured by taking the sum of successfully completed courses and dividing them by the sum of courses in which students were enrolled. Successful grades were A, B, C, and P. Course completion rates were measured by summing the courses completed and dividing that number by the sum of courses in which students were enrolled. Retention was measured by tracking COL-101 students to the following semester (Spring 2023) and the following year (Fall 2023) to see if they reenrolled at the institution. This descriptive summary data supplemented the qualitative data gathered using course assessments, reflections, and focus groups.

Regarding focus groups, outreach was initiated to Fall 2023 COL-101 students during the first third of the semester. Fifteen students responded to the invitation to voluntarily participate among three focus group dates and times. Of those 15 students who initially expressed interest, 10 attended and participated in focus group sessions.

Students who participated in the focus groups were provided refreshments and a \$20 Amazon gift card for their time.

As stated, the focus groups were bound to a specific Midwest, 2-year community college and focused only on students who enrolled in the COL-101 in Fall 2023, the data that would be included to supplement the baseline case. Once all students chose to participate, 60-minute focus group session dates and times were established based on student needs. These sessions were scheduled outside of the COL-101 class time. At the beginning of each focus group session, each student participant was given a consent form to review and sign, while also being assigned a unique identifier number to support confidentiality.

In addition, names were not associated with transcribed data, and consent forms were secured through storage that was housed in a separate location than the collected data. Semi-structured questions guided the focus group dialog, but the setting and nature of the conversation allowed for further elaboration and casual discussion. All three focus groups were held in the same room with the same furniture and equipment. Students and researchers were seated at the same table together. Identical introduction material was provided for all three focus groups and one set of preapproved questions were asked in all three focus group sessions (Appendix X). The focus group sessions were recorded using two cameras to capture both audio and video. One was set to a wide view to see where each participant was seated. The participants were provided a tag with their participant number to stick on their clothing in the camera view. The second camera was set on the table to mainly capture audio that may not be audible to the wide-angle camera.

Two of our researchers conducted the live focus groups. One served as the interviewer and the other served as the camera operator. After the focus group sessions were completed, one of the researchers from our team (i.e., the camera operator) transcribed the recordings with the assistance of Adobe Premiere Pro software. The software visually identified each speaker and transcribed the associated audio with generic labels. That researcher was subsequently able to manually review the transcription and fix the errors made by the software when participants spoke over each other and were labeled incorrectly. That researcher relabeled the transcript of speakers with their focus group assigned participant numbers (i.e., 1–10) to support internal validity. Participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcript for member checking validity. All student participants indicated that they were not concerned and waived their right to review the transcripts.

The three researchers in our group who did not participate in the focus group sessions watched and coded the focus group session videos independently. They took field notes, documented body language, and recorded other interesting aspects for depth of data that could later be considered for evaluation and findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Upon completion of independent coding, all researchers in our group met to combine and validate our coding results. The two researchers in our group who facilitated the focus groups reviewed the seminar assessment surveys and reflection assignments and coded their findings.

Regarding the pre- and post-assessment surveys, COL-101 instructors collect data each semester using these surveys which are administered to students through the learning management system, Canvas. Pre- and post-assessment surveys were collected

for the baseline group, all COL-101 courses in the Fall 2022 semester, and the NUR affinity group during the Fall 2022 semester (see Appendix A and Appendix B for COL-101 pre- and post-assessments). The MOC affinity group did not complete the post-assessment surveys during the Fall 2022 for COL-101 due to an oversight by the instructor resulting in that data being unavailable for this study.

Regarding the reflection assignment, students from the MOC and NUR affinity groups were assigned a three-question open-ended reflection assignment to provide an opportunity for more depth of responses to the questions posed (see Appendix E). Only the students in MOC cohort who participated in the second semester COL-102 course completed the reflection assignment. Two different researchers coded data from the focus group sessions, seminar assessment surveys, and reflection assignments, to enhance validity via intercoder reliability discussions. As such, Saldaña's (2009) three steps to coding, outlined in Chapter Two, were utilized.

## **Presentation of Data and Results**

The presentation of data and results will be organized by case and will align with the research question themes under investigation in this qualitative case study. After each case has been explored independently, a case comparison is presented.

### ***Baseline Case***

Most of the baseline data presented in the following section tells the story of the students who enrolled in and completed the standard-format, 1-semester COL-101 course in Fall 2022. The only exception is the focus group data that were collected from students who were enrolled in COL-101 in Fall 2023.

**Research Question 1 Theme: Student Success.** To evaluate student success, descriptive statistics, select course assessment data, and select focus group data were reviewed. To begin to evaluate the success of students in the baseline cohort, descriptive statistics on course success, course completion, and retention were compiled. As displayed in Table 2, 81.7% of students in the standard 1-semester format successfully completed (i.e., received grades of A, B, or C) COL-101 in Fall 2022, while 18.2% were unsuccessful (i.e., received grades of D or F), and one student withdrew (0.1%). As for the remainder of the coursework in which the group enrolled that semester, 94.7% of those courses were completed and 76.6% were completed successfully (i.e., completed meaning they finished the course, and successfully completed meaning they received grades of A, B, or C). When we examined a cross-section of the data, students who successfully completed the standard 1-semester format of COL-101 also completed 96.2% of their other coursework that semester (other than COL-101), and 86.0% of those courses were completed successfully.

**Table 2**

*Baseline Group Fall 2022 Course Success and Completion Data:*

Course	Successful (A, B, C, P)	Unsuccessful (D, F)	Withdrew
COL-101	81.7%	18.2%	0.1%
Other Coursework	76.6%	18.2%	5.3%
Successful in COL-101, Other Coursework	86.0%	10.1%	3.8%

As for retention statistics, 81% returned to the institution during the following semester (Spring 2023), while 62% returned the following year (Fall 2023). When we examined completion and success rates for these students, this group had a 91.5% completion rate and a 77.5% success rate the following semester (Spring 2023).

As has been discussed, one of the affinity cohort groups that participated in the pilot 2-semester format of COL-101 course in this study was composed of the MOC student success program students. Students recruited to the program were Black or Hispanic males. As such, a subset of the baseline group, including students who identify as Black or Hispanic males, was also examined for comparison purposes. It should be noted that comparing a subset of the baseline group to include only NUR cohort students was not something we could accomplish, therefore this affinity group was compared to the overall baseline population only.

The subset of the baseline group included 87 Black and Hispanic male students (5.9% of the total baseline population). This baseline subset of students had a 59.8% success rate and a 100% completion rate for COL-101 in Fall 2022. Less than half (40.2%) were unsuccessful. When we examined completion and success rates for other courses taken by these students in the same semester, 91.1% of courses were completed and 57.9% were completed successfully. The students in this subset who successfully completed the standard 1-semester format of COL-101 completed 94.4% of all other coursework (not including COL-101), and 80.8% of those courses were completed successfully.

As for retention statistics for the subset, 70.1% returned to the institution during the following semester (Spring 2023), while 51.7% returned the following year (Fall

2023). Of the students from the subset group who were retained in Spring 2023, course success and completion data were obtained for that semester as well to serve as a comparison to the MOC cohort students who were retained for the Spring 2023 semester. The baseline subset of students completed 89.7% of courses (10.3% withdrew), had a success rate of 62.9%, and only 26.8% received a D or F.

When comparing the overall baseline group to the Black and Hispanic male baseline subgroup, as displayed in Table 3, we observed that the Black and Hispanic male baseline subset performed worse than the overall baseline group. The overall baseline group had a COL-101 success rate that was 21.9% higher than the subset. The overall baseline group also had an 18.7% higher success rate in other coursework than the baseline subset group. When we examined a cross-section of the data, the number of students in the overall baseline group who were successful in COL-101 as well as in other coursework was 5.2% greater than that of the subset. The completion rates were not drastically different between the two groups. Both groups had an approximate completion rate for COL-101 of 100%. The overall baseline group completed other coursework at a slightly higher rate (3.6%) than the subset. Lastly, when we compared the cross-section of data, we observed that those from the overall baseline group who were successful in COL-101 completed other coursework at a slightly higher rate (1.8%) than those in the subset group who were successful in COL-101.

**Table 3**

*Overall Baseline Group (BASE) Compared to Subset Baseline Group (SUB): Fall 2022*

*Course Success and Completion Data*

Course	Successful (A, B, C, P)		Unsuccessful (D, F)		Withdrawn	
	BASE	SUB	BASE	SUB	BASE	SUB
COL-101	81.7%	59.8%	18.2%	40.2%	0.1%	0.0%
Other Coursework	76.6%	57.9%	18.2%	42.1%	5.3%	8.9%
Successful in COL-101, Other Coursework	86.0%	80.8%	10.1%	19.2%	3.8%	5.6%

As for retention statistics, the overall baseline group was also retained at a higher rate than the subset baseline group. The overall baseline group was retained at a 10.9% higher rate than the baseline subset during the following term (Spring 2023) and at a 103% higher rate than the subset of the following year (Fall 2023). Lastly, the baseline group completed their Fall 2023 coursework at a slightly higher rate (1.8%) than the subset but succeeded in the Fall 2023 coursework at a much higher rate (14.6%) than the subset. These descriptive data emphasize the need to investigate a new model of the COL-101 course to potentially aid in the success of Black and Hispanic male students.

Course assessments were also collected for students who completed the standard COL-101 course in Fall 2022. The pre- and post-assessment surveys both included questions about students' familiarity with campus resources, facilities, and software and information related to student success and sense of belonging. The following assessment questions, which are presented in Table 4, were questions that we identified to specifically investigate student success:



1. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your academic success?
2. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your personal success and well-being?
3. How familiar are you with software applications that will be utilized on campus and in your course?
4. How familiar are you with the career and degree pathways program at this college?

**Table 4***Fall 2022 COL-101 Baseline Assessment Survey Data*

Survey Question	Pre-assessment			Post-assessment		
	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your academic success?	18.03%	66.35%	15.63%	74.64%	24.37%	0.98%
How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your personal success and well-being?	18.35%	61.78%	19.87%	72.27%	25.98%	1.75%
How familiar are you with software applications that will be utilized on	33.05%	55.47%	9.49%	75%	23.14%	1.86%

campus and in your  
courses?

How familiar are you with the career and degree pathways program at this college?	22.20%	56.09%	21.71%	61.27%	35.34%	3.39%
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The pre- and post-assessment surveys included questions in which students must identify if they are “very familiar”, “somewhat Familiar” or “not at all familiar” with a variety of campus services. When comparing the student’s reported familiarity with campus facilities and resources that support academic success at the beginning of the class (pre-assessment) to their feelings at the end of the course (post-assessment), we determined that there was a 56.61% increase in students who reported that they were “very familiar” with the facilities and resources that support academic success. As such, there was a decrease in students who reported “somewhat familiar” (-41.98%) as well as “not at all familiar” (-14.65%). Similarly, there was a 53.92% increase in students who responded “very familiar” to the question regarding campus facilities and resources that impact a student’s personal success and well-being. Consequentially, there was a decrease in students who reported “somewhat familiar” (-35.82%) as well as “not at all familiar” (-18.12%) for this question. These findings indicate that the course achieved its goal of increasing a student’s familiarity with campus facilities and resources that support their academic and personal success. When comparing data from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment surveys, there was a 41.95% increase in the familiarity of software applications for those who answered, “very familiar,” a 32.33% decrease in those who

answered, “somewhat familiar,” and a 7.63% decrease in those who answered, “not at all familiar.” Lastly, when comparing pre- and post-assessment results for the question about familiarity with career and degree pathways programs at this college, there was a 39.07% increase in “very familiar” responses, a 20.75% decrease in “somewhat familiar” responses, and a 18.32% decrease in “not at all familiar” responses. This data suggest that the course achieved the goal of improving student familiarity with facilities and resources to support academic success, personal success and well-being, software applications used on campus and in courses, and career and degree pathway programs.

In addition to the comparison questions reviewed above, the pre-assessment survey also asked, “What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?” This question was determined to be a measure of student success. A little less than two-thirds (62%) of students indicated that they hoped the course would benefit their success in one way or another. Some responses included the following themes related to student success: time management, study skills, resources to assist with academic work, ability to navigate the website and learning management system, understanding the transition from high school to college to be more successful, become better organized, and find ways to balance school/work/life to be more successful in college.

Regarding time management, one student wrote, “The benefits I hope to obtain from this course would be overall student success, maintaining good grades, and time management.” Another student wrote, “Time management and staying on top of my homework.” Yet another student stated, “I hope to become better at time management and being productive outside of a school environment.” Regarding study skills and resources

to assist with academic work, one student wrote, "I would like most to learn valuable study skills and time management skills which are vital to being a successful college student." Another student stated, "I hope to obtain how to have better [sic] study skills, manage my time better, and to learn more about the different organizations at this college." One student wrote, "Hopefully I'll be able to know how to get tutoring help."

