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Exploring (Mis)alignments between First-Year Students' Expectations and Experiences

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Exploring (Mis)alignments between First-Year Students' Expectations and Experiences

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Abstract

Understanding what expectations first-year students have for their first semester of college can help university faculty, staff, and administrators have a better understanding of how to best provide support and resources that meet the needs of their students and lay the necessary foundations for their academic and social success early on. Unfortunately, many students report a variety of social, academic, personal, and environmental experiences that do not fully match their expectations. The purpose of this study was to examine what expectations and experiences first-year college students had about their first semester and how they interpreted both alignments and misalignments between their expectations and experiences.

The research questions of this study were explored in two phases using an explanatory sequential mixed method design. In phase one, quantitative matching pre- and post-surveys were given to traditional first-year students to understand what (mis)aligned expectations first-year students had at the beginning of their first semester of college (pre-survey), and what they reported experiencing (post-survey). For the first phase of the experiment, 96 participants completed all or most of the initial expectation survey and 52 participants completed the entire follow-up experience survey. A paired t-test analysis was conducted on the matching pre- and post-survey questions to explore which areas of student experiences had the most significant (mis)alignments. Using descriptive statistics, individuals were scored and assigned a (mis)alignment score, falling on a spectrum of having overestimated expectations (entered college with higher expectations, but reported lower experience scores), aligned expectations and experiences, or underestimated expectations (entered college with lower expectations, but reported higher experience scores). Six individuals representing the various (mis)alignment options were invited to an interview to explore how students with varying alignment and

misalignment scores perceived their experiences and expectations. Thematic analysis was used to create six themes from the student interviews that provided a more in-depth understanding of the types of expectations students had for their college experience and how they felt about any (mis)alignments they might have experienced.

The results of this study echo the general literature and research base on student expectations: 1) they do matter, 2) they come from a variety of sources, 3) they impact each individual student's experience and perception of college in unique ways, and 4) students tend to hold higher expectations than they should. The results of this study indicated that academic and social expectation and experience (mis)alignments are the most significant for students. However, the results also indicated that (mis)alignments in expectations and experiences are not always a bad thing and can lead to the development of adaptability and resiliency skills that help students create more realistic expectations and decision-making processes in the future.

Recommendations for future studies on expectations and experiences (mis)alignments could explore how to better utilize technology, social media, and student programming to help shape the student expectation formation process both before students move in and early in their college career to help them develop healthier and more realistic expectations overall.

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Finally, I would like to thank the student participants who took the time to take part in this study. I have learned so much from you all, and truly believe that this experience has changed the way I approach my work in student affairs for the better.

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my supportive family and close friends who have been a continuous source of encouragement, love, and understanding throughout this entire process. Thanks for checking in and making sure we celebrated the small achievements along the way. I truly appreciate all the positive thoughts, prayers, and snacks, which have made this all possible. You all mean the world to me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

Students start their college careers with a wide range of expectations for what they are about to experience over the next few years while earning their degree. They will speculate as to how and what their institutions will be able to offer them academically, socially, professionally, and personally while obtaining their degree, and they expect a high quality of services and experiences in return for their investments (time, money, and energy) into the higher education system (Iyeke et al., 2018; Lam & Santos, 2018; Nadelson et al., 2013). Students, as customers of the higher education industry, have social, academic, and professional goals that they believe they will work to fulfill (or their institution will provide) while they are in college (Thompson et al., 2007). Beyond these developmental expectations, students are also entering into college with practical expectations on their graduation and degree attainment schedules (Thompson et al., 2007). These expectations matter. Institutional resources, staff, and support often focus on providing a positive experience for their students. Colleges and universities are operating, in practical terms, as businesses, which can only remain viable and strong so long as they continue to provide quality services to their customers, their students, to maintain their competitive edge in the highly saturated and competitive American higher education marketplace. Awarding degrees and educating students is higher education's primary product and business objective, which requires the quality of experiences students have while enrolled to remain high enough to retain them through graduation.

The retention literature indicates that when students are not satisfied with their college experience or when their expectations are not aligning with their experiences, they are likely to

become disengaged and disinterested with the campus and their academics, making them susceptible to dropping out (Braxton et al., 1995; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, students who report more closely aligned expectations and experiences are more capable of handling the academic and social stressors of the first-year experiences, which in turn, result in higher year-one GPAs (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Students' perceptions of their satisfaction with their college experience can be directly rooted in the expectations they have for their overall higher education experience (Rosenbaum et al., 2016).

Understanding how and where students develop the expectations that they have is a critical component for university staff and faculty to grasp as they try to plan how to best serve and support their students (both in what they need as well as want). Expectations can have large-reaching impacts on their behavior and actions (Bucurean, 2018), as well as how they go about building relationships with those around them. Creating barriers to building communities as a result of operating from unrealistic expectations is a great hindrance to their social and academic well-being and can have serious consequences in regard to their success as a student (Thompson et al., 2007). Problems continue to compound as students expand their unrealistic expectations into all aspects of the college experience (both inside and outside of the classroom), which can make them either overconfident about their ability to perform and adapt to their new environment effectively or sell themselves short, undercutting their confidence, which is also damaging (Johnson & Fowler, 2011). When students begin to realize their expectations (realistic or not) are not being met, the result can be a number of negative outcomes, such as poor academic performance or feeling disconnected both socially from their peers as well as environmentally from their campus (fit-wise), which may lead to them ultimately not being retained as a student (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Nadelson et al., 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for conducting this study was to examine what expectations and experiences first-year college students have about their first semester and how they interpret both alignments and misalignments of their expectations and experiences. This study describes the processes for how expectations are made, what the expectations are for first-year students, and how expectations affect students' perceptions of their college experience. Understanding the mindset that new students have when they start their college career gives college and university faculty, staff, and administrators a better understanding for how to best provide support and resources that meet the needs of their students and lay the necessary foundations for their academic and social success early on.

The study used an explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The first phase included collecting quantitative data about expectations and experiences using a pre- and post-survey from a sample of first-year students enrolled in a first-year university seminar course in the beginning and at the end of their first semester. The second phase involved qualitative data collection using individual interviews from a subset of the participants who had the highest or lowest expectation-experience alignment to better understand how students formed and interpreted their expectations (Almalki, 2016; Creswell, 2015). The follow-up interviews further illuminated and described the students' perceptions of their expectation-experience disconnect as it related to their satisfaction and success during their first semester.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What academic, social, personal, and person-environmental fit expectations do college students hold about their first semester of college?

2. What academic, social, personal, and person-environmental fit experiences do college students have during their first semester of college?
3. What are the areas in which student expectations and experiences align?
4. What dimensions of the college experience are the most disconnected in terms of expectations and experiences?
5. How do students interpret any (mis)alignments between expectations and experiences?

Significance of the Study

Most students do not put their economic earning potential on the line and sacrifice their time, energy, and money to enroll in college just for the fun of it (Sorkhabi & Strage, 2016). Although college is a place for students to meet new people, try new things, expand their worldviews, learn, and have fun, the reality is that it is also one of the most stressful, difficult, anxious, and lonely times in a young adult's life (Miller et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 2007). Students working hard to obtain a degree and graduate to start their professional and personal lives is a shared goal and interest for both the student and institution alike (Miller et al., 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). The higher education sector is constantly under the watchful eyes, and oftentimes, scrutiny, of the public and legislators who often question the choices that university administrators make as they try to make both an environment and a customer service experience for their students that meet their many needs and wants. Whether these challenges come from a place of inexperience (many people, 48% in 2019, do not hold a college degree) (Baumhardt & Julin, 2019) or a retrospective perception (parents not understanding that time and technology have completely altered and reshaped the education system since the time they were in college themselves), it is understandable that external

stakeholders might have frustrations and hesitations in supporting this complex, and oftentimes mysterious higher education system (Miller et al., 2005; Moore & Morton, 2017).

Like the students who enroll, the public and some government officials have their own unrealistic expectations for what the experience should be or give to the students who attend, and stakeholders (including students, families, and even state legislators who provide funding for higher education in their states) want to have a say in what this experience should provide (Athiyaman, 1997; Miller et al., 2005; Voss et al., 2007). These stakeholders see higher education as a transactional business experience between the student (the customer) and the institution (the business/provider), and they believe that students who enroll in college should leave with a higher level of learning, employable or specialized skills, and as a better global citizen (the product) (Athiyaman, 1997; Miller et al., 2005; Voss et al., 2007). While these expectations are not completely off base, education in itself is not transactional; a student cannot just buy a degree and knowledge and expect to benefit from the college experience without hard work and self-initiative.

When students enter college with unrealistic expectations, they start their college careers with their focus and priorities not in the right place, which can be damaging to their overall well-being. They run the risk of, at the very least, having a bad experience (low satisfaction), and on the dangerous high end of not feeling or being able to cope with the actual stressors and responsibilities, which may result in them dropping out of college altogether. Not completing their college experience means that they are missing out on all the personal, social, academic, and professional benefits that result from higher education, and they walk away with debt, lost time, and a damaged sense of self. It remains critical that colleges find ways to educate their future and current students on how to better establish their expectations so they do not have to

add the additional stressors or barriers to an already complex and difficult transition. Students who find satisfaction in their college experience are more likely to perform better academically, be retained, and graduate, which helps to reach the objectives of higher education institutions to produce the highest quality individuals who can better serve both the U.S. society and the world as a whole (Miller et al., 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2016).

This study adds to the body of existing research providing insight on the needs and expectations of today's current student population (Generation Z) as well as provides much needed insight into expanding the knowledge base of how unmet expectations affect student success. Having a better understanding of what today's students need and want and how to communicate with them effectively could provide more realistic details about the college experience to connect them with resources and opportunities that will increase their success and satisfaction. Beyond this study's potential to inform the current expectation literature, the study has practice and policy implications. Finding ways to personalize the transition experience can have immediate effects on the early expectation formation process and long-lasting retention benefits. Exploring ways to help students recognize and understand the usefulness of their past experiences related to major life transitions (like moving, starting high school, joining a community, etc.) is beneficial, because that awareness can bring higher levels of confidence to students in their own abilities when it highlights what obstacles they are capable of overcoming.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework of the Study

First-year college students encounter a great deal of challenges as they transition into college. Being able to effectively balance their newfound freedoms, explore their new environment, and adjust to the responsibilities of a college student means that there are a lot of unknown and oftentimes uncountable variables that can affect the first-year experience. They

expect a great deal of experiences to come from their time in college (academic, social, personal, and professional), but unfortunately for them, their expectations seldom align with what they actually experience while in college (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Even though students receive an overabundance of information from friends, family, the media, and the institution itself as they prepare for their transition into college, many still start their first semester at a disadvantage, with either high or unrealistic expectations (Ailes II et al., 2017; Krieg, 2013; Stern, 1966). The following sections review the two theoretical models that guided the framework of this study: Expectancy-Value Theory and Ecological Systems Theory.

Expectancy-Value Theory

The Expectancy-Value Theory is an appropriate theoretical model to apply to the formation of expectations and institutional fit during the transition into college. Vroom's (1978) "multiplicative model" is used to predict a student's motivation to apply themselves and learn, and the formula is made up of three components: Motivation = Valence x Expectancy x Instrumentality (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Stecher & Rosse, 2007; Vroom & Jago, 1978). In the formula, valance refers to the importance that individuals place on an expectation outcome, instrumentality refers to the belief that the effort and performance will lead to the desired outcome, and expectancy refers to the quality of work put in by the individual in an effort to make an outcome happen (good work leads to, hopefully, a good outcome) (Vroom & Jago, 1978). The expectancy component, if not careful, could venture into the realms of Piaget's (1929) magical thinking (which will be discussed more in the next chapter) and result in a foundation of unrealistic expectations, although Vroom's formula focused more on operating from a place of accurate and appropriate skill and support when conceptualizing a task rather than optimism alone (Dunning et al., 2003; Vroom & Jago, 1978; Wargo, 2012).

In this model, an individual's inherent sense of academic self-worth and ability have far-reaching impacts. This inherent drive to learn should come from both the pleasure and sake of expanding one's mind, combined with a student's expectations for success (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Students who are not confident in their abilities to perform well or even pass a particular class or subject, for example, may choose to not put in the effort to even attempt to be successful, let alone take the necessary steps of seeking assistance from faculty by attending office hours or making an appointment with someone like an academic advisor (Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Students are unlikely to perform at their peak performance levels when they enroll in a major they are not invested or interested in because of the wishes or demands of someone with authority or from their support group, like a parent, family member, or even a high school teacher (Aljohani, 2016; Gregory & Huang, 2013). This is due to the fact that the students are not personally invested (if not adamantly against it altogether) in the pursuit nor its ultimate outcome, degree completion (Cruz & Kellam, 2018; Gibson, 2010). If students have this effort-is-futile attitude from the get-go, it will certainly affect their ability to be successful in meeting their learning and graduation goals (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005).

As many education professionals might attest, students' level of motivation to learn and apply themselves to a subject or academic concept is typically a good indicator of their ability to succeed in this pursuit. This is especially true in higher education, where the responsibility of learning is often on the student, and where academic assistance is often delivered only when specifically requested by the student. Unlike in high school where a teacher might be able to flag and address an issue early in a semester, faculty members often do not have the time or resources to provide that sort of service without the initiative of the struggling student, especially within the typical large lecture-style courses that many first-year students are enrolled in. This can be an

issue for some students who do not fully understand how to build a relationship with their faculty and do not know how to effectively communicate with them (through email and during office hours) about what their needs are, which can induce anxiety and lead to procrastination in asking for help (Griffin et al., 2014; Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In college, motivation becomes a key component in multiple dimensions of the expectation formation process, affecting everything from social to academic involvement and achievement. These examples further emphasize the need to better understand what expectations students have when starting college, how they form these expectations, and how these expectations align (or do not align) with as well as influence their actual experiences in college.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1994) operates under the premises that human development (especially early on) can only take place as a result of increasingly complex, constant, and continuous interaction with other people and concepts over time (especially within their immediate or proximal environment) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993). This model frames the human development process as a result of a larger "ecosystem" divided into layers, which impacts the individuals' personal and psychological development in specific ways and makes up their sense of self and ability to cope and thrive within their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993, 1994). The layers include: microsystem (immediate environment, including family, friends, and community leaders); masosytem (the relationship that exists between the microsystems like the relationship between an individual's family and the church they attend); exosystem (the relationship between an individual's microsystems and groups they are not personally affected by or involved with); macrosystem (the larger culture or society in which the individual lives in – can be social, political, religious, socioeconomic, etc.); and chronosystem

(major environmental events or life transitions that affect and shape development and the other layers of the ecosystem, including divorce, economic depressions, and war) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993, 1994; Renn, 2003). The chronosystem was an added layer to the 1979 model and operates as a "sociohistorical" layer in that it considers how the layers interact and affect each other over time (Renn, 2003). An example of this would be a teacher praising the students for going above and beyond with their class assignments (a micro-macrosystem interaction). The student-teacher relationship is a microsystem, and it is reinforcing a positive behavior of working hard and being responsible (work ethic – macrosystem). The teacher is instilling the idea that hard work is important, and that the student should strive to be a high achiever and a responsible individual because it will pay off in the long run.

In terms of institutional fit, Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) Ecological Systems Model reiterates how important 1) the physical environment (campus, classrooms, student union, residence halls, recreation facilities) is in supporting the academic and social satisfaction of the students who interact with it and 2) the institution's characteristics and values (academic, professional, research, mission) that match the student's own held values and priorities (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Spady, 1970; Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001). If students are enrolled in a college that holds opposing values to their own or creates a perceived level of hostility or oppression of values, this may lead to dissatisfaction in their choice to enroll in the first place, and it can lead to feelings of seclusion from peers and staff and can (as an extreme result of this misalignment) ultimately lead to them leaving the institution (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005).

This theoretical lens is important to consider in terms of aligning experiences with expectations. Students inevitably begin college with a variety of expectations as to how they will navigate through and cope with their new environment, such as what their relationship with their

roommate will be, learning how best to get from one class to the next, what a classroom with more than 200 classmates in it will be like, going to a fraternity house for parties, figuring out the transit and parking system, attending a football game, etc. (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001). It is essential that administrators and university staff consider this as an important piece to the first year of college (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001). Finally, institutional leaders must understand that they play a significant role in helping to create the types of campus environments and experiences their students are expecting. While this model suggests that new students already have developmental foundations from their home, community, and family, it is important to remember that their development is far from over. First-year college students are set up for rapid growth and change brought on by the abundance of experiential and learning opportunities during this transitional experience. It is important for students to be in an environment that supports their growth and development during this major transition and milestone in life. Although it might not come as a surprise to housing and student affairs professionals, it is critical that new students feel comfortable and safe to explore their new environments to begin developing themselves as young adults (Renn, 2003). A campus environment that is hostile or makes its students feel uneasy or unwelcomed is not a conducive place to learn and thrive (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 2006).

Definitions

Expectations: Expectations are a personal belief or preconceived thought about how future actions or events will come to pass, which can be reasonably believed to come true (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Katona, 1980; Olson et al., 1996). Expectations are formed through both personal experience as well as through the collection of inputs and data (knowledge)

obtained through sources that are perceived to be reliable (the media, family, and peers) (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Olson et al., 1996).

Experiences: For this study, experiences are defined as an individual's lived perceived events and interactions – they are events that have happened and therefore can be a source of reflection (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Katona, 1980; Olson et al.,1996).

First-year student: This term is synonymous with the term freshman. For this study, the term refers to students who are enrolled full-time, are first-time college students, are around the age of 18 at the start of their college career and live on campus. This population faces many obstacles within their first year of college, particularly within the first few weeks of their first semester as they are transitioning and adjusting both academically and socially to their environments (Ailes II et al., 2017; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Tinto, 2006).

Person-Environmental Fit: Students' comfort with 1) the physical attributes (amenities, housing, departmental services), 2) community (on and around campus) with students, faculty, staff, and the residence of the surrounding town, and 3) their potential for individual growth congruence with the institutional values and opportunities (social, academic, professional, and personal) **(**Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001).

Retention: Retention rates are calculated from the percentage of a college's first-year, first-time undergraduate students who continue to be enrolled from one year (or semester) to the next (Burrell, 2019). Retention is important to higher education as it is a marker for institutional effectiveness and success to its constituents, including legislators, students, and alumni (Braxton et al., 1995; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2006).

Student Satisfaction: Student satisfaction refers to the reactions and feelings toward the experiences the students are having in college. Satisfaction helps shape their attitudes and outlooks on their collegiate careers (Miller et al., 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Students who are not satisfied with their college environment and are not meeting their college expectations can feel almost betrayed because their confidence in their current institution's ability to serve them in the way they think they should be treated has been shattered, which can lead to dropping out or transferring to another institution (Rosenbaum et al., 2016).

Student Success: This term has been synonymous with academic performance and relates to grade point average, course completion, and retention from one semester to the next through to graduation (Cerdeira et al., 2018). More recently, it has become the "defining agenda for modern universities" (Clughen, 2018, p. 320), which drives a customer-service operating mindset and focuses on a holistic approach to the student experience, including personal, academic, and professional development (Zhang et al., 2019).

Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, the study participants represented a small sample of the first-year college students on a single large public research university campus with very high research activity, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to all first-year students and other campuses. The participants only included students who were first-time, full-time students and who enrolled in college right after high school, which further limits the generalizability to transfer or other non-traditional students. Additionally, data were collected from participants at multiple times throughout the semester, which resulted in some attrition of participants. Finally, although this study utilized well-established (both in validity and reliability)

instruments, the scope of this study focused on only a single semester whereas the instruments were intended to be utilized over the course of an entire academic year.

Chapter Summary

First-year college students face a number of challenges during their transition into college, many of which can be traced back to the same root: operating and making decisions from unrealistic expectations. Expectations color all aspects of the college experience (academic, social, personal, and professional); however, students' expectations are seldom aligned with their actual experiences. This study sought to better understand what expectations students hold, what experiences they have, where (mis)alignment takes place, and how students interpret the (mis)alignments experienced during their first semester of college. This study has wide implications for both adding to the expectation literature to give a clearer understanding on how today's students make decisions related to college, as well as for informing policy, communication, and resource allocation to increase student satisfaction and success.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Students enter higher education with a number of expectations about all aspects of their college experience – they are, after all, entering into one of the most challenging chapters of their lives, so they are highly interested and invested in making the most of their time in college. Expectations affect a wide range of decisions and behaviors, including the development of social systems (from friends to romantic partners), professional and career aspirations, and interactions with and views about their community and their place within their society (Thompson et al., 2007). Beyond just reaching graduation, students have a number of practical expectations on social, academic, personal, and career-focused outcomes (Thompson et al., 2007). They have high expectations for what their institutions will do to assist them while obtaining their degree, as well as high expectations for the quality of experiences they will enjoy in return for their investments (time, money, and energy) (Iyeke et al., 2018; Lam & Santos, 2018; Nadelson et al., 2013). These expectations matter to them, obviously, but they should also matter to the campus administrators, faculty, and staff whose responsibility should be supporting their students in all dimensions of this student experience. However, students begin to encounter problems when the expectations that they hold for themselves, their education, and their overall time in college (both inside the classroom and out) turn out to be unrealistic or unattainable. These unrealistic expectations can result in poor academic performance, feeling disconnected both socially from their peers as well as environmentally from their campus (fit-wise), and may lead to them ultimately not being retained as a student (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Nadelson et al., 2013).

The purpose of this study was to examine what expectations and experiences first-year college students had about their first semester and how they interpreted both alignments and misalignments between their expectations and experiences. The following chapter 1) discusses what expectations are and how they are formed, as well as give a brief overview of the targeted population and their expectations about college, 2) describes the different sources of expectations (peers, community, and pop culture), 3) discusses where common (mis)alignments between expectations and experiences exist (social, services, and academic), and 4) explores the effect of (mis)alignment on college satisfaction and student retention. Research for this literature review was conducted using the scholarly database, EBSCOhost, with the following key words: expectation(s), experience(s), Freshman Myth, first-year students, transition, student success, student satisfaction, student retention, and decision-making. The supporting articles utilized in this chapter were predominately from the last 10 years, but historical and other older relevant documents were also utilized to provide historical and grounded context for this study.

Expectations

People use expectations, consciously or not, to inform their decisions and actions in all aspects of their lives every day, from the mundane (ordering the same sandwich for lunch because they know they like it) to more complex and significant decisions (deciding to take a promotion at work in a new city). Expectations matter. They are rooted in past experiences and are used, essentially, as crystal balls that help individuals project themselves into a future based on where they think their decision's outcomes will lead. Aside from new students starting college, there are few times in a person's life where they are faced with as many unknowns, high hopes, fears, and anxiety about not knowing what to expect next. It is a dangerous cocktail of not having prior practical (realistic) experience about college life, being overconfident in their

current (high school) abilities, and getting wrong or even bad information about what college is and how to be successful while in it. The following section will explore 1) what expectations are, how are they formed, and what threats they may pose to the decision-making process, and 2) who first-year students are and why their vulnerability to the expectation formation process should be important to institutions and those who work there.

What are Expectations and How are they Formed?

A review of the literature base about college expectations indicated that expectations heavily shape how students perceive their first-year experiences and are an intricate part of the decision-making process overall. Before describing what and how expectations affect first-year students, a well-laid foundation of what expectations are, how they are formed, and how they are related to the decision-making process will be reviewed from a cognitive and psychological perspective to provide a context for the larger focus of this study.

Expectations are, fundamentally, a personal belief or preconceived thought about how future actions or events will come to pass, which can be reasonably believed to come true (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Katona, 1980; Olson et al., 1996). Expectations are formed through a combination of both personal experience as well as through the collection of inputs and data (knowledge) obtained through sources that individuals perceive to be reliable and trustworthy – although this may not be the case – including sources like the media, family, and peers (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Olso, 1996). Despite it being an extremely important part of everyday life, economic, educational, marketing, and psychological research has long documented that people, even with their ability to empathize with others and use information to make decisions through critical thinking, still have problems crafting realistic expectations on which to base their actions (Bucurean, 2018; Dunning et al., 2003; Johnson, 2018; Katona, 1980; Wargo, 2012).

Expectations essentially become a second-nature, de facto component of the decision-making process, and the frequency in which people use expectations can make it nearly impossible for an individual to realize what they are using to make these decisions (Ferguson et al., 2008; Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Wargo, 2012).

Choices made based off expectations range widely in size and complexity. Regardless of the actual outcome, which cannot technically be known at the moment a decision is made, these expectations can have large-reaching effects on behavior and actions (Bucurean, 2018). Fortunately, for the majority of all the decisions made in a person's life, few have truly long-lasting effects on an individual's life and well-being regardless of whether or not the outcomes based on these decisions meet the individual's expectations.

While developing expectations, individuals often operate under two psychological assumptions: 1) that hoping or wishing for something to be true or happen means it will ("magical thinking") (Piaget, 1929, 1971), and 2) that if expectations are met, they will be happy (Johnson, 2018). The concept of magical thinking was developed by the father of developmental psychology, Jean Piaget (1929, 1971), and described a phenomenon where children operated under the belief that their thoughts somehow had the ability to translate to actions for themselves and others – bad thoughts led to bad actions, good thoughts led to rewards (i.e. being angry at dad will cause him to trip over a toy and stub his toe) (Dunning et al., 2003; Johnson, 2018; Subbotsky, 2014).

Dr. John A. Johnson (2018), now a retired psychology professor emeritus from Pennsylvania State University, described the foundations for how people form expectations by comparing it to an activity shared by millions of people around the world: getting a cup of coffee in the morning. In this comparison, he notes the fact that he wants to start his day off with a cup

of coffee because he has the expectation that having a cup of coffee in the morning brings him joy and energy (experience and knowledge) to start his day off right, but he knows that if he wants a cup that he will have to make a pot (grind the beans, run the water through the filter, etc.) and that waking up to expect a cup ready to go is unrealistic (he must put in the effort to make the beverage to enjoy it, no magical thinking) (Johnson, 2018; Piaget, 1929, 1971; Subbotsky, 2014). Johnson (2018) notes that for repeated experiences, like making coffee or doing a project at work with a team that you are comfortable with, expectations provide a solid foundation from which to safely operate. The risk comes from applying unrelated and unrealistic expectations from other experiences and using that to predict outcomes for another – especially a new and complex experience like a life transition (Johnson, 2018, Subbotsky, 2014). Although Piaget believed that magical thinking was the result of children not fully understanding causality and more complex social behaviors and is something they mostly grow out of by adulthood, when viewed through personal philosophies and abilities (like through the lenses of optimism, idealism, or perhaps even ignorance) it becomes less certain that this is something that individuals grow out of easily (Dunning et al., 2003; Johnson, 2018; Piaget, 1929, 1971; Subbotsky, 2014). It can be difficult to fully believe that highly desired outcomes do not always come true due to the fact that it is a wish, especially in times of uncertainty and anxiety, which are descriptions that can easily apply to life transitions, such as starting college (Dunning et al., 2003; Johnson, 2018; Piaget, 1929, 1971; Subbotsky, 2014).

There are many concerns associated with the expectation formation process, and there are often some inherent misperceptions included when people form expectations, which makes it difficult for people to accurately gauge what realistic expectations are. Expectations are made of both past experiences and from the best current information that an individual has. However, it is

still subject to the threat of existing in an unrealistic or false context. Even under the best intentions and circumstances, using future outcomes as a pretext for making current decisions will always come with a certain degree of risk and uncertainty (Wargo, 2012). In fact, some data indicate that the an individual's capability of rating their ability (the self) against that of the general population (or peers) in areas like critical thinking, spelling, grammar ability, and even levels of humor has them outperforming by 40 to 50 percentage points despite the opposite being true; additionally, this was even found true within specialized fields like medicine when it came to predicting their knowledge of terminology and patient interviewing skills (Adams & Adams, 1960; Dunning et al., 2003; Hodges et al., 2001; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). The research also indicates that those who chronically overestimate their abilities (overconfidence) are also more likely to be unable to accurately assess their own limitations, which could cause them to put themselves in situations they are not prepared to succeed in, thus operating on unrealistic expectations (Dunning et al., 2003; Johnson & Fowler, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). To reiterate, individuals' overconfidence in their expectations does not mean that their desired outcomes are more likely to occur (magical thinking), but it does mean that they are more willing to fully commit to an idea if they think that it is right – regardless of whether it is actually good or not (Adams & Adams, 1960; Dunning et al., 2003).

Underestimating individual ability or placing too much trust into acquired knowledge is the root of developing unreasonable expectations. Believing in an expectation without having a good basis for it being reasonable (magical thinking) can be dangerous to an individual's sense of self-worth and well-being (Dunning et al., 2003; Johnson, 2018; Johnson & Fowler, 2011; Piaget, 1929; Subbotsky, 2014). There is some research that indicates there is a fine line when it comes to overconfidence being a help or a hindrance. Under the rare and right circumstances,

being overconfident can lead to advantageous levels of increased ambition, creativity, morale, and persistence (Johnson & Fowler, 2011). Johnson and Fowler (2011) hypothesized that overconfidence might hold evolutionary and societal ties to the human race – humans are transactional in nature (they seek out and continue actions and behaviors that are rewarding and, for the most part, avoid decisions that bring them pain or penalty) (McKay & Dennett, 2009). Individuals who are overconfident typically only affect themselves (and not always negatively or with lasting effect), so their behavior is generally overlooked. It is only when their overconfidence affects the greater environment or community (causes a net loss) that anyone takes note and imposes repercussions (Johnson & Fowler, 2011; McKay & Dennett, 2009). Overconfidence becomes dangerous and destructive when it tips the thought process from the unproductive to the delusional, resulting in an error in judgment, overestimation in abilities, or an underestimation in the time or energy it takes to complete a task (Johnson & Fowler, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

A final common issue associated with the expectation formation process, perception bias, occurs when individuals' expectations and experiences do not align, and it can either be optimistic (positive) or pessimistic (negative) (Sharot, 2011). When expectations are higher or greater than what is reasonable, they are optimistic; if their expectations fall below the experiences, it is pessimistic. Although this optimism can influence things related to the ability to work well with a group of strangers, it can go beyond this to areas such as predicting the level of enjoyment in experiences like going on vacation or seeing a favorite singer live in concert (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Sharot, 2011). The human thought process tends to tilt more toward the optimistic side of expecting to enjoy an experience more than people actually do (Sharot, 2011). Often, issues like overconfidence and magical thinking tend to interfere with the decision-

making process, resulting in a majority of the population (multiple reports estimate that this affects about 80% of the population) experiencing an optimistic bias across all gender, race, and nationality subgroups (Dunning et al., 1990; Johnson & Fowler, 2011; Sharot, 2011; Subbotsky, 2014).

First-Year Students and their Transition to College

Now that the expectation and decision-making process has been discussed at length, it is important that the population of this study is described and examined to provide context on who these students are and why it matters that they are facing issues with expectations. This study focused on traditional first-year college students (freshmen). These students were recent high school graduates, around eighteen years old, lived on campus, were enrolled full-time, and had zero prior personal college experience (Jung, 2013; Keup, 2007; Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Tinto, 2006).

First-year students enter into an environment that is challenging in all aspects. The literature on transition for first-year students highlights multiple factors that affect students' academic and social performance as well as their ability to cope with stressors (Ailes II et al., 2017; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Tinto, 2006).This population faces many obstacles within their first year of college, particularly within the first few weeks of their first semester as they are transitioning and adjusting both academically and socially to their environments (Ailes II et al., 2017; Baker et al., 1985; Blanc et al., 1983; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Tinto, 2006). During this transition, they are typically alone for the first time in their lives, often far from their family and high school friends, are in a new physical space (a small, shared dorm room in a new city or state), and have been given all the power to make decisions for themselves. They do not fully understand the extent of the personal challenges that lie ahead, nor the fact that success in

college usually hinges on the ability to be disciplined and self-sufficient. They are faced with a variety of new and challenging situations that test their time management skills, resilience, adaptability, and sometimes personal values, all of which puts many of them outside of their comfort zones. Being in complete control of their own schedules and priorities like their sleep (and waking) schedules, deciding whether or not to go to class or study, working through roommate conflicts, and engaging in new behaviors, such as drinking, can be an exhilarating and emotionally draining experience (Smith & Wertlib, 2005). For most of these students, this is the first time they are completely responsible for all aspects of their decisions (both the good and bad), and many experience a disconnect between their perceived expectations of what college will be like and the reality they face (Kuh et al., 2008; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005).

This population is particularly important to their college or university because they represent institutional income for the next four to five years. Every student lost is not only a loss of a sure, future income (students have a required number of hours that they must complete at a minimum to graduate), but a loss of investment as well – resources poured into their education, housing, and personal development are a total loss for the institution. First-year retention rates are calculated from the percentage of a college's first-year, first-time undergraduate students who continue to be enrolled from one year to the next (Burrell, 2019). Research on retention practices is often focused on specific populations and stages of a student's college experiences, with a bulk of it focusing on a general population of students who are at the highest risk for attrition and academic issues: first-year students (Ailes II et al., 2017; Tinto, 2006). In 1996, Tinto reported that half of all students who depart from college do so before their second year of enrollment, and a more recent report indicated that there had been little success raising the retention rate significantly, with the college retention national average at only 68.7% in 2008 and

70% in 2018 (Jamelske, 2009; Selingo, 2018; Tinto, 1996). Retention is important to higher education as it is a marker for institutional effectiveness and success to its constituents (including legislators, students, and alumni), and is often used as an indicator for institutional effectiveness and national rankings and can even affect state-level funding (Braxton et al., 1995; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2006). The effect of expectation and experience (mis)alignment will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter, but it is important to introduce this factor early on to frame the larger implications of this issue before getting into specifics.

Sources of Expectations

Students (and individuals in general) draw their expectations from many sources in their daily lives. Some of these sources are personal, coming from their family, siblings, friends, teachers, or coaches (sources that they are directly connected to), while others come from external trusted sources like their community, media, movies, TV, or social media (sources they are not directly connected to) (Ailes II et al., 2017; Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Olso, 1996, Smith & Werlieb, 2005). Despite (or perhaps as a result of) the wide variety of information available to the population about the process of transitioning into college and what the college experience is, the research consistently indicates that students are still entering into their higher education careers with unrealistic expectations of what their first year will be like as a college freshman (Ailes II et al., 2017; Krieg, 2013; Mu & Cole, 2018; Stern, 1966). What is important to note is that each of these sources holds value and weight (sometimes equally) during the decision and expectation formation process, and that it can be difficult for students to separate or originate these sources when it comes to decision time (Ferguson et al., 2008; Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Wargo, 2012).

A qualitative study conducted by Samura (2015) set out to better understand some of the broader expectations that students have for their time in college, as well as where these expectations were coming from, by using semi-structured interviews and photo journals from a 16-week period. Based on the data collected from the photo journals and interviews, the researcher identified two types of expectations: internal and external (Samura, 2015). Internal expectations came from the students themselves and were rooted in what their personal goals and hopes were, how their college experiences would be, and how their time in college would change them for the better (shaped by their goals and wishes) (Samura, 2015). External expectations referred to how other people's ideas (family, friends, community, and the media) influenced and shaped the decisions and choices that the students made (Samura, 2015). Although it is important to differentiate the sources that influence expectations, it should be noted that these sources often have an overlapping or compounding effect, meaning that expectations are often shaped from multiple sources, and the weight that an individual places on any one of these sources is unique to that individual and a combination of both external and internal factors (Samura, 2015). The following section will review two of the common sources of expectations for first-year students and their effects on the first-year experience: 1) "trusted sources" (individuals who students would believe are accurate sources of information, like peers, family, and community), and 2) pop culture and films (media, movies, internet).

"Trusted Sources": Peers, Family, and Community

The people in an individual's life who helped to raise and educate them hold a special and foundational place in their morals, values, and references for making decisions. Peers (friends), family, community leaders, and teachers have lasting effects on a person and can be a powerful source of expectations for new college students. This source of knowledge and support

is grouped together in what could be called “trusted sources,” because these are the individuals and groups whose advice is taken and received almost without question because they are a person’s support network and are perceived as having the best intentions (Hussain & Rafique, 2013). Despite the fact that first-year students are inspired by their new peers, community, and environment in college, as students begin to develop their own identities, beliefs, and expectations, and start to make their own decisions, they have still been greatly influenced by their family members, peers from back home, and the community in which they were raised (Albert et al., 2013; Hussain & Rafique, 2013; Jones et al., 2014). These sources in particular are important to review because although there is deep trust, there is also an inherent risk for setting up well-intentioned, but unrealistic expectations that can have negative influences on the student transition experience.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, expectations for what the college experience will be like are developed from experience and, in this case, the collection of knowledge gathered from several sources including word of mouth from friends or family members, teachers, and community members (Sipilä et al., 2017; Thompson, 2007; Wright, 2013). All of these sources combine and add to the knowledge base that is used to form expectations, even if it is a distorted and incomplete depiction of what the college experience is actually like (Ailes II et al., 2017). New students are at a slight disadvantage when it comes to developing realistic expectations about their college experience because they are only able to base them off their collected data (knowledge on the subject). This is not to say that students can only form accurate college expectations solely through personal experience living and interacting in their college environment (which is not possible as a recent high school graduate); instead it is important for higher education professionals to remember that it is easy for students to quickly

pick up bad habits and internalize inaccurate depictions of the college experience when they allow themselves to be carried away by the stories of powerful influences such as peers, family members, siblings, and high school teachers (Ailes II et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2005; Villarreal et al., 2015).

A qualitative study that explored the roles that parents play in a student's college transition highlighted the immense driving power that they can have in their child's decision-making process (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Parents can provide not only information about their college experience to help their child build their own expectations but may also be the driving force behind why they are enrolling (or not enrolling) in the first place. A fine line exists between parents providing encouragement and a supportive push to get their students to go to college, and them forcing them to go because that is what they did or did not do, and they think that their child needs to go to college (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Parents provide economic, social, career, and political reasons why (or at least why they believe) their child should enroll in college, often from an early age, which feeds into the expectation development and personal narratives of the students (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Many students do not fully know why they are going to college, let alone what they will study, but just know that it is the thing to do after graduating high school because it is a family expectation. While some parents force their children to enroll in college or study a particular major either out of family tradition or fulfilling un-met or un-finished business (because either or both of the parents did not go to or finish college), many more just make it known that going to college is an expectation and a gateway to future opportunities – this can be true (though not always) for both students of multi-generational college graduates as well as first-generation students (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Students from these families either 1) accept this family expectation, accept the challenge and opportunity

and adapt, grow, and succeed, 2) accept the family expectation, struggle because they are not prepared (academically, socially, or personally) or interested in going to college but find their place and persist, or 3) accept the family expectation, struggle, do not find their place on campus (academically or socially) and end up not being able to graduate (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Although forcing someone who is not ready or interested in going to college obviously has economic, health, and social risks, for a lot of students, having the support and push helps to motivate them to engage with and benefit from higher education.

The first-year students who are fortunate enough to have had either friends, siblings, or parents attend college before them can use their stories and experiences to their advantage, using that knowledge to build their expectations on a more realistic foundation of what to expect in college (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Wells & Lynch, 2012). Peers and siblings who are older and have started or graduated from college are a strong source of expectations (Miller et al., 2005; Samura, 2015). Although these stories and advice usually come from a good place (intention-wise), new students will still be using second-hand experiences that are from the unique experiences of others and are biased (for better or worse) as a basis for their own college experiences (Miller et al., 2005). They can be a positive influence by setting the standard of goals to reach or beat, and modeling beneficial behavior, or they can be damaging by providing one-sided stories that elicit anxiety or promote risky or counterproductive behaviors (Albert et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2005; Samura, 2015).

In the same qualitative study that identified two types of expectations (internal and external), Samura (2015) interviewed a group of Asian-American students about their sources of information about how to navigate college and found that more often than not, siblings provided a strong source of information on not only how to navigate campus, but also how to set goals to

meet people, interact with faculty, and get involved on campus. Even when sibling behavior was not ideal, younger students were able to learn through their mistakes and challenges about what to do or what not to do as a college student (still positive outcomes) (Samura, 2015). Risk behaviors are usually associated with negative or dangerous activities like binge drinking, but knowing what these dangers are and the risks involved (thanks to their siblings' experiences) can also serve as a catalyst for change or growth should they still choose to engage in them. Being open to taking chances emotionally and intellectually can encourage students to meet new people, try new things, and can help to expand their worldview in the process of solidifying their identity, which includes their academic and career aspirations (Jones et al., 2014; Samura, 2015).

Gregory and Huang (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to better understand how the expectations of teachers and parents affected sophomore high school students four years later. In the study, 4,094 students from 527 public, private, and religious-based high schools participated and responded to self-report questionnaires to share their expectations about their degree attainment levels. Additionally, their parents and teachers were also surveyed to gauge their expectations for the students (Gregory & Huang, 2013). Gregory and Huang (2013) utilized a cross-classified multilevel model, which allowed for a multiple layered analysis, comparing the collective input of multiple teachers and parents for the same student. Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and ANCOVA, and the results from within-person comparisons showed that all sources of expectations motivate and uniquely predict their enrollment in college four years later, with teacher expectations having the highest power of predicting college enrollment, especially for students from low socioeconomic families (Gregory & Huang, 2013).

Pop Culture and Films

One of the most pervasive and possibly most problematic sources for college expectations comes from pop culture and films and its impact within society at large. The media provides countless stories and examples of what college is like in movies, TV shows, and in videos on phone applications and the internet. Because this is commonplace in everyday life, the narratives shown are not always critically evaluated and are merely consumed as a blurred mix of entertainment that's also perceived as informative. The construct of (mis)education described in research by Byers (2005) describes the process in which a student takes in various stories and ideas from what they see on screen to help them build their identity. Combining different fragments from one show or film with another allows students to develop false constructed narratives (therefore a (mis)education) of norms which they use later to form expectations (Byers, 2005). The problem with these sources is the fact that they are made for entertainment purposes, and a majority of the examples shown on these platforms are setting untrue and sometimes damaging precedents for new students starting college.

Pop cultural references to college tend to focus on the fun aspects of the college experience. However, when it comes to the academic components, this is often glossed over, vilified, or belittled to represent more of a hindrance to the students' daily activities, rather than their primary reason for being in college in the first place. An extensive quantitative meta-analysis was conducted to review the literature base and cross-media content (from movies, magazines, and internet videos) to explore the themes of these sources on the perception of higher education (Reynolds, 2014). Reynolds (2014) explored how pop culture and the media portray the various academic, social, and individual aspects of the college experience from not only a student's perspective, but from the perspectives of family members, faculty, and

university administrators to get a full picture and understanding of how these sources are influencing the expectations of the college experience. The results of this review indicated that overall, pop culture had created a negative perception of higher education and, as was suspected, the college experience through this lens focused on the social rather than the academic aspects (Reynolds, 2014). This initial negative outlook greatly influences the perceived relationship with faculty members, who in the movies, are often portrayed as obstacles to fun, unnecessarily difficult to work with, and uninterested in the overall well-being of their students – which not only is inaccurate, but creates an unnecessary barrier for students who might not even attempt to build a relationship with their faculty (and seek help when needed) because of the misconception (Reynolds, 2014). The issues associated with framing this educational experience in this way can have damaging effects on the expectation formation process of first-year students, but it can be particularly damaging to first-generation students who are entering into college with even less of an experiential base to draw expectations from and are already starting their college careers out as statistically higher retention risks (Reynolds, 2014; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012).

Old School, National Lampoon's Animal House, Pitch Perfect, Legally Blonde, Admissions, and *Monsters University* are among many of the frequently cited examples from movies of what the college experience is like; however, these films tend to focus disproportionally on co-curricular social activities and things like parties and drinking that make up only a portion of some students' college experience (Nuñez, 2018; Selter, 2017). As a means of entertainment, these films' references to college focus mainly on the fun of college, like dating, parties, road trips, Greek Life, and experimenting with alcohol and drugs, and very rarely show any time in a classroom, studying, going to office hours, working on assignments, etc., which are all important, real components of the college experience (Reynolds, 2014; Singer,

2003; Sorkhabi & Strage, 2016; Thompson, 2007; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Wright, 2013). Due to the fact that these societal and pop culture sources are selling entertainment and a story, not accuracy, they tend to gloss over or omit many of the more realistic but difficult aspects of transitioning into college – pulling all-nighters, switching majors, the anxiety of studying for multiple midterms in one week, and homesickness – which are important details needed to build realistic expectations (Thompson et al., 2007). Though at their root these films and media are entertainment, it is impossible for new students to start their college transition without having been influenced in some way by these skewed or oversimplified media sources disguised loosely as either advice or an operation manual for first-year students; therefore, their effect on first-year students needs to be further explored (Snow, 2017 Sorkhabi & Strage, 2016; Reynolds, 2014).

A quantitative study exploring the relationship between media consumption and student perceptions specifically explored the impact that fictional stories about college have on students' narrative and expectations for what college was like (Nuñez, 2018). An ANOVA and multivariate analysis of their collected data indicated that student's perception of how difficult college would be or their understanding of what the college experience would be like was not impacted by the quantity of college-themed media they consumed; however, those students who consumed more of this type of media were more likely to see the college experience as more of a social experience (like partying) (Nuñez, 2018). There was a significant disconnect between the student's perception of the impact of college-focused media and what its impact actually was, with the researcher concluding that students were unaware of the true extent that the fictional college narratives had on their perception and expectation formation process (Nuñez, 2018).

The study, "*Animal House* Effect: How University-Themed Comedy Films Affect Students' Attitudes" by Wasylkiw and Currie (2011) found more evidence connecting pop

culture film references and norms to unrealistic expectations and negative preconceptions for the academic components of college. They used a two-part experimental study, with part one analyzing 34 movies about college to determine how higher education was characterized as a whole and the effect it had on college student perceptions (Wasylkiw & Currie, 2011). Part two described the effect that these films actually had on students (Wasylkiw & Currie, 2011). The data analysis of part one of the study indicated trends that included 1) an overwhelming number of stories focusing on the white male college experience and the power they had (with Greek life and campus administrators), 2) a view of women in which they were depicted less as individuals, and more like plot or character goals (to impress, ask out, win-over), and 3) a large focus on high risk behaviors such as drinking and smoking (Wasylkiw & Currie, 2011). The researchers indicated that participating in risk-taking behaviors was one of the highest reoccurring themes outlined in the films' portrayal of college (17% showed students smoking and 40% drinking alcohol during the films), and a focus on academic components was the lowest recorded theme.

Part two of the study had students watch either clips of *Animal House* or *Planet Earth*, then have them reflect about their own substance use, their thoughts of substance use generally in college, and what their personal views of academics were (Wasylkiw & Currie, 2011). The results of Wasylkiw and Currie's (2011) study indicated that 1) students who had more experience watching movies about substance use in college were more likely themselves to be using it (drugs/alcohol), 2) these same students had a more positive overall feeling toward substance use in college, and 3) these attitudes were not good indicators of their attitudes toward academic endeavors during college. This could be because they believe that they can responsibly keep these two factors apart, or perhaps they are either overconfident in their abilities to be able to handle the effects of these substances on their academic performances and attitudes, or they

are ignorant to the real ramifications of long-term substance use on their ability to function as a student (Jones et al., 2014; Snow, 2017; Wasylkiw & Currie, 2011). Pop culture films and media tend to gloss over some of the more real and negative aspects of substance use, and this can be problematic for students when in reality they are unable to handle themselves or operate the way they believe.

Finally, it should be noted that although movies get the bulk of the attention in the literature, television also contributes to pop culture and can serve as a source to further add to misconceptions surrounding higher education. A qualitative study conducted in the early 2000s looked at seven different popular TV shows from the time that had components related to going to college or the college experience, and it found that the general tone for higher education was comedic (Tobolowsky, 2006). Again, faculty were typecast as individuals who were only concerned about the subject matter, and not the students (Tobolowsky, 2006). The perception of having an educator who does not care about their students can have a negative effect on future faculty-student professional and academic relationships, as well as interfere with student success because a student in need might not feel comfortable reaching out for help to someone who they believe is not invested in them (Tobolowsky, 2006).

The studies explored in this section further show the need to better understand how pop culture media is altering the expectation and decision-making process, and they illustrate why there is a real need for the media to find ways to better showcase all aspects of the college experience. Even though media is entertainment, the students who are watching are still being affected by these stories and forming expectations based on these sources.

What Expectations do First-Year Students Have?

What expectations do first-year students have for their time in college? U.S. colleges and universities are seeing not only a significant increase in student enrollment over the past 40 years but are also serving what is now the most academically and socially diverse student population ever (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Students from all walks of life and academic preparedness are enrolling in higher education to better themselves through learning, and through this expect to be able to find better jobs post-graduation to support themselves and their families (Miller et al., 2005). Some students report feeling like they are entering college not being fully prepared academically or personally while in high school and are expecting college to better 1) educate them, 2) prepare them to start a long-term career, and 3) teach them how to navigate the complexities of adulthood (finances, civic engagement, etc.) post-graduation (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). With the goal to explore the students' expectations of college experiences and services, a survey of 351 first-year students (50% were out-of-state students) was conducted to understand how their personal characteristics affected: 1) their expectations for college (especially related to academics), 2) their decision to attend that institution, and 3) their knowledge of campus programming and support services as a factor in college selection (Nadelson et al., 2013). The results indicated that a number of personal characteristics were correlated with first-year students' college expectations and experiences: 1) expectations related to higher focus on academic performance, indicated by ACT scores, indicated a lower emphasis on developing social and intrapersonal relationships (they focused more on academics), and 2) out-of-state students focused their expectations on social benefits; this could connect to the fact that out-of-state students may be from a higher socioeconomic class and could make their college decision based on the institutional brand (Nadelson et al., 2013).

Some students start their college experience not fully knowing what to expect, nor do they have a good idea what they are going to be studying academically. These students have enrolled for reasons that Sorkhabi and Strage (2016) described as simply "for the college experience" (p 331). Sorkhabi and Strage's qualitative study (2016) explored how students who were in college just for the experience fared against their peers who had more specific goals and directions, and they found that these students were at great risk academically. One fifth of a sample of students matriculated under this premise (for the experience) and the study found that these students studied less, missed class more and had an overoptimistic outlook on their abilities and their situation of poor academic performance compared to their peers who had other reasons for starting college (Sorkhabi & Strage, 2016). This study shows that not having any expectations at all can be as damaging to a student's success as having unrealistic ones.

These study synopses show that first-year students have expectations for many aspects of their college experience, and some are not even fully aware of what to expect from college. It is important to understand that these expectations are unique on a person-by person basis, and that they can be either immediate or long-term (and sometimes both) and are affected by students' age, the community they grew up in, and sources from which they are getting their expectations. The rest of this section will review the types of expectations that students hold about their first year in college: 1) social and personal expectations, and 2) academic expectations. These expectations are important because, in order to understand how best to serve and support their students and goals, college administrators, faculty, and staff must first know what it is that students are looking to get out of their time in college.

Social and Personal Expectations

Although it is not a primary objective of colleges and universities, students, especially first-year students, view this transition and campus as a place to engage in social activity outside of the classroom to meet new people (Ailes II et al., 2017; Samura, 2015). Many of these social opportunities are sanctioned by and held on the campus itself, such as attending athletic events, pep rallies, welcome week programming, Greek functions, intramural sports, or joining a student-sponsored club or organization. Other social opportunities, although not sponsored by their institution, are quintessential social college experiences that take place off campus in their community, such as house parties, exploring the town's nightlife (clubs and bars), getting involved in community service opportunities or local religious organizations, attending local art and music festivals, and engaging with local businesses, restaurants, and entertainment venues (Samura, 2015). These numerous opportunities provide the perfect occasion for students to meet new people, try new experiences, and explore and develop their own interests and tastes as an adult.

For many students, college is an opportunity for self-discovery, and an opportunity for them to broaden their social lives (Samura, 2015). Whereas before in high school, their social circles were limited both culturally and geographically, college provides an opportunity to engage and mingle with people from all over the world. It can be overwhelming for some to have to build their new communities from scratch, but also liberating, as college is an opportunity for some students to truly be themselves for the first time in their lives.

A quantitative study by Krallman and Holcomb (1997) that explored new students' social expectations for college provided a wide variety of responses to how their social lives would change or remain the same after starting college: 1) 59% believed that they would have to work

(put in effort) to make new friends, 2) 64% believed that their relationship with their family would not change after leaving for college, 3) 38% believed that their relationship with their friends from high school would remain unchanged after starting college, 4) 81% believed that their classmates had values that were similar to their own , and 5) 75% believed that they will experience a lot of social pressures (to try new things) while in college. The same study also explored what personal expectations new students held for their transition into college: 1) 59% believed that they would not need any sort of help to do well in their classes, 2) 89% believed that they knew exactly why they were in college and how it fit into their larger future goals, 3) 30% believed that it would be difficult to develop time-management and self-disciplined skills to make sure they were staying on top of all their assignments and making it to class prepared and ready, 4) 16% were worried that they would not make it to graduation, and 5) 88% believed that the reading skills and strategies they developed in high school would be sufficient for their college classes (Krallman & Holcomb, 1997). What is most interesting about these results is the level of confidence that students have in their ability to navigate their college transition with little to no problem, that their academic skills and behaviors used in high school were adequate to remain academically successful in college, and that 88% believed that they would graduate compared to the six-year graduation rate of 52.2% at the time (The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2019) and 2018's six-year graduation rate of 60% (Krallman & Holcomb, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This level of overconfidence, especially from the personal expectations, is a good indicator that unrealistic expectations are prevalent and wide-reaching in scope for first-year students.

Peer relationships are one social expectation of the college experience that have received a lot of attention in the transition literature because of the importance that students place on

them, as well as the anxiety they have surrounding them. First-year students often hold unrealistic expectations for the types of relationships they will form with their peers during college, particularly during the first year (Ailes II et al., 2017; Samura, 2015). One of the biggest expectations that new students have is that they are looking to make friends and build a new community around them. This sense of community is very important because it goes beyond a simple desire to almost a necessity because these individuals become a support system and, in a sense, a new family away from home, which is important academically, socially, and health-wise (mentally especially) (Samura, 2015). This network of friends includes the individuals who will help them manage homesickness, breakups with significant others, form study groups, and navigate through some of the more high-risk activities of college (including drinking, casual sex, and substance use) should they choose to partake (Samura, 2015).

A qualitative study by Robinson and Glanzer (2016) explored how students expected their time in college would help them develop a guiding personal philosophy (sense of purpose). The students who participated in the qualitative study were interviewed to understand the difference between those students who did and did not have expectations for their college experience (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016). Data was collected from a group of 75 students (53 from public universities, 17 who attended a two-year college) who had previously participated in a nation-wide, Gallup-sponsored survey (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016). The researchers chose to use a phenomenological methodology to examine 1) the students' view of their own purpose (on a personal level), 2) their colleges' purpose, and 3) their college experiences as it relates to their own personal purpose development (developing their philosophy) (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016).

Participants were interviewed on the phone for 20 to 30 minutes about various aspects of their experiences and personal purpose development (life purpose, expectations for experiences

in college to lead to a personal philosophy, their perception of life meaning, their experiences with class assignments about purpose development, and conversations happening in and out of the classroom exploring the topic of purpose development) (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016). The responses were coded for themes using both holistic coding (summarizing entire answers for single-word themes) and axial coding (to determine which themes were dominant across the participants) (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016).