One student noted this as a top priority and wrote, "I hope to learn about all the tutoring options I have access to. That is the most important thing to me at the moment."

Regarding the ability to navigate the website and learning management system one student wrote, "I hope to obtain more knowledge about the this college website itself and help me get used to [the learning management system] a bit more." For some students, they hoped the course would ease the transition from high school to college. One student stated, "I hope it makes my transition from high school to collage [sic] easier." Another student echoed those sentiments and wrote, "I hope to get a better understanding of how I can be successful while here at this college by knowing where resources are and how to transition from high school to college."

Students were very forthcoming in stating their hopes that the course would help them personally with their organization skills. One student wrote, "I hope that this course will help me stay organized and on track during this semester! I tend to get stressed very easily." Another student identified this as a top priority and stated, "My main hope for this class is that it will help me with staying organized in my classes and help keep me up to date on current events around the school." One student noted the hope that the course would help balance work and other responsibilities and wrote, "I hope to learn more about how to properly manage my time as a college student in this course. It can be

difficult trying to balance school, work, and hobbies.” Another student echoed these sentiments and stated, “I hope to understand how to balance my school, work, and personal life.”

Another question related to student success that was included on the pre-assessment survey administered to COL-101 baseline students in Fall 2022 was, “In what ways do you hope your instructor will help you be successful in your first semester at the college.” About one-third (33%) of student respondents indicated that they hoped the instructor would help them with success skills like time management, study skills, career exploration, course registration information, and transfer information.

One student wrote they hoped the instructor would “talk about time management.” While a classmate also stated, “I just hope to learn more about time management.” Another student wrote, “I hope she can help me learn how to balance my time management better and motivate me to do my work.” Regarding study skills, one student stated, “Essentially just building confidence in study skills, time management, and being a better student than i [sic] was in high school.” Another student took it one step further and requested, “I hope my instructor will be able to give me personalized study tips because what works best for some doesn't always work for everyone.” Career exploration was mentioned by students as a request that their instructors discussed in the course. One student wrote, “I hope my professor shows us more about how to find information on the career pathways.” Another student stated, “Hopefully, my professor will be able to show us what skills and abilities we will be able to use and learn to be more productive and efficient students, ultimately helping us succeed in our career pathways.” Some students hoped their instructors would help them with course selection

and registration. One student wrote, “By the end of this semester I won't need to stress about finding the right applications or links for future classes” as a result of the guidance from the instructor. Another student stated he/she hoped the instructor would, “help me answer some questions I may have while signing up for classes next semester.” Some students were looking beyond their time at the college and hoped their instructors would provide information to prepare them to transfer to another college or university. One student stated, “I hope the assignments given help with daily tasks involved with being a student at this college, I also hope that these tips and helpful advise [sic] are things that I can not only use now but when I transfer to a different college.” Another student stated, “I hope that he can answer questions as I know it is difficult as a freshmen [sic] to find your footing as I am looking to transfer [sic] I want to get the best education here.”

As a compliment to the pre-assessment question, “In what ways do you hope your instructor will help you be successful in your first semester at the college,” the post-assessment survey administered to this group included the question, “In what ways did your instructor contribute to your success this semester?” Over half (57%) of student responses indicated the course and instructor positively impacted their success. Some responses included the following themes related to student success: time management, study skills, note taking, career insights, the college website and learning management system, and their instructors' support. The importance of instructor support varied depending on the individual instructor. This idea of instructor-specific impact is a theme that we see throughout this chapter.

Regarding time management, one student indicated that the instructor “helped me better understand time management and how to transition from high school time

management to college time management.” Another student stated, “My instructor helped me learn how to have good time management and when to seek help in classes.”

Regarding study skills, specifically note-taking, one student commented on how the instructor's assistance included time management and note-taking. The student stated, “Some ways that my instructor contributed to my success was by helping my time management and helping with note taking.” One student noted that the instructor helped the student and wrote, “I learned better to way manage [sic] time and to study.”

Regarding career insights, one student reflected on the instructor’s role and stated, “she really helped explain how there are multiple career pans [sic] that I didn't even know about that are offered at this college.” Students noted the instructors helped them navigate the learning management system. One student wrote, “She was very helpful when I was confused on how to use [the learning management system].” Another student echoed those sentiments and wrote, “My instructor contributed knowledge about the location of things at the campus and the location of things on [the learning management system].”

Likewise, students noted the instructor’s assistance in learning how to use the website. One student simply stated his/her instructor was instrumental in “helping me learn the website.” Another student wrote, “She answered all the questions I had and showed where [sic] to look on websites if I needed that.” Students also commented on the support they received from their instructors. One student stated, “She was super supportive and nice, always there for me, and always there to be helpful.” Another student wrote, “She was very supportive about pretty much everything. I enjoyed having her joyful personality shown to me every week. It allowed me to destress even if [sic] was for a short time.” And yet another student wrote, “My instructor was extremely kind,

encouraging, and supportive. The instructor encouraged us to know our limits regarding our working and personal lives.”

When asked, what aspects of this course were most beneficial to their success this semester, a student shared:

This course helped me learn new ways to ensure my assignments are completed in a timely manner, showed me how and where I can receive help on campus, taught me new ways to reach out for help in multiple aspects of student life, whether that be mental health related, class work related, or financial aid related. Overall, this course was a necessary introduction to the important parts of life as a student at [school name].

Regarding focus group data, several focus group questions were generated to specifically gain a better understanding of how the standard format, 1-semester COL-101 course impacted student success. Those questions were:

1. In what ways has the COL-101 course affected you in terms of the following:
  - a) Time Management Skills?
  - b) Test Preparation and Study Skills?
  - c) Critical Thinking?
  - d) Utilization of resources on campus (Advising, Ace Center, Library, etc.)?
2. In what ways has the College 101 course affected your academic plans?
  - a) Has the College 101 course impacted your likelihood to complete a degree or certificate here at this college?



- b) Do you plan to transfer to another academic institution before completing a degree or certificate here at this college?

The first set of questions (i.e., listed under “In what ways has the COL-101 course affected you in terms of the following”) focused on evaluating the impact of the course on skills that could impact success. Results were compiled from all three focus group sessions. When asked about their critical thinking skills, two students elaborated on their answers. In the first focus group, Student 1 shared that her instructor made the class think outside the box with conversation icebreakers at the beginning of class. In the second focus group, Student 4 explained the different examples of time management skills and tools that his instructor provided during the time management module. Student 4 said, “Never thought about having a planner ever.” The other students in the focus groups simply said, “no” and did not elaborate further in regard to how COL-101 impacted their critical thinking skills.

Most of the students who participated in the focus groups did not feel that COL-101 contributed to their time management skills but what they shared throughout the discussion varied. Student 1 explained that the time module did not help and that she has been in the process of discovering different calendar apps on the internet. Student 2 said, “You can’t teach time management. It’s self-discovery.” Students 3 and 5 did not contribute to the conversation on time management. Student 4 said that COL-101 helped his time management skills and that he uses, “[Canvas] for transferring my homework due dates into [my] planner to keep on hand.”

Student 6 shared her own perspective as well as what she hoped others could have gained from the time management module in COL-101:

I have pretty good time management skills. I have everything on my calendar. I have a to-do list for each day. I am like planned out by the minute. And I think that for me I already know and implement all of those things that he was that my professor was trying to teach us and tell us. But for people that aren't so good on that side, it must have been super helpful because like, I'm like my whole, my whole every days are micromanaged by myself. So coming from somebody that's a little bit more scatterbrained and doesn't really have a plan, I'm sure that that was really helpful.

All four students in focus group three stated that COL-101 did not influence their time management skills. Student 7 said, "I actually have really bad time management and I figured it out on my own so far throughout the semester." Student 8, Student 9, and Student 10 believed they all came to college with adequate time management skills and tools.

Most of the students who participated in focus groups did appreciate the information provided in the course that educated them regarding the different resources on campus. Student 1 said it made campus less intimidating and Student 2 responded with, "that was the main thing that helped me." Student 3, Student 4, and Student 5 all agreed with Student 6 when she said, "They make us aware that it's there when we need it. So I would say they do a good job."

Student 9 summarized the consensus well: "My COL-101 course has done a really good job educating me on the different resources on campus, like the tutoring center, the library, just all of that. And I think it's done a really good job with that." Essentially, the groups conferred that the course didn't have much impact on academic

skills that they needed to be successful in courses (i.e., critical thinking, test preparation, time management), but they appreciated knowing where resources are located should they need to use them.

When students were asked whether the advising session students received in class impacted any of their academic plans, 50% of those who were present for the lesson stated that there was no impact because they had already proactively created their next semester academic plan. Student 9 did shared very openly:

This might be rude, but I felt like that presentation was incredibly pointless because I was like, I already had to register for class to take this class. And now I'm taking this class to be told how to register for classes in the class I already registered for. So I was like, Why am I getting this presentation? I already registered for classes.

On the other hand, the remaining 50% indicated that the session helped provide reminders and more in-depth details than what they already knew. Student 7 admittedly learned about summer course options.

The participants noted that the course did not impact their plans to graduate, as they intended to graduate regardless. Student 1 and Student 2 both responded with “nope.” Student 5 said, “I don’t think any of my plans have changed.” Student 6 responded with ‘I would say mine is the same too.’ Student 4 diplomatically expressed:

You know, it's just you know, it's kind of like, you know, they're giving you a little push forward, just, you know, giving you that extra encouragement. It's not like it's changing any projects or it's just, you know, it's helping like.

In the third focus group, Student 9 expressed that she planned to graduate from the college and the other three students agreed. All four of these students in Focus Group 3 simply replied “yes” when asked if they planned to transfer after confirming they all planned to graduate from the college. The majority (90%) of focus group participants reported that they intended to transfer to another institution following graduation and that the course had no impact on that decision. There were no more than one-word answers from any students to the question of intent to transfer, with all respondents answering either “yes” or “unsure.”

Although 90% said they planned to transfer, the students in Focus Group 2 had a tangential discussion regarding how COL-101 could focus more on career exploration and opportunities to enter the workforce, rather than just transfer pathways. Student 3 said:

I have a good idea where I'm going in my career path, but I know that if I didn't then that having more career based like learning center would be better for me to figure out what I feel like I'm most passionate about.

Student 5 elaborated on what Student 3 was saying with:

And I do kind of have an idea. But if I was...introduced to other things...I could change my mind. I'm an undecided. I'm just indecisive trying to... really look at everything. And that would be helpful to... be in that class and lay out... who I am as a person. These are my interests. Help me find some sort of how-to put that in that together and choose the rest of my life.

Student 4 continued speaking related to this theme:

It really is... how do you get people to show up- is you give them incentives, that's cut-and-dry. If you give these people an opportunity to learn about their careers and then also... let them have fun.

Finally, Student 3 wrapped up the dialogue with the following statement: "They'll be able to hang out with people in your class while you're also able to talk about stuff that will help you."

In sum, the focus group results insinuated that the standard 1-semester COL-101 course content does not have much impact on student success and most students are already familiar with resources such as Canvas and the student portal. This was interesting, as the pre- and post-assessment results contradict this finding. It may be that the instrumentation allowed for these varying perspectives. For instance, the assessment data were gathered using simple yes or no questions, while the focus group setting allowed for elaboration. Another thing to consider is that the pre- and post-assessment surveys were administered to all 1,408 students who took COL-101 in Fall 2022, while the focus groups were composed of only 10 students who took the course in Fall 2023. Something could also be said about students who elect to participate in a focus group. Is there something that sets them apart?

We were prepared for students to potentially respond in a way that would imply that the course was not impactful on their success. As such, we asked questions about program improvement as well. Much of the feedback revolved around students requesting less redundant information, a smaller focus on Canvas preparation, and an increased focus on student engagement. For instance, in one focus group, three students said they wanted a way to indicate that they already knew about Canvas and how to use it, time

management skills, and study skills. Students from all focus groups made it quite evident that the faculty member was imperative in whether or not the class was engaging, and that a more engaging course would have had a great impact on their success. Engagement data is explored in more detail below under Research Question 2.

**Research Question 2 Theme: Student Engagement.** To evaluate student engagement, select course assessment and focus group data were reviewed. To begin to evaluate the engagement of students in the baseline cohort, some pre- and post-assessment survey results from the surveys administered to the baseline students in Fall 2022 COL-101, were reviewed. The following assessment questions were specifically aimed at investigating student engagement:

1. How confident are you in your interpersonal communication skills?
2. How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities at this college?

These data are presented in Table 5. It should be noted that we selected the question, “How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities...” to help evaluate student engagement because this knowledge is essential to being an engaged student-member of the campus community.

**Table 5**

*Fall 2022 COL-101 Baseline Assessment Survey Data for Student Engagement*

Survey Question	Pre-assessment			Post-assessment		
	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	Very	Somewhat	Not at all

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How confident are you in your interpersonal communication skills?	38.65%	53.57%	7.78%	64.92%	32.79%	2.30%
How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities at this college?	49%	43.30%	7.70%	81.27%	17.96%	0.77%

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When comparing the student's reported confidence in their interpersonal communication skills at the beginning of the class (i.e., pre-assessment) to their feelings at the end of the course (i.e., post-assessment), it was found that there was a 26.27% increase in students who reported "very confident." As such, there was a decrease in students who reported "somewhat confident" (-20.67%) as well as "not at all confident" (-5.5%). Similarly, there was an increase in students who responded "very familiar" on the post-assessment when compared to the pre-assessment, regarding the question that addressed familiarity with their rights and responsibilities at this college. There was a 32.27% increase in students who reported "very familiar." Consequentially, there was a decrease in students who reported "somewhat familiar" (-23.34%) as well as "not at all familiar" (-6.93%). These findings indicated that the course achieved its goal of increasing student confidence in their interpersonal communication skills as well as increasing their familiarity with their rights and responsibilities at this college.

In addition to the comparison questions reviewed above, the pre-assessment survey also asked, "What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you

more successful at this college?” Almost half (47%) of student respondents indicated they hoped that the course would benefit student engagement. Responses included the following themes related to student engagement: the ability to navigate the campus, know where to find buildings, resources, and services, learn how to communicate with professors, staff, and classmates, learn about student clubs and organizations, learn more about their rights and responsibilities as students, networking opportunities, and meeting people.

Regarding the ability to navigate the campus and knowing where to find buildings and resources, one student wrote, “I hope that this course will help me understand how to navigate this college, especially the physical [sic] campus.” Another student wrote, “Benefits I hope to obtain from this course to make me more successful at this college is to be able to know where to get other course materials, (ex: books) and how to navigate between buildings on campus.” Yet another student stated, “Knowledge of how to navigate campus, what they have on campus to help students, and how to navigate all of the technology used on campus.” Emphatically, one student wrote, “I hope this course makes it easier to navigate around!” Another way the course works to benefit student engagement is through interpersonal communication skills particularly when communicating with professors. One student wrote they hoped the course would help “to be able to use resources more and how to be properly communicated with a teacher if there is a problem.” Another student stated, “I hope to learn ways to more easily communicate with teachers and learn more about the different opportunity's [sic] this college offers.” Quite a few students wrote about their hopes of finding student clubs and organizations they could join. One student wrote, “I hope to get to know all the resources



available to me and learn about clubs and organizations that interest me.” Another student wrote, “I hope to learn what clubs and programs there are on campus.” While another student stated, “I want to be able to know more organizations and clubs within this college so I can become more involved.” In terms of learning more about student rights and responsibilities, one student wrote:

I hope to understand my rights and responsibilities as a student and learn to take advantage of them. However, my one true goal from this class is to grow socially, to be able to communicate and socialize with confidence and without fear.

In regards to meeting people and making connections, students wrote the following, “I hope I learn how to be more comfortable around campus and meet new people,” “I hope that from this course I can obtain simple yet useful social skills and connections in order to meet new people,” and, “I hope to gain a better understanding of the campus; the opportunities it presents and get to meet other students with my interests.”

The pre-assessment survey also asked, “In what ways do you hope your instructor will help you be successful in your first semester at this college?” Approximately 70% of student respondents indicated that they hoped the instructor would help them be successful by being engaging themselves and promoting engagement within and outside of the classroom. Responses included themes like answering questions, being good communicators, helping students with their communication skills, being patient and understanding with students, helping students navigate the campus and find the resources needed, finding clubs and organizations to join, and just being a kind/caring/compassionate person whom they could consult for any reason.

Students very directly wrote responses including, “Be there to answer questions,” “Just to Answer [sic] questions that I may have,” and, “Answer questions thoroughly.” Students also indicated they hoped their instructors would be patient, understanding, kind, caring, and compassionate. One student stated:

I hope they will be able to answer any question that I may have and be able to assist me in navigating my first semester here. I hope they will be patient with any stupid question I may ask and point me in the right direction.

Another student stated, “I hope my instructor will be flexible and patient with students who may need assistance in navigating an online class and students with other responsibilities and concerns.” Yet another student wrote, “I hope my instructor will be kind and supportive.” In terms of getting involved in clubs one student hoped his/her instructor would “Help me understand any events, clubs, and more going on at the campus to see what I can do.” Another student stated, “I just hope she explains clubs a little bit because I want to get involved at the campus.”

In the post-assessment survey, 25% of responses indicated that the course and instructor impacted student engagement. Students were asked two open-ended questions: “What aspects of the course were most beneficial to your success this semester?” “In what ways did your instructor contribute to your success this semester?” Some responses included the following themes related to student engagement: in-person/zoom meeting conversations, conversation starters/ice breakers, discussion boards, campus tours, clubs and organizations, communication, and the attitude of the instructor. Regarding student engagement insights from the post-assessment, a student shared:

We learned about things that I had no clue were a thing at [school name]. I thought [school name] was just for coming here for class then going home. I didn't know there were clubs/organizations. I learned how to become more involved with the student body and the college itself.

Another student shared about the level of engagement in the classroom:

It was cool to do the activities to really put what we learned each week into practice. It showed me some of the things that I thought I had a grasp on that I really didn't and furthermore helped me to now know how to correctly know and use each tool that was provided.

Regarding focus group data, several focus group questions were generated to gain a better understanding of how the standard format, 1-semester COL-101 course could be improved, and some of the responses specifically identified student engagement. Those questions were:

1. What suggestions do you have for how the College 101 course could be improved for new students?
  - a) Are there specific parts of the College 101 course that you think need to be added?
  - b) Are there specific parts that you think need to be removed?
2. What additional guidance (if any) by the faculty would significantly benefit you during the College 101 course?
3. Think back to when you were starting the College 101 course. How did your experience turn out to be similar or different from what you expected?

When asked about whether anything needed to be added to the COL-101 course, 50% of participants reported that they would like more engagement activities, 10% of participants reported that it would be helpful if all faculty were fully and consistently prepared, and the remaining 40% did not state that anything specific needed to be added. Additionally, 30% of participating students reported that they would like more engagement throughout the course, 20% reported that they would like less time on Canvas, 20% reported that they want their faculty to “actually teach,” and the remainder had no response when asked what suggestions they have for improving the COL-101 course.

When asked about whether the students would like to be more engaged with other students, all student focus group participants said yes. Four of the students expressed concerns regarding how hard it is to make friends at the college level and two of the students said that work and life keep them so busy they do not want to be forced to make friends, but they do believe it is important to be engaged. When discussing what engagement opportunities looked like, Student 2 requested more “get to know you” activities on days that the class finished covering content early. Student 1 requested more club and organization opportunities for students with specific interests and provided an example of the Nursing Major Club. Two students suggested partner activities in all classes and four more students throughout the three focus groups indicated that group activities and assignments in all classes would improve student engagement. Only two of the students who participated in the focus group session thought that requiring attendance at activities outside of the classroom would improve student engagement and positively impact new students. One student suggested creating outings with a club to a networking

event with a focus on your major of study to improve engagement and two other students in that focus group agreed that this kind of career-focused networking event would have a positive impact. When time outside of class was mentioned, 40% of the focus group participants indicated that they would like to learn more about careers and would like to visit a career-related event as a group.

During the second focus group conversation, students once again suggested that an icebreaker at the beginning of class was an ideal form of engagement. Both Student 4 and Student 6 mentioned enjoying academic spaces in which professors spoke to students casually and when conversations with peers during class were encouraged. Student 6 mentioned that she will not go out of her way to talk with classmates around her unless the professor encourages it as a part of the class. Student 5 stressed that she wanted to be more engaged on campus but not in a formal sense, like joining a club.

Student 4 shared that his most talkative classes were the ones in which the students collectively shared interests; he specifically mentioned his multicultural education class as he and his peers shared the goal to become teachers. Student 4 said, “And that class is the most engaging out of all of my classes, purely because we are able to have that shared experience.”

In the third focus group, Student 9 mentioned that she only formed a study group because it was specifically mentioned by the professor in her business class. Student 9 further stated that she has not had the chance to join clubs due to her busy schedule. Student 7 elaborated on Student 9’s comment about a busy schedule, sharing that she has not been able to attend any of the large on-campus events because they were always happening during her class schedule.

When prompted about engagement and a sense of belonging, Student 1 referenced the lack of residential life in a community college setting and that due to this, it was hard to make friends. This concept was also mentioned in another focus group, by Student 9. Student 9 shared, “I feel like community college is kind of already at a disadvantage in that sense because like 95% of students commute.”

Student 1 elaborated, “It’s hard to force people to connect with each other.” She later mentioned the scavenger hunt activity in COL 101 and that this activity forced the students to interact in a positive manner. Student 1 asked if the college could help create friendships and relationships in an organic way. Student 2 agreed with Student 1 and continued that being in a new environment with people in different stages of life was intimidating.

### **Research Question 3 Theme: Sense of Belonging.**

Select course assessment and focus group data were reviewed to evaluate a student's sense of belonging. To begin to evaluate the sense of belonging of students in the baseline cohort, some pre -and post-assessment survey results from the surveys administered to the baseline students in Fall 2022 COL-101 were reviewed.

Over half (53.9%) of the students who completed the pre-assessment indicated that they are somewhat or very familiar with the campus organizations and leadership opportunities at this college. When reviewing post-assessment survey data, we found that a majority (95.3%) indicated that they are somewhat or very familiar with the campus organizations and leadership opportunities at this college. This reported familiarity signified that the course achieves the goal of improving student familiarity with campus

organizations and leadership opportunities, which is essential to gaining a sense of belonging on campus.

Aside from that comparison question, another question that was included in the pre-assessment survey was, “What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?” Some responses to this question aligned with the theme of a sense of belonging. Seven percent of student respondents indicated that they hoped the course would benefit their sense of belonging. These responses included the following themes related to a sense of belonging: join clubs/organizations and connect with more people, meet people, obtain new friends, become more social/involved, build relationships, find out how I fit in, and I would love to feel at home at the college. One student stated, “I hope taking this class would benefit me being comfortable at this college.” Another student wrote, “I hope to gain close relationships with the other people in this class.” A third student wrote, “I hope to benefit from making new friends and having a successful college career.”

Another question that was included on the pre-assessment was, “In what ways do you hope your instructor will help you be successful in your first semester at this college?” There were 4% of responses to this question that were also relevant to the theme of student success. These students indicated that they hoped the instructor would help them in ways that enhanced their sense of belonging primarily by being a person with whom they can connect personally as well as informing students of clubs and organizations that they can join to find friends on campus. One student wrote, “I hope my instructor will help provide opportunities for communication with others to make connections and be successful in social relations.” Another student stated, “I hope he will

grow connection [sic] with me so I have one person I know I can go to for help.” A third student stated, “I hope that my instructor will help me to learn to make more connections in college and to make the most out of those connections.”

The post-assessment survey included two questions that are complimentary to the ones discussed above, and those are, “What aspects of this course were most beneficial to your success this semester?” “In what ways did your instructor contribute to your success this semester?” In the post-assessment survey, 4% of responses indicated the course and instructor impacted their sense of belonging. Some responses included the following themes related to a sense of belonging: on-campus friendships, a sense of community, motivation/encouragement, a welcoming environment, confidence, and comfortability. One student wrote, “I hope that we as a class are prompted to come together as a community and be there for each other. If needed, we could help each other in other classes and grow together.” Another student stated, “I hope they are someone I am comfortable communicating with if I need help or if I have any questions.”

One student responded to the post-assessment question, “What aspects of this course were most beneficial to your success this semester?” with the following response related to one’s sense of belonging:

How the school made me feel. Regardless of all the programs, opportunities, and scholarships, the school that I choose feels like home, a place where I will be able to grow and develop not just academically but in all aspects of life.

Regarding the post-assessment question about the instructor's influence, another student shared:



He went out of his way to check up with me and inform me that an assignment was due, and it made a huge positive difference and made me feel valued. I felt that he invests himself in the success of his students.

The final measure used to assess the sense of belonging in the baseline group was focus group data. Focus group discussions related to engagement and a sense of belonging often overlapped. However, we asked the following questions with the specific aim to assess this theme:

1. How has the College 101/102 course at this college impacted relationships with students and faculty whom you otherwise probably would not have connected with?
  - a) Have relationships developed?
  - b) Friendships?
  - c) Study groups?
  - d) Faculty support?
2. In what ways has the College 101/102 course been in developing a sense of community/belonging here at the community college?
3. With which group or groups within this college do you feel most closely associated?
  - a) Do you actively participate in academic or social group activities with students outside your COL-101/102 peer group?
  - b) Would you like to be more engaged with other students?
4. How could this college improve student engagement and a sense of belonging/community among students?