The students' wide variety of college expectations influenced their perception of their purpose development: 76.2% were labeled as Holistics and they expected their university to aid in the development process. On the other hand, 23.8% (labeled the Instrumentalists) did not expect personal development from their university and saw the college experiences as more of a means to an end in more practical terms rather than personally philosophical or transformational (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016). The Holistics student data outlined three major categories: 1) career expectations, where they expect help exploring career options and laying a path for them to follow to reach this goal; 2) social expectations and experiences, where they expect to learn from others to help themselves narrow and define their own purpose; and 3) epistemological expectations, where they expect their university to help them gain a deeper understanding and perspective of their world and better self-awareness of themselves to grow more maturely as an individual (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016). The Instrumentalists student data outlined the purpose of college as utilitarian in regard to developing skills and means to starting a career after graduation. Fifty percent of the Instrumentalists felt confident in what their post-graduation goals were and saw it as a necessary step to get through, not something personally transformative; the other half did not know how to reach their career goals when they started college, but they were confident that they would learn the practical skills to figure it out (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016).

These results showed that there was a clear divide between students who held a holistic mindset (who recognized that their university was a place to explore, define, and pursue their purpose) and those with an instrumental mindset (who viewed their university as a place to develop career skills only) (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016). Understanding what students want to get out of their college experience personally, whether they are a Holistic or an Instrumentalist, can affect their expectations, and knowing how to identify them early will make it easier to connect them with the institutional services and support that will help them reach their personal goals and potential (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016).

Academic Expectations

First-year students typically have a single academic goal in mind when they start college: to graduate. This is a fair and fine goal, but oftentimes they overlook the many academic components that accompany this large end goal. Their study habits, technology use, relationships with their peers, advisors, and faculty members, and time-management skills are all important components to their overall academic success. Each of these is important, as well as likely very different from what they were used to in high school. Students report a mixed bag of what they expect their academic experience in college to be. Overconfidence becomes an issue for some who were high achievers in high school and thought that it was easy to succeed, and they often think that college will be equally as easy (Samura, 2015). Despite the issues that arise from using pop culture as a reference source for building college expectations, today's Gen Z students describe themselves as avid and sincere learners, with 89% seeing education as a means to achieving other goals, making them invested and motivated to succeed academically (Rickes, 2016). Data collected by Bryan et al. (2018) suggest that high schools that spend time providing information and expectations about what college is like are more successful in having their

graduating students enroll into some sort of higher education. More than ever before, well-intended steps are being taken in high school to prepare students for their first year of college, including taking Advance Placement (AP) courses or dual enrollment college credit classes while still in high school, having academic advisors create personalized educational plans, or getting additional tutoring or college prep (such as help writing admission essays or SAT/ACT prep) (Bryan et al., 2018; Rickes, 2016). This can help high school students get the edge they need to get into college and help them earn some college credit early. However, it seldom prepares them for the complete immersion that is being a college student.

A quantitative study exploring what academic expectations new students have for college provided a comprehensive overview of what students expect in their faculty and academic performance: 1) 40% of new students reported that they expected to depend greatly on faculty to help them when they are struggling in a class, 2) 25% believed that their faculty would teach them how to study for a college exam, 3) 20% believed that their faculty would check in on them to make sure they understood the material and were doing their assignments, 4) 50% believed that their faculty would reach out to them to make sure things were going okay in general with their transition into college, 5) 96% of them believed that they would have similar grades to what they had in high school, 6) 60% believed that their courses would be easy overall, and 7) 40% believed that everything they would need to know for the class would be in the textbook and assigned readings (Krallman & Holcomb, 1997).

A mixed methods study conducted at an Australian university in 2009 by Crisp et al., also explored what academic expectations new students had about starting college by both surveying 2,753 freshmen over two years and conducting focus group interviews with 33 university staff members who responded to the comments made and expectations held by the new students. The

student participants of this study were representative of the student population across gender, age, majors, and student status (full-time) (Crisp et al., 2009). Their responses indicated that they held the following expectations about their first-year of college (averaged over the two years): 1) 69.5% believed that they would be able to manage both a job and their coursework; 2) 87% believed that having face-to-face access/contact with faculty would increase their academic performance; 3) 83% believed that working collaboratively with their peers on assignments would help them learn; and 4) 24.5% thought they would need to spend six to 10 hours of studying outside the classroom a week, with 31% anticipating 11-15 hours, 21% 16-20 hours, and 14.5% 20 or more hours a week (Crisp et al., 2009). In addition, 92% anticipated that in many respects college would be a different experience than high school, extending to academic effort and load (teaching and studying) and personal responsibility for their own success (time management, hard work, and building a support system of peers) (Crisp et al., 2009). The staff interviewed in the focus groups indicated that 1) they liked the expectation survey because it provided quantitative data to their anecdotal experiences working with students; 2) they found the data useful for developing student support services; 3) they could use the survey results in discussions with their students to highlight unrealistic expectations; 4) they were surprised that students reported that they wanted to do group work (which went against their anecdotal personal and professional experiences) and that students believed that they would be able to handle a full academic load while also working a significant amount of hours; and 5) they identified that the expectations that they most wanted to change and address with their students were academic expectations (study skills, homework, and attending class) (Crisp et al., 2009).

The role of the faculty and classroom provide some interesting insight into their academic expectations. The first-year students use their experience from high school as a reference for

building their expectations for what to expect in college and find the norms in a classroom on a college campus. Starting with classroom expectations, a mixed methods study was conducted to better gauge what students expected from their faculty's teaching styles using a means-end chain approach, which is often used in customer service research to better understand a consumer's feeling for the various aspects of a product or service (Voss et al., 2007). Voss et al. (2007) also utilized soft and hard laddering (in-depth interviews followed up with surveys) to gain a better understanding of the students' expectations for lectures. The data and results were organized and displayed in hierarchical value maps by indicated nodes of themes and lines that connected the concepts. The results of the study indicated that students expected faculty members to have strong teaching and communication skills, and be approachable, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic about both teaching and their students (Voss et al., 2007). They wanted learning experiences that helped them to learn the material, pass the tests, and prepare them for their careers (Voss et al., 2007). Results also indicated that students' academic interests had less motivation than did their career interests and goals (Voss et al., 2007). A qualitative study conducted at a university in Uganda explored this topic further, examining students' perceptions of what makes faculty members and their teaching methods effective (Nabaho et al., 2017). Fifty senior (final year) students were interviewed to provide insight into the behaviors and skills that denote an effective instructor. This study found similar results as the Voss et al. 2007 study – students identified that quality instructors are most effective when they are equally learning and student-centered in their teaching and in their interactions with their students (Nabaho et al., 2017). In addition to this, having a strong and versatile communication styles, being an expert in their field, being approachable, and providing timely feedback on assignments are also desirable traits and are strong indicators of being a high caliber instructor (Nabaho et al., 2017).

Students also have expectations for how they want to be instructed. The youngest of Gen Z students, who will make up the next major class generation after the Millennials and are born after 2004 (and have had technology integrated into all aspects of their entire lives) have expectations for the use of technology as a tool in their education (Rickes, 2016). The expectation that technology will be used is a given for this population, and in fact, it has been found to be effective in enhancing academic goals and student motivation to participate in and complete academic assignments, especially group work (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018). Hoffmann and Ramirez' (2018) quantitative survey of 73 Gen Z students revealed that they utilized technology to organize their thoughts, share ideas with classmates, and because of this ease in communication, preferred to work collaboratively in groups rather than individually on assignments (a stark contrast to the Millennials before them). They also held positive attitudes about the assignments and class in general when they were able to engage their classmates, their instructors, and the subject matter through various technology avenues (slides, apps, websites, etc.) (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018). Students expect to use technology to help them connect and collaborate on projects and while studying, and for their faculty to be able to adapt their lessons using the technology (videos, interactive activities, slides) to meet the different learning style needs of the class (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018; Levin & Wadmany, 2006).

(Mis)alignment between Expectations & Experiences

For every expectation that first-year students have about their first year of college, an eventual experience will occur that will either align with their expectations or not. Understanding the effect that (mis)alignment of expectations and experiences has on first-year students was a major component of this study. Previous sections of this literature review have highlighted what expectations first-year students have about their college experiences, but this section will discuss

areas of the student experience that are influenced by the (mis)alignment of these expectations and reality. This section will start by briefly describing the phenomenon known as the Freshman Myth, which serves as a historical basis for the premise of this study and will conclude by exploring areas of (mis)alignment related to social and academic expectations.

Unrealistic Expectations – The Freshman Myth

It is true that many students are still starting their college experience with either high or unrealistic expectations for what to expect during their first year of college, despite the fact that movies, magazines, blogs, or websites publish an extensive amount of information about what the college transition and overall experience involves (Ailes II et al., 2017; Krieg, 2013; Stern, 1966). Even receiving information through secondhand sources like friends and family who have lived college experiences does not always correct students from these unrealistic expectations (Ailes II et al., 2017; Krieg, 2013; Stern, 1966). The first-year expectation literature indicates that many freshmen are starting their college experience from an overly optimistic mindset (Ailes II et al., 2017) in terms of both their academic and social transition (Schilling & Schilling, 1999; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Described first in 1966, the term Freshman Myth described the phenomenon that plagues many first-year students as they start their first year of college, and it has been theorized to be responsible for a wide range of negative experiences and outcomes those students reported during this transition (Ailes II et al., 2017; Mu & Cole, 2018; Nadelson et al., 2013; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Stern, 1966).

The Freshman Myth is a collection of expectations that, similar to how all other expectations are formed, are built from a combination of previous experiences and a synthesis of the data collected on the subject and turned into a mental picture of what the college experience is like (Olson et al., 1996). When the knowledge (data) students had acquired and used to form

their expectations for college is found to be untrue (or not based in reality), the feelings fueling their confidence to navigate their new, complicated environment is cut off, essentially damaging their foundation of feeling prepared to take on the challenges of college (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Stern, 1966). Students may report feeling isolated and not feel like they will be able to be successful students (or even worthy to be in college), which can negatively affect their self-efficacy and their academic and social performances in the long run (George & Dane, 2016; Garriott et al., 2015). These feelings can be compounded from stress and anxiety from being uncomfortable in their new environment where their freedom to make their own choices can seem overwhelming (Krieg, 2013). The larger issue with these expectations is that they tend to be built from experiences that are not actually lived and from sources that are trusted with good intentions but are not necessarily accurate.

This myth is used as an explanation for why students were creating unrealistic expectations about their college experience (Ailes II et al., 2017; Mu & Cole, 2018; Nadelson et al., 2013; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Stern, 1966). Though this concept provides a common term to describe the complex issue of (mis)alignment of expectations and experiences, it really only provides an explanation and description of students who are operating under extreme levels of overconfidence. Not all students are operating within extreme levels of overconfidence, nor are they completely devastated and unable to function or recover should they find they have fallen victim to this myth.

To elaborate this point, a year-long longitudinal study conducted by Mu and Cole (2018) used a pre- and post-survey of 8,759 freshman students from 69 institutions to explore how varying first-year student expectations influenced student engagement. Multiple statistical analyses were performed exploring three areas of engagement: 1) student-faculty interaction, 2)

collaborative learning opportunities, and 3) discussions with others from diverse backgrounds (Mu & Cole, 2018). The data collected were used to create a baseline of expectations (an average) as well as to identify variations in expectations. Students were found to have a wide range of expectations; however, being overly optimistic in expectations as a universal standard across participants was not supported in contrast to the conclusions drawn from earlier studies (Mu & Cole, 2018; Stern, 1966). Mu and Cole (2018) suggested that the current understanding of the Freshman Myth was more complex than simply comparing expectations and behaviors and that the variation in expectations was key. Students who started their college careers with a wider range of expectations (academic, involvement, and institutional) were more likely to meet their engagement expectations. Optimistic expectations for the first year (despite not matching fully with reality) have the positive effect of being a force of encouragement and a motivation to be open to new experiences, leading to higher satisfaction and a more positive transition (Mu & Cole, 2018).

In another example, a longitudinal quantitative study explored the effect that achieving or failing to achieve short-term expectations have on mental health, motivation, and academic outcomes while in college (Villarreal et al., 2015). Four hundred thirty-four high school students were interviewed in their senior year of high school, after their freshman year, and four years later (Villarreal et al., 2015). Villarreal et al. (2015) reported that students who did not achieve their short-term goals were less likely to attain their degree four years later, but the misalignment did not influence their perceptions of satisfaction with their educational experience or the progress made to obtain a degree. Results from chi square tests indicated that females held higher expectations, were more likely to achieve their ambitious short-term goals (college enrollment), and attained higher levels of education (Villarreal et al., 2015). Students who did not meet their

short-term expectations had lower high school grade point averages and lower levels of motivation for obtaining higher levels of education; however, a linear regression on mental health did not show a relationship between failing to meet their short-term goals and being significantly more depressed (Villarreal et al., 2015). The study concluded that it was not simply failing to achieve a short-term goal that was the issue, but rather how ambitious that goal was – students with more ambitious goals viewed them as worth the effort and risk, and they were more likely to be accepted positively if they failed to meet the high expectations (Villarreal et al., 2015). These studies bring up an important point because they emphasize that the issues of (mis)alignments are not always a case of straightforward cause and effect. While experiencing a disconnect can be challenging for some, it does not necessarily condemn a student to failure - students can learn from these (mis)alignments and it can be advantageous in the right amount and circumstance (Mu & Cole, 2018; Villarreal et al., 2015).

Social Expectations and (Mis)alignments

Students spend a majority of their time in college outside of the classroom, interacting with peers, getting involved, exploring their interests and their new communities, and spending time bettering themselves by taking advantage of the numerous campus resources. Unrealistic expectations are often associated with personal ability within the literature, but they can also be connected to external sources that the students will interact with (such as relationship with peers, staff, faculty) and institutional services.

A longitudinal qualitative study by Keup (2007) explored college (mis)alignments by interviewing nine students about their college transition and what expectations and experiences they had while in college and what effect this had on their adjustment to their new environment. The interviews were conducted during the spring of students' senior year of high school to get a

baseline for their expectations, and then again at the end of their first and second semesters of college to follow-up and examine their expectations compared to their experiences (Keup, 2007). The results of the first round of interviews highlighted the strength of utilizing a qualitative data collection approach because previously unexplored themes emerged related to the students' nonacademic expectations about their interpersonal relationships and personal development during their transition and first-year of college (Keup, 2007). Students described their expectations, hopes, and personal anxieties as they related to their desire to have meaningful peer-to-peer interactions in college – beyond a support network academically (study groups). They also focused on spending quality time connecting to their peers while getting involved in student organizations on campus, going to parties, finding romantic partners, and building a new community (on par with their family back home) (Keup, 2007). Students also spoke passionately about using their time in college, as well as the independence and freedom this allows them, to look inward and to develop themselves both personally and professionally, and to explore their values and priorities as an adult (Keup, 2007).

In follow-up interviews both at the end of the students' first semester and again at the end of their first year, students shared details of their actual experiences while in college: 1) that campus involvement expectations were not always fully met, in some part as a result of not being able to manage their time and other responsibilities (class, jobs, social relationships), but this was seen positively because it was viewed not as a disappointment, but as a future opportunity and something to look forward to (there was still plenty of time to try new things while in college), 2) that independence was seen as not an escape from authority figures or responsibility, but was framed as a way to make decisions that are on their own terms and that are right for their personal (including making quality relationships with others and learning how to better express

their values and personality) and academic (including learning how to balance course selection, course loads, and studying) goals, and 3) that many students reported feeling well-adjusted overall to their new life as a college student despite any unmet expectations and the hardships they experienced during their first year (feeling most successful in building meaningful relationships and least in making connections with faculty) (Keup, 2007). The study concluded that simply experiencing some expectation-experience misalignment did not automatically mean that the student would be unsuccessful or that they would not be able to adjust (Keup, 2007), which is an important message and lesson for new students to understand early in their college journey.

Finally, early on in their college career, students place high expectations on building peer relationships with those who live in their residence hall as well as just making friends in general. New students also expect that 1) the relationship they have with their peers who live within their residence hall (dorm), especially their roommate, will be a high quality and lifelong friendship, and 2) they will build a community and network of peers who live on their floors and within their residence halls who will help navigate and explore their new environment and act as a familial support system both socially and in their academic pursuits (Ailes II et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2005; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Most students, however, find that their social expectations fall short of their optimistically high expectations of how their cohabitating peers will assist their personal growth and college success, especially in the long-term; the relationships made at the beginning of the first semester often decline as the semester and year goes on as students begin to build relationships based on mutual interests rather than just proximity (Ailes II et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2005). Building this deeper peer network based on commonalities and genuine support plays an important role in a student's overall health and wellness (emotionally,

personally, and socially) **(**Higgins et al., 2010).

Academic (Mis)alignments

Academic expectations go beyond what students expect in the classroom and encompass study habits, faculty interactions, and even career preparation. A survey by Smith and Wertlieb (2005) collected responses from 31 first-year students enrolled in a year-long pre-business seminar course at a four-year public college in a pre-test about their academic and social expectations at the start of their freshman year, then again at the end of their first semester, and one final time at the end of their first year (matching post-tests in the middle and end of their freshman year) to get data on their lived experiences. The combined results of the surveys included items related to academic ("I will need to attend all classes in college") and social ("It will be easy to make friends at college") expectations (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005, p. 159). A paired t-test analysis resulted in data that showed that student expectations were not aligned with what they experienced (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). This misalignment was not a significant indicator of academic success overall, however, students who had more mid-range (median) expectations had higher GPAs than those who had a larger expectation/experience gap (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Regression analysis indicated that expectation alignment occurred between the second and third post-tests, indicating that the students were adapting their thoughts and actions to better align with the reality of the responsibilities and environment in which they were learning and living in, which enhanced their academic success and is in line with other research on the Freshman Myth (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Stern 1966).

Students also indicate that sometimes (mis)alignments of academic expectations can have long term effects on career prospects and professional development. In one mixed methods study, Rosenbaum et al. (2016) explored how the concept of institutional confidence in its

services and overall academic value affects the decision (and expectation-making processes) of college students in terms of how they decide where to enroll, what to study, and how these experiences will influence their personal development and employability later in life. The focus of this study flipped the script, exploring not how students fail to meet the expectations of the institution, but rather how their institutions were failing to meet the needs and expectations of their students (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Six hundred and twenty-five student interviews and 757 student survey responses from two private occupational and eight community colleges outlined three expectation categories that colleges offer their students: 1) a tangible and attainable pathway to graduation, 2) courses that are relevant to their major and career goals, and 3) professional connections that will assist in them starting a career post-graduation (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Rosenbaum et al. (2016) interviewed the participating students four months into their first semester (still within range of being at risk for drop out) using a structured open-ended question interview protocol. These interviews focused on various areas of their academic college experiences and explored how they saw higher education influencing their future (Rosenbaum et al., 2016).

The results of the interviews highlighted multiple examples of expectation misalignment: 1) some students were dissatisfied with remedial courses, which were necessary for some but did not count toward their degree and cost time and money to complete, 2) some students reported being confused about some of the college procedures or requirements (academic advising), and 3) some students failed to recognize the relevancy of some of the courses that they were taking in regard to their future degree attainment and career goals (general education and elective requirements) (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Factor analysis was used to compare the variables of the survey to an institutional confidence rating. In two-year colleges, students in occupational

programs indicated having a higher institutional confidence that their program and education was relevant in both course content and in transferability to career goals (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). These results showed a correlation between students who had institutional confidence and those who were committed to remaining in college due to the fact that they believed their time, energies, and resources were well spent in the pursuit of their degrees (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Students believed that this experience was a means to an end to accomplish the academic and professional expectations that they held (Rosenbaum et al., 2016).

Finally**,** it is also important to note that students are not the only individuals who have a (mis)alignment in their expectations and experiences when it comes to college academics. A study by Brinkworth et al. (2008) added in an additional component to the academic student expectation literature by examining how faculty perceptions influence expectation-experience dynamic. The researchers surveyed 223 science and humanities students over six months during their first year exploring their college expectations, specifically in regard to learning and academics (reasons for major selection, quality of faculty teaching and feedback, and the effect of outside commitments on their classroom performance), during their orientation week at the beginning of the semester (Brinkworth et al., 2008). Then 189 students (split between second semester first-year and second-year students) were surveyed again 18 months later (with a post-test) to have them reflect on their actual college experiences (Brinkworth et al., 2008). Using students from two different academic cohorts for the second survey allowed the researchers to test two different cohorts and allowed for a separate reflection of experiences (between the two groups) of the same time period (to reflect on their first year of college) (Brinkworth et al., 2008). The faculty who were surveyed all taught first-year only courses and were only surveyed at the end of the year.

The results of the Brinkworth et al. (2008) study indicated that science and humanities students had similar experiences during their first year in college, including understanding the need and importance of going to class (humanities at 79% and science at 90%), reporting that collaborating with peers was important to their learning process (humanities at 70% and science at 60%), and believing they learned better from faculty who were passionate and enthusiastic about the subject and their academic well-being (humanities at 95% and science at 98%). The factor of outside commitments received mixed results. Students indicated that outside commitments did not negatively affect their academic performance as much as the faculty believed that it would, which indicates that students were not as overloaded with work as was perceived by the faculty (Brinkworth et al., 2008). Feedback on academic performance provided another disconnect: students from both groups had strong expectations that they would be provided feedback on drafts of assignments (90%), however, the instructors did not provide this feedback (only 7% from humanities and 26% from the sciences) (Brinkworth et al., 2008). The faculty's expectation of giving feedback was at 0% in the humanities and only 22% in the sciences (Brinkworth et al., 2008).

The results of this orientation survey indicated that students were generally aware that college was going to be a different experience than high school but that they did not expect this difference to be significant, which seemed paradoxical (Brinkworth et al., 2008). This seemed to be a theme in multiple dimensions, where it was understood that processes and efforts in college were different, but that they did not allocate time or energy (on their end or the faculty's) to create realistic expectations for academic adjustment and preparedness for college (ranging from assignment feedback and study time to faculty interaction) (Brinkworth et al., 2008). This study

shows that institutions have the ability to effectively correct or shape academic expectations, but it is a process that takes time and dedicated efforts to achieve.

Effects of (Mis)alignments on Student Satisfaction and Retention

The existing literature base on the effect of the (mis)alignment between expectations and experiences on first-year students provides substantial data for which areas of the college transition are most greatly affected by the disconnect. This disconnect has far-reaching effects on the student, threatens the overall satisfaction of the college experience, and has long-term retention implications. Institutions need to keep their customers (their students) happy, engaged, and enrolled to remain financially viable, but more than that, they should measure their ability to serve their customers (students) as the basis of their effectiveness (Athiyaman, 1997). Effectiveness is measured in large part through retention data, and the retention literature indicates that when students are not satisfied with their college experience or their expectations are not aligning with their experiences, they are likely to become disengaged and disinterested with their campus and academic pursuits, making them susceptible to dropping out (Aljohani, 2016; Braxton et al., 1995; Tinto, 1996).

When students have more accurately aligned expectations and experiences, they experience higher levels of student satisfaction and are more likely to build the resiliency skills needed to handle the academic and social stressors of the first year of college, which results in higher first-year GPAs (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Thus, students' satisfaction with their college experience can be directly related to the expectations they hold in all areas of the college experience, from academic and intellectual development to social interaction and campus involvement (Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Spady, 1970; Thompson et al., 2007). Research conducted by Woosley (2003) noted that the academic and social experiences during the first few weeks of

a freshman's college career can be very indicative as to whether or not the student will be retained and graduate. Thus, it is necessary to not only look at what happens when expectations are realized, but to also understand what happens when these expectations fall short. This final section will review how expectation and experience (mis)alignment affects students' satisfaction with their college experience and their persistence as a student.

Customer satisfaction plays an important role in higher education. Students are coming into college with a number of expectations (as discussed throughout this chapter) and one way to fulfil their expectations is by utilizing their campus resources and services. Students want to believe that their resources and money are going toward programs, services, and opportunities that will align with their goals and make them a successful student and professional post-graduation (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Students who are satisfied with their college experiences are more likely to rate their overall higher education experiences as extremely positive and beneficial (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). However, individuals who come to realize they are not satisfied with their current college environment and their college expectations are not being met will be left feeling lost and disappointed because their confidence in their current institution's ability to serve them in the way they think or believe, has been shattered (Rosenbaum et al., 2016).

One campus service expectation that students utilize has long-reaching goals: career-readiness. There is a clear dissatisfaction for the amount and quality of career preparation that students expect to be provided to them from their career center. When students report dissatisfaction with their level of career preparation, their blame is often placed on a failing of their college for not doing enough to connect them to their desired career (in terms of jobs and internships) (Miller et al., 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Voss et al., 2007). The disconnect in

career services comes from an expectation that it is the institution's responsibility to do the legwork to connect the student to a job, when in actuality the career centers are really only responsible for teaching professional skills and providing opportunities for students to do their own job and internship placements (Ailes II et al., 2017; Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Whether or not this criticism is an unfair expectation for institutions, from the students' (customer) perspective, the fact remains that many students do feel let down by their institution in this regard (Athiyaman, 1997). This unrealistic expectation can negatively affect the students' confidence in their institution's effectiveness, and it is vital for the institutional staff to keep this in mind when showcasing their career services to prospective and new students, as well as to those important constituents like parents who are the ones oftentimes financing their child's education (Hussain & Rafique, 2013; Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Wells & Lynch, 2012). Institutions that can provide more details about how their career services work and how to better utilize the career staff, events, and resources will more effectively limit or avoid miscommunications and misconceptions from students and ultimately avoid unfair expectations from the get-go.

When students are satisfied, their attitudes and outlooks of their collegiate experience are positive, and they become even more avid supporters of their campus (which is good for alumni relations post-graduation) and are more likely to invest the energies and efforts to persist to see the college experience through (Athiyaman, 1997; Miller et al., 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2016). In a two-phase study conducted by Appleton-Knap and Krentler (2006), the role of student expectations in terms of academic classroom satisfaction were explored by measuring the relationship between the perceptions and expectations held through: 1) recalling expectations and current perceptions at the end of a semester (expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm), and 2)

measuring and comparing expectations at the start and end of a semester (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006). The researchers explored the application of the expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm, which is made up of four constructs: expectations, performance, disconfirmation (the divergences between expectations and experiences), and satisfaction (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006). For both experiments, students were divided into the paradigm's three satisfaction outcome groups (below, meets, and exceeds). The results from a one-way ANOVA test were consistent with prior research that showed that satisfaction was achieved when expectations were exceeded (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006).

Some surprising results came from the second study, which indicated that students' post-course assessment of their expectations did not match their actual levels of disconfirmation when compared to their initial expectations at the start of their semester. Participants from the second study indicated significant levels of disconfirmation despite indicating their expectations were met (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006). These results showed that when evaluating satisfaction, memories reconstruct early expectations (end of semester memories put a hindsight bias on recall) (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006). This showed that when expectations are measured at the start of an experience, the amount to which expectations are met is not a strong predictor of course satisfaction, whereas when measured together at the end of the semester, the extent to which a student's expectations are fulfilled is a good predictor for course satisfaction (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006).

Even though there has been a steady increase in student enrollment over the last decade, the retention and graduation rates have remained rather low and stagnant (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). A little over 20% of first-year college students do not return for their second year, and over 55% of all college students who end up dropping out do so by the end of the

second year (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). With these figures in mind, college administrators must be proactive in their preparation for providing services that are not only meeting the expectations of their students, but also their needs. Upgrading and adjusting institutional services (academic, social, personal, and professional) to align with the needs of the current student population, Gen Z, will be a critical component to increasing retention rates and efforts. Schwieger and Ladwig (2018) created a meta-analysis that reviewed the characteristics and expectations of the Gen Z population and provided suggestions for working with and supporting them through their college experiences. Some of the report's highlights include that Gen Z students: 1) are planners, and focus goals on future outcomes, 2) are highly responsive to personalization in communication and teaching styles, 3) are highly skilled with and are comfortable using technology to accomplish tasks (independently or with others), and 4) are hard workers willing to put in the effort to learn something on their own (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018). The study outlined ways that institutions could align their efforts and support for this population through the creation of new (or updating current) programs and services that take into consideration the needs and strengths of the population listed above. To provide intentional retention-based services to meet the expectations of Gen Z, colleges and universities can begin to: 1) expand their online resources and teaching methods (such as blended classes), which include their pedagogy, as well as enhanced team-centric communication and collaborations, 2) provide boot camps or certification programs that they can complete in addition to their courses that will teach them practical skills in a wide-range of areas, and 3) develop integrated career and employer curriculum and opportunities to increase collaboration between students and professionals in the field to gain work experiences throughout the year inside the classroom and out (in addition to the traditional internship or summer job opportunities) (Schwieger & Ladwig,

2018). These suggestions will not only live up to the expectations that this population has, but will take proactive, retention-focused steps to ensure that their college experience is not only satisfactory but is something that has a long-lasting impact on their perceptions of higher education.

Chapter Summary

Understanding how expectations affect the thoughts, actions, and well-being of an individual has far reaching applications for higher education professionals who are tasked with the development and education of their students into brand ambassadors for the institution and members of the larger global society (Nadelson et al., 2013). At their core, colleges and universities are operating as businesses and can only remain relevant, viable, and strong as long as they continue to provide quality services to their customers (their students) and constituents (parents, community, and legislators). The higher education landscape is in constant flux, and institutions must take proactive steps to ensure their product is meeting students' needs to maintain a competitive edge in the highly saturated U.S. higher education marketplace.

The transition into college is often a complex and difficult challenge for first-year students. On top of having to adjust to living on their own, making new friends, engaging with a more rigorous academic course load, and having to learn how to navigate the complexities that are inherently a part of any higher education system, these new students are also having to internally navigate one of the biggest hurdles, their expectations. The expectation literature covers a variety of specific factors that affect first-year students during their first semester and year of college, indicating that students hold expectations about what to expect academically in the classroom, socially on campus and in their residence hall, and how their time, money and energy will lead them to a desired career post-graduation. Though these new students spend a lot

of time thinking about developing expectations for all components of their time in college, very seldom do their expectations align with their lived experiences in all these components. It is a major issue that these expectations are not being met, and this misalignment in expectations and experiences increases retention threats, decreases satisfaction and institutional confidence, and can add unnecessary stress on an already stressful transition for new students. Though much has been written about what expectations and experiences new students have about and during their transition into college, a gap in this literature base exists in understanding how students interpret this (mis)alignment in terms of their ability to be satisfied with their college services and ultimately whether they are capable of meeting their goals (whether that be personal, professional, or academic). This study attempted to fill the gaps in the existing literature base by producing some specific data on not only what current students are expecting and experiencing, but also on how students are explaining and interpreting this misalignment. This study fills in areas within the expectation and first-year experience literature that are currently unexplored.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine what expectations and experiences first-year college students had about their first semester and how they interpreted both alignments and misalignments between their expectations and experiences. This study described how expectations were formed, what expectations the first-year students had, and how expectations affected students' perceptions of their college experience. Understanding how these processes occur and influence students' first year of college has wide reaching and practical implications for providing better services for the unique needs of this population of students. This chapter begins with a brief research design and an overview of data integration techniques for mixed methods designs, and then describes in detail the sampling, data collection, and data analysis separately for both phases (Phase One: quantitative methods and Phase Two: qualitative methods) of the design.

Research Design

To answer the research questions, this study utilized a mixed methods design, which is a research design that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to draw conclusions within the same study (Creswell, 2005). The design of this study aligns with parameters set by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), who identified three defining characteristics of a mixed methods research design: 1) quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed thoroughly to address the study's research questions and hypotheses, 2) the results from both the quantitative and qualitative data and findings are combined to form conclusions, and 3)

the combined data are organized into an appropriate mixed methods design that best supports the procedures necessary to answer the research questions.

Guided by both the objectives as well as the depth of data analysis required to fully explore the research questions, the structure of the mixed methods design utilized in this study is an explanatory sequential design, which is comprised of two phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The first phase included collecting quantitative data using a pre- and post-survey, followed by a second qualitative data collection and analysis phase. The quantitative phase provided a snapshot of the actual expectations that first-year students had before starting college and the actual lived experiences that they reported at the end of their first semester. The qualitative data provided supportive explanatory data on how students explained and interpreted the misalignment that they experienced during their first semester.

In an explanatory sequential design, the researchers 1) utilize the data collected during the quantitative phase to select participants for the follow-up qualitative interview, and 2) use the qualitative phase to further explain the significance of the results from the quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006; Morgan, 2014). The explanatory sequential design has the benefit of being simple to execute, because each stage is done one at a time and the resulting data analysis can be divided between the two phases to highlight the analysis of each and the combined results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, 2018).

Data Integration Techniques: Mixed Methods Design

Mixed methods design draws conclusions that often provide a holistic, big-picture overview of the data, as it draws from the strengths of both designs to explore and answer its desired research questions (Fetters et al., 2013; O'Cathain et al., 2010). O'Cathain et al. (2010) described two techniques that can be used to enhance the data integration process: 1)

Triangulation and 2) Following a thread. Researchers using a mixed method design often conduct their quantitative and qualitative study components separately and try to find ways to connect them through a process known as triangulation (O'Cathain et al., 2010; Patton, 2002). Utilizing triangulation, the researcher describes the results from each phase of the study and looks for areas of convergence or discrepancies, which can help to answer the research questions with more depth or help identify areas for future study (O'Cathain et al., 2010). Following a thread is a technique where the researcher analyzes both sets of data and puts them into categories – these categories or themes are then applied (threaded) to all other themes for comparisons and analysis (O'Cathain et al., 2010; Patton, 2002). The researcher will often create a visual model to show how the different datasets are connected and woven together with this thread for the ease of the data presentation (O'Cathain et al., 2010). For this study, the triangulation integration process was used to synthesize the results of Phase One to develop the interview questions for Phase Two.

In an explanatory sequential design, which framed this study, data are first collected and analyzed from the quantitative surveys, and these results are then connected to the qualitative phase to explore selected quantitative outcomes for further clarification and detail (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This integration allows for further exploration of interesting, outlying, or surprising quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This integration allows researchers to come to more meaningful conclusions, which are based in quantitative data, but expanded upon with personal in-depth context and clarification. The researchers need to make it clear how the collected quantitative data are used to guide the sampling of the qualitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This can be visualized in a joint display graph or table that can

highlight the range of quantitative scores or themes, which are the basis for the second phase sample selection (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Phase One – Sample

The first phase of the study included collecting quantitative data using a pre- and post-survey from a convenience sample of first-time first-year students enrolled in a 16-week section of a student success seminar course at the beginning and end of their first semester (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The population from which this sample came from were all incoming first-time first-year students at a single public research university in the mid-south. Convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling method where the sample comes from a population that meets similar (homogeneous) criteria (Etikan et al., 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018); in this case, all participants were enrolled in a 16-week first-year student success (introduction to college) class. The following limitations are associated with this sampling method: 1) the results from the sample cannot be generalized to the larger population, and 2) outliers are often problematic for this method; however, follow-up qualitative interviews with potential outlier participants make this issue less problematic (Etikan et al., 2016).

The faculty and staff who taught the 16-week sections of the student success class gave me permission to invite their students to participate. During the data collection in Fall 2019, 20 instructors covering 33 sections of the student success course provided contact information for their students. Instructors who chose to collaborate with this study aided the study by promoting this opportunity to their students, sending an invitation email to their classes on my behalf (Appendix B) in an attempt to enhance the student response rate. This email described the study and its purpose, as well as provided a link to the survey and the consent form. Course instructors were also given the option to allow me to come to their class to explain the study and send

additional participation reminders (again to promote a higher participation and response rate), with five instructors inviting me to visit nine different sections of students in person. A majority of the participating instructors chose not to let me visit and opted to introduce and explain this study themselves using the details form the initial invitation email that I sent them asking them to help me with this study. I was not given a reason from all the instructors for why they did not want me to come by, but a few responded back to me that they thought that it would be more meaningful coming from them rather than me as a stranger to the classroom. No extra credit or class grades were associated with the study for participation; however, participants were incentivized to complete both surveys (pre and post) by being entered into a raffle to win one of four $50 Amazon gift cards upon completion of both surveys.

The 16-week student success courses are in contrast to the typical 8-week format of this class. The same course material is covered in both formats, but the 8-week sections meet twice a week for half a semester, as opposed to once a week for a full semester. The majority of the students choose to self-enroll in these 16-week sections, although some are assigned this option if they are participating in certain Student Success Center programs. The students from which the sample was drawn represent all majors except engineering, architecture, business, music, and agriculture and life sciences (who have a separate first-year student success class requirement). A typical 8-week section of this class has 18 students enrolled, but special, semester-long sections can have class sizes ranging from 30 to 100. During the fall 2019 semester, there were 20 instructors teaching 44 sections (many taught more than one section that semester) of the 16-week student success class, with a total of 781 students enrolled across all of those sections. For the first phase of the experiment, 96 participants completed all or most of the initial expectation survey and 52 participants completed the entire follow-up experience survey.

Phase One – Data Collection

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained (Appendix A), and all participants had to indicate as to whether or not they were 18 years or older at the start of data collection to be eligible to participate in the study. For both phases, participants were given full, detailed information about the process and purpose of this study in order to give their informed consent to be included in both parts of Phase One of the study. The Informed Consent information was discussed during both the class visit (if that was allowed by the instructor) and in the introduction emails, and it was detailed at the start of each of the Phase One surveys (Appendix E).

Participant data for Phase One were collected at two different points during the fall 2019 semester. The first took place within the first month of the fall semester (expectations survey). The second experiences survey was accessible two weeks before the final exams began at the end of the fall semester. Students who participated completed both questionnaires online through a university-affiliated Qualtrics account. An introduction email was sent at the start of the semester by their instructor on my behalf, with a follow-up from myself a week later to encourage participation (Appendix B), both of which explained the purpose of the study and invited them to participate via a link. The e-mail made it clear that their decision whether or not to participate in the study was strictly voluntary, and that there would be no negative effects on their grade in class should they choose not to participate. A similar message was sent out during the last two weeks of the semester to encourage participation in the Experiences survey (Appendix B).

Participants provided their university computer login username, which was used to match the participant responses from the two surveys at the start and end of the semester for data analysis and was used to contact students to participate in Phase Two of the study (Schindler &

Burkholder, 2014). After collecting all the data from both phases, all students who participated in the study were assigned a non-identifying code and had all of their personal information removed for confidentiality before running any analysis. All data collected were housed on a secured, password-protected computer on campus in my office, so only I had access to the computer and electronic database of student data. No subsequent reports or presentations will include any personal identifiers.

Instruments *(CSEQ and CSXQ).* Pre- and post-surveys were used to collect quantitative data that measured college students' expectations and experiences. The end-of-semester survey, College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) (Appendix E), was developed by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, and ran continuously from 1979 to 2014, where it was retired as an individual assessment and incorporated into the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) (Gonyea et al., 2003). Since 1979, the 4th edition of the CSEQ has been utilized at over 500 colleges and universities for more than 300,000 students (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2007). Construct validity between variables has high correlations between student performance, retention, and enrollment, which has established the reliability and validity of the CSEQ (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2007). Additionally, the psychometric properties have been found to have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.8 or above (Kuh et al.,1997; Pace & Kuh, 1998; Pike, 1995). The CSEQ is made up of more than 150 items across eight categories: 1) College Activities (93 items: campus resources, and opportunities for growth and development), 2) College Environment (10 items: student's perception about the priorities and focus of the campus environment), 3) Estimate of Gains (25 items: self-reported growth and progress toward college goals), 4) Demographics (19

items: job/financial, demographic, academic, and enrollment status), 5) Reading and Writing (five items: activities doing both or either in and out of the classroom), 6) Conversations with Others (16 items), 7) Opinions About their College or University (two items: institutional fit), and 8) Additional Questions (up to 20 items of campus-specific questions) (Gonyea et al., 2003; Pace & Kuh, 1999). The CSEQ can be conducted either on paper or online, and it takes about 30 minutes to complete (Pace & Kuh, 1999). The CSEQ was based on a simple premise related to student learning: "The more effort students expend in using the resources and opportunities an institution provides for their learning and development, the more they benefit" (Gonyea et al., 2003, p. 4). Robert Pace, the survey's developer, uses the term "quality of effort" (referring to the interaction between students and their campus environments) which connects the concepts of academic achievement, satisfaction, and persistence to student success and retention (Gonyea et al., 2003).

In 1998, a complementary survey was developed to assess the goals, motivations, and expectations that new students have about their college experience, the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) (Appendix D) (Gonyea et al., 2003; Kuh & Pace, 1998; Pace & Kuh, 1998). Expectations are important indicators for satisfaction and can provide insight into how students perceive relationships and interactions with a variety of college personnel and resources, as well as how they perceive themselves faring in their new environment academically and socially (Gonyea et al., 2003). Like the CSEQ, the CSXQ has more than 100 questions, but of those 87 items are mirrored between the CSEQ and CSXQ. The CSXQ is slightly shorter than the experience survey and is made up of over 121 items in total across seven categories: 1) College Activities (56 items: campus resources, and opportunities for growth and development), 2) College Environment (10 items: student's perception about the

priorities and focus of the campus environment), 3) Demographics (14 items: job/financial, demographic, academic, and enrollment status), 4) Reading and Writing (four items: activities doing both or either in and out of the classroom), 5) Conversations with Others (16 items), 6) Opinions About their College or University (one item: institutional fit), and 8) Additional Questions (up to 20 items of campus-specific questions) (Gonyea et al., 2003).

When paired as a pre- and post-survey, the results provide campus administrators a clearer understanding of what students want and need, and more importantly, how best to assist and support students in multiple areas of the college experience (Gonyea et al., 2003). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for both the CSXQ and CSEQ have been reported to range from good to excellent, with a reliability of 0.80 or above for each of the surveys and a 0.20 to 0.40 for the inter-item correlations (Gonyea et al., 2003; Pallant, 2010).

Robert Gonyea, the director of the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University, granted permission to use and adapt the study's instruments (Appendix D). All items used and or adapted from the CESQ and CSXQ for this study were used with the permission from the CSEQ Assessment Program, Indiana University, Copyright 1998, The Trustees of Indiana University. For the purpose of my study, I adapted both the CSXQ and CSEQ to align them better with my research questions and to make them more relevant (campus-specific) for the student participants. My updates to the surveys can be found in Appendix E (CSXQ) and Appendix F (CSEQ).

1) Adapted CSXQ (Appendix E) – total of 91 items: collecting 137 data points (multiple questions fall under more than one category):
    a. Academic Expectations: 45 questions
    b. Social Expectations: 37 questions

c. Personal Expectations: 37 questions

d. Person-Environmental Expectations: 12 questions

e. Demographic: 6 questions

2) Adapted CSEQ (Appendix F) – total of 108 items collecting 168 data points which fall under the following categories (multiple questions fall under more than one category):

a. Academic Experiences: 51 questions directly or overlapping with another category

b. Social Experiences: 44 questions directly or overlapping with another category

c. Personal Experiences: 61 questions directly or overlapping with another category

d. Person-Environmental Experiences: 12 questions directly or overlapping with another category

The questions used and adapted for this study were chosen because they provide ample coverage of the social, academic, and personal expectations and experiences, inside the classroom and out, that new students have in regard to this study's guiding principles. Eighty-four questions from each of the pre- and post-surveys are complementary and can be used to measure gains and losses between the items by running a paired t-test analysis. Demographic questions only needed to be collected once in the pre-survey (CSXQ) since the participants for Phase Two came from the Phase One sample and would not change for the second survey. The demographic information collected in the experience survey from each participant included: their gender identification, their student residency status (in-state or out of state), their first-generation college student status (did either of their parents graduate from a college/university), and their racial or ethnic identification. An additional piece of demographic information came from student enrollment information based off the section that the participant came from, which was provided by the director of the first-year student success course. Most students were enrolled

freely in any general section of the success course based on their preference or course schedule, while other students were conditionally enrolled or pre-enrolled in specific pre-determined classes and cohorts based off a particular student status, including honors students, off-campus students, and students who were participating in various student success programs which were specifically for first-year students who were considered by the university as a high retention risk either due to financial needs or based off of their academic performance from high school (these students received additional staff support throughout their first year and access to specific scholarship opportunities unrelated to the class they were enrolled in).

Phase One – Data Analysis

Phase One data analysis utilized the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software to run descriptive analysis and paired samples t-tests to analyze significant differences between mean scores from the matching pre- and post-survey items. Each answer for every item of the survey was assigned a numerical value (for example, very often was a score of five, and never was a score of one) and then each item was placed into one of the following categories: Academic, Social, Personal, Person-Environmental, or Demographic. Items were combined and averaged by category to create category expectation-experience (mis)alignment scores. The average scores were used to highlight any interesting inter-category anomalies or outliers for the sample and for each individual participant, which was used for the second phase of the study.

To explore the first two research questions, a descriptive analysis was run to gather the means and standard deviations of scores for what expectations students held and what experiences they actually had.

Research question one: What academic, social, personal, and person-environmental expectations do college students hold about their first semester of college?

Research question two: What academic, social, personal, and person-environmental experiences do college students have during their first semester of college?

To explore the third and fourth research questions, a paired t-test was run to test for significant mean differences between expectations and experiences scores to indicate the areas of (mis)alignment.

Research question three: What are the areas in which student expectations and experiences align?

Research question four: What dimensions of the college experience are the most disconnected in terms of expectations and experiences?

Phase Two – Sample

Phase Two of the study utilized a nested sample technique, which consisted only of students who participated fully in Phase One. The calculated category expectation-experience (mis)alignment scores from Phase One were used to highlight any interesting inter-category anomalies or outliers. The category expectation-experience (mis)alignment scores were used to select the participants for the second phase of the study (Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2015). Participants for the second phase were only considered if they had completed both surveys (pre and post) of Phase One.

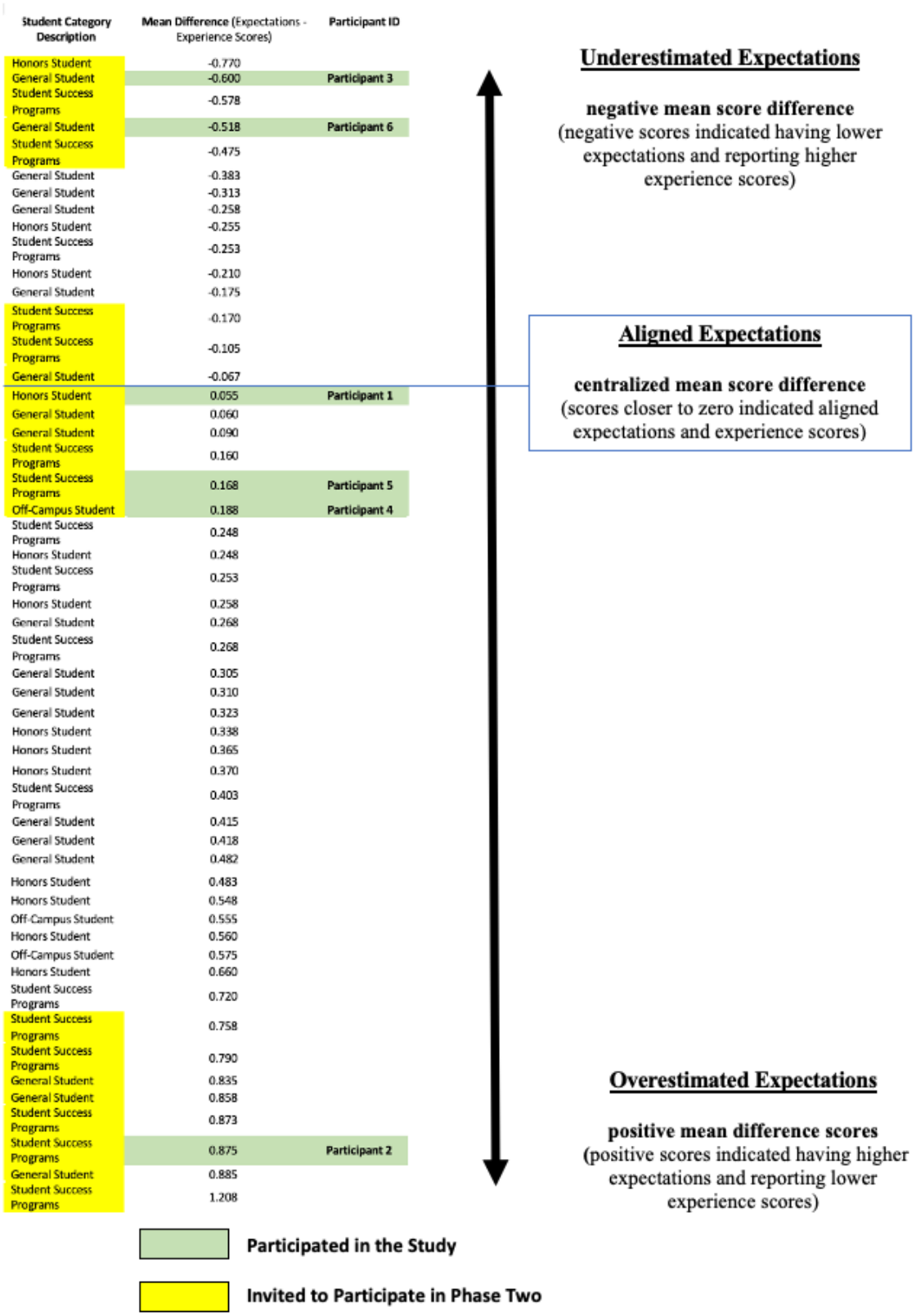
Using purposeful sampling, participants were selected from their category alignment scores that were either 1) closely aligned on all, specific, or multiple categories, or 2) drastically different on all, specific, or multiple categories to better understand how students form and interpret their expectations (Almalki, 2016; Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2002). The end goal was an

in-depth understanding of how students interpreted and were potentially affected by the close alignment between expectations and experiences or by any gaps or misalignments that existed between these two categories (Patton, 2002).

Twenty-two students were invited to participate, eight with the most extreme positive mean score differences were considered to fall on the Overestimated Expectations end of the Expectation-Experience Alignment spectrum (positive scores indicated having higher expectations and reporting lower experience scores), five with the most extreme negative mean score differences were considered to fall on the Underestimated Expectations end of the Expectation-Experience Alignment spectrum (negative scores indicated having lower expectations and reporting higher experience scores), and nine with the most centralized mean score differences were considered to fall centrally on the spectrum with an Alignment of Expectations (scores closer to zero indicated aligned expectations and experience scores). Of these 22 students, six agreed to participate (with two from the lower negative end of the spectrum, one form the higher positive end, and three from the center of the expectation and experience spectrum). The mean difference scores for all 52 qualifying participants (including their student descriptive category type) for Phase Two of the study are displayed as a spectrum in **Figure 3a.** This figure shows where the participants fell on the Expectation-Experience Alignment spectrum. Those who were invited to participate in Phase Two are highlighted in yellow with those who accepted to participate are indicated in green.

Figure 3a

Participant Expectation-Experiences Alignment Spectrum



Phase Two – Data Collection

` Participants who met the desired criteria were asked to participate in the follow-up interviews to further explore their Phase One results (Appendix G). Participants consented to engage in one-to-one interviews that were conducted via the video call service, Microsoft Teams. The qualitative data collected from Phase Two came sequentially from the results of the surveys from Phase One. The follow-up interviews further illuminated and described the students' perceptions of their expectation-experience (mis)alignment as it related to their satisfaction and success during their first semester of college, providing qualitative data to compliment the findings from the quantitative data. Student participants for Phase Two were contacted early in the Spring 2020 semester to participate in interviews, which was framed as a follow-up to the survey responses collected from the prior fall semester. The participants received up to three follow-up messages from me during the participant outreach phase of the data collection to further increase the likelihood that they would see my invitation, and to give them additional opportunities to consider whether or not to participate.

The six student interviews were conducted individually with each participant toward the end of their spring 2020 semester, with an average interview time of 27 minutes (the shortest interview being 21 minutes and the longest at 35 minutes). The participants were able to select an interview time from a number of options within a two-week span. The students were questioned using a semi-structured interview process, using open-ended guiding questions followed with questions to gain an in-depth understanding of their individual perceptions and thoughts on their expectations and experiences (Agee, 2009; Zorn, 2010). The Phase One data collection shaped the subsequent sub-questions, which helped to illuminate areas of interest that I needed to explore during Phase Two (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Interview Procedure

Before the interview started, the participants were asked to read and sign an Informed Consent page (Appendix H), which was sent electronically prior to the interview, and made clear to the participants that their responses would be kept confidential, and that any identifying information would be removed for the purposes of the dissertation write-up. This form also reviewed their rights, as participants, and reminded them of the overall purpose of the study. All the student interviews were recorded, with their permission to be recorded sought at the start of each interview. Afterward, I transcribed the recordings to be used for developing codes into themes. Microsoft Teams provided an option to apply closed captioning to each of the recorded videos, which created a raw transcript of each interview. I reviewed the transcriptions individually while re-listening to the audio file for accuracy and to finalize the transcripts. Recording the session allowed me to take on a more active listening role during the interaction, which was important for building trust and accuracy in the data collection process (Patton, 2002). During the interview, the student participants were told to answer the questions to whatever extent they felt appropriate or comfortable doing. I asked semi-structured follow-up questions when deemed necessary for more depth or clarification (Zorn, 2010).

An interview protocol process was utilized. Each participant was asked eight questions about their first year of college, utilizing a mix of sample trends and individual results from their Phase One survey responses (expectations, experiences, and (mis)alignment). The questions in the interview were semi-structured and were developed based off the results from Phase One of the study, focusing on the trends and outcomes of that portion of the study, as well as their actual responses during the interview (through follow-up questions) to guide and direct the in-depth

interview (Zorn, 2010). The guiding semi-structured questions included the following questions, and were followed up with additional open-ended questions when appropriate (Appendix I):

1) What were some of the expectations that you had for your first semester of college?
    a. *Follow-up:* Where did these expectations come from?
2) When thinking about what your first semester of college would be like, what would you say was the thing that you were looking forward to the most?
    a. *Follow-up:* Did that happen for you in your first semester? Why/why not?
3) How do you think your first semester of college went overall? What are some of the things that you experienced during this time?
4) Let's take a look at the results of your expectation and experience scores from the fall semester expectations and experiences surveys. How would you interpret these scores and results? (*I will take a few minutes to talk about what the scores mean with you).*
    a. *Follow-up:* What surprised you the most? Why?
    b. *Follow-up:* What surprised you the least? Why?
5) Looking at your fall results, tell me how you feel about the areas that did not align?
    a. *Follow-up:* Tell me about the area that had the strongest (closest) alignment. How do you feel about this?
    b. *Follow-up:* Tell me about the area that had the weakest (furthest) alignment. How do you feel about this?
    c. *Follow-up:* Tell me about a particular time this past semester when it dawned on you that maybe an expectation that you held was unrealistic? How did that make you feel? What did you change or do differently because of this?

6) Suppose you are walking through the student union and run into a prospective student who is wanting to come here for college next year. What advice would you give them to prepare them for their first semester of college?
    a. *Follow up* (with appropriate additional questions if necessary)
7) What is your definition of a successful college student?
    a. *Follow up* (with appropriate additional questions if necessary)
8) Would you like to share anything else with me at this time?

Students received these interview questions after signing up for an interview time, as well as a one-page descriptor that described how the four-category expectation-experience (mis)alignment scores (Academic, Social, Personal, and Person-Environmental) and overall scores were developed in addition to their individual scores in each of these categories (Appendix J shows an example of what this category description and score sheet looked like). Questions four and five allowed for more time to review their scores and to have them reflect on their thoughts and perceptions of the presented data.

After question seven, each participant was given a quick synopsis for the purpose of the study – which was ultimately to get a better understanding of what first-year students expect and experience during their first semester of college, which would be used to help assist myself as a student affairs practitioner and my department, which develops and manages student services for new students. Students were asked to reflect on how they thought this research could be beneficial to developing student experiences and were asked to provide any other thoughts or questions at that time before concluding the interview.