Thirty percent of participants noted that the course did not have an impact on their relationships with students and faculty, 20% reported that it impacted student relationships only, 40% reported that it impacted faculty relationships only, and the last 10% reported that it impacted their relationship with the campus in general (i.e., knowing where things were located).

When asked whether the COL-101 course had developed their sense of community/belonging at the college, 40% of respondents said that it did not have any impact at all, and 20% indicated that they learned a lot about campus resources but did not necessarily develop a sense of belonging due to the course. On the other hand, 40% reported that they feel more comfortable and less alone than before. For instance, Student 4 answered, “You know, it makes me feel like everyone else is in the same boat as me. Kind of like just a little bit frazzled.” Student 3 mentioned a diminished sense of confusion due to the community gained in COL-101. Student 6 added, “It helped me understand that everyone else is just like me and I am not behind.”

More than two-thirds of student participants in the focus groups (70%) indicated that they did not participate in academic or social group activities with students beyond their COL-101 peer group. Similarly, most students reported that either there are no groups or groups of students at the college with whom they feel closely associated (40%), or that they were mainly associated with current friends (40%). Three students (30%) indicated they would like to engage with other students at the college without formally joining a club or organization.

When the conversation transitioned to topics regarding a sense of belonging on campus, in the second focus group, Student 6 shared that she is usually someone who is

willing to talk to anyone but not on the college campus, as she feels intimidated. Student 10 stated that “It’s just difficult at a community college.”

Sixty percent of students in the focus groups said COL-101 did not impact their relationship with other students but 40% indicated that it did impact their relationship with their professor. While 40% said that they still socialize with their high school friends, another 40% said that the course helped them to realize that they are not alone or falling behind and 20% said that the course helped them to realize that everyone else is experiencing the same challenges and difficulties. The data indicated that a sense of belonging was increased, as 60% of students indicated that they felt supported by their COL-101 professor and that the course helped them gain awareness of facilities, buildings, parking, resources, and campus locations.

### *Men of Color (MOC) Case*

The MOC cohort consisted of eight students from the college’s MOC program. These eight, 18–21-year-old students, enrolled in the 2-semester pilot of COL-101 and COL-102 that was reserved for the MOC affinity group. The students enrolled in and completed the COL-101 section in Fall 2022, and all of these students enrolled in COL-102 in Spring 2023.

**Research Question 1 Theme: Student Success.** To evaluate student success for the MOC affinity group who were enrolled in one of the 2 semester COL-101 and COL-102 pilot sections, descriptive statistics, select course assessment data and reflection assignment data were reviewed. To begin to evaluate the success of students in this cohort, descriptive statistics regarding course success, course completion, and retention were compiled. First, all the students in this cohort not only completed, but successfully

completed the first semester COL-101 course, in Fall 2022 (i.e., completed meaning they finished the course and successfully meaning they received grades of A, B, or C). As for the coursework other than COL-101 in which cohort enrolled that semester, 97% of those courses were completed and 90% of courses were completed successfully.

As a reminder, our initial goal was to implement a pilot 2-semester course of COL-101 and COL-102 for both affinity groups in the study. The MOC affinity group is the only cohort of students who not only enrolled in both semesters of the course (i.e., COL-101 in Fall 2022 and COL-102 in Spring 2023) but also had students complete both of those courses. More specifically, seven of the eight students who completed the first semester, COL-101 course in Fall 2022, enrolled in and completed COL-102 in Spring 2023. The COL-102 course was not graded, however, the remainder of the coursework in which the students enrolled during Spring 2023, outside of COL-102, was investigated. It was observed that for these courses, 96.6% of courses were completed and 86.2% were completed successfully.

Retention rates were also examined for this group of students. The majority (87.5%) of the students from the Fall 2022 MOC cohort returned to the institution the following semester (Spring 2023), and three-quarters (75%) of the cohort returned the following year (Fall 2023). At first glance, these success and retention rates seem impressive; however, the sample size must be taken into consideration. A full discussion regarding how these rates compare to the other groups will be explored in the Comparison section. Essentially, it was noted that the MOC affinity group had outperformed the overall baseline group, and most importantly, the Black and Hispanic male subset baseline group.

Course assessments were also collected for students who participated in the pilot 2-semester course sequence of COL-101 and COL-102. Unfortunately, due to an oversight on the part of the instructor, for this cohort, none of the post-assessment survey data were collected at the conclusion of the COL-101 course in Fall 2022. Students were not prompted to complete the post-assessment survey and were therefore not required to complete the survey. As such, we are unable to determine if the first semester COL-101 course impacted the student's feelings on the measures that we explored. The Fall 2022 pre-assessment data is presented, and the focus is the open-ended responses to that survey. The same group was surveyed in Spring 2023 and, fortunately, both pre- and post-assessment results were collected.

The pre- and post-assessment surveys both included questions related to familiarity with campus resources, facilities, and software as well as student success and sense of belonging. The following assessment questions, which are presented in Table 6, were identified as questions that addressed measures of student success:

1. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your academic success?
2. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your personal success and well-being?
3. How familiar are you with software applications that will be utilized on campus and in your course?
4. How familiar are you with the career and degree pathways program at this college?

**Table 6***Fall 2022 COL-101 MOC Assessment Survey Data*

Survey Question	Pre-assessment		
	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your academic success?	50%	50%	0%
How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your personal success and well-being?	50%	50%	0%
How familiar are you with software applications that will be utilized on campus and in your courses?	0%	100%	0%
How familiar are you with the career and degree pathways program at this college?	0%	100%	0%

As mentioned, comparing pre- and post-assessment data for the MOC who completed COL-101 in Fall 2022 was not possible. The pre-assessment data demonstrated that this group reported that at the beginning of their first semester in Fall 2022, all of them were either already somewhat or very familiar with campus facilities and resources to support their academic success. Similarly, they all were either already somewhat or very familiar with campus facilities and resources to support their personal success and well-being. Lastly, every student in this group reported being only somewhat familiar with the software application expectations and career and degree pathways

program at this college, at the beginning of the Fall 2022 semester. The post-assessment data may not have been very insightful, given the little room for improvement needed.

One open-ended question on the MOC COL-101 pre-assessment survey asked, “What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?” This question was identified as a measure of student success. Two students answered this question. One student indicated wanting to become familiar with the tutoring center and hoping to “gain a better understanding of the pathway to success for my degree.” The second student stated, “I expect to obtain the knowledge that I need to obtain success, I wish to also learn how to have better study habits and to also figure out what I wish to do with my life.”

As mentioned previously, all students from the original MOC affinity group who enrolled in COL-101 in Fall 2022 completed the course and enroll in COL-102 the following semester (Spring 2023). These students completed pre- and post-assessment surveys at the beginning and end of the COL-102 course. These assessments contained questions identified as measures of student success. Those questions, which are presented in Table 7, were:

1. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support success?
2. How familiar are you with the financial aid process at this college?

**Table 7***Spring 2023 COL-102 MOC Assessment Survey Data for Student Success*

Survey Question	Pre-assessment			Post-assessment		
	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support success?	87.5%	12.5%	0%	83%	17%	0%
How familiar are you with the financial aid process at this college?	87.5%	12.5%	0%	83%	0%	17%

When comparing the student's reported familiarity with campus facilities and resources that support success at the beginning of the class (e.g., pre-assessment) to their feelings at the end of the course (e.g., post-assessment), it was determined that there was a 2.5% decrease in students who reported, "very familiar," a 4.5% increase in students who reported, "somewhat familiar," and no change at all to those who reported, "not at all familiar" (0%). Regarding the question, "How familiar are you with the financial aid process at this college?" there was a 2.5% decrease in students who reported, "very familiar," a 12.5% decrease in those who answered, "somewhat familiar," and a 17% increase in those who answered, "not at all familiar." The results did not change significantly from the beginning to the end of the semester, but it should be noted that more students completed the pre-assessment survey (8) than completed the post-assessment survey (6) which may skew the results.



In addition to the comparison questions reviewed above, the MOC COL-102 pre-assessment survey included the question, “How do you define student success?” One student wrote, “Being able to set a goal to completing the goal.” Two other students also mentioned setting and completing goals. Two students identified completing a degree as the definition of success. At the end of the semester, students completed a post-assessment survey which included the question, “How has your definition of success changed since you started college?” One student wrote, “Success to me means to accomplish your goals that you’ve been trying to pursue and attain.” Another student stated, “Not getting to [sic] behind, just doing your best work on time and you should be very successful.” Another student stated, “To me success changed from a want to a need. Everything I did in college I took more serious [sic].” “Managing time wisely and loving what you do” was what another student indicated as his definition of success. And, finally, one student wrote this, “Yes, I used to think success was how good someone was in a field but now success to me is more personal to how I get things done.”

Another open-ended question that was included on the MOC COL-102 pre-assessment was, “What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?” Two students mentioned wanting to receive “ongoing support,” one student desired “a mentor” and one student wrote he hoped to improve “communication skills.” One student reported he wanted the course would help him “to get out of my comfort zone.” At the end of the semester the MOC students were asked, “What benefits did you obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?” One student stated, “This course helped me with many things the most important being the ability to receive help with my classes.” Another student echoed

these sentiments as he stated the course “taught me to be more comfortable outside of my comfort zone and ask for help.” One student noted he benefited from the course because “it helped with becoming a good college student and showed an easier understanding to college basics.” One student noted the course benefited him when he wrote, “It helps you build a sense of community and just lets you build more connections and find more people like you.” The theme of connections was repeated in this student's response who stated, “Connections, getting more help with choosing the right decisions and bettering my focus to my career.”

Finally, the students in the MOC program completed a reflection assignment toward the end of their second semester in the COL-102 course. The reflection assignment questions are in Appendix E. Students in the MOC program were asked, “What could the college do, or do better, to support student success and a sense of belonging at this college? One student wrote the college could offer “more counseling and more help for students who are struggling.” Another student suggested improving the math program. One student recommended “more support for the M.O.C. from the college.” Regarding the ways the second semester COL-102 course impacted the students’ feelings of success, students reported the following outcomes for having been enrolled in COL-102: improved study habits and grades, connecting with new students, pushing students to go above and beyond, and building confidence about career choice.

**Research Question 2 Theme: Student Engagement.** To evaluate student engagement, select course assessment and focus group data were reviewed. To begin to evaluate the engagement of students in the MOC cohort, some pre- and post-assessment survey results from the surveys that were administered to the MOC cohort in Fall 2022

and Spring 2023 were reviewed. As a reminder, this group was not administered the post-assessment survey in Fall 2022. Regarding the Fall 2022 pre-assessment survey, the following questions addressed the construct of student engagement:

1. How confident are you in your interpersonal communication skills?
2. How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities at this college?

These data are presented in Table 8. As noted earlier, we chose the question about rights and responsibilities as a measure of engagement because this knowledge is essential in order to be an engaged student-member of the campus community. Another issue that we would like to note is that there were no specific open-ended questions specifically aimed at assessing student engagement. When reviewing the assessment survey questions listed above, students were equally split across both questions in regard to feeling “very familiar” and “somewhat familiar.” None of the student respondents in this group reported “not at all familiar” to either question.

**Table 8**

*Fall 2022 COL-101 MOC Pre-assessment Survey Data for Student Engagement*

Survey Question	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
How confident are you in your interpersonal communication skills?	50%	50%	0%
How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities at this college?	50%	50%	0%

Regarding the Spring 2023 post-assessment survey, the following question, which is displayed in Table 9, specifically addressing the construct of student engagement:

1. How familiar are you with Service Learning and Civic Engagement opportunities at this college?

**Table 9**

*Spring 2023 COL-102 MOC Assessment Survey Data for Student Engagement*

Survey Question	Pre-assessment			Post-assessment		
	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
How familiar are you with Service Learning and Civic Engagement opportunities at this college?	25%	37.5%	37.5%	17%	67%	17%

When comparing the pre- and post-assessment results regarding the question listed above, there was an observed 8% decrease in those who reported they were “very familiar,” a 29.5% increase in those who reported they were “somewhat familiar,” and a 20.5% decrease in those who reported they were “not at all familiar.” While uncertain, it is possible that the decline in student survey respondents as mentioned previously (i.e., 8 respondents to the pre-assessment and 6 to the post-assessment), is the cause of the change in the percentage of those who indicated being very familiar.

As mentioned previously, the students in the MOC program completed a reflection assignment toward the end of the second semester in the COL-102 course. The reflection assignment questions are in Appendix E. Regarding the impact the second semester COL-102 course had on student feelings of engagement, students were asked to “describe specific events, people, or experiences that you believe have supported you on your academic journey over the past year.” Overwhelmingly, students identified the instructor as the person who supported them during their academic journey. This was the same instructor for both courses in the sequence who provided consistent mentorship. One student wrote, “[The instructor] has definitely helped me out a lot and was a good mentor in general.” Two students simply wrote “the instructor” or his name in response to that question. Students also indicated other people and services they felt supported by to include “professors,” “peers,” an athletic team, and the MOC program specifically.

**Research Question 3 Theme: Sense of Belonging.** To evaluate a student's sense of belonging, select course assessment and focus group data were reviewed. To begin to evaluate the sense of belonging of students in the MOC cohort, some pre- and post-assessment survey results from the surveys administered to the MOC students in Fall 2022 COL-101, were reviewed.

The question included in the assessments related to a sense of belonging was, “How familiar are you with campus organizations and leadership opportunities at this college?” Comparison of the results of the pre- and post-assessment revealed that students indicated feeling somewhat familiar with campus organizations and leadership opportunities at the college which would increase a sense of belonging on campus. As mentioned, none of the students in the MOC cohort completed the post-assessment

survey, therefore we are unable to determine if there was growth in this area from the beginning to the end of their first semester in college. In response to the open-ended question, “In what ways do you hope your instructor will help you be successful in your first semester at this college?” One student responded, “Just to be as helpful as possible and to ensure we stay on task and that we are welcomed with open arms.” While another student who responded to the questions stated, “I hope to get help with organization and stress relief from being overwhelmed with responsibility.”

Additionally, we inquired about student confidence in their critical thinking skills which relates to their sense of belonging. There was growth from the beginning to the end of the semester in student sense of confidence in their critical thinking skills. The pre-assessment survey included one open-ended question regarding ways that students hope their classmates will help them be successful as it relates to the theme of sense of belonging. One student hoped classmates would “hold each other accountable” while another student was looking for “a sense of community.” A third student noted classmates could help with success by “having more connections.”

The post-assessment survey included open-ended questions related to the ways that the instructor and classmates aided in student success during the second semester COL-102 course. Regarding the ways that the instructor aided in student success, one student reported, “[the instructor] helped with so many things from registration to getting help with my grades.” Another student stated the instructor “checked in with me weekly and engaged us in outside activities.” One student wrote about the instructor “they opened me up to more opportunities and set me up for success.” Another student went on

to write, “He just made the first year so much easier and the whole process in general. Whenever I needed help with anything he would do it.”

Regarding how classmates aided in student success, one student shared that his classmates “encouraged me and went through the pain with me and I just do better when I see other people doing it.” Another student felt classmates helped with success by “being motivating and being there for me.” Yet another student responded, “They created friendships that built confidence and allowed a more comfortable day.” Another student noted, “they helped me balance responsibilities to help me worry less.” And finally, one student stated, “The classmates in the MOC were amazing. I’m not the best at math but being able to ask students for help was a huge help.”

Finally, the students in the MOC program completed a reflection assignment toward the end of their second semester in the COL-102 course (see Appendix E). Students were asked what the college could do, or do better, to support their success and sense of belonging at the college. A common theme in the responses was events and activities to encourage students to “hang out” and have fun. One student suggested the college “have more fun events like kickball or dodgeball or basketball games.” Another student suggested, “the college could host more events to attract students to the school and to hang out.” Students also recommended improving the math program and having more counseling services available to struggling students. One student stated, “More counseling and more help for students who are struggling.”

### *Pre Nursing (NUR) Case*

The original NUR cohort consisted of 15 students who expressed interest in the college's NUR program. This group was selected in order to investigate a subset of our workforce development student population.

**Research Question 1 Theme: Student Success.** To evaluate student success for the NUR affinity group who were enrolled in one of the 2-semester COL-101 and COL-102 pilot sections, descriptive statistics and select course assessment data were reviewed. To begin to evaluate the success of the students in this cohort, descriptive statistics on course success, course completion, and retention were compiled. The cohort began as a group of 15 who enrolled in the first-semester COL-101 course in Fall 2022, but six dropped out before the course began. Since the faculty and course content typically have no influence on pre-semester withdrawals, these six students were excluded from the descriptive data below. The withdrawal data reported were only those who dropped at some point after coursework began. As displayed in Table 10, 77.8% of students in the standard 1-semester format successfully completed (i.e., received grades of A, B, or C) COL-101 in Fall 2022, while 11.1% were unsuccessful (i.e., received grades of D or F), and 11.1% withdrew. As for the rest of the coursework the group enrolled in that semester, 92.7% of those courses were completed and 80.5% were completed successfully (completed meaning they finished the course, and successfully completed meaning they received grades of A, B, or C). When we compared a cross-section of data, the students who successfully completed the standard 1-semester format of COL-101 completed 100% of their remaining courses that semester (other than COL-101), and 96.9% of those courses were completed successfully.



**Table 10***Fall 2022 Pre Nursing (NUR) Affinity Group Course Success/Completion Data*

Course	Successful (A, B, C, P)	Unsuccessful (D, F)	Withdraw
COL-101	77.8%	11.1%	11.1%
Other Coursework	80.5%	12.2%	7.3%
Successful in COL-101, Other Coursework	96.9%	3.1%	0%

Retention rates were also collected for this group of students. It was observed that 77.8% of the students from the Fall 2022 NUR cohort returned to the institution the following semester (Spring 2023), and 77.8% of the cohort returned the following year (Fall 2023).

As mentioned in the MOC section, our original goal was to have both affinity groups enroll in and complete both semesters of the pilot course. COL-101 in Fall 2022 and COL-102 in Spring 2023. However, the COL-102 section was not required because it would have required changing all first-semester student degree requirements. Changing degree requirements would have imposed financial aid implications, which was not the intent of this research. Unfortunately, the NUR cohort decided not to complete the second semester, COL-102 course. Still, we believed that it would be interesting to examine course success and completion data for students from this cohort who were retained in Spring 2023. Students in the NUR cohort who completed the first-semester, COL-101 course, but did not complete the second-semester, COL-102 course completed 85.3% of their Spring 2023 classes, and 85.3% of those courses were completed successfully (i.e.,

completed meaning they finished the course and successfully meaning they received grades of A, B or C).

As mentioned in the MOC section, course assessments were also collected for students who participated in the pilot 2-semester course of COL-101 and COL-102. Given that NUR cohort students did not complete the additional COL-102 course, this section will focus on their responses to the pre- and post-assessment surveys administered in Fall 2022. The pre- and post-assessment surveys both included questions that inquired about familiarity with campus resources, facilities, and software, and included measures of student success and sense of belonging. The following assessment questions, which are presented in Table 11, specifically addressed student success:

1. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your academic success?
2. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your personal success and well-being?
3. How familiar are you with software applications that will be utilized on campus and in your course?
4. How familiar are you with the career and degree pathways program at this college?

**Table 11***Fall 2022 NUR Assessment Survey Data*

Survey question	Pre-assessment			Post-assessment		
	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your academic success?	29%	71%	0%	71%	29%	0%
How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your personal success and well-being?	29%	43%	29%	43%	57%	0%
How familiar are you with software applications that will be utilized on campus and in your courses?	29%	57%	14%	86%	14%	0%
How familiar are you with the career and degree pathways program at this college?	43%	57%	0%	71%	29%	0%

When comparing the student reported familiarity with campus facilities and resources that support academic success at the beginning of the class (e.g., pre-

assessment) to their feelings at the end of the course (e.g., post-assessment), it was determined that there was a 42% increase in students who reported “very familiar.” As such, there was a decrease in students who reported “somewhat familiar” (-42%). No students in this cohort reported “not at all familiar” in the pre -or post-assessment survey. Similarly, there was an increase in students who responded “very familiar” on the post-assessment when compared to the pre-assessment, for the question regarding campus facilities and resources that impact a student’s personal success and well-being. It was revealed that there was a 14% increase in students who reported “very familiar.” There was also an increase in students who reported “somewhat familiar” (14%) but a significant decrease in those who reported “not at all familiar” (-29%). These findings indicated that the course achieved its goal of increasing a student’s familiarity with campus facilities and resources that support their academic and personal success. When comparing data from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment surveys, there was a 57% increase in the familiarity of software applications for those who answered, “very familiar,” a 43% decrease in those who answered, “somewhat familiar,” and a 14% decrease in those who answered, “not at all familiar.” Lastly, when comparing pre- and post-assessment results for the question regarding familiarity with career and degree pathways programs at this college, there was a 28% increase in “very familiar” responses and a 28% decrease in “somewhat familiar” responses. No one from this cohort answered “not at all familiar” in the pre- or post-assessment. These data suggested that the course achieved the goal of improving student familiarity with facilities and resources to support academic success, personal success and well-being, software applications used on campus and in courses.

In addition to the comparison question above, the pre-assessment included the question, “What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?” Seven students responded to this question. One student stated, “I hope to learn more about this college and how I can utilize the resources provided to make a great first year and help me succeed!” Another student wrote, “I hope to learn more about my career path i [sic] am taking and i [sic] hope to have fun while doing it!” One student stated, “I hope that this class helps me learn how to navigate and learn how to use [the learning management system].” A third student responded to the question and stated, “I hope to gain more confidence in college life through navigating my ways [sic] around campus, learning about the resources available to me, being more comfortable using the school websites, and managing my workload efficiently.” Two students indicated they hoped to gain better study skills and wanted to use the tutoring services.

As a compliment to the pre-assessment question, “What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?” the post-assessment survey that was administered to this group included the question, “What aspects of this course were most beneficial to your success this semester?” Some responses to this open-ended question aligned with the theme of student success. One student stated, “The things that I found most beneficial in this course are helping me create a better plan for myself for next semester, and also helping me learn more about the school overall.” Another student responded, “Talking to other people who also are new to college and have similar interests for careers as me.” For one student the course was most beneficial in “helping me set up my spring semester class.” Another student said the course was helpful with “all the planning and learning how to make my schedule definitely helped

me a lot.” For one student, “The most beneficial was walking campus and going through the buildings our scheduled classes were in and visiting the library.”

**Research Question 2 Theme: Student Engagement.** To evaluate student engagement, select course assessment and focus group data were reviewed. To begin to evaluate the engagement of the students in the NUR cohort, some pre- and post-assessment survey results were administered to the NUR cohort in Fall 2022. As a reminder, this group did not remain enrolled in COL-102 in Spring 2023, therefore no assessment data were compiled from that semester. Regarding the Fall 2022 pre-assessment survey, the following questions were specifically aimed at investigating student engagement:

1. How confident are you in your interpersonal communication skills?
2. How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities at this college?

These data are presented in Table 12. As noted earlier, we chose the question on rights and responsibilities as a measure of engagement because this knowledge is essential to being an engaged student-member of the campus community. Another thing to mention is that there were no specific open-ended questions specifically aimed at assessing student engagement.

**Table 12***Fall 2022 COL-101 NUR Assessment Survey Data for Student Engagement*

Survey question	Pre-assessment			Post-assessment		
	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Not at all familiar
How confident are you in your interpersonal communication skills?	57%	43%	0%	57%	43%	0%
How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities at this college?	57%	43%	0%	86%	14%	0%

When reviewing the pre-assessment survey question regarding confidence in interpersonal communication skills, students were almost equally divided for the question pertaining to interpersonal skills for the response options of feeling “very familiar” and “somewhat familiar.” None of the students responded, “not at all familiar.” There was no change in responses to this question on the post-assessment survey. Regarding the question related to familiarity with rights and responsibilities, the pre-assessment survey revealed an even division between “very familiar” and “somewhat familiar” responses and no one reported “not at all familiar.” However, in this case, responses to “very familiar” increased by 29% while responses to “somewhat familiar” decreased by the

same amount. This data allowed us to surmise that, for the NUR group, the COL-101 course may positively impact student familiarity with their rights and responsibilities.

**Research Question 3 Theme: Sense of Belonging.** Select course assessment and focus group data were reviewed to evaluate student sense of belonging. To begin to evaluate the sense of belonging of students in the NUR cohort, some pre- and post-assessment survey results from the surveys administered to the NUR students in Fall 2022 COL-101 were reviewed.

The question included in the assessments related to a sense of belonging was, “How familiar are you with campus organizations and leadership opportunities at this college?” A comparison of the results of the pre- and post-assessment, indicated that students felt not at all or somewhat familiar with campus organizations and leadership opportunities at the college which would increase a sense of belonging on campus at the beginning of the semester; but, by the end of the semester, no student reported being not at all familiar with these opportunities and some students shifted from feeling somewhat familiar to very familiar with these opportunities.

In response to the open-ended question, “In what ways do you hope your instructor will help you be successful in your first semester at this college?” students used words like “inform,” “guide,” “understanding,” and “patient” in their responses. One student wrote, “I hope that you will be understanding and patient with me.” Another student stated:



I hope my instructor can help me to be better at preparing for classes and the exams because I have always put off studying for tests and usually do good but I feel like that probably won't be the case for most college exams.

In response to the open-ended question regarding the ways that the instructor contributed to their success on the post-assessment survey, students used words like “organized,” “encouragement,” and “comfortable,” to describe the instructor. One student wrote, “My instructor helped me learn how to have good time management and when to seek help in classes.” Another student stated, “She was very helpful and engaging. Had an answer for whatever questions I had.”