At the end of the interview, participants were thanked and given a brief snapshot of where their interviews fell into the overall process of this research project. Students were told

that they would receive a copy of their transcript after their interview and were asked to review it and to relay back any clarifications should they find any. No participants returned back any changes that needed to be made to the transcripts.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies, due to their nature and structure, cannot be quality checked by calculating reliability and validity, and instead can be validated by being deemed trustworthy (Patton, 2002). The trustworthiness of a study refers to the rigor of the methodology and accuracy of the results collected (Connelly, 2016; Morse et al., 2002; Patton, 2002). Trustworthiness is established in qualitative methodology when the researcher develops questions that are dependable (systematically followed) and authentic (aware of self-biases and perspectives when drawing conclusions) (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline the four criteria that should be considered (although are not always necessary) when determining the trustworthiness of a study: 1) Credibility, 2) Dependability, 3) Conformability, and 4) Transferability. For the purposes of this study, the credibility and dependability of Phase Two were explored.

Simply put, when a study has credibility, its findings can be considered to be true and accurate (Birt et al., 2016; Morse et al., 2002; Polit & Beck, 2014). Member checking was used to ensure the data were both credible and trustworthy. Member checking allowed the participants to check the accuracy of the data to ensure that the researcher had the most credible data to use to draw conclusions and themes (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse et al., 2002; Polit & Beck, 2014). In this study, the transcriptions of the student interviews were shared with each participant, thus allowing them to comment on and clarify (intention or meaning), to ensure that the collected data is as close to accurate as possible before any conclusions were formed (Morse

et al., 2002). The transcripts were typed directly from the interview recording verbatim. Three of the participants responded back with feedback about their transcript, but it was only to confirm the accuracy and no change requests were received. Transcripts that received no feedback were considered authentic and accurate for analysis.

The dependability of a study refers to the shelf-life of the data over time and conditions, meaning that the results found in a study are applicable regardless of time or place of the data collection phase (Polit & Beck, 2014). Some studies are affected by these two conditions greatly. For example, if a study is conducted on gauging satisfaction of an institution's academic policies, students who are going through conduct or disciplinary proceedings for cheating might have results that differ greatly compared to their peer counterparts who are not going through any academic or conduct hearings. The dependability of the results for this study was considered, at least for first-year (traditional) students, to be good because the experiences and expectations held by first-year students between cohorts (year-to-year) should remain rather similar, particularly for students who might score on the more extreme ends of the (mis)alignment spectrum (from the surveys of Phase One).

In addition to the credibility and dependability steps utilized, two other strategies were also included to enhance the quality of this study: 1) a peer debriefer, and 2) audit trail. A peer debriefer, which is an individual who has either prior experience in qualitative data analysis or expertise in the subject matter of the study (Spall, 1998), was utilized. One peer debriefer was used for this study, and they assisted me in the creation of codes from the interview transcripts and provided a self-check on the themes developed to ensure that I was not overlooking any major trends. This peer was a higher education colleague who had extensive experience working with various interviewing techniques in qualitative research designs. An audit trail is used to

assist any future researchers in replicating this study (Appendix K outlines the audit trail for this study). An audit trail is developed by creating transparent descriptions and notes, from start to end, of all the research steps taken for a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 310-319). It is important to note not only the steps taken, but the thought and decision-making process that accompanied these steps (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Malterud, 2001). For example, it is not enough to say that a theme was identified, but the notes must include how the researcher came to identify and recognize this theme.

COVID-19 Considerations

The global COVID-19 pandemic and stay-at-home orders for the United States started in early March of 2020, which was during the spring semester when the qualitative interviews took place. The university in which this study was conducted at (and whose students it focused on) shifted completely online on March 19 for course instruction and required students to return home for the remainder of the spring and summer sessions. I had already started the process of reaching out to participants at this time but had not been able to conduct any of the interviews. To give students some time to adjust to living and learning at home, I waited until mid-April to move forward with scheduling interviews which were conducted all online using Microsoft Teams. This study did not specifically ask questions about their COVID-19 related experiences, only about their fall 2019 semester experiences. It should be stated that all interviews and qualitative data collected from the participating students for this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that should be taken into consideration as a societal factor and influencer (whether conscious or not by the students during their interviews) when considering this study and dissertation in the future.

Phase Two – Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis provided qualitative data to compliment the findings from Phase One, as well as address the fifth and final research question of the study:

Research question five: How do students interpret and explain misalignments between expectations and experiences in regard to their ability to be a successful student?

Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis was utilized to analyze the collected student interviews for this study. Thematic Analysis is a popular method for analyzing interview transcripts because it is an accessible and flexible method of data analysis that can be utilized effectively by researchers who have a wide range of qualitative research experience (from novices to experts) (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Data analysis using Thematic Analysis can be done by either one of two approaches: 1) an inductive approach to analyzing data includes developing codes and themes from a bottom-down methodology by pulling them directly from the data, or 2) a deductive approach that utilizes a top-down methodology to developing codes and themes using previously held concepts or theories that are tested against a hypothesis or research question in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Researchers utilizing Thematic Analysis often pull from both of these approaches, with an intention or priority of using one as a framework for doing their analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Braun and Clarke (2012) provided a six-phase guide that I used in my study as a foundation in conducting thematic analysis: 1) Phase one: becoming familiar with the data. This stage requires that the researcher be very familiar with the data, including reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, re-listening to the audio files of the interviews, and reviewing interview notes taken while conducting the interview; 2) Phase two: developing codes. The researcher

reads through each of their participant's transcripts and highlights or notes a characteristic word or short phrase which captures the idea being expressed. This is a tedious process because each line of transcript collected must be reviewed and processed, and though not every line needs a code, there are no limits to the number of codes which may emerge and be identified. After all transcripts are coded, the researcher goes back through each code and combines like phrases or ideas with the same language across all participants; 3) Phase three: developing themes. After the codes have been finalized, they are grouped or clustered into overarching and related ideas, which are again named with either a word or short phrase to capture the essence of the theme. Several codes make up one theme, and there are no limits to the number of themes developed – the researcher must determine which codes are relevant (those that are not relevant are discarded) and which themes make sense within the scope of the study and the research questions being asked; 4) Phase four: reviewing the themes. In this phase, all themes are re-examined and checked again against the original data, the codes created, and the other themes. This checks a final time that the themes are relevant to the actual data collected and to the parameters of the study. This review may result in codes being moved around, themes' names or descriptors being re-adjusted, or the deletion of a created theme if necessary; 5) Phase five: naming and defining the final themes. This phase is used to develop a name or phrase for the theme which clearly expresses how the researcher understands the data collected. The naming or phrasing of the theme should be clear and understandable to anyone reading the study; and 6) Phase six: Developing a report which is the final step of analysis, and includes collecting quotes from participants, reviewing research questions of the study, and writing a scholarly report of the study's findings through the developed themes which are grounded in the data collected from the participants' words (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Chapter Summary

This methodology chapter describes the mixed methods design used to answer the study's research questions. This study sought to answer the five research questions in two phases: 1) quantitative, to understand what expectations first-year students had, what they actually experienced, and where, if anywhere, (mis)alignments were taking place, and 2) qualitative, to better understand how students with varying alignment and misalignment scores perceived their experiences and expectations. Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design and thematic analysis, this chapter describes the sampling, data collection, and data analysis steps for each phase of this study. This mixed method design allowed for a thorough understanding of students' perceptions of their expectation-experience (mis)alignments.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine what expectations and experiences first-year college students had about their first semester and how they interpreted both alignments and misalignments between their expectations and experiences. The results of this study describe: how first-year students developed their expectations for their first semester of college, what expectations these students held, and how expectations affected students' perceptions of their college experience. This chapter will begin with a brief summary of this mixed methods study design, including data collection and analysis, and then will separately describe the results of both Phase One (quantitative analysis) and Phase Two (qualitative analysis) dividing these phases into sections by research question and major emerging themes, respectively.

Summary of the Study

The results presented in this chapter are divided into two phases that correlate with the methodology in which the data were collected: Starting with Phase One, quantitative results, followed by Phase Two, qualitive findings.

Design of the Study

Explanatory sequential design, as outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) was used as the framework for collecting the data for this study. In an explanatory sequential design, the data collected during the quantitative phase were used to select participants for the follow-up qualitative interview. Using qualitive interviews, additional information was collected to further explore the data collected from the pre- and post-surveys of Phase One, which allowed the

participants to provide more insight into how and why they answered the surveys the way they did (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006; Morgan, 2014).

Quantitative Results – Phase One

The following sections will describe the quantitative data collection, data analysis, sample, and results of Phase One of the study, which are used to explore the first four research questions of the study.

Quantitative Data Collection

First-year students who were enrolled in the first-year university success seminar course were invited to participate in this study. The expectation survey was completed by participants within the first few weeks of the fall 2019 semester, with the experience survey being completed prior to finals at the end of that semester. Both surveys were taken online during the invited student's free time (not taken during class or for any course credit) via a university-licensed Qualtrics account. Only the participants who completed both surveys qualified to be contacted for the second phase of the study.

Quantitative Sample

The participants of this phase of the study were from a convenience sample of first semester, first-year college students who enrolled in a 16-week section of a student success seminar course. During the fall 2019 semester, there were 20 instructors teaching 44 sections (many taught more than one section that semester) of the 16-week student success class, with a total of 781 students enrolled across all of those sections. For the first phase of the study, 96 participants completed all or most of the initial expectation survey (a low response rate of 12.3% of the total student sample). For the pre-survey, which measured expectations, there were 96 participants (83% female, 17% male). The majority were in-state students (69%), with 30%

being from out-of-state and one being an international student. In terms of the participants' ethnicity for Phase One, the majority were Caucasian (non-Hispanic) (69%), while other races included LatinX (14%), Black or African American (9%), Asian or Pacific Islander (5%), Native American (2%), and other: Middle Eastern (1%). This sample was used to answer the first research question regarding what expectations new students have for college. Based off information provided by the participating university seminar instructors, additional data were collected about the student make-up of the sections, which included descriptive characteristics of the students. Of the pre-survey participants, the majority of the sample (38%) was made up of general students (students not participating in any university sponsored support programming or the Honors College) and students who participated in university-led student success programs (33%) (which pre-enrolls in-state students who are considered higher retention risks by the university due to either financial need or poor/low performance in high school). The remainder sample was made up of Honors students (23%) and off-campus students (6%) (students living with their families and not in on-campus housing for their first year of college).

Only participants who completed all or a majority of the pre-survey were invited to complete the post-survey. Of the 96 students who filled out the pre-survey, 52 (77% female, 23% male) completed all or a majority of the post-survey, which measured experiences (a 54% response rate from those who participated from the first phase). The majority were in-state students (64%), with 34% being from out-of-state and one being an international student. In terms of the participant's ethnicity for phase one, the majority were Caucasian (non-Hispanic), (65%), while other races included LatinX (15%), Black or African American (12%), Asian or Pacific Islander (4%), Native American (2%), and other: Middle Eastern (2%). For the participating students in the post-survey, the sample included a majority of general students

(38%) and students who participated in university-led student success programs (33%), with additional groups of Honors students (23%) and off-campus students (6%). Table 4.0 outlines the descriptive demographics data for Phase One (expectations) and Phase Two (experiences).

Table 4.0
Descriptive Demographic and Category Data for Expectation and Experience Samples

	Phase one: Expectations (n = 96)		Phase two: Experiences (n = 52)	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Gender				
Male	16	17%	12	23%
Female	80	83%	40	77%
Residency Status				
In-state student	66	69%	33	64%
Out of state student	29	30%	18	34%
International student	1	1%	1	2%
Race/Ethnicity				
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	66	69%	34	65%
LatinX	13	14%	8	15%
Black or African American	9	9%	6	12%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5	5%	2	4%
Native American	2	2%	1	2%
Middle Eastern	1	1%	1	2%
Student category identifier				
General student	36	38%	20	38%
Honors student	22	23%	12	23%
Off-campus student	6	6%	3	6%
Student success program Participant	32	33%	17	33%

Quantitative Data Analysis

The data collected from the surveys were analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to run descriptive analysis and paired samples t-tests to analyze significant differences in the mean scores between the matching pre- and post-survey items. The

first and second research questions required that a descriptive analysis be conducted to create a report that included the means and standard deviation scores for the projected expectation scores as well as the reported experience scores. To address the third and fourth research questions, a paired samples t-test was conducted to explore any (mis)alignments in the expectations and experience scores.

The individual items from both surveys were assigned to one of the following thematic categories (allowing for items to overlap where necessary): Academic, Social, Personal, Person-Environmental, or Demographic. Items were combined and averaged by thematic category to create category expectation-experience (mis)alignment scores. Creating these category scores helped to more easily identify participants who had various (mis)alignments of college expectations and experiences during their first year of college, and these individuals were then invited to participate in the second phase of the study.

Quantitative Results

Research Questions One and Two - Expectations and Experiences

To answer the first and second research questions, a descriptive analysis was conducted to gather the means, standard deviations of scores, and variance scores for what expectations students held for their first semester of college and what experiences they actually had during that time period. To best describe what expectations and experiences were collected, the data collected for each of the surveys (pre- and post-survey) were analyzed and scored separately.

> ***Research Question 1 (R1):*** What academic, social, personal, and person-environmental expectations do college students hold about their first semester of college?
>
> ***Research Question 2 (R2):*** What academic, social, personal, and person-environmental experiences do college students have during their first semester of college?

The first and second research questions (R1 and R2) were made up of four parts: 1) academic, 2) social, 3) personal, and 4) person-environmental, which are described in detail in the following sections. A chart of the total descriptive statistical results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of both the academic, social, personal, and person-environmental expectation and experience results can be found in **Appendix L** and **Appendix M**, respectively.

The following sections provide the results of Phase One of the study and include a descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data for each of the study's subsections: 1) Academic Expectations and Experiences, 2) Social Expectations and Experiences, 3) Personal Expectations and Experiences, and 4) Person-Environmental Expectations and Experiences. All items used and or adapted from the CESQ and CSXQ for this study were used with the permission from the CSEQ Assessment Program, Indiana University, Copyright 1998, The Trustees of Indiana University.

Academic Expectations and Experiences

The academic expectations that the participants had for their first semester of college were explored in 45 items, and academic experiences in 51 items. The following subsections describe the results of the major subcategories of the participants' academic expectations and experiences during their first semester of college and include: short and long-term academic goals, academic behaviors, academic products, relationships with faculty, academic conversations with others, environment promotes academic growth, and academic gains.

Short and Long-Term Academic Goals

The students reported short and long-term goals in the pre- and post-survey, sharing what they believed their grade point average (GPA) would be during their first semester of college and whether or not they had any plans on enrolling in graduate school after getting their

undergraduate degree. These academic goals were explored in two items in the pre-survey and two in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectations and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of these academic goals are presented in **Table 4.1.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected and experienced thoughts and academic performance on a Likert-Scale for the academic items on the table, with: 1) the GPA items ranging from one to four, with one being a GPA of a D average (1.9 or lower), two being a GPA of a C average (2.9-2.0), three being a GPA of a B average (3.9-3.0), and a four being a GPA of an A average (4.0); and 2) the Graduate School items ranging from one to three, one being "Yes" (they intend to enroll into Graduate School program), two being "Maybe" (undecided), and three being "No" (no plans to enroll into a Graduate School program).

Table 4.1
GPA and Post-Graduation Plans: Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-3)	*SD*	*Var.*
GPA				
What do you expect your college grade point average to be at the end of this semester?	87	3.31	0.51	0.26
What is your college grade point average to be at the end of this semester?	52	3.09	0.68	0.47
Graduate School Plans				
Prior to starting college, do you expect to enroll in an advanced degree (graduate school), after you complete your undergraduate degree?	87	1.53	0.64	0.39
After completing your first semester of college, do you expect to enroll in an advanced degree (graduate school), after you complete your undergraduate degree?	52	1.69	0.76	0.57

Note. GPA means were scored on a scale from 1-4, with one being a GPA score of 1.9 or lower; two being a GPA score between 2.0 and 2.9; three being a GPA score between 3.0 and 3.9; and a four being a GPA score of 4.0. Graduate School means were scored on a scale of 1-3, with one being a Yes (intention to enroll in a graduate program); two being a Maybe (undecided whether to enroll in a graduate program); and three being a No (no intention to enroll in a graduate program).

Some notable expectation and experience goals for grades and Graduate School included:

1) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*

    a) More students anticipated that they would earn high academic scores than the number of students who reported actually receiving high academic scores at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for Grade Point Average (GPA) in their first semester was 3.31 (*SD*=0.51) with a reported experience mean of 3.09 (*SD*= 0.68). Almost all (97%) of the participants believed that they would have either an A or B average GPA in their first year. Only two participants expected a C average GPA, and no one anticipated anything lower than a C average GPA. In reality, 20% of students reported a C average GPA for their first semester, with a majority of students (55%) reporting a B average GPA. This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

    b) At the end of their first semester of college, more of the participants indicated that they had no plans to enroll in graduate school after completing their bachelors. The pre- and post-survey scored the participants' anticipated graduate enrollment plans on a scale from one to three, with one being planning on it, two being will maybe enroll, and three being not planning on going to graduate school. The mean participant expectation for enrolling in a graduate program after graduating from college was 1.52 (SD=0.63) with a reported

experience mean of 1.69 (SD= 0.76). Whereas the percentage of students who were unsure if they would attend graduate school in the pre-survey dropped slightly in the post-survey (from 37% to 35%), the number of students who reported that they were not planning on attending graduate school more than doubled in their expectation reporting scores (from 7% to 17%). It appears that more students saw themselves attending graduate school at the start of their first semester of college than at the end.

Academic Behaviors

The students reported on their expected frequency to engage in academic-focused actions and behaviors during their first semester of college. These academic behaviors were explored in 21 items in the pre-survey and 22 in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their academic behaviors are presented in **Table 4.2.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected and experienced frequency of engaging in academic actions and behaviors on a Likert-Scale from 1) one to four for the social items on the table, with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred, and 2) one to four for the final two items on the table, with one being 5 or fewer hours a week, two being 6-10 hours a week, three being 11-15 hours a week, and four being 15-20 hours a week.

Table 4.2
Academic Behaviors - Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected to use the library as a quiet place to read or study	96	2.55	1.03	1.07
Used the library as a quiet place to read or study	52	2.21	1.19	1.42
Expected to use a database (online or in the library) to find material on some topic	96	2.35	0.85	0.72
Used a database (online or in the library) to find material on some topic	52	2.08	0.79	0.62
Expected to use e-mail to communicate with an instructor or classmates	96	3.52	0.71	0.50
Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor or classmates	52	3.42	0.67	0.44
Expected to participate in class discussions using an electronic medium (e-mail, list-serve, chat group, Blackboard, etc.)	96	2.97	0.93	0.87
Participated in class discussions using an electronic medium (e-mail, list-serve, chat group, Blackboard, etc.)	52	2.65	1.05	1.09
Expected to complete their assigned readings before class	95	3.40	0.74	0.54
Completed the assigned readings before class	52	3.17	0.88	0.77
Expected to have to take detailed notes during class	95	3.61	0.62	0.3
Took detailed notes during class	52	3.38	0.69	0.48

Table 4.2 (Cont.)
Academic Behaviors - Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected to have to contribute to discussions while in class	95	3.00	0.88	0.77
Contributed to discussions while in class	52	3.05	0.88	0.77
Expected to have to try to see how different facts and ideas fit together	94	3.17	0.74	0.55
Tried to see how different facts and ideas fit together	52	3.12	0.83	0.69
Expected to have to apply material learned in a class to other areas (a job or internship, other courses, relationships with friends, family, co-workers, etc.)	95	3.11	0.82	0.67
Applied material learned in a class to other areas (a job or internship, other courses, relationships with friends, family, co-workers, etc.)	52	2.91	0.92	0.84
Expected to have to summarize major points and information from your readings or class notes	95	3.17	0.82	0.67
Summarized major points and information from your readings or class notes	52	3.09	0.79	0.62
Expected to use information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments	95	3.15	0.85	0.72
Used information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments	52	2.73	0.91	0.83

Table 4.2 (Cont.)
Academic Behaviors - Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected to have to explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member)	95	2.98	0.82	0.68
Tried to explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member)	52	3.12	0.90	0.81
Expected to work on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students	95	2.82	0.89	0.79
Worked on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students	52	2.42	0.89	0.80
Expected to memorize formulas, definitions, technical terms and concepts	95	3.23	0.89	0.80
Memorized formulas, definitions, technical terms and concepts	52	2.95	0.93	0.87
Expected to ask other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them	94	2.84	0.95	0.91
Asked other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them	52	2.61	1.01	1.02
Expected to refer to a book or manual about writing style, grammar, etc.	95	2.48	1.07	1.15
Referred to a book or manual about writing style, grammar, etc.	52	2.23	1.06	1.12
Expected to revise a paper or composition two or more times before you are satisfied with it	95	2.98	0.95	0.89

Table 4.2 (Cont.)
Academic Behaviors - Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Revised a paper or composition two or more times before you are satisfied with it	52	2.60	1.03	1.07
Expected to attend a lecture or panel discussion	92	2.65	0.97	0.93
Attended a lecture or panel discussion	52	2.10	1.09	1.19
Expected to use a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.)	92	2.38	0.97	0.94
Used a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.).	52	1.67	0.92	0.85
Expected to read Textbooks/Assigned Books for class	79	3.29	1.11	1.23
Read Textbooks/Assigned Books	49	2.81	1.13	1.28
About how many hours a week do you expect to spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?	86	2.56	0.78	0.6
During the semester, about how many hours a week did you spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?	52	2.40	0.82	0.68

An additional question was asked only in the post-survey: *During the coming semester in college, how often did you work harder than you thought you would to meet the instructor's*

expectations and standards? The mean experience score was 2.60 (*n* = 52), with a standard deviation of 1.00 and a variance of 0.99. The post-survey had students indicate if they made the additional effort to meet their instructor's (faculty's) expectations, and if so how often this was done: 41% (*n* = 21) indicated that they very often made this effort with a score of four, 41% (*n* = 21) indicated that they often made this effort with a score of three, 14% (*n* = 7) indicated that occasionally made this effort with a score of two, and 4% (*n* = 2) said they never made that effort with a score of one.

Some notable academic activity expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience Alignments*
    a) Students reported participating in class discussions as much as they anticipated. The mean participant expectation for contributing to discussions while in the classroom in their first semester was 3.00 (*SD*=0.88) with a reported experience mean of 3.05 (*SD*= 0.88). This indicates that their expectation and experience scores at the start and end of their first semester of college were closely aligned.
    b) Students reported having to find ways to connect facts and ideas summaries as much as they anticipated. The mean participant expectation for synthesizing different academic and classroom concepts in their first semester was 3.17 (*SD*=0.74) with a reported experience mean of 3.12 (*SD*= 0.83). This indicates that their expectation and experience scores at the start and end of their first semester of college were closely aligned.
2) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*
    a) Students anticipated that they would attend more academic lectures and panels than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for attending

academic-focused lectures outside of their day-to-day classroom requirements in their first semester was 2.65 (*SD*=0.97) with a reported experience mean of 2.10 (*SD*= 1.09). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

b) Students anticipated that they would utilize academic resources on campus to enhance their academic performance and skills more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for using academic resources like study spaces, writing centers, and learning labs in their first semester was 2.38 (*SD*=0.97) with a reported experience mean of 1.67 (*SD*= 0.92). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

c) Students reported having to create summaries of their notes and study guides more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for creating these course summaries to help them study in their first semester was 3.17 (*SD*=0.82) with a reported experience mean of 3.09 (*SD*= 0.79). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

d) Students reported sharing the information that they learned in class with others more than they anticipated in their first semester. The mean participant expectation for sharing or demonstrating information that they learned in their class to someone else in their first semester was 2.98 (*SD*=0.82) with a reported experience mean of 3.12 (*SD*= 0.90). This indicates that their reported experience scores at the end of the semester were higher than what they expected at the beginning of college.

Academic Products

The students reported the frequency in which they produced academic products, such as papers, projects, and presentations during their first semester of college. These academic products were explored in five items in the pre-survey and five in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of the production of academic products are presented in **Table 4.3.** The mean score of each academic product item in the following table corresponds to the expected and experienced frequency of creating academic products on a Likert-Scale from 1) one to four for the first six academic product items on the table, with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred, and 2) one to five for the final four items on the table related to the frequency that students created reading and writing products, with one being no opportunities to create those products, two being fewer than five opportunities, three being between five and ten opportunities, four being between 11 and 20 opportunities, and five being more than 20 opportunities to develop reading and writing products.

Table 4.3
Academic Products and Activities Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected that they would have to develop a bibliography or set of references for a term paper or other report	96	2.31	0.87	0.76
Developed a bibliography or set of references for a term paper or other report	52	2.14	1.06	1.12

Table 4.3 (Cont.)
Academic Products and Activities Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected that they would have to prepare a paper or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources	95	3.02	0.81	0.66
Worked on a paper or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources	52	2.77	0.96	0.93
Expected that they would write a major report for a class (20 pages or more)	95	1.81	0.88	0.77
Prepared a major report for a class (20 pages or more)	52	1.18	0.55	0.30

Reading and Writing

	n	*M* *(1-5)*	*SD*	*Var.*
Had expectations they would write Term Papers/Other written Reports	79	3.18	0.98	0.97
Wrote Term Papers/Other Written Reports	49	2.68	1.01	1.03
Expected to write essay exams for their courses	79	2.96	0.99	0.99
Wrote essay exams for their courses	49	1.90	0.85	0.72

Some notable academic activity expectation and experience results included:

1) Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:

a) Students anticipated that they would be writing long reports or papers for class more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for

having to write long essays, papers, and projects with requirements of 20 or more pages of content their first semester was 1.81 (*SD*=0.88) with a reported experience mean of 1.18 (*SD*= 0.55). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

b) Students anticipated that they would have to complete essay-style exams in college more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation of having to complete exams that were either entirely essay format or included essay writing portions in their first semester was 2.96 (*SD*=0.99) with a reported experience mean of 1.90 (*SD*= 0.85). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Relationship with Faculty

The students reported the frequency in which they developed relationships with faculty members during their first semester of college. These relationships were explored in six items in the pre-survey and six in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of relationships are presented in **Table 4.4.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected and experienced frequency of building these relationships on a Likert-Scale from one to four for the faculty interaction items on the table, with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred.

Table 4.4
Interactions and Relationships with Faculty – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected opportunities to discuss ideas for a term paper or other class project with a faculty member	96	2.44	0.87	0.75
Discussed ideas for a term paper or other class project with a faculty member	52	2.21	1.02	1.03
Expected opportunities to discuss your career plans and ambitions with a faculty member	95	2.33	0.93	0.86
Discussed your career plans and ambitions with a faculty member	52	2.38	0.93	0.86
Expected opportunities to discuss your academic major or course selection with a faculty member	96	2.56	0.94	0.88
Discussed your academic major or course selection with a faculty member	52	2.68	0.90	0.80
Expected opportunities to ask an instructor for information related to a course they were taking (grades, make-up work, assignments, etc.)	96	2.84	0.91	0.83
Asked your instructor for comments and criticisms about your academic performance	52	2.18	0.88	0.77
Expected opportunities to work with a faculty member on a research project	96	1.72	0.85	0.73
Worked with a faculty member on a research project	52	1.19	0.49	0.24
Expected to seek advice and help from an instructor or staff member to improve your writing	95	2.72	1.05	1.10

Table 4.4 (Cont.)
Interactions and Relationships with Faculty – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Asked an instructor or staff member for advice and help to improve your writing	52	2.03	0.99	0.98

Some notable academic activity expectation and experience results included:

1) Expectation and Experience Alignments

a) Students reported discussing their career plans with a faculty member as much as they anticipated. The mean participant expectation for having conversations with faculty members about future career goals and ambitions post-graduation in their first semester was 2.33 (*SD*=0.93) with a reported experience mean of 2.38 (*SD*= 0.93). This indicates that their expectation and experience scores at the start and end of their first semester of college were closely aligned.

2) Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:

a) Students anticipated that they would have access and opportunities to interact with their instructors for course help more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for having the opportunity for academic-focused conversations with faculty members (about grades, assignments, content clarification, etc.) their first semester was 2.84 (*SD*=0.91) with a reported experience mean of 2.18 (*SD*= 0.88). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

b) Students anticipated that they would receive help from their instructors on how to enhance their writing abilities more than they reported at the end of their first semester.

The mean participant expectation for receiving help, guidelines, and advice on how to improve their writing their first semester was 2.72 (*SD*=1.05) with a reported experience mean of 2.03 (*SD*=0.99). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

c) Students reported discussing their major and course selection with a faculty member more than they anticipated in their first semester. The mean participant expectation for having the opportunity to talk with a faculty member about their academic options within their major and future class planning in their first semester was 2.56 (*SD*=0.94) with a reported experience mean of 2.68 (*SD*= 0.90). This indicates that their reported experience scores at the end of the semester were higher than what they expected at the beginning of college.

Academic Conversations with Others

The students reported the frequency in which they engaged in various academic conversations with others during their first semester of college. These activities were explored in 10 items in the pre-survey and seven in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of academic conversations with others are presented in **Table 4.5.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected and experienced frequency of engaging in these conversations on a Likert-Scale from one to four for the items on the table, with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred.

Table 4.5
Academic Conversations with Others - Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expect to have conversations about the arts (painting, poetry, theatrical productions, dance, symphony, movies, etc.)	89	2.31	0.97	0.95
Had conversations about the arts (painting, poetry, theatrical productions, dance, symphony, movies, etc.)	52	2.24	1.00	1.00
Expect to have conversations about science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.)	89	2.20	0.80	0.64
Had conversations about science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.)	52	1.93	0.89	0.78
Expect to have conversations about computers and other technologies	89	2.13	0.88	0.78
Had conversations about computers and other technologies	52	1.80	0.81	0.65
Expect to refer to knowledge they acquired in their readings or classes while in conversations with others	89	2.75	0.77	0.60
Referred to knowledge acquired in their readings or classes while in conversations with others	52	2.52	0.80	0.65
Expect to refer to something one of their instructors said about a topic or issue while in conversations with others	89	2.92	0.76	0.57
Referred to something one of your instructors said about a topic or issue while in conversations with others	52	2.52	0.87	0.76

Table 4.5 (Cont.)
Academic Conversations with Others - Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expect to subsequently read something related to the topic or issue they are learning about	89	2.70	0.88	0.78
Subsequently read something that was related to the topic or issue they were learning about	52	2.48	0.92	0.84

Notable academic activity expectation and experience results included:

1) Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:

a) Students anticipated that they would have conversations about technology more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for having conversations with others about new technology or utilizing technology in their lives during their first semester was 2.13 (*SD*=0.88) with a reported experience mean of 1.80 (*SD*= .81). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

b) Students anticipated that they would reference what they were learning in their class in conversations with others more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for connecting subject matter and information from class to their daily conversations with others during their first semester was 2.92 (*SD*=0.76) with a reported experience mean of 2.52 (*SD*= 0.87). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Environment Promotes Academic Growth

The students reported the impact that they believed their campus environment would have on bolstering their academic growth during their first semester of college. These activities were explored in four items in the pre-survey and four in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their perception on environmental impact on academic growth are presented in **Table 4.6.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected and experienced emphasis that their environment will provide in terms of academic growth on a Likert-Scale from one to seven for the academic items on the table, with: one being a weak emphasis and seven being a strong emphasis.

Table 4.6
Campus Promoting Academic Growth – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-7)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected emphasis that their environment would assist in developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities	87	5.80	1.11	1.23
Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities	52	5.51	1.37	1.88
Expected emphasis that their environment would assist in developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities	87	5.45	1.26	1.58
Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities	52	5.57	1.15	1.32
Expected emphasis that their environment would assist in developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources)	87	5.07	1.30	1.69

Table 4.6 (Cont.)
Campus Promoting Academic Growth – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-7)	*SD*	*Var.*
Emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources)	52	5.03	1.59	2.51
Expected emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competence	87	5.44	1.44	2.06
Emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competence	52	5.48	1.58	2.49

Notable academic activity expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*

   a) Students anticipated that their college environment would help them become better students more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for being influenced by college to develop better academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities as a student during their first semester was 5.80 (*SD*=1.11) with a reported experience mean of 5.51 (*SD*= 1.37). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

   b) Students reported that being on campus and in a college environment enhanced their critical thinking skills more than they anticipated in their first semester. The mean participant expectation for their academic environment to enhance their critical thinking, evaluative, and analytical skills in their first semester was 5.45 (*SD*=1.26) with a reported experience mean of 5.57 (*SD*= 1.15). This indicates that their reported experience scores

at the end of the semester were higher than what they expected at the beginning of college.

Academic Gains

In the post-survey, students were asked to describe their perceptions of any academic gains they had developed during their first semester of college. These new skills were explored in six items in the post-survey only.

The descriptive statistical experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of these academic gains are presented in **Table 4.7**. The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the perceived amount of growth experienced by the students on a Likert-Scale from one to four for the academic growth items on the table, with: one being very little growth occurred, two being some growth occurred, three being quite a bit of growth occurred, and four being that a lot of growth occurred.

Table 4.7
College Leading to Academic Growth and Critical Thinking Skills – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Obtaining knowledge and skills applicable to a specific job or type of work (career preparation)	52	2.34	0.86	0.73
Gaining a broad general education about different fields of knowledge	52	2.54	0.87	0.76
Gaining a range of information that may be relevant to a career	52	2.52	0.94	0.88
Gaining knowledge about other parts of the world and other people	52	2.49	0.92	0.84

Table 4.7 (Cont.)
College Leading to Academic Growth and Critical Thinking Skills – Expectations and Experiences

Becoming aware of the consequences (benefits, hazards, dangers) of new applications of science and technology	52	2.33	1.06	1.13
Learning on your own, pursuing ideas, and finding information you need	52	2.97	0.83	0.69

Note. The items in Table 4.7 were only included in the post survey, so no mean comparison scores are available for these items.

Some notable growth in academic and critical thinking skills included:

1) *Experience Reporting:*
   a) Students reported the highest experience mean score in learning on their own (doing their own research to clarify or learn new information) ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.69$).
   b) Students reported the lowest experience mean score by learning about the impact and applications of new science and technology ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.13$).

Social Expectations and Experiences

Surveys explored how social interactions and relationships impacted the student experience, and the role and influence that they played early in the transition and first semester of college. The social expectations that the participants had for their first semester of college were explored in 37 items, and social experiences in 44 items. The following subsections describe the results of the major subcategories of the participant's social expectations and experiences during their first semester of college and include: social activities, conversations with others, relationship with others, and peer impact on thinking and behavior.

Social Activities

The students reported the frequency in which they engaged in various social activities during their first semester of college. These activities were explored in 10 items in the pre-survey and seven in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their social activities with others are presented in **Table 4.8.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected and experienced frequency of engaging in social activities on a Likert-Scale from one to four with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred.

Table 4.8
Engaging in Social Activities While in College – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expect to go to an art exhibit/gallery or a play, dance, or other theater performance with other students, friends, or family members	92	2.36	0.98	0.96
Went to an art exhibit/gallery or a play, dance, or other theater performance with other students, friends, or family members	52	1.91	1.01	1.02
Expect to attend a concert or other music event on or off campus	92	2.59	0.92	0.84
Attended a concert or other music event on or off campus	52	1.72	0.93	0.87
Expect to meet other students somewhere on campus (union dining hall, etc.) for a discussion	92	3.04	0.99	0.99

Table 4.8 (Cont.)
Engaging in Social Activities While in College – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Met other students somewhere on campus (union, dining hall, etc.) for a discussion	52	2.67	1.17	1.36
Expect to attend a cultural or social event on campus or in the community	92	2.57	0.89	0.80
Attended a cultural or social event on campus or in the community	52	2.08	1.08	1.17
Expect to play a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate)	92	1.84	1.07	1.15
Played a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate)	52	1.25	0.68	0.47
Expect to attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group	92	2.74	1.05	1.10
Attended a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group	52	2.34	1.20	1.44
Expect to work on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student government, special event, etc.)	92	2.32	1.02	1.03
Worked on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student government, special event, etc.)	52	1.89	1.13	1.27
Expect to work on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.)	92	2.20	1.06	1.13

Table 4.8 (Cont.)
Engaging in Social Activities While in College – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Worked on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.)	52	1.78	0.98	0.96
Expect to meet with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization	92	1.89	0.94	0.89
Met with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization	52	1.49	0.85	0.72
Expect to manage or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus	92	2.08	1.04	1.08
Managed or provided leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus	52	1.65	0.93	0.86

Some notable social activity expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*

   a) Students anticipated that they would attend music events off campus more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for attending music events off campus, like concerts or festivals, during their first semester was 2.59 (*SD*=0.92) with a reported experience mean of 1.72 (*SD*= 0.93). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

b) Students anticipated that they would be attending social or cultural events more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for attending events that had a social or cultural focus either on campus or in the community during their first semester was 2.57 (*SD*=0.89) with a reported experience mean of 2.08 (*SD*= 1.08). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

c) Students anticipated that they would play on an organized team sport more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for participating on a team sport, such as intramural, club, or intercollegiate during their first semester was 1.84 (*SD*=1.07) with a reported experience mean of 1.25 (*SD*= 0.68). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Conversations with Others

The students reported the frequency in which they engaged in various types of conversations with others during their first semester of college. These conversation topics were explored in 10 items in the pre-survey and seven in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their conversations are presented in **Table 4.9.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the frequency of the conversation topics on a Likert-Scale from one to four with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred.

Table 4.9
Social Conversations with Others at College – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expectation of discussing current events in the news	88	2.68	0.86	0.75
Experience discussing current events in the news	52	2.54	0.94	0.88
Expectation of discussing social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations	89	2.62	0.96	0.92
Experience discussing social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations	52	2.80	0.98	0.96
Expectation of discussing different lifestyles, customs, and religions	89	2.69	0.85	0.72
Experience discussing different lifestyles, customs, and religions	52	2.60	0.89	0.79
Expectation of discussing the ideas and views of writers, philosophers, historians	88	2.28	0.93	0.87
Experience discussing the ideas and views of writers, philosophers, historians	52	2.20	1.01	1.02
Expectation of discussing the arts (painting, poetry, theatrical productions, dance, symphony, movies, etc.)	89	2.31	0.97	0.95
Experience discussing the arts (painting, poetry, theatrical productions, dance, symphony, movies, etc.)	52	2.24	1.00	1.00
Expectation of discussing science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.)	89	2.20	0.80	0.64

Table 4.9 (Cont.)
Social Conversations with Others at College – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Experience discussing science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.)	52	1.93	0.89	0.78
Expectation of discussing computers and other technologies	89	2.13	0.88	0.78
Experience discussing computers and other technologies	52	1.80	0.81	0.65
Expectation of discussing social and ethical issues related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, genetics, military use	89	2.31	0.94	0.88
Experience discussing social and ethical issues related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, genetics, military use	52	2.33	0.96	0.93
Expectation of discussing the economy (employment, wealth, poverty, debt, trade, etc.)	88	2.24	0.84	0.71
Experience discussing the economy (employment, wealth, poverty, debt, trade, etc.)	52	2.38	0.99	0.98
Expectation of discussing international relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.)	89	2.44	0.94	0.89
Experience discussing international relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.)	52	2.27	0.93	0.87

Some notable social conversation expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*

   a) Students reported having conversations with others about social issues more than they anticipated in their first semester. The mean participant expectation for having conversations about social issues (peace, justice, human rights, equality, and race) in their first semester was 2.62 (*SD*=0.96) with a reported experience mean of 2.80 (*SD*= 0.98). This indicates that their reported experience scores at the end of the semester were higher than what they expected at the beginning of college.

   b) Students reported discussing the economy with others more than they anticipated in their first semester. The mean participant expectation for having conversations about and related to the economy (employment rates, wealth, poverty, debt, and trade) in their first semester was 2.24 (*SD*=0.84) with a reported experience mean of 2.38 (*SD*= 0.99). This indicates that their reported experience scores at the end of the semester were higher than what they expected at the beginning of college.

Relationship with Others

The students reported the quality of their relationships and the frequency and type of interactions during their first semester of college. These activities were explored in 10 items in the pre-survey and 13 in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of quality of relationship score for various campus relationships are presented in **Table 4.10.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected amount of allocated time for each on a Likert-Scale from one to seven for relationship items with: one being remote, uninvolved, impersonable, and seven being friendly, supportive, helpful.

Table 4.10
Forming Relationships and a Community with Others While in College – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-7)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected relationships with other students or student groups	85	5.58	1.43	2.06
Experience forming relationships with other students or student groups	51	5.14	1.79	3.20
Expected forming relationships with Faculty	84	5.29	1.32	1.75
Experience forming relationships with faculty	51	5.29	1.42	2.01
Expected relationships with administrative personnel and offices	82	4.56	1.63	2.67
Experience forming relationships with administrative personnel and offices	51	4.28	1.96	3.82

The mean score of each item in the following table (**Table 4.11**) corresponds to the expected and experienced frequency of relationship building on a Likert-Scale from one to four with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred.

Table 4.11
Making Friends and Building Meaningful Relationships – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expect to make friends or interact with students whose interests are different from yours	89	3.16	0.81	0.66
Made friends or interacted with students whose interests are different from yours	52	2.74	0.92	0.84
Expect to make friends or interact with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours	89	3.27	0.70	0.49
Made friends or interacted with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours	52	2.86	0.90	0.81
Expect to make friends or interact with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours	89	3.35	0.66	0.43
Made friends or interacted with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours	52	2.85	1.00	1.00
Expect to have serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours	89	2.82	0.86	0.74
Have had serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours	52	2.51	1.05	1.11
Expect to have serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours	89	2.67	0.89	0.79

Table 4.11 (Cont.)
Making Friends and Building Meaningful Relationships – Expectations and Experiences

Have had serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours	52	2.43	1.09	1.19
Expect to have serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours	89	2.62	0.97	0.94
Have had serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours	52	2.40	1.12	1.27
Expect to socialize with a faculty member outside the classroom (grab lunch, a coffee, etc.)	96	1.53	0.78	0.61
Have socialized with a faculty member outside the classroom (grab lunch, a coffee, etc.)	52	1.38	0.77	0.59

Some notable building relationships expectation and experience results included:

1) Expectation and Experience Alignments

a) Students reported building relationships with faculty as much as they anticipated. The mean participant expectation for forming relationships with course instructors in their first semester was 5.29 (*SD*=1.32) with a reported experience mean of 5.29 (*SD*= 1.42) (equal means). This indicates that their expectation and experience scores at the start and end of their first semester of college were nearly exactly aligned.

2) Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:

a) Students anticipated that they would make friends with people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds more than they reported having made at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for interacting with and making friends with

others who were from racial or ethnic backgrounds different to their own during their first semester was 3.35 (*SD*=0.66) with a reported experience mean of 2.85 (*SD*= 1.00). This indicates that their expectations scores (hopes for making connections and friends with diverse individuals) at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester (they made fewer friends from diverse backgrounds than they had hoped).

b) Students anticipated that they would make friends with people who had different interests than themselves more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for interacting with and making friends with people who had different interests in their first semester was 3.16 (*SD*=0.81) with a reported experience mean of 2.74 (*SD*= 0.92). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Three additional questions were asked only in the post-survey:

a) *How often during the semester did you do the following: Ask a friend for help with a personal problem or concern?* The mean experience score was 2.66 (*n* = 51), with a standard deviation of 1.10 and a variance of 1.20. In regard to the students' response to the item, they reported that: 29% (*n* = 15) indicated that they would very often ask for help with a score of four, 27% (*n* = 14) indicated that they would often ask for help with a score of three, 24% (*n* = 12) indicated that they would occasionally ask for help a score of two, and 20% (*n* = 10) said they never asked for help from a friend with a score of one.

b) *How often during the semester did you do the following: Ask a friend to tell you what they really thought about you.* The mean experience score was 2.09 (*n* = 51), with a standard deviation of 1.15 and a variance of 1.32. In regard to the students' response to the item, they reported that: 20% (*n* = 10) indicated that they would very often ask what a friend thought of them with a score of four, 12% (*n* = 6) indicated that they would often ask what a friend thought of them with a score of three, 27% (*n* = 14) indicated that they would occasionally ask what a friend thought of them with a score of two, and 41% (*n* = 21) said they never asked what a friend thought of them with a score of one.

c) *How often during the semester did you do the following: Talked with a faculty member, counselor, or other staff member about personal concerns.* The mean experience score was 1.69 (*n* = 51), with a standard deviation of 0.93 and a variance of 0.86. In regard to the students' response to the item, they reported that: 6% (*n* = 3) indicated they would very often talk about personal concerns with a score of four, 14% (*n* = 7) indicated they would often talk about personal concerns with a score of three, 24% (*n* = 12) indicated they would occasionally talk about personal concerns a score of two, and 57% (*n* = 29) said they never talked about personal concerns with a score of one.

Peer Impact on Thinking and Behavior

The students reported the frequency in which they engaged in conversations with others during their first semester of college that influenced their thinking and behavior, socially. The impact of these peer interactions was explored in seven items in the pre-survey and 11 in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of these impactful social conversations are presented in **Table 4.12.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected and experienced number of behaviors influenced by conversations students had on a Likert-Scale from one to four for the items on the table, with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred.

Table 4.12
Conversations Influencing Ideas, Thinking, and Behavior – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Conversations Impact on Behavior				
Expected to refer to knowledge acquired in reading or classes	89	2.75	0.77	0.60
Referred to knowledge you acquired in your reading or classes	52	2.52	0.80	0.65
Expected to have to explore different ways of thinking about a topic or issue	87	2.89	0.75	0.57
Explored different ways of thinking about a topic or issue	52	2.60	0.87	0.76
Expected to refer to something one of their instructors said about a topic or issue	89	2.92	0.76	0.57
Referred to something one of their instructors said about a topic or issue	52	2.52	0.87	0.76
Expected to subsequently read something related to the topic or issue	89	2.70	0.88	0.78
Subsequently read something that was the topic or issue	52	2.48	0.92	0.84

Table 4.12 (Cont.)
Conversations Influencing Ideas, Thinking, and Behavior – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected to have to change their opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others	89	2.42	0.69	0.47
Changed their opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others	52	2.02	0.83	0.69
Expected they would have to persuade others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments they cited	89	2.46	0.83	0.68
Persuaded others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited	52	2.13	0.92	0.85
Sharing Information during Conversations				
Expected that they would have to explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member)	95	2.98	0.82	0.68
Explained material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member)	52	3.12	0.90	0.81

Some notable social and peer impact on student behavior expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*

   a) Students anticipated that they would have their opinions changed by others more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for having their opinions changed as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented to

them by others during their first semester was 2.42 (*SD*=0.69) with a reported experience mean of 2.02 (*SD*= 0.83). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Four additional questions were asked only in the post-survey:

a) *Think about your college experience up to now. To what extent do you feel you have gained or made progress in the following areas: Presenting ideas and information effectively when speaking to others?* The mean experience score was 2.44 (*n* = 52), with a standard deviation of 0.94 and a variance of 0.88. In regard to the students' response to the item, they reported that: 12% (*n* = 6) indicated that they gained a lot of progress with a score of four, 40% (*n* = 21) indicated that they gained quite a bit of progress with a score of three, 29% (*n* = 15) indicated that they have gained some progress with a score of two, and 19% (*n* = 10) said they feel that they have gained very little progress with a score of one.

b) *Think about your college experience up to now. To what extent do you feel you have gained or made progress in the following areas: Developing the ability to get along with different kinds of people?* The mean experience score was 3.11 (*n* = 52), with a standard deviation of 0.86 and a variance of 0.74. In regard to the students' response to the item, they reported that: 38% (*n* = 20) indicated that they gained a lot of progress with a score of four, 38% (*n* = 20) indicated that they gained quite a bit of progress with a score of three, 19% (*n* = 10) indicated that they have gained some progress with a score of two, and 4% (*n* = 2) said they feel that they have gained very little progress with a score of one.

c) *Think about your college experience up to now. To what extent do you feel you have gained or made progress in the following areas: Developing the ability to function as a member of a team?* The mean experience score was 2.85 (*n* = 52), with a standard deviation of 0.92 and a variance of 0.84. In regard to the students' response to the item, they reported that: 29% (*n* = 15) indicated that they gained a lot of progress with a score of four, 33% (*n* = 17) indicated that they gained quite a bit of progress with a score of three, 33% (*n* = 17) indicated that they have gained some progress with a score of two, and 6% (*n* = 3) said they feel that they have gained very little progress with a score of one.

d) *How often in college did you do the following: Asked other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them?* The mean experience score was 2.61 (*n* = 52), with a standard deviation of 1.01 and a variance of 1.02. In regard to the students' response to the item, they reported that: 21% (*n* = 11) indicated that they very often requested a friend to check their paper for clarification with a score of four, 37% (*n* = 19) indicated that they often asked for paper assistance with a score of three, 25% (*n* = 13) indicated that they occasionally asked for paper assistance with a score of two, and 17% (*n* = 9) said they never ask for paper assistance with a score of one.

Personal Expectations and Experiences

Sections of the surveys explored how the student believed their time in college would impact them personally and allow them to grow as an induvial. The personal expectations that the participants had for their first semester of college were explored in 37 items, and personal experiences in 61 items. The following subsections will describe the results of the major subcategories of the participants' personal expectations and experiences during their first

semester of college and include: expected satisfaction with college experience, additional time commitments, personal activities – including academic related and non-academic related – communicating and sharing ideas with others, personal gains, and proactive self-improvement.

Expected Satisfaction with College Experience

The students' expected (and perceived) satisfaction with their college experience was explored through one item in both the pre- and post-surveys.

1 Students' expectations of how much they thought they would like their college experience resulted in:
    a. 81% (n = 70) expecting that they would like it or like it very much, 16% (n = 14) indicated neutral feelings towards the experience, and only 3% (n = 3) reported that they would not like college.
2 Students' reported satisfaction with their college experience resulted in:
    a. 75% (n = 38) reported that they like it or like it very much, 19% (n = 10) indicated neutral feelings towards the experience, and only 6% (n = 3) reported that they did not like college.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their personal expectations are presented in **Table 4.13.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected satisfaction on a Likert-Scale from one to four, with one being "I won't/don't like it," and four being "I will be/am enthusiastic about it."

Table 4.13
Satisfaction with College Overall – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
How well do you think you will like college?	87	3.13	0.80	0.65
How are you liking college after your first semester?	51	2.96	0.85	0.72

An additional question was asked only in the post-survey: *If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?* The mean experience score was 3.20 (*n* = 51), with a standard deviation of 0.83 and a variance of 0.68. In regard to students' satisfaction with their school selection, they reported that: 41% (*n* = 21) indicated yes, they would definitely choose the same school again if given the choice with a score of four, 41% (*n* = 21) indicated that yes, they probably would choose the same school again with a score of three, 14% (*n* = 7) indicated that probably no, they would not choose the same school again with a score of two, and 4% (*n* = 2) said no, they definitely would not choose the same school again with a score of one.

Additional Time Commitments

The students reported what additional time commitments or activities they expected that they would need to account and schedule for on a regular or semi-regular basis. These additional commitment items were explored in three items in both the pre- and post-surveys.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their additional time commitments are presented in **Table 4.14.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected amount of allocated time for each on a Likert-Scale from one to four, with: 1) one being five or fewer hours a week, two being six to ten hours a week, three being 11 to 15 hours a week, and four being 16 to 20

hours a week for the out of class activities items, and 2) one being one to ten hours a week, two being 11 to 20 hours a week, three being 21 to 30 hours a week, and four being 31 to 40 hours a week for the four items about jobs.

Table 4.14
Managing Time Commitments – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
During the semester in this upcoming semester about how many hours a week do you expect to spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?	86	2.56	0.78	0.60
During the semester, about how many hours a week do you spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?	52	2.40	0.82	0.68
In this upcoming semester, about how many hours a week do you plan to work for pay in an on-campus job?	84	1.15	0.48	0.23
During the semester, how many hours a week did you to work for pay in an on-campus job?	51	1.02	0.14	0.02
In this upcoming semester, about how many hours a week do you plan to work for pay in an off-campus job?	82	1.40	0.77	0.59
During the semester, how many hours a week did you to work for pay in an off-campus job?	49	1.39	0.89	0.78

Note. The means of the hours spent doing academic activities outside of the classroom each week were scored on a scale from 1-4, with one being five or fewer hours a week; two being six to ten hours a week; three being 11 to 15 hours a week; and four being 16 to 20 hours a week. The

means of the hours working each week were scored on a scale from 1-4, with one being one to ten hours a week; two being 11 to 20 hours a week; three

Some notable time management expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience Alignments*
    a) Students reported that they worked in an off-campus job as much as they anticipated. The mean participant expectation for the hours each week they would be working off-campus for income in their first semester was 1.40 (*SD*=0.77) with a reported experience mean of 1.39 (*SD*= 0.89) (equal means). This indicates that their expectation and experience scores at the start and end of their first semester of college were closely aligned.
2) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*
    a) Students anticipated that they would spend more time outside of class on academic activities than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for spending time outside of their assigned class time on academic activities like studying, research, reading, or rehearsing, in their first semester was 2.56 (*SD*=0.78) with a reported experience mean of 2.40 (*SD*= 0.82). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Personal Activities – Academic Related

The students reported the frequency in which they engaged in various activities during their first semester of college that were academically focused and personally enriching. These activities were explored in six items in the pre-survey and seven in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their academically focused and personally enriching activities are

presented in **Table 4.15.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected amount of allocated time for each on a Likert-Scale from 1) one to four for the first 10 academically-related personal items on the table, with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred, and 2) one to seven for the final two items on the table related to perception of course relevancy, with one being a weak emphasis, and seven being a strong emphasis.

Table 4.15
Participating in Activities and Events that are Academically Focused – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Academically Related Personal Items				
Expect to use a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself	92	2.97	1.00	1.00
Used a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself	52	2.71	0.98	0.95
Expect to attend a lecture or panel discussion	92	2.65	0.97	0.93
Attended a lecture or panel discussion	52	2.10	1.09	1.19
Expect to discuss your career plans and ambitions with a faculty member	95	2.23	0.93	0.86
Discussed your career plans and ambitions with a faculty member	52	2.38	0.93	0.86

Table 4.15 (Cont.)
Participating in Activities and Events that are Academically Focused – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expect to discuss your academic major or course selection with a faculty member	96	2.56	0.94	0.88
Discussed your academic major or course selection with a faculty member	52	2.68	0.90	0.80
Expect to ask your instructor for comments and criticisms about your academic performance	96	2.30	0.95	0.91
Asked your instructor for comments and criticisms about your academic performance	52	2.18	0.88	0.77
	n	*M* (1-7)	*SD*	*Var.*
Relevance of Course Load				
Expected environmental emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses	87	5.31	1.56	2.45
Experienced environmental emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses	51	5.09	1.63	2.66

Some notable academically focused and personally enrichening expectation and experience results included:

1) Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:

a) Students anticipated that they would be enrolled in classes that they found value in more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for finding personal relevance and practical value of the content and subject matter of the

courses they are enrolled in during their first semester was 5.31 (*SD*=1.56) with a reported experience mean of 5.09 (*SD*= 1.63). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

An additional question was asked only in post-survey: *During your first semester of college, how often did you work harder than you thought you could to meet the instructor's expectations and standards?* The mean experience score was 2.60 (n = 52), with a standard deviation of 1.00 and a variance of 0.99. Students reported that they worked harder than expected to meet the expectations of their instructors: 21% (*n* = 11) indicated they did very often with a score of four, 33% (*n* = 17) indicated they often did with a score of three, 31% (*n* = 16) indicated they occasionally did with a score of two, and 15% (*n* = 8) said they never did with a score of one.

Personal Activities – Non-Academic Related

The students reported the frequency in which they engaged in various activities during their first semester that were not academically based but did contribute to their personal development. These activities were explored in 17 items in the pre-survey and 17 in the post-survey.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their additional time commitments are presented in **Table 4.16.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected amount of allocated time for each item on a Likert-Scale from 1) one to four for the first 30 non-academically-related personal items on the table, with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred, and 2) one to five for the reading and writing items in the table with one being none, two being fewer than five times,

three being between five and ten times, four being between 11 and 20 times, and five being more than 20 times, and 3) one to seven for the final two items on the table related to the campus environment assisting with personal development, with one being a weak emphasis, and seven being a strong emphasis.

Table 4.16
Participating in Activities and Events that are Academic, but Not Required – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Non-Academically Personal Activities				
Expect to learn how to combine different facts and ideas together	94	3.17	0.74	0.55
Tried to see how different facts and ideas fit together	52	3.12	0.83	0.69
Expect to apply material learned in a class toother areas (a job or internship, other courses, relationships with friends, family, co-workers, etc.)	95	3.11	0.82	0.67
Applied material learned in a class to other areas (a job or internship, other courses, relationships with friends, family, co-workers, etc.)	52	2.91	0.92	0.84
Expect to use information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments	95	3.11	0.82	0.67
Used information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments	52	2.73	0.91	0.83

Table 4.16 (Cont.)
Participating in Activities and Events that are Academic, but Not Required – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expect to follow a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity	92	2.41	1.05	1.10
Followed a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity	52	1.58	0.82	0.68
Expect to attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group	92	2.74	1.05	1.10
Attended a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group	52	2.34	1.20	1.44
Expect to work on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student government, special event, etc.)	92	2.32	1.02	1.03
Worked on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student government, special event, etc.)	52	1.89	1.13	1.27
Expect to work on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.)	92	2.20	1.06	1.13
Worked on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.)	52	1.78	0.98	0.96
Expect to meet with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization	92	1.89	0.94	0.89

Table 4.16 (Cont.)
Participating in Activities and Events that are Academic, but Not Required – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Met with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization	52	1.49	0.85	0.72
Expect to manage or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus	92	2.08	1.04	1.08
Managed or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus	52	1.65	0.93	0.86
Expect to make friends or interact with students whose interests are different from yours	89	3.16	0.81	0.66
Made friends with students whose interests are different from yours	52	2.74	0.92	0.84
Expect to make friends or interact with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours	89	3.27	0.70	0.49
Made friends or interacted with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours	52	2.86	0.90	0.81
Expect to make friends or interact with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours	89	3.35	0.66	0.43
Made friends or interacted with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours	52	2.85	1.00	1.00

Table 4.16 (Cont.)
Participating in Activities and Events that are Academic, but Not Required – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expect to have serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours	89	2.82	0.86	0.74
Had serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours	52	2.51	1.05	1.11
Expect to have serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours	89	2.67	0.89	0.79
Had serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours	52	2.43	1.09	1.19
Expect to have serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours	89	2.62	0.97	0.94
Had serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours	52	2.40	1.12	1.27
	n	*M* (1-5)	*SD*	*Var.*
Reading and Writing				
Expected frequency of Reading Non-Assigned Books (for pleasure)	79	2.39	1.11	1.24
Experienced frequency of Reading Non-Assigned Books (for pleasure)	49	1.92	0.91	0.83

Table 4.16 (Cont.)
Participating in Activities and Events that are Academic, but Not Required – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-7)	*SD*	*Var.*
Environment's Impact on Personal Development				
Expected environmental emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities	*86*	4.99	1.52	2.32
Experienced environmental emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities	52	4.76	1.71	2.93

Some notable academically focused and personally enriching expectation and experience results included:

1) Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:

a) Students anticipated that they would follow a regular schedule for physical activity more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for building and maintaining a regular schedule of exercise or recreational activity in their first semester was 2.41 (*SD*=1.05) with a reported experience mean of 1.58 (*SD*= 0.82). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

b) Students anticipated that they would find leadership opportunities in a club or organization more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for taking a leadership role in some sort of organization, club, or service project (either on campus or in the community) their first semester was 2.08 (*SD*=1.04) with a reported experience mean of 1.65 (*SD*= 0.93). This indicates that their

expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

c) Students anticipated that they would read for pleasure more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for reading non-books for pleasure (not assigned academically) in their first semester was 2.39 (*SD*=1.11) with a reported experience mean of 1.92 (*SD*= 0.91). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Communicating and Sharing Ideas with Others

The students reported what types of conversations they would have as well as what sorts of communication skills they expected to develop as a result of personal interactions and opportunities they would have while in college. These conversational topics and gains in interpersonal communication skills were explored in nine items in both pre- and post-surveys.

The descriptive statistical expectation and experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of the types of conversations they would have and the communication skills they would develop are presented in **Table 4.17.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected opportunities to have diverse conversations and practice and grow their communication skills for each item on a Likert-Scale:1) from one to four for the first 16 conversation and communication skill-related personal items on the table, with: one being never occurred, two being occasionally occurred, three being it often occurred, and four being that it very often occurred, and 2) one to seven for the final two items on the table related their campus' influence on developing a better appreciation of diverse thoughts as they personally develop, with one being a weak emphasis and seven being a strong emphasis.

Table 4.17
Building Interpersonal Skills Through Interactions with Others – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Communication with Others				
Expected to explore different ways of thinking about a topic or issue	87	2.89	0.75	0.57
Explored different ways of thinking about a topic or issue	52	2.60	0.87	0.76
Expected to change their opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others	89	2.42	0.69	0.47
Changed their opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others	52	2.02	0.83	0.69
Expected to be able to persuade others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited	89	2.46	0.83	0.68
Persuaded others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited	52	2.13	0.92	0.85
Expected to have conversations about social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations	89	2.62	0.96	0.92
Had conversations about social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations	52	2.80	0.98	0.96
Expected to have conversations about different lifestyles, customs, and religions	89	2.69	0.85	0.72
Had conversations about different lifestyles, customs, and religions	52	2.60	0.89	0.79

Table 4.17 (Cont.)
Building Interpersonal Skills Through Interactions with Others – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected to have conversations about ideas and views of writers, philosophers, historians	88	2.28	0.93	0.87
Had conversations about the ideas and views of writers, philosophers, historians	52	2.20	1.01	1.02
Expected to have conversations about social and ethical issues related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, genetics, military use	89	2.31	0.94	0.88
Had conversations about social and ethical issues related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, genetics, military use	52	2.33	0.96	0.93
Expected to have conversations about international relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.)	89	2.44	0.94	0.89
Had conversations about international relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.)	52	2.27	0.93	0.87
	n	*M* (1-7)	*SD*	*Var.*
Environment's Impact on an Individual's Appreciation of Diversity				
Expected environmental emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity	87	5.47	1.27	11.62
Experienced environmental emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity	52	5.42	1.59	2.52

Some notable conversation and communication expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience Alignments*

   a) Students reported that they had conversations about social and ethical issues as much as they anticipated. The mean expectation for having social and ethical discussions related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, genetics, military use in their first semester was 2.31 (*SD*=0.94) with a reported experience mean of 2.33 (*SD*=0.96). This indicates that their expectation and experience scores at the start and end of their first semester of college were closely aligned.

2) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*

   a) Students reported having personal growth by having conversations with others about social justice more than they anticipated in their first semester. The mean participant expectation for developing enhanced interpersonal skills through conversations with others about social justice (including equity, race, and human rights) in their first semester was 2.62 (*SD*=0.96) with a reported experience mean of 2.80 (*SD*= 0.98). This indicates that their reported experience scores at the end of the semester were higher than what they expected at the beginning of college.

Personal Reflection

In the experience survey, students reported some additional experiences from their first semester of college, focusing on experiences and behaviors that promoted self-reflection. These self-reflection items were explored in five items in the post survey only.

The descriptive statistical experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of these self-reflections are presented in **Table 4.18.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the experienced frequency of the following actions or behaviors on a Likert-Scale from one to four, with: one being that they never experienced the

action or behavior, two being that they occasionally experienced the action or behavior, three being that they often experienced the action or behavior, and four being that they very often experienced the action or behavior.

Table 4.18
Recognizing Actively Engaging in Self-Reflection while in College

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Asked a friend for help with a personal problem or concerns	51	2.66	1.10	1.20
Read articles or books or watched videos online about personal growth, self-improvement, or social development	51	2.08	1.00	0.99
Took a test or quiz to measure your abilities, interests, attitudes, or skills	51	2.19	1.03	1.07
Asked a friend to tell you what they really thought about you	51	2.09	1.15	1.32
Talked with a faculty member, counselor or other staff member about personal concerns	51	1.69	0.93	0.86

Note. The items in Table 4.18 were only included in the post survey, so no mean comparison scores are available for these items.

Some notable self-reflection results included:

2) *Experience Reporting:*

   a) Students reported the highest experience mean scores in self-reflection in learning how to ask friends (peers) for help with personal problems or concerns (M = 2.66, SD = 1.10).

b) Students reported the lowest experience mean scores in self-reflection in learning how to ask university staff, counselors, or faculty for help with personal problems or concerns ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.93$).

Proactive Self-Improvement

In the experience survey, students reported some additional experiences from their first semester of college, focusing on personal experiences related to behaviors and actions that promoted self-improvement and self-growth. These perceived personal improvement items were explored in 17 items in the post survey only.

The descriptive statistical experience results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their perceived personal improvement are presented in **Table 4.19**. The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the experienced frequency of the following actions or behaviors on a Likert-Scale from one to four, with: one being that they experienced very little growth related to the item, two being that they experienced some growth related to the item, three being that they experienced quite a bit of growth related to the item, and four being that they experienced a lot of growth related to the item.

Table 4.19
Recognizing Self-Improvement and Skill Gains from College Experience

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Obtaining knowledge and skills applicable to a specific job or type of work (career preparation)	52	2.34	0.86	0.73
Gaining a broad general education about different fields of knowledge	52	2.54	0.87	0.76

Table 4.19 (Cont.)
Recognizing Self-Improvement and Skill Gains from College Experience

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Gaining a range of information that may be relevant to a career	52	2.52	0.94	0.88
Gaining knowledge about other parts of the world and other people	52	2.49	0.92	0.84
Writing clearly and effectively	51	2.44	0.92	0.85
Presenting ideas and information effectively when speaking to others	52	2.44	0.94	0.88
Becoming aware of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life	52	2.62	0.93	0.87
Developing your own values and ethical Standards	52	2.80	0.89	0.79
Understanding yourself, your abilities, interests, and personality	52	2.92	0.84	0.70
Developing the ability to get along with different kinds of people	52	3.11	0.86	0.74
Developing the ability to function as a member of a team	52	2.85	0.92	0.84
Developing good health habits and physical fitness	52	2.35	1.01	1.02
Becoming aware of the consequences (benefits, hazards, dangers) of new applications of science and technology	52	2.33	1.06	1.13
Thinking analytically and logically	52	2.78	0.92	0.84
Putting ideas together, seeing relationships, similarities, and differences between ideas	52	2.83	0.86	0.73

Table 4.19 (Cont.)
Recognizing Self-Improvement and Skill Gains from College Experience

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Learning on your own, pursuing ideas, and finding information you need	52	2.97	0.83	0.69
Learning to adapt to change	52	3.30	0.76	0.58

Note. The items in Table 4.19 were only included in the post survey, so no mean comparison scores are available for these items.

Some notable self-improvement experience results included:

1) Experience Reporting:

a) Students reported the highest experience mean scores in personal growth in: 1) learning how to cope and adapt to change in their lives ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.76$), and 2) developing better interpersonal skills (allowing them to interact and build relationships with others) ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.86$).

b) Students reported the lowest experience mean scores in believing that in their first semester: 1) they would develop better writing skills ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.92$), 2) they would develop healthy habits (staying physical and active) ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.01$), and 3) they would feel that their first semester helped prepare them for a career after college ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.86$).

Person-Environmental Expectations and Experiences

Sections of the surveys explored how the students believed their environment (both the physical surroundings and how they would utilize the campus) would impact their student experience. The environmental expectations that the participants had for their first semester of college were explored in 12 items, and environmental experiences in 12 items. The following

two subsections will describe the results of the major subcategories of the participants' person-environmental expectations and experiences during their first semester of college and include: the environmental impact on academic and personal activities, and environmental impact on personal growth and benefits.

Environmental Impact on Academic and Personal Activities

The environmental impact of the campus on student's academic and personal activities was explored through five items in both the pre- and post-surveys. The descriptive statistical results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their perceived environment-driven academic and personal expectations and experiences are presented in **Table 4.20.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected frequency of use, action, or behavior on a Likert-Scale from one to four, with one being never, and four being very often.

Table 4.20
Interacting with and Utilizing the Physical Spaces on Campus – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Use the library as a quiet place to read or study	96	2.55	1.03	1.07
Used the library as a quiet place to read or study	52	2.21	1.19	1.42
Use a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself	92	2.97	1.00	1.00
Used a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself	52	2.71	0.98	0.95

Table 4.20 (Cont.)
Interacting with and Utilizing the Physical Spaces on Campus – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-4)	*SD*	*Var.*
Meet other students somewhere on campus (union, dining hall, etc.) for a discussion	92	3.04	0.99	0.99
Met other students somewhere on campus (union, dining hall, etc.) for a discussion	52	2.67	1.17	1.36
Use a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.)	92	2.38	0.97	0.94
Used a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.)	52	1.67	0.92	0.85
Use campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.).	92	2.66	1.05	1.10
Used campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.).	52	2.05	1.01	1.02

Some notable environmental expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*

    a) Students anticipated that they would use an on-campus academic resource center more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for using on-campus resources (such as a writing center, learning lab, or study hall) to enhance their academic success their first semester was 2.38 (*SD*=0.97) with a reported experience mean of 1.67 (*SD*= 0.92). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

b) Students anticipated that they would use on-campus recreational facilities more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for using recreational facilities and resources (like pools, courts, fitness centers) their first semester was 2.66 (*SD*=1.05) with a reported experience mean of 2.05 (*SD*= 1.01). This indicates that their expectations scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Environmental Impact on Personal Growth and Benefits

The environmental impact of the campus on student's personal growth and perceived benefits (or gains) was explored through seven items in both the pre- and post-surveys. The descriptive statistical results, including means, standard deviations, and variances of their perceived environment-driven academic and personal expectations and experiences are presented in **Table 4.21.** The mean score of each item in the following table corresponds to the expected environmental emphasis on the following college experiences and personal growth opportunities using a Likert-Scale from one to seven, with one being a weak emphasis and seven being a strong emphasis.

Table 4.21
Recognizing how University Services and Campus Culture Impact Personal Growth – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-7)	*SD*	*Var.*
Expected an emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities	87	5.80	1.11	1.23

Table 4.21 (Cont.)
Recognizing how University Services and Campus Culture Impact Personal Growth – Expectations and Experiences

	n	*M* (1-7)	*SD*	*Var.*
Experienced an emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities	52	5.51	1.37	1.88
Expected an emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities	86	4.99	1.52	2.32
Experienced an emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities	52	4.76	1.71	2.93
Expected an emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities	87	5.45	1.26	1.58
Experienced an emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities	52	5.57	1.15	1.32
Expected an emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity	87	5.47	1.27	1.62
Experienced an emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity	52	5.42	1.59	2.52
Expected an emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources)	87	5.07	1.30	1.69
Experienced an emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources)	52	5.03	1.59	2.51
Expected an emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competence	87	5.44	1.44	2.06

Table 4.21 (Cont.)
Recognizing how University Services and Campus Culture Impact Personal Growth – Expectations and Experiences

Experienced an emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competence	52	5.48	1.58	2.49
Expected an emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses	87	5.31	1.56	2.45
Experienced an emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses	51	5.09	1.63	2.66

Some notable personal impact expectation and experience results included:

1) *Expectation and Experience Alignments*

   a) Students reported that their college environment supported their career goals as much as they anticipated. The mean participant expectation for exploring career goals and developing relevant skills as a result of being in their college environment in their first semester was 5.44 (*SD*=1.44) with a reported experience mean of 5.48 (*SD*= 1.58). This indicates that their expectation and experience scores at the start and end of their first semester of college were closely aligned.

2) *Expectation and Experience (Mis)Alignments:*

   a) Students anticipated that their college environment would support the development of academic skills more than they reported at the end of their first semester. The mean participant expectation for developing better academic skills and scholarly qualities as a result of being in their college environment in their first semester was 5.80 (*SD*= 1.11) with a reported experience mean of 5.51 (*SD*= 1.37). This indicates that their expectation

scores at the start of college were higher than what they reported experiencing at the end of their first semester.

Research Questions Three and Four – Variances of Expectations and Experiences

To answer the third and fourth research questions, a paired *t*-test analysis was conducted on all participants who completed the pre- and post-survey. Only the individual students who participated in both of the surveys could be counted in this analysis, since the paired *t*-test requires a matched sample size of the same participants *(n= 52).* To be counted in this analysis, participants had to have responded to more than 85 percent of all items on each survey – all but four participants participated fully in both the pre- and post-survey. Missing variables were coded as -99 in the dataset for the SPSS analysis. I conducted paired samples *t*-tests on all 84 of the paired variables from the pre- and post-survey, which resulted in 34 significant paired analysis. An additional 12 items will be highlighted in the following sections as they related to the research questions but were not statistically significant in this study.

Aligned Expectations and Experiences

R3: *What are the areas in which student expectations and experiences align?*

Of the paired *t*-tests, only three pairs indicated that the surveyed students had aligned expectations and experiences, however none of these paired results were significant *($t = 0$, $p > .05$).* **Table 4.22** shows students having matching expectations and experiences.

Table 4.22
Aligned Expectations and Matched Experiences

	Mean difference	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 17 - *Summarize major points and information from your readings or class notes* (Q6_6_PRE – Q6_6_POST)	0	0	51	1.0
Pair 30 - *Use a campus lounge to relax or study by themselves* (Q7_3_PRE – Q7_3_POST)	0	0	51	1.0
Pair 71 - *Institutional support in the development of aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities* (Q13_2_PRE – Q14_2_POST)	0	0	50	1.0

Note. No significant p-values reported ($p < .05$.)

These aligned expectation and experience items included:

- *Pair 17: Summarize major points and information from your readings or class notes.* The mean expectation score was 3.10, and the mean experience score was 3.10. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically non-significant gain, $t(51) = 0$, $p = 1$. The effect size was 0.00, and therefore a non-significant effect size. At the end of their first semester of college, student expectations related to note taking matched their experiences at the start of the semester.
- *Pair 30: Use a campus lounge to relax or study by themselves.* The mean expectation score was 2.71, and the mean experience score was 2.71. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically non-significant gain, $t(51) = 0$, $p = 1$. The effect size was 0.00, and therefore a non-significant effect size. At the

end of their first semester of college, student expectations related to using public space for alone-time for either academic or personal use matched their experiences at the start of the semester.

- *Pair 71: Institutional support in the development of aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities.* The mean expectation score was 4.78, and the mean experience score was 4.78. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 51$), showing a statistically non-significant gain, $t(50) = 0$, $p = 1$. The effect size was 0.00, and therefore a non-significant effect size. At the end of their first semester of college, student expectations of being supported by their institution while exploring their creative interests matched their experiences at the start of the semester.

Overestimated Expectations

R4: *What dimensions of the college experience are the most disconnected in terms of expectations and experiences?*

Thirty-four of the pairs from the paired *t*-test indicated that the surveyed students held higher expectations for these dimensions of their college experience than they experienced. All 34 of these pairs were significant *($p < .05$).* **Table 4.23** shows that for these items, students anticipated having greater or more expectations within the items than they ended up having, and these experiences are organized from highest means to lowest.

Table 4.23
Overestimated Expectations Matched with Experiences

	Mean difference	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 68 - *Writing essay exams for their courses* Q11_4_PRE - Q11_4_POST	0.93617	6.107	46	< .001**
Pair 29 - *Attend a concert or other music event on or off campus* Q7_2_PRE - Q7_2_POST	0.75	4.837	51	< .001**
Pair 9 - *Ask your instructor for information related to a course you are taking (grades, make-up work, assignments, etc.)* Q5_9_PRE - Q5_9_POST	0.67308	3.841	51	< .001**
Pair 27 - *Write a major report for a class (20 pages or more)* Q6_16_PRE - Q6_16_POST	0.67308	4.496	51	< .001**
Pair 37 - *Follow a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity* Q7_10_PRE - Q7_10_POST	0.67308	5.032	51	< .001**
Pair 26 - *Ask an instructor or staff member for advice and help to improve their writing* Q6_15_PRE - Q6_15_POST	0.63462	3.905	51	< .001**
Pair 34 - *Use a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.)* Q7_7_PRE - Q7_7_POST	0.63462	4.021	51	< .001**
Pair 65 - *Having conversations with others about reading non-assigned books* Q11_1_PRE - Q11_1_POST	0.61702	4.37	46	< .001**

Table 4.23 (Cont.)
Overestimated Expectations Matched with Experiences

	Mean difference	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 33 - *Attend a cultural or social event on campus or in the community* Q7_6_PRE - Q7_6_POST	0.59615	3.421	51	.001**
Pair 11 - *Work with a faculty member on a research project* Q5_12_PRE - Q5_12_POST	0.57692	3.814	51	< .001**
Pair 36 - *Play a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate)* Q7_9_PRE - Q7_9_POST	0.53846	4.232	51	< .001**
Pair 35 - *Use campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.)* Q7_8_PRE - Q7_8_POST	0.51923	3.821	51	< .001**
Pair 39 - *Work on a campus committee, student organization, or service project* Q7_12_PRE - Q7_12_POST	0.5	3.411	51	.001**
Pair 32 - *Attend a lecture or panel Discussion* Q7_5_PRE - Q7_5_POST	0.46154	3.15	51	.003**
Pair 40 - *Work on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.)* Q7_13_PRE - Q7_13_POST	0.46154	3.47	51	.001**
Pair 42 - *Manage or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus* Q7_15_PRE - Q7_15_POST	0.46154	2.95	51	.005**
Pair 38 - *Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group* Q7_11_PRE - Q7_11_POST	0.44231	3.076	51	.003**

Table 4.23 (Cont.)
Overestimated Expectations Matched with Experiences

Pair 45 - *Make friends or interact with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours* Q8_3_PRE - Q8_3_POST	0.44231	3.753	51	< .001**
Pair 77 - *Relationships with other students or student groups* Q14_1_PRE - Q15_1_POST	0.42857	2.216	48	.031*
Pair 21 - *Work on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students* Q6_10_PRE - Q6_10_POST	0.42308	2.797	51	.007**
Pair 55 - *Have conversations with others about computers and other technologies* Q9_7_PRE - Q9_7_POST	0.42308	2.591	51	.012*
Pair 66 - *Read Textbooks/Assigned Books* Q11_2_PRE - Q11_2_POST	0.40426	2.362	46	.022*
Pair 25 - *Revise a paper or composition two or more times before you are satisfied with it* Q6_14_PRE - Q6_14_POST	0.40385	2.377	51	.021*
Pair 41 - *Meet with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization* Q7_14_PRE - Q7_14_POST	0.40385	2.236	51	.030*
Pair 18 - *Use information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments* Q6_7_PRE - Q6_7_POST	0.38462	2.688	51	.010**
Pair 63 - *Changing personal opinions as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others* Q10_5_PRE - Q10_5_POST	0.38462	2.594	51	.012*

Table 4.23 (Cont.)
Overestimated Expectations Matched with Experiences

Pair 61 - *Refer to something one of your instructors said about a topic or issue in conversations with other people* Q10_3_PRE - Q10_3_POST	0.36538	2.428	51	.019*
Pair 1 - *Use the library as a quiet place to read or study* Q5_1_PRE - Q5_1_POST	0.34615	2.579	51	.013*
Pair 44 - *Make friends or interact with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from their own* Q8_2_PRE - Q8_2_POST	0.34615	2.827	51	.007**
Pair 67 - *Write term papers or other written reports* Q11_3_PRE - Q11_3_POST	0.34043	2.143	46	.037*
Pair 43 - *Make friends or interact with students whose interests are different from their own* Q8_1_PRE - Q8_1_POST	0.32692	2.497	51	.016*
Pair 60 - *Explore different ways of thinking about a topic or issue* Q10_2_PRE - Q10_2_POST	0.32	2.1	49	.041*
Pair 80 - *First-semester grade point average (GPA)* Q20_PRE - Q18_POST	0.24	2.471	49	.017*
Pair 83 - *Work for pay in an on-campus job* Q24_PRE - Q21_POST	0.10638	2.34	46	.024*

*Note. Significant p-values reported (*p<.05. **p≤ .01)*

These overestimated items included:

- *Pair 68: Writing essay exams for their courses.* The mean expectation score was 2.85, and the mean experience score was 1.91. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 47$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(46) = 6.107$, $p <$

.001. The effect size was 0.94, and therefore a large effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to write more essay exams in class than they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 29*: *Attend a concert or other music event on or off campus.* The mean expectation score was 2.48, and the mean experience score was 1.73. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 4.837$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.78, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to attend more musical events than they reported actually going to by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 9: Ask your instructor for information related to a course you are taking (grades, make-up work, assignments, etc.).* The mean expectation score was 2.87, and the mean experience score was 2.19. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.841$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.71, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have more conversations with their instructors about their academic performance and class content than they reported actually having by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 27: Write a major report for a class (20 pages or more).* The mean expectation score was 1.87, and the mean experience score was 1.19. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 4.496$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.69, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to write longer papers than what they reported actually being assigned to write by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 37: Follow a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity.* The mean expectation score was 2.25, and the mean experience score was 1.58. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 5.032$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.67, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have a more structured exercise routine than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 26: Ask an instructor or staff member for advice and help to improve their writing.* The mean expectation score was 2.67, and the mean experience score was 2.03. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.905$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.61, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have more conversations about how to improve their writing than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 34: Use a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.).* The mean expectation score was 2.31, and the mean experience score was 1.67. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 4.021$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.65, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to utilize these academic resources more than what they reported actually using them by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 65: Having conversations with others about reading non-assigned books.* The mean expectation score was 2.45, and the mean experience score was 1.83. A paired

samples *t*-test analysis was conducted ($n = 47$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(46) = 4.370$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.53, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have more conversations about their non-academic reading interests than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 33: Attend a cultural or social event on campus or in the community.* The mean expectation score was 2.67, and the mean experience score was 2.08. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.421$, $p = .001$. The effect size was 0.63, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to attend more cultural or social community events than what they reported actually going to by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 11: Work with a faculty member on a research project.* The mean expectation score was 1.77 and the mean experience score was 1.19. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.814$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.60, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have more opportunities to do research with faculty than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 36: Play a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate).* The mean expectation score was 1.79, and the mean experience score was 1.25. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 4.232$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.51, and therefore a medium effect size. At the

start of their first semester of college, students expected to participate in more team-based physical activities than what they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 35: Use campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc).* The mean expectation score was 2.58, and the mean experience score was 2.06. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.821$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.50, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to use campus recreational facilitates more than what they reported actually using by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 39: Work on a campus committee, student organization, or service project.* The mean expectation score was 2.40, and the mean experience score was 1.90. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.411$, $p = .001$. The effect size was 0.44, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to be more involved socially on campus with others than what they reported actually being by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 32: Attend a lecture or panel discussion.* The mean expectation score was 2.56, and the mean experience score was 2.10. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted ($n = 52$), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.150$, $p = .003$. The effect size was 0.49, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to attend more academic-focused events than what they reported actually attending by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 40: Work on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.).* The mean expectation score was 2.50, and the mean experience score was 1.79. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.470$, p = .001. The effect size was 0.43, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to be more involved socially off-campus with others than what they reported actually being by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 42: Manage or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus.* The mean expectation score was 2.12, and the mean experience score was 1.65. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.950$, p = .005. The effect size was 0.42, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to use their leadership skills more than what they reported actually using by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 38: Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group.* The mean expectation score was 2.79, and the mean experience score was 2.35. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.076$, p = .003. The effect size was 0.41, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to explore different student involvement opportunities more than what they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 45: Make friends or interact with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours.* The mean expectation score was 3.29, and the mean experience

score was 2.85. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 3.753$, $p < .001$. The effect size was 0.61, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to make friends with ethnically diverse peers more than what they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 77: Relationships with other students or student groups.* The mean expectation score was 5.55, and the mean experience score was 5.12. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 49), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(48) = 2.216$, $p = .031$. The effect size was 0.28, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have more relationships with their peers than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 21: Work on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students.* The mean expectation score was 2.85, and the mean experience score was 2.42. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.797$, $p = .007$. The effect size was 0.43, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have more opportunities to work with their peers on class assignments than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 55: Have conversations with others about computers and other technologies.* The mean expectation score was 2.23, and the mean experience score was 1.81. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.591$, $p = .012$. The effect size was 0.44, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to

have more conversations about technology with others than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 66: Read Textbooks/Assigned Books.* The mean expectation score was 3.26, and the mean experience score was 2.85. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 47), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(46) = 2.362$, $p = .022$. The effect size was 0.34, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to read their assigned readings more than what they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 25: Revise a paper or composition two or more times before you are satisfied with it.* The mean expectation score was 3.00, and the mean experience score was 2.60. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.377$, $p = .021$. The effect size was 0.41, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to proofread and revise their written work more than what they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 41: Meet with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization.* The mean expectation score was 1.90, and the mean experience score was 1.50. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.236$, $p = .030$. The effect size was 0.40, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have more conversations with faculty members about their campus involvement opportunities than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 18: Use information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments.* The mean expectation score was 3.12, and the mean experience score was 2.73. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.688$, $p = .010$. The effect size was 0.42, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have more opportunities to apply outside experience to their classwork than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 63: Changing personal opinions as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others.* The mean expectation score was 2.40, and the mean experience score was 2.02. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.594$, $p = .012$. The effect size was 0.58, and therefore a medium effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have their minds changed by others more than what they reported actually having by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 61: Refer to something one of your instructors said about a topic or issue in conversations with other people.* The mean expectation score was 2.88, and the mean experience score was 2.52. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.428$, $p = .019$. The effect size was 0.47, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to incorporate what they are learning in their classes in their casual conversations more than what they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 1: Use the library as a quiet place to read or study.* The mean expectation score was 2.56, and the mean experience score was 2.21. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.579$, $p = .013$. The effect size was 0.33, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to use this academic resource more than what they reported actually using by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 44: Make friends or interact with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from their own.* The mean expectation score was 3.21, and the mean experience score was 2.87. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.827$, $p = .007$. The effect size was 0.46, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to make more friends with economically diverse peers than what they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 67: Write term papers or other written reports.* The mean expectation score was 3.00, and the mean experience score was 2.66. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 47), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(46) = 2.143$, $p = .037$. The effect size was 0.34, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to have written more papers for class than what they reported actually writing by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 43: Make friends or interact with students whose interests are different from yours.* The mean expectation score was 3.08, and the mean experience score was 2.75. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.497$, $p = .016$. The effect size was 0.41, and therefore

a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to befriend more peers with diverse interests than what they reported actually doing by the end of the semester.