The NUR students were all originally enrolled in COL-102 for their second semester. Before the start of the semester, the instructor, who taught the COL-101 course during the first semester for this cohort, took another job and left the college. A replacement instructor met with the students and explained the situation. Within a couple of weeks, the students had all dropped the course. An attempt to reach out to the NUR students who dropped the COL-102 course in hopes of having a conversation regarding their reasons for dropping out was mostly unsuccessful. However, two students did respond via email. One student wrote:

The reason I decided to drop this course because I won't be receiving any College credit hours and that's the only class, I have on campus that day. I also live 45 minutes away so it's practical. It was a great class and had great intentions, but I think it should be a credited class.

Another student wrote, “It's an optional class with no credit and on top of that was my only class on Friday morning . . . And finally I see little that can be gained from staying in COL-102.” Based on these responses, it seemed that the day and time of the course offering and students not earning college credit for the course were significant factors in not completing the course.

It is also hypothesized that the instructor was a significant factor in the students' sense of belonging and success based on their responses to the post-assessment during the COL-101 course and that having the instructor replaced had a significantly negative impact on the students' desire to continue in the course.

### **Summary and Comparison**

Most of the data presented in this chapter were gathered through a qualitative case study investigation of students enrolled in the COL-101 and COL-102 courses at a medium-sized midwestern community college. Sense of community, involvement, marginality and mattering, and validation theories were utilized as the conceptual frameworks to ground the study through a focused perspective and guided us to answer the three research questions explored below.

#### ***Research Question 1:***

Our first research question was: What is the difference in student success (course success, course completion, semester-to-semester retention) between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format, and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?

When comparing the success and retention data for the baseline cohort, the MOC baseline subset cohort, the MOC affinity cohort, and the NUR affinity group cohort, we found that the baseline Fall 2022 success rates were higher than the baseline subset group but lower than the affinity MOC and NUR groups indicating that the cohort affinity groups outperformed the baseline group. In order to determine whether or not the structure of the course offering was the reason for this performance difference, the baseline subset group (i.e., Black or Hispanic males) was compared to the MOC group. The success, completion, term-to-term (i.e., Fall 2022 to Spring 2023) retention, and year-to-year (i.e., Fall 2022 to Fall 2023) retention rates were substantially lower for the baseline subset group. While both groups completed COL-101 at the same rate, the MOC cohort completed other courses in Fall 2022 at a 5.9% higher rate than the baseline subset. The MOC cohort was 40.2% more successful in COL-101 and 32.1% more successful in other courses in Fall 2022. The MOC cohort was retained in Spring 2023 at a 17.4% higher rate and in Fall 2023 at a 23.3% higher rate, than the baseline subset group. Given this dynamic, we posit that completing the COL-101 and COL-102 2-semester course sequence could have had an impact.

These courses were also taught by the same instructor for both semesters, which could also contribute to the success of the affinity group. For example, a student from the MOC group specifically called out their instructor when they said, “[instructor’s name] helped with so many things from registration to getting help with my grades.” Additionally, a different MOC student replied with only their instructor's name when describing specific events, people, or experiences that they believed supported them on their academic journey over the past year. A student in the NUR cohort stated, “She’s

awesome and makes me feel comfortable asking questions and is very knowledgeable on anything i'm [sic] confused about," when describing how their instructor contributed to their success. Another NUR student emphasized, "[Instructor's first name] kept me very organized and helped me with everything i [sic] needed when it came to my classes!" These are just a few of the statements that support the theme of instructor importance.

The NUR cohort was specifically recruited by one of our team members while visiting area high schools. This recruitment strategy was employed because the college does not currently capture a student's interest in Nursing anywhere in their system, but we thought a pre Nursing affinity group would be a good group to investigate. As such, we were unable to pull a relevant comparable subset of the baseline group for NUR as we did for MOC. However, when comparing the overall baseline group data to the NUR data, we saw that the NUR students had higher success and retention rates than the baseline group. These findings suggested that the MOC and NUR cohorts benefited in terms of success and retention through the cohort model. For the MOC students, this benefit appeared to have been a bit more impactful than for the NUR students, who only completed the first COL-101 course in the sequence.

When comparing the pre- and post-assessment measures that emphasized student success, the Fall 2022 COL-101 baseline and NUR students displayed an increase in the measures from the start to the end of the semester. In other words, we can surmise that the baseline and NUR students felt that the class positively contributed to some aspects of their student success. As a reminder, the MOC COL-101 students did not complete the post-assessments, therefore we cannot determine if the students felt that Fall 2022 COL-101 course had an impact on their success. Additionally, we were able to determine, from

open-ended questions on the pre-assessment, that the baseline students reported wanting to gain general academic skills to feel better prepared for college-level courses. This same group reported that these skills were indeed gained throughout their time in COL-101, according to their post-assessment data.

Regarding the MOC group, open-ended questions on the pre-assessment indicated that they were seeking career and life guidance during their first semester at college. While we did not have their post-assessment data, we did have data from the reflection assignment that this group completed at the conclusion of the COL-102 course in Spring 2023. The MOC students shared that during their first year, they found community on campus, built academic skills, and built their overall confidence. This information led us to believe that the course the 2-semesters of COL-101 and COL-102 impacted aspects of student success (i.e., academic skills).

Regarding the NUR group, pre-assessment data revealed that this group had already established their career goals and they were seeking more specific knowledge related to degree progression in order to meet their goals, as well as hoping to gain general academic skills. According to their post-assessments, this group gained the knowledge related to degree progression that they were seeking, and developed a community of fellows with like interests.

It was observed that student course success and completion and year-to-year retention measures were higher for both affinity groups when compared to the baseline. When compared to each other, the MOC group appeared slightly more successful than the NUR group. This gap in success increased in the Spring of 2023. The MOC group performed significantly better in that semester, while they were concurrently enrolled in

COL-102 while the NUR group, who chose not to continue in COL-102, had lower course success and completion rates. These findings implied that creating cohorts in the COL-101 course can have a positive impact and that the 2nd-semester COL-102 course could also have a positive impact on student success. The assessment data would also imply that all groups of students are receiving what they hoped to find related to their academic success in the COL-101 course. This is an interesting contradiction to what we heard from our baseline students during the focus groups we conducted.

***Research Question 2:***

Our second research question was as follows: What is the difference in reported student engagement between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?

Post-assessment data from the baseline students indicated that the course did improve their interpersonal communication and familiarity with rights and responsibilities. Additionally, a quarter of these students mentioned that the instructor positively impacted their engagement on campus. MOC students indicated via reflection assignments that their instructors supported them the most in their first year at the institution. The NUR students already reported a strong sense of confidence in their interpersonal communication skills on their pre-assessments. As such, a NUR student's sense of self didn't shift much thanks to COL-101, as indicated on their post-assessments. However, there was a slight improvement in understanding rights and responsibilities as a college student. Additionally, NUR students indicated in their post-assessments that their instructor was helpful and engaged and answered questions.

The focus on instructor engagement as highlighted in the assessment and reflection data, tied back to the theme we gleaned from the focus group data. When focus group students were asked about program improvement, students reported more engagement activities could be incorporated and that some of their instructors should be more prepared to engage with students throughout class time. The focus group students indicated that they wanted more engagement, but they couldn't articulate how they wanted that goal achieved. Still, a through line appears to be related to instructor engagement. In all, we did not find that one of our groups fared particularly better in terms of engagement so we cannot say if the affinity grouping, or course format had any impact in that regard. We did, still, find valuable information. The students want to be engaged, and the instructor is a key player in that engagement.

### ***Research Question 3***

Our third and last research question asked: What is the difference in reported student sense of belonging between students who took the COL-101, 1-semester format and those who took the COL-101 & COL-102, 2-semester format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?

Students in the baseline and NUR group appeared to achieve the goal of understating how to join campus organizations and how to find leadership opportunities, based on a comparison of their responses to their pre- and post-assessments. Additional information gathered from an analysis of the assessments open-ended questions for the baseline group was that they wanted to join clubs, make friends, and be social on campus in their first semester of college. These students also shared that they wanted their COL-101 instructor to be someone they connect with as well as a resource to connect them

with others on campus. There were very few positive sentiments shared by the baseline group regarding a sense of belonging. There were a few who shared that they found motivation and engagement opportunities, as a sense of community, comfort, and friendships, but these responses were the exception and not the rule.

Additionally, students who participated in the focus groups shared mixed comments regarding COL-101's impact on their sense of belonging while starting college. Some students shared they were feeling less alone, as a part of the course's impact. Most focus group participants shared they were not actively participating in social opportunities on campus outside of the classroom environment.

When reviewing the MOC Spring 2023 COI-102 reflection assignments, students shared that at the beginning of their second semester on campus, they were hoping their classmates would hold them accountable and that they would continue to build connections and find a sense of community on campus, something it seems they may have missed from their first semester. Additionally, NUR assessment data did not reveal any positive impact made by the course on their sense of belonging. As was seen with Research Question 2, in all, we did not find that one of our groups fared particularly better in terms of a sense of belonging so we cannot say if the affinity grouping, or course format, had any impact in that regard. We gleaned the least amount of information on a sense of belonging in general. The lack of belonging data gleaned is certainly one of the weaknesses of this study. Even still, what we did come to understand is that the consensus would be that the COL-101 course has no impact on a student's sense of belonging.



## **Chapter 4: Recommendations and Dissemination**

### **Problem Statement**

There is a persistent enrollment crisis at community colleges that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Shapiro, 2023). The drops in enrollment from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020, Spring 2020 to Spring 2021, and Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 were much larger than year-over-year changes over the last two decades (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). According to Bulman & Fairlie (2022), when looking at year-over-year changes by semester back to 1992, the changes in student enrollment during the pandemic were large outliers (p. 5). Community colleges understand that an increase in retention will lead to an increase in enrollment. To improve retention and therefore enrollment, student success practices must be reevaluated. A student's first year in college will influence the rest of their college career, yet most first-year experience courses have a duration of one semester. An examination of the first-year experience model could alter student success.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to enhance the first-year experience program for community college students. Two affinity group cohorts were created. One was a group of freshman students who were recruited into the Men of Color (MOC) program at the community college under study. The second cohort was a group of freshmen pre Nursing (NUR) students. The MOC and NUR cohorts were enrolled in two sections of a course called College Success Seminar (COL-101) that has been offered using various formats and modalities for more than 20 years at the community college under study. At the time of the study, the format of COL-101 was a 1-semester course worth one credit hour and

required for first-year students. There were more than 40 sections not placed in cohorts (1,480 students) enrolled in the course using the traditional format during the semester under study and this research refers to that group of students as the baseline group. The MOC and NUR sections were offered the opportunity to continue and enroll in a pilot of a zero-credit hour second semester of the course called COL-102. The cohort groups were not charged tuition for COL-102 and did not receive credit for the course. The MOC cohort completed COL-102 but the NUR cohort dropped the course before it began.

The following research questions guided the qualitative case study of the three groups (baseline, MOC and NUR):

1. What is the difference in student success (i.e., course success, course completion, term-to-term retention) between students who took the COL-101, 1-term format, and those who took the COL-101, 2-term format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?
2. What is the difference in reported student engagement between students who took the COL-101, 1-term format and those who took the COL-101, 2-term format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?
3. What is the difference in reported student sense of belonging between students who took the COL-101, 1-term format and those who took the COL-101, 2-term format? What is the difference between those who took these courses as a cohort versus standard enrollment?

## **Recommendations**

This section revisits some of the most compelling findings of this study. We review the findings and offer recommendations derived with the hope that these recommendations make an impact at the community college of study, as well as fellow community colleges.

### ***Research Question 1: Student Success***

We were all employees of the community college where this study took place at the time of this research. It so happened that one of our research team members was the director of institutional research. As such quantitative metrics were readily available and used to examine student course completion, course success (i.e., letter grade of A, B, C, or P), and term-to-term and year-to-year retention. Descriptive success data were extracted for the baseline group of students, a subset of the baseline comprised of Black and Hispanic male students, the MOC cohort group, and the NUR cohort group.

Baseline statistics were used to determine the impact of the course for these success metrics in the NUR and MOC groups. The overall baseline group data, as well as data from the subset comprised of demographics similar to the MOC cohort (i.e., Black and Hispanic males), were compared to the MOC cohort. The overall baseline group data were compared to the NUR cohort (e.g., a comparable subset of the baseline group was not available for a narrower comparison to the NUR cohort). Success in all coursework during the Fall 2022 semester was determined to be approximately 10% higher for the NUR cohort than the baseline group. Similarly, success for the MOC cohort was approximately 10% higher than the baseline subset group in Fall 2022. The MOC group experienced greater success than the overall baseline group and the NUR cohort as well

in Fall 2022. During the Spring 2023 semester, the MOC cohort had the highest success rate for all coursework when compared to the overall baseline group, the subset baseline group, and the NUR cohort. A focused examination of the MOC cohort versus the subset of the baseline yielded a 23% higher success rate for the MOC cohort in Spring 2023. The NUR cohort also outperformed the baseline group and had success rates that were approximately 8% higher than the baseline group in Spring 2023.

Though it is recognized that both cohorts may have benefitted from the support and experiences within their affinity group, these findings suggested that affinity-grouped cohorts of COL-101 enhanced success and retention. The most significant differences were witnessed in the success and retention rates of the MOC cohort when compared to the overall baseline and the baseline subset group. Still, it must be acknowledged that there may be something inherently different about students who opted into the cohort programs. As much as we want to attribute these drastic changes to the cohort model itself, there may be some confounding variables to be addressed in future research.

The qualitative data obtained through the baseline student focus groups suggested that the students assign value to receiving support in groups with which they identify by affinity. Students indicated that they would like more interaction with others who are also pursuing a credential within their chosen discipline of study. The students who had not yet chosen a career pathway indicated that it would be nice to be placed in a first-year experience (FYE) program with others who share similar interests. The focus group discussions revealed that students feel that making connections, developing friendships, and forming study groups would contribute to their overall success in college.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative metrics described, we recommend that community colleges use a cohort model to assign students to their FYE programs to improve student success and retention. Students who have chosen a program or field of study should be placed in career-focused cohorts. First-year students who have not chosen a discipline of study should be provided another form of cohort by affinity.

***Research Question 2: Student Engagement***

Data collected from focus group participants identified that first-year students desire to be engaged on campus with fellow students. The focus group responses were representative of the baseline group consisting of 1,480 students, and we determined that first-year students benefitted from an introductory course that familiarized them with the institutional resources and expectations while also encouraging interpersonal and campus engagement. Data collected from the post-assessment surveys demonstrated that students who participated in the MOC cohort felt more engaged in campus life after completing the COL-101 and COL-102 sequence.

Students in the focus group discussions indicated that a college success course helped them to establish milestones and provided the academic checkpoints that would help them to achieve their goals. Current information regarding advising, registration, FAFSA, financial aid, degree requirements, and career services are all important components of a successful and engaging FYE course. Themes from this study included student desire for their college success seminar instructor to connect them with others, to connect with other students with similar interests, and to find ways to feel they fit in on campus. The students did not provide clear suggestions for engagement methods that could be implemented. The students indicated that they would like time to attend events

on campus but do not want to be required to attend any particular event. Bailey et al. (2015) noted that it is widely accepted that structural barriers exist for students who matriculate at a community college such as family responsibilities, the commute to and from campus, multiple jobs, and competing responsibilities. They stated that the traditional structure of community colleges hampers student progress toward completing a credential or degree (Bailey et al., 2015). This critique prompted Baily et al.'s (2015) strong and convincing case for rethinking the structure of community colleges. There are a wide variety of unique student needs and challenges, making it difficult to determine the best set of engagement activities to incorporate into FYE programming.

We recommend that community colleges incorporate campus engagement incentives within their FYE program in a manner that helps students feel supported as they increase their involvement in campus life. One suggestion, for example, would be to advertise a list of all events, activities, and social opportunities for engagement within the FYE course. Additionally, colleges could incentivize attendance at a certain number of independently chosen activities. We also recommend building creative incentives that encourage students to engage in events and activities in groups. We determined that intentional enrollment of students by affinity groups can encourage engagement participation. In addition, students from all focus groups made it quite evident that the faculty member was an imperative component in their decision to determine whether or not the class was engaging, and that a more engaging course would have had a greater impact on their success. As such, we recommend that colleges train instructors to deliver their FYE program or course to purposely foster engagement. This could include providing examples of icebreakers, short games that would influence and encourage

students to actively participate with each other, and the creation of strategies to plan engagement outside the classroom environment such as a scavenger hunt or a meetup for coffee or lunch. The University of Connecticut's website provides a list of lesson plans and activities on its FYE page that can be used as icebreakers and team-building exercises (University of Connecticut, n.d.).

Students at a community college, as opposed to a 4-year university, will typically spend a very short time with the institution. About 50% of the students who participated in the focus groups indicated that the sessions helped to provide reminders and more in-depth details than what they already knew. Student 7 confirmed that they learned about summer course options, for instance. Therefore, our recommendation is to include follow-up meetings with students beyond their first year, and throughout their matriculation at the institution. As such, our suggestion for future research would be for community colleges to explore a transition from FYE courses to learning community models that support and track student persistence and success from registration to graduation, transfer, or career placement. We recommend that FYE facilitators or faculty implement second-year standardized check-in points with their FYE cohorts. Providing ongoing and meaningful support to students throughout their first year and beyond offers intentional touch points and contacts for students to obtain answers to their questions within the college community and as they prepare for their next adventure at their transfer institution or their career in the college's community service area.

A well-planned course with high levels of continued engagement opportunities will create a personalized feeling with powerful interventions to reach each unique

student wherever they are on their educational journey. This aligns with the community college mission and accountability to their service areas.

***Research Question 3: Sense of Belonging***

Data collected from the MOC cohort on post-assessment surveys indicated that the COL-101 and COL-102 courses provided a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging themes reported were building connections, finding a sense of community, and classmate support. One comment stated that the student was “welcomed with open arms.” Similarly, the NUR cohort reported the COL-101 course enhanced their sense of belonging. Following suit, the baseline group comments centered on the following sense of belonging themes: wanting to join clubs, to make friends, to be social on campus, and to obtain a connection with their instructor to help connect with others. Focus group discussion data from the baseline case made it clear that students at the community college are looking for a way to feel they belong. In the pre and post course survey responses, Students mentioned that they wanted to feel less alone, get familiar with campus organizations and leadership opportunities, and gain close relationships with people in their classes. Focus group participants acknowledged multiple challenges associated with trying to connect and plug in at the community college setting. They had trouble articulating what would work best for them but the desire for more engagement was strong.

The students in the focus groups who knew which academic pathway they were pursuing stated that they would appreciate more opportunities to meet and collaborate with other students on the same path. Students who were unsure of which academic pathway they might pursue, or those who were attending the community college to



complete general education requirements and transfer, stated that they would appreciate help finding out how to fit in on campus. In the pre-assessment survey, some of the responses from baseline students to the question “What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?” indicated they hoped the course would benefit their sense of belonging. One student stated, “I hope taking this class would benefit me being comfortable at this college.” Another student wrote, “I hope to gain close relationships with the other people in this class.” A third student wrote, “I hope to benefit from making new friends and having a successful college career.”

To provide students with an opportunity to gain or increase their sense of belonging, we recommend that community colleges place students in affinity group cohorts to participate in a first-year experience. Where possible, the recommendation would be for the cohorts to be career focused. For the students who have not yet chosen an academic career path, the recommendation is to be creative in the development of cohort groups. The desire to be placed with other students based on some common interest or affinity was a frequent point of emphasis from students on pre and post-assessment surveys as well as in the focus groups. Perhaps students interested in certain clubs, hobbies, or specific interests would be considered in creating an affinity group model. We would even suggest that different methods to cohort students into affinity groups be considered each year as part of continuous program assessment, review, and improvement. One way to help inform the creation of affinity groups would be to include questions on the post-assessment survey such as, “What people, things, or activities make you smile or feel content?” “What are you good at (strengths, talents)?” and “What kind of activities do you find so absorbing that you lose track of time?”

Evidence of this recommendation in practice can be found in the video on the Mesa Community College website (Mesa Community College, 2019) which includes testimonials from students. A student in the video stated that she was explaining the new program to her mom who stated “Well, this is awesome. You have a group of people you can go to if you have problems” (Mesa Community College, 2019, 3:02). Another student in the video said:

With the first year experience like you could also gain like sense of like friendship because everybody’s like on the same boat as you... so it’s like okay cool we’re all on common grounds that could spark like friendships and I explained how like me how like I made a friend randomly who was a kid from Westwood right off like I didn’t expect that but like I made a friend with him (Mesa Community College, 2019, 3:36).

Melissa Carpenter stated, “the students really connect with each other, and they see each other during social activities so it’s inside the classroom but it’s also what they are learning outside of the classroom” (Mesa Community College, 2019, 3:58).

### **Instructor Recommendations**

Data collected in the form of post-assessment surveys indicated that the quality of COL-101 instructors is very important. A MOC cohort response pointed out that their instructor played a key role in their success. Similarly, a NUR cohort response revealed that the instructor was helpful and engaging and helpful answering questions. Through focus group discussion data, student experience and feelings about the COL-101 course were very different depending on the instructor. While some students shared that their instructor made the course interesting, fun, or engaging, others reported that their

instructor was strict, inflexible, or less informative. The COL 101 and COL 102 instructor for the NUR cohort was unable to teach the second semester. This was a turning point in the NUR cohort timeline and, as such, all of the students withdrew from the COL 102 course in the second semester. We believe this is an indication that the course instructor has a high impact on the students' course satisfaction and experience.

Our original literature review did not shine a light on this instructor impact, but an additional study that we found, by Education Equity Solutions, explained that instructors are more than twice the factor in predicting whether a student will pass a course than GPA, the high school students attended, or demographic statistics (Dadgar et al. 2023). In this study, a faculty survey, course syllabi, and performance and background data from 22,827 students enrolled in 704 different gateway math courses at four community colleges were used (Dadgar et al. 2023). The relationships between pedagogies, instructional practices, and student success were examined while the researchers controlled for factors typically used to predict success (i.e., race, socioeconomic status, high school attended) and found instructors were a highly significant determinant of whether students passed the courses (Dadgar et al. 2023). Our focus group discussions revealed that most student participants felt strongly that the personality and attitude of their FYE facilitator or faculty made an impact on their overall sense of belonging and desire to persist with the college.

We recommend that instructors or facilitators for the FYE course, especially with community colleges, be well-trained. With regard to the community college that we studied, instructors are currently provided a 1-hour training session prior to the beginning of each semester as well as weekly reminders for each lesson. Our recommendation

suggests that it is important to carefully select highly engaging instructors or facilitators who are vetted for their dedication to student success and enthusiasm. If full-time faculty are instructing the course, their student evaluations and classroom success metrics should be examined to determine the qualifications to serve in this ambassador role. The personnel who are asked to serve or are accepted as a facilitator/faculty for an FYE should view the assignment as an honor. It should be clear that student evaluations that are related to the institutional expectations for the instructor will be taken very seriously. Faculty or facilitators with outstanding FYE student evaluations that meet expectations should be considered college ambassadors. College ambassador service would provide solid evidence regarding institutional service that is necessary for faculty rank promotion. The success of the program depends on whether students feel welcomed to the college, can conclude that they made the right choice, and that they belong within the campus community.

### **Dissemination Plan**

Our research team will write and record a TED Talk style video as the main component of our dissemination plan. Each member of our cohort will participate in the creation of the video. The entire team will collaborate to write the script. Two members of the team will present on camera while other members of the team produce and/or edit the video footage. The team will post the completed video on our LinkedIn channels to publicize our project, findings, and recommendations.

Additionally, we will submit presentation proposals to share our research at professional conferences including MCCA (November 2024 – Branson, MO) and NOSS

(February 2025 – New Orleans, LA). Other conferences to consider, if MCCA and NOSS proposals are not accepted, would be the following:

1. The First Year Experience Conference, held annually in February. Proposals accepted in the summer.
2. The Midwest First Year Experience Conference, held annually in September. Proposals accepted in July.
3. 31<sup>st</sup> National Conference on Students in Transition (October 2 – 4, 2024) sponsored by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition University of South Carolina. Proposals accepted in Summer.

## **Conclusion**

Our recommendations incorporate a multi-faceted approach to enhancing the first-year experience for community college students. First, start by keeping the necessary goals of student enrollment, student success, and student retention. Our study found that the instructor's role is paramount and therefore we recommend the instructors or facilitators of the program are well-trained and vetted for their embodiment of the mission and goals of the college. Next, we recommend that community colleges determine the community-specific needs of students and define the learning outcomes and competencies that students should develop through the program. We found that community college students want and need holistic support and that the student's sense of belonging is a key indicator of their persistence and success. We recommend the program design include traditional components such as campus orientation, introduction to

campus services and resources, and support and guidance with registration and program requirements with materials organized within the college learning management system for students to reference easily. In addition, we recommend that the program design provides ample opportunity for students to get involved and engaged on campus. Another important recommendation is that a cohort model is implemented to place students in the program using careful consideration while defining affinity groups to foster a sense of belonging at the college.

We recommend career focused affinity groups as we found students appreciate cohorts of students interested in their same field of study as they provide a learning community for student collaboration within their academic program increasing engagement and student success. Successful students become successful employees who contribute to and improve their communities. The data collected in this study, particularly from the MOC cohort, provides a story of how a cohort based FYE program can help community colleges deliver on their mission to provide quality education at an affordable cost while meeting employer needs or preparing students for transfer to a four-year institution. We recommend that colleges use quantitative metrics, but we found that qualitative data collection was most important in evaluating and measuring program success. Finally, we recommend that community colleges commit to continuously improving the student experience by revisiting the methods used to create affinity groups or cohorts to ensure that students find the program to be meaningful, relevant, impactful, and effective. This aligns with our focus group findings. Students reported wanting more opportunities to engage during their first year that are not required but are centered around their area of interest, career choice, or some other affinity.

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**Appendix A: Fall 2022 COL-101 Pre-assessment Survey**

1. How familiar are you with campus organization and leadership opportunities at this college?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
2. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your academic success?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
3. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your personal success and well-being?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
4. How familiar are you with software and applications that will be utilized on campus and in your courses?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
5. How confident are you in your interpersonal communication skills?
  - a. Not at all

- b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
6. How familiar are you with the career and degree pathways program at this college?
- a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
7. How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities as a student at this college?
- a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
8. What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?
9. What concerns do you have about taking this course?
10. In what ways do you hope your instructor will help you be successful in your first semester at this college?

**Appendix B: 2022 Fall COL-101 Post-assessment Survey**

1. How familiar are you with campus organizations and leadership opportunities at this college?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
2. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your academic success?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
3. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your personal success and well-being?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
4. How familiar are you with software and applications that will be utilized on campus and in your courses?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
5. How confident are you in your interpersonal communication skills?
  - a. Not at all

- b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
6. How familiar are you with the career and degree pathways program at this college?
- a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
7. How familiar are you with your rights and responsibilities as a student at this college?
- a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
8. What aspects of this course were most beneficial to your success this semester?
9. What aspects of this course were least beneficial to your success this semester?
10. In what ways did your instructor contribute to your success this semester?

**Appendix C: Spring 2023 COL-102 Pre-assessment Survey**

1. How do you define success?
2. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your success?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
3. How familiar are you with the financial aid process at this college?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
4. How confident are you in your critical thinking skills?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
5. How familiar are you with Nursing and Allied Health programs at this college?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
6. How familiar are you with Service Learning and Civic Engagement opportunities at this college?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very

7. How do you define diversity, equity, and inclusion?
8. What benefits do you hope to obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?
9. What concerns do you have about taking this course?
10. In what ways do you hope your classmates will help you be successful your second semester at this college?

**Appendix D: Spring 2023 COL-102 Post-assessment Survey**

1. How has your definition of success changed since you started college?
2. How familiar are you with campus facilities and resources to support your success?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
3. How familiar are you with the financial aid process at this college?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
4. How confident are you in your critical thinking skills?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
5. How familiar are you with Nursing and Allied Health programs at this college?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very
6. How familiar are you with Service Learning and Civic Engagement opportunities at this college?
  - a. Not at all
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Very

7. How has your definition of diversity, equity and inclusion changed in the last year?
8. What benefits did you obtain from this course to make you more successful at this college?
9. In what ways did your instructor help you to be successful your second semester at this college?
10. In what ways did your classmates help you be successful your second semester at this college?



**Appendix E: Spring 2023 COL-102 Reflection Assignment**

1. In what ways have you grown academically and personally over the past year as a student at this college?
2. Please describe specific events, people, or experiences, that you believe have supported you on your academic journey over the past year.
3. Tell us what's missing. What could the college do, or do better, to support student success and sense of belonging at this college?

## Appendix F: Fall 2023 COL-101 Focus Group Script & Questions

1. Agenda
  - a. Welcome
  - b. Informed Consent
  - c. Ground Rules
  - d. Demographic questionnaires
  - e. Start Recorder
  - f. Focus Group Discussion
  - g. Stop Recorder
  - h. Thank You & Incentives
2. Facilitators
3. Primary
  - a. Ask questions and keep conversation on track
4. Backup
  - a. Keep track of topic coverage
  - b. Notice quiet participants
  - c. Help facilitator with logistics
5. Facility
  - a. College Library Study Room, 2nd floor
  - b. Signage to direct participants to location – clear yet discrete
6. Equipment
  - a. 2 recorders (to assure backup)
    - i. Assure enough memory (recording storage)

- b. Microphone
- c. Batteries/Charger/Power Cord

**NOTE:** Practice with equipment before first session; check recording after session

1. Participant Incentives

- a. Snacks
- b. \$20 Amazon Gift Card

2. Ground Rules Prior to Start

- a. Confidentiality
  - i. Try not to use names
  - ii. What is discussed in the Focus Group stays in the Focus Group
- b. Try to use words that are understood by all in your answers
- c. Respect other people's opinions
- d. Speak in turn
- e. Speak loudly for the recording
- f. Turn off cell phones
- g. Others?

Welcome to the College 101 Focus Group

1. Facilitator Introductions
2. Participant Introductions (remind that identity beyond the discussion will be protected)
3. Ice Breaker Question – Do any of you know what our mascot is? Have you heard of Scooter McCougar?
4. Sense of Belonging and Engagement Questions

- a) How has the College 101/102 course at this college impacted relationships with students and faculty whom you otherwise probably would not have connected with?
- b) Have relationships developed?
  - i. Friendships?
  - ii. Study Groups?
  - iii. Faculty support?
- c) In what ways has the College 101/102 course been in developing a sense of community/belonging here at the Community College?
- d) With which group or groups within this college do you feel most closely associated?
- e) Do you actively participate in academic or social group activities with students outside your College 101/102 peer group?
- f) Would you like to be more engaged with other students?
- g) How could this college improve student engagement and a sense of belonging/community among students?

5. Impact on Retention and Success Questions

- a) In what ways has the College 101/102 course affected you in terms of the following:
  - i. Time Management Skills?
  - ii. Test Preparation and Study Skills?
  - iii. Critical Thinking?

- iv. Utilization of resources on campus (Advising, Ace Center, Library, etc.)?
  - b) In what ways has the College 101/102 course affected your academic plans?
  - c) Has the College 101/102 course impacted your likelihood to complete a degree or certificate here at this college?
  - d) Do you plan to transfer to another academic institution before completing a degree or certificate here at this college?
6. Program Improvement Questions
- a) What suggestions do you have for how the College 101/102 course could be improved for new students?
  - b) Are there specific parts of the College 101/102 course that you think need to be added?
  - c) Are there specific parts that you think need to be removed?
  - d) What additional guidance (if any) by the faculty would significantly benefit you during the College 101/102 course?
  - e) Think back to when you were starting the College 101/102 course. How did your experience turn out to be similar or different from what you expected?

## Appendix G: COL-101 Sample Syllabus

COL 101 - N05

College Success Seminar

Spring 2024

### Course Information

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**Description:** A required course for degree-seeking students covering various aspects of college life including resources and procedures, interacting with instructors, instructor expectations, critical thinking, goal setting and commitment, learning styles, development of network and support groups, value of education and philosophy of learning, identification of student interests and needs, technology used in college classes and study skills.

*Credit Hours: 1*

**Start and End Date:** 01/22/2024 - 05/14/2024

**Modality:** Online

### Course Learning Outcomes

- CLO 1) Students will explore and identify campus organizations that allow opportunities to form friendships, develop leadership skills, and have a sense of campus community
- CLO 2) Students will locate campus facilities and resources to support academic success
- CLO 3) Students will locate campus facilities and resources to support personal success and well-being
- CLO 4) Students will identify and use software and applications utilized on campus and in courses
- CLO 5) Students will practice effective tactics for interpersonal communication

- ♦ CLO 6) Students will investigate degree and career pathways
- ♦ CLO 7) Students will recognize and be notified of their rights and responsibilities as an [REDACTED] student

### Instructor Information

**Title:** Professor of  
Sociology **Email:**  
vherbel@[REDACTED]  
**Phone:** 636-[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

#### *Office Location*

[REDACTED]

#### *Office Hours*

Mondays & Wednesdays 11:30am-12:30pm; Tuesdays &  
Thursdays 9:30am-11:30am; or by appointment as needed and  
via zoom if needed.

### Required Text and Materials

No Textbook Required Textbook Purchase Page

### Technology Requirements

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- ♦ Up-to-date Internet
- ♦ browser High-speed internet access
- ♦ You will need to have basic computer skills to be successful in your courses. (Skills include but are not limited to: create, send, respond to, and add attachments to email; ability to use word processing programs, ability to navigate the internet etc.) Your instructor is a subject matter expert. The instructor will

- not provide instruction on basic computer skills.
- ♦ For problems with logging in, email, the portal, and other ████ tech (not Canvas) contact the [IT Service Desk](#).
- ♦ For problems with Canvas, click the Get Help button on your main Canvas menu and contact Canvas support.

## Course Activities

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For students enrolled in the hybrid sections, there will be mandatory on-campus meetings for the first 8 weeks of the semester. Then the course will transition to fully online.

For students enrolled in the online sections, all coursework will be completed in Canvas with no regular on-campus meetings, but students must log in to the course regularly and complete all coursework on time.

Assignment types will include quizzes, discussion board assignments, and uploading files, screenshots and documents.

## Grading Scale

Letter	Percentage
A	90 - 100%
B	80 - 89%
C	70 - 79%
D	60 - 69%
F	Below 60%

## Grading Criteria

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### *How Grades Are Computed*

Assignments completed on time and correctly will receive full credit.



Assignments completed on time but incorrectly, or assignments that are submitted after the deadline ("late") will receive half credit.

Assignments that are not completed or are completed after the deadline and are incorrect will receive no credit.

### *Feedback*

Students are expected to read the assigned course materials prior to class and come prepared to discuss material. Course work is due on or before the deadline given in Canvas (all assignments will be submitted through Canvas unless otherwise noted). All course work must be turned in at the assigned times. Late work will not receive full credit.

Students will receive regular feedback on completed course assignments.

### Course Policies

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#### Attendance Policy

Attendance is a priority for this course, and participating is part of attendance. Missing class may result in a loss of points and may also jeopardize your scholarships, A+ status, grants, loans, or any other financial aid you receive. Attendance is taken during each class and is required to be reported to the financial aid office on campus at least twice each semester. Students are expected to be in class for the entire period. Late arrivals & early departures may negatively affect your final grade. Students may be expected to participate in classroom discussions and activities, particularly when called upon. Non-participation is equivalent to absenteeism.

For sections that meet on campus, this course is a hybrid course which means attendance is a combination of attending on-campus meetings every week for the first 8 weeks and completing activities and participating in discussions online throughout the entire semester.

For sections that meet fully online, attendance is determined by consistent activity in Canvas and completion of assignments on time all the time. Students who do not log in to the course regularly and do not submit all assignments on time may be viewed and


reported as not attending.

### Absences

We recognize there may be a valid reason or emergency that may cause a student to miss class. If a student misses one (1) class meeting, the student is responsible for scheduling a 1-on-1 meeting with their instructor prior to the next on-campus class meeting. If a student fails to schedule a 1-on-1 meeting with their instructor prior to the next on-campus class meeting, they may be dropped from the course and required to retake this course the following semester. If a student misses more than one class, the student will likely be required to retake this course the following semester.

### Withdrawal Policy

Students who elect to withdraw from (commonly referred to as dropping) this course should do so immediately. You can do this by requesting an “add/drop” form from the Enrollment Services Office. If you simply quit attending any class without withdrawing, you will receive a grade of “F” for this course.

To review the last date to change from credit to audit, last day to withdraw with a "W", and other important semester dates, please go to the Academic Calendar located on the  portal.

For the full policy on withdrawal and administrative withdrawal, please check the college website.

### Late Work and Test Make-Up Policy

Assignments completed on time and correctly will receive full credit.

Assignments completed on time but incorrectly, or assignments that are submitted after the deadline ("late") will receive half credit.

Assignments that are not completed or are completed after the deadline and are incorrect will receive no credit.

## Course Schedule

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- ♦ Week 1- Module 1 Pt. 1 Getting Started
- ♦ Week 2 - Module 1 Pt. 2 Academic Skills
- ♦ Week 3 - Module 2 Student Success & Leadership
- ♦ Week 4 - Module 3 Pt. 1 Student Rights, Title IX & Study Skills
- ♦ Week 5 - Module 3 Pt. 2 Time Management & Goal Setting
- ♦ Week 6 - Module 4 Pt. 1 Student Planning
- ♦ Week 7 - Module 4 Pt. 2 Financial Aid/Literacy
- ♦ Week 8 - Module 5 Critical Thinking
- ♦ Week 9 - Module 6 Career Services
- ♦ Week 10 - Module 7 Civic Engagement/Service
- ♦ Week 11 - Module 8 Wrap Up
- ♦ Week 12-16 - Module 9 Be Extra! Extra

Canvas Course Schedule [schedule redacted]

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