- *Pair 60: Explore different ways of thinking about a topic or issue.* The mean expectation score was 2.92, and the mean experience score was 2.60. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 50), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(49)= 2.100$, p =.041. The effect size was 0.38, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected their time in college to change the way they thought about a topic more than what they reported actually experiencing by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 80: First-semester grade point average (GPA).* The mean expectation score was 3.34, and the mean experience score was 3.10. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 50), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(49)=2.471$, p=.017. The effect size was 0.46, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to earn higher GPAs than what they reported actually receiving by the end of the semester.
- *Pair 83: Work for pay in an on-campus job.* The mean expectation score was 1.13, and the mean experience score was 1.02. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 47), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(46) = 2.340$, p = .024. The effect size was 0.32, and therefore a small effect size. At the start of their first semester of college, students expected to be employed on campus more than they actually were by the end of the semester.

Underestimated Expectations

Of the paired *t*-tests, only nine pairs indicated that the surveyed students had lower expectations than what they reported experiencing (underestimated), however, none of these paired results were significant ($p > .05$). **Table 4.24** shows that for these items, students anticipated having fewer experiences within the items than they ended up having.

Table 4.24
Underestimated Expectations Matched with Experiences

	Mean	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 84 - *Hours a week working for pay in an off-campus job* Q25_PRE - Q22_POST	-0.02222	-0.33	44	0.743
Pair 72 - *Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities* Q13_3_PRE - Q14_3_POST	-0.03922	-0.237	50	0.814
Pair 81 - *Enroll in an advanced degree (graduate school), after graduating* Q22_PRE - Q19_POST	-0.04	-0.286	49	0.776
Pair 14 - *Contribute to class discussions* Q6_3_PRE - Q6_3_POST	-0.05769	-0.444	51	0.659
Pair 8 - *Discuss their academic major or course selection with a faculty member* Q5_8_PRE – Q5_8_POST	-0.07692	-0.481	51	0.632
Pair 7 - *Discuss career plans and ambitions with a faculty member* Q5_7_PRE – Q5_7_POST	-0.09615	-0.626	51	0.534
Pair 57 - *Conversations with others about the economy (employment, wealth, poverty, debt, trade, etc.)* Q9_9_PRE – Q9_9_POST	-0.09615	-0.607	51	0.546

Table 4.24 (Cont.)
Underestimated Expectations Matched with Experiences

Pair 50 - *Conversations with others about social issues (peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relation)* Q9_2_PRE – Q9_2_POST	-0.13462	-1	51	0.322
Pair 19 - *Explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member)* Q6_8_PRE – Q6_8_POST	-0.19231	-1.347	51	0.184

Note. No significant p-values reported (*p > .05.)

The underestimated items included:

- *Pair 84: Hours a week working for pay in an off-campus job?* The mean expectation score was 1.31, and the mean experience score was 1.33. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 45), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(44) = -0.33$, p =.743.
- *Pair 72: Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities.* The mean expectation score was 5.57, and the mean experience score was 5.61. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 51), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(50) = -0.237$, p =.814.
- *Pair 81: Enroll in an advanced degree (graduate school), after graduating.* The mean expectation score was 1.64, and the mean experience score was 1.68. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 50), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(49) = -0.286$, p =.776.
- *Pair 14: Contribute to class discussions.* The mean expectation score was 3.00, and the mean experience score was 3.06. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = -0.444$, p =.659.

- *Pair 8: Discuss their academic major or course selection with a faculty member.* The mean expectation score was 2.62, and the mean experience score was 2.69. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = -0.481$, $p = .632$.
- *Pair 7: Discuss career plans and ambitions with a faculty member.* The mean expectation score was 2.29, and the mean experience score was 2.38. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = -0.626$, $p = .534$.
- *Pair 57: Conversations with others about the economy (employment, wealth, poverty, debt, trade, etc.).* The mean expectation score was 2.29, and the mean experience score was 2.38. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = -0.607$, $p = .546$.
- *Pair 50: Conversations with others about social issues (peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relation).* The mean expectation score was 2.67, and the mean experience score was 2.81. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = -1$, $p = .322$.
- *Pair 19: Explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member).* The mean expectation score was 2.92, and the mean experience score was 3.12. A paired samples t-test analysis was conducted (n = 52), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = -1.347$, $p = .184$.

Thematic Category Scores – Expectations and Experiences Scoring

As previously stated, each item of the survey was assigned a numerical score and was then placed into one of the following thematic categories: Academic, Social, Personal, or Person-

Environmental. The scores of these related items were combined and averaged to create four category expectation-experience (mis)alignment scores. These averaged scores were used to highlight any interesting inter-category anomalies or outliers for the sample and for each of the individual participants (only for the 52 who completed both surveys), which was used for the second phase of the study. Each of the categories were made up of pre- and post-survey items which included:

- *Academic Category Scores* included items such as: study habits, assignment types (length, difficulty, and effort put into completing it), relationship with faculty members, in-classroom experiences, reflection on academic performance, applying or sharing what students learned in class with others in a non-class setting, developing new skills to enhance their learning/writing/comprehension, and understanding course relevancy to academic major or career goals.
- *Social Category Scores* included items such as: developing relationships with others in the college community (peers, faculty, staff), the significance and value they placed on these relationships as well as how they changed or grew by interacting and connecting with people who were different from them (religiously, politically, economically, racially, ideologically, etc.), and experiences outside of the classroom (getting involved on campus, going to events, etc.).
- *Personal Category Scores* included items such as: seeking to grow/better themselves (academically, socially, personally) through experiences, exploring interests (new/old), expanding their mind and worldview by possibly stepping outside of their comfort zone, identifying areas of self-growth and seeking help (from faculty, staff, peers), thinking

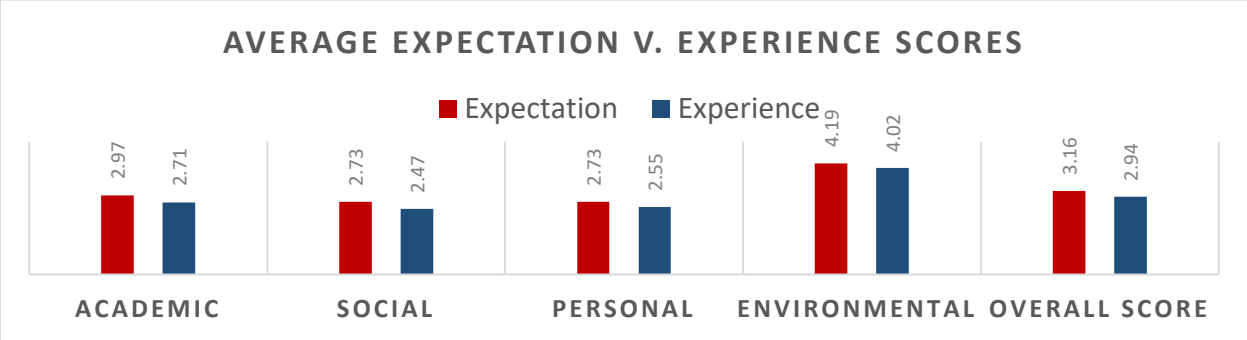
about long-term goals and developing action plans to reach them, and anticipating difficulties or challenges and developing solutions/taking action steps.

- *Person-Environmental Category Scores* included items such as: both utilizing the physical space of the campus (study rooms, workout facilities, athletic facilities, residence halls, classrooms, etc.) and in the community (using them to relax, study, hang out with others, etc.) as well as understanding/recognizing how these spaces impacted their personal wellbeing, skill development, academic performance, and overall experience as a student.

An additional overall category was calculated by averaging the expectation and experience scores for each of the four categories. However, these scores were only calculated for the 52 participants who completed both of the pre- and post-surveys. Calculating the mean difference scores between overall expectation and experience scores was used to place the participants on a (mis)alignment continuum that indicated if their expectations were aligned or misaligned (either having over or underestimated expectations). Participants who had mean difference which were closer to zero had more aligned expectations and experiences.

Figure 4a provides a visual representation of the expectation and experience average score discrepancies. The Academic and Social mean expectation and experience difference scores were both the largest and the same, with a mean of 0.26. The Personal and Environmental mean difference scores were also nearly the same, with a mean of 0.18 and 0.17 respectively. Each category was measured on a scale of one to five (with five being the highest score). Students generally started college with high expectations across all categories, with three of the four rounding up to a three out of five and the Environmental category having the highest average expectation and experience scores at an average of four out of five.

Figure 4a *Category Means for Expectations and Experiences for all Category Scores*



I conducted a paired *t*-test analysis to examine any significant changes between expectations and experiences for all four categories as well as overall scores for significant changes between the expectation and experience (pre- and post-surveys). Of the five paired *t*-tests, only the academic and social category scores were significant ($p < .05$), whereas the category scores for personal, person-environmental, and overall categories were not significant ($p > .05$).

- *Academic category scores:* The mean academic expectation score was 2.97, and the mean academic experience score was 2.71. A paired *t*-test analysis was conducted (*n=52*), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 4.34$, $p = .003$. The effect size was 0.6, and therefore a medium effect size.
- *Social category scores:* The mean social expectation score was 2.73, and the mean social experience score was 2.47. A paired *t*-test analysis was conducted (*n=52*), showing a statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 4.02$, $p = .01$. The effect size was 0.6, and therefore a medium effect size.
- *Personal category scores:* The mean personal expectation score was 2.73, and the mean personal experience score was 2.55. A paired *t*-test analysis was conducted (*n=52*), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 2.65$, $p = .07$.

- *Person-Environmental category scores:* The mean person-environmental expectation score was 4.19, and the mean person-environmental experience score was 4.02. A paired *t*-test analysis was conducted (*n=52*), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 1.72$, $p = .29$.
- *Overall category scores:* The mean overall expectation score was 3.15, and the mean overall experience score was 2.94. A paired *t*-test analysis was conducted (*n=52*), showing a non-statistically significant difference, $t(51) = 0.96$, $p = .89$.

Qualitative Results – Phase Two

The following sections will describe the qualitative data collection, data analysis, sample, and findings of Phase Two of the study, which provides qualitative data to complement the findings from Phase One, as well address the fifth and final research question of the study.

Research Question five (R5): *How do students interpret and explain misalignments between expectations and experiences in regard to their ability to be a successful student?*

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative data for Phase Two came from one-on-one interviews with six participants using a semi-structured interview protocol. Out of six participants, three had closely aligned expectations and experiences scores (balanced expectations), one was with higher expectation scores and lower experience scores (overestimated expectations), and two had lower expectation scores and higher experience scores (underestimated expectations). The table below (**Table 4.25**) is a sample snapshot which highlights the six first-year students who participated in the study.

Table 4.25

Participant Demographic Overview

	Participant 1	**Participant 2**	**Participant 3**	**Participant 4**	**Participant 5**	**Participant 6**
Pseudonyms	Dennis	Karly	Marissa	Jonathan	Andie	Bethany
Expectation-Experience Alignment	Aligned Expectations	Overestimated Expectations	Underestimated Expectations	Aligned Expectations	Aligned Expectations	Underestimated Expectations
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Race	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Residency status	Out-of-state student	In-state student	In-state student	In-state student	In-state student	In-state student
Expected 1st semester GPA	B (3.9 -3.0)	B (3.9 -3.0)	B (3.9 -3.0)	A (4.0)	B (3.9 -3.0)	A (4.0)
Reported 1st semester GPA	A (4.0)	C (2.9 -2.0)	C (2.9 -2.0)	B (3.9 -3.0)	B (3.9 -3.0)	A (4.0)
Planning on going to college	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The interviews that were one-on-one video calls conducted in Microsoft Teams lasted on average 27 minutes (the shortest interview being 21 minutes and the longest was 35 minutes) and explored the students' college expectations, experiences, and their perceptions of any (mis)alignments between these two factors. Participants received the interview questions in advance (Appendix I) and a one-page descriptor which explained how the four-category expectation-experience (mis)alignment scores (Academic, Social, Personal, and Person-Environmental) and overall scores were developed, in addition to their individual scores in each of these areas (Appendix J).

To increase the trustworthiness of the data, participants were asked to partake in member checking (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse et al., 2002; Polit & Beck, 2014) and were sent a copy of their transcript to check the conversation for accuracy and provide corrections or clarifications if necessary. Two additional credibility and dependability steps were utilized to enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative data: 1) a peer debriefer who assisted in the creation of codes from the interview transcripts and provided a self-check on the themes developed (Spall, 1998), and 2) an audit trail which clearly outlines all the research steps taken for a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 310-319) (Appendix K).

Qualitative Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2012) six steps of Thematic Analysis were used to prepare and analyze the qualitative data for this study: 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) developing codes, 3) developing themes, 4) reviewing the themes, 5) naming and defining the final themes, and 6) developing a report. **Figure 4b** on the following page provides an example of how raw quotes from the transcript were worked into codes and refined into themes for this study using Thematic Analysis (phases two through five).

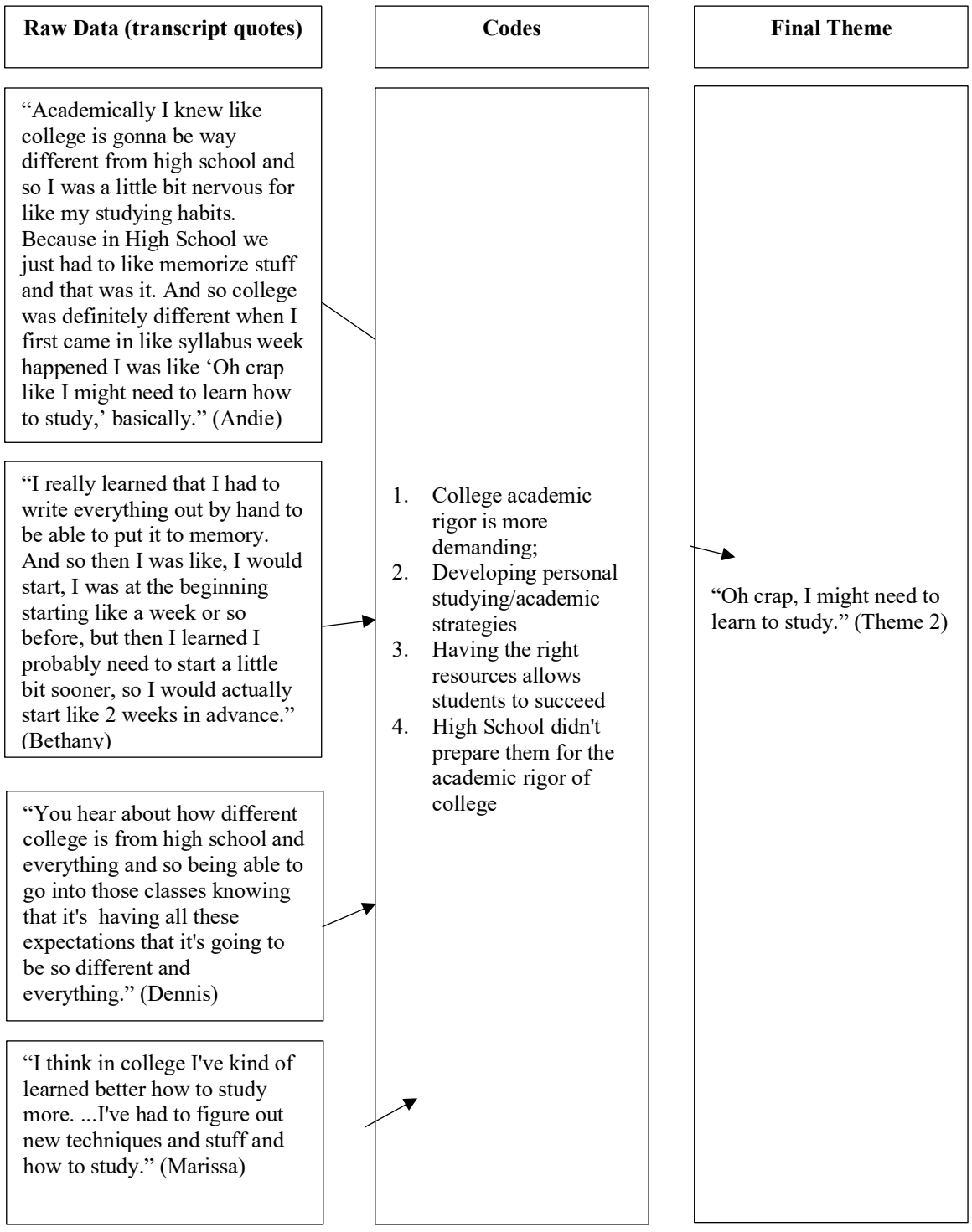


Figure 4b

Theme Development Example Using Thematic Analysis

Descriptive Overview of Participants' Expectations and Experiences

The following sections provide an overview of each of the six participants and their experience and expectation scores. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identity, and this name will be used throughout the rest of the paper to identify individual quotes and contributions.

Participant One

Dennis is a male, Caucasian first-year student who was enrolled as an out-of-state student. He was studying art, was enrolled in the university's Honors College, and had no current plans on going into a graduate program after graduating college. He had expectations of making a B-average GPA (between a 3.0 and 3.9) starting his first semester but ended up reporting an A-average GPA (4.0) for his first semester. When asked what advice he would give to another incoming first-year college student, he said that they would encourage people to make a concentrated effort to go out and meet new people and find their group of friends. Dennis' Expectation and Experience Category Scores can be found in **Figure 4c** below. Dennis' overall Expectation-Experience scores placed him centrally in the Aligned Expectation area (more than any other participant interviewed) of the alignment spectrum.

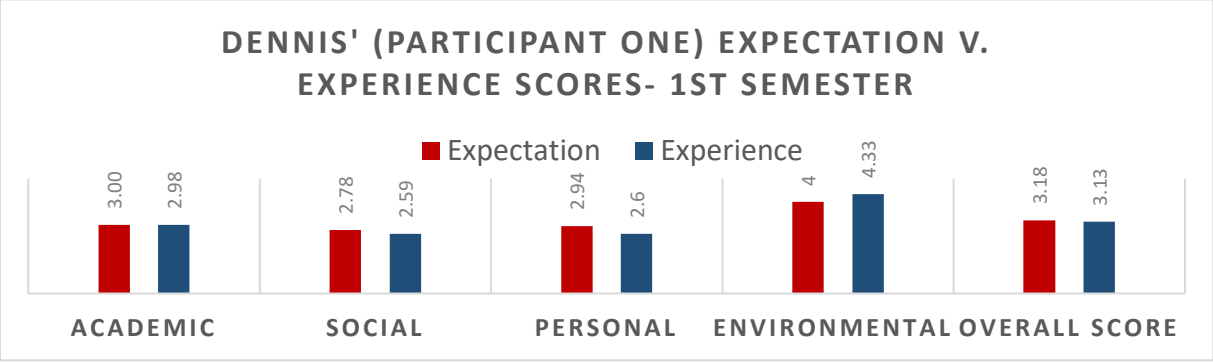


Figure 4c
Dennis' Expectation v. Experience Category Scores and Average Category Scores

Participant Two

Karly is a female, Caucasian first-year student who was enrolled as an in-state student. She was studying psychology, was enrolled in a student success program specifically for first-year students who are considered by the university as a high retention risk either due to financial need or based off of their academic performance from high school (these students received additional staff support throughout their first year and access to specific scholarship opportunities) and had no current plans on going into a graduate program after graduating college. She had expectations of making a B-average GPA (between a 3.0 and 3.9) starting her first semester but ended up reporting a C-average GPA (between a 2.0 and 2.9) for her first semester. When asked what advice she would give to another incoming first-year college student, she said that students should try to avoid setting their expectations too high, because they will be disappointed if reality does not meet their expectations. She also urged students to adopt a more lackadaisical point of view, and just accept whatever happens. Karly's Expectation and Experience Category Scores can be found in **Figure 4d**. Karly's overall Expectation-Experience scores placed her on the Overestimated Expectation end of the alignment spectrum.

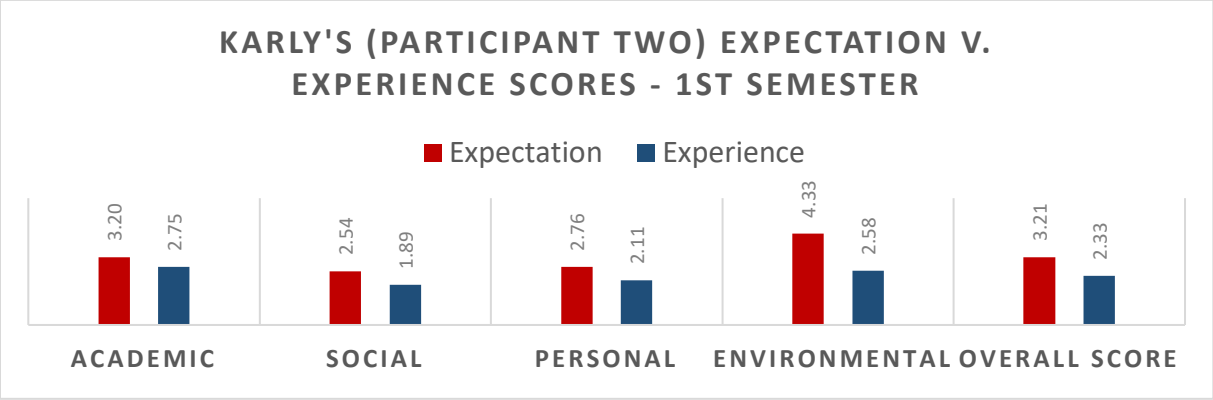


Figure 4d
Karly's Expectation v. Experience Category Scores and Average Category Scores

Participant Three

Marissa is a female, Caucasian first-year student who enrolled as an in-state student. She was studying education, was not participating in any university-sponsored programs (or did not fall into any of the other special-population student categories of the sample) and had current plans on going into a graduate program after graduating college to become a teacher. She had expectations of making a B-average GPA (between a 3.0 and 3.9) starting her first semester but ended up reporting a C-average GPA (between a 2.0 and 2.9) for her first semester. When asked what advice she would give to another incoming first-year college student, she urged students to just go in with an open mind and remember to push past their social anxiety fears. Marissa's Expectation and Experience Category Scores can be found in **Figure 4e** below. Marissa's overall Expectation-Experience scores placed her on the Underestimated Expectation end of the alignment spectrum.

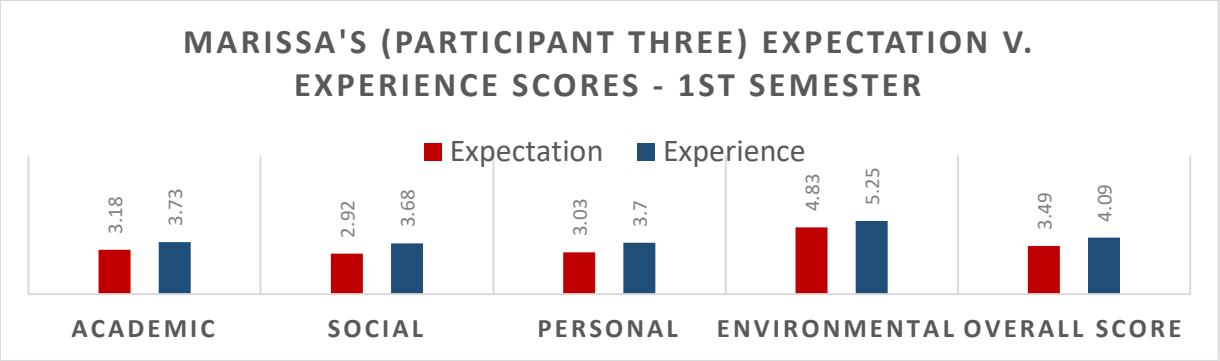


Figure 4e
Marissa's Expectation v. Experience Category Scores and Average Category Scores

Participant Four

Jonathan is a male, Caucasian first-year student who was enrolled as an in-state student. He was studying psychology, was enrolled in a success program specifically for first-year students who are considered by the university as a high retention risk (either due to financial needs or based off their academic performance from high school) and had current plans on going

into a graduate program after graduating college to become a lawyer. He had expectations of making an A-average GPA (4.0) starting his first semester but ended up reporting a B-average GPA (between a 3.0 and 3.9) for his first semester. When asked what advice he would give to another incoming first-year college student, he said new students should prepare themselves for the increased homework load and to put in the effort to make friends. Jonathan's Expectation and Experience Category Scores can be found in **Figure 4f** below. Jonathan's overall Expectation-Experience scores placed him centrally in the Aligned Expectation area of the alignment spectrum.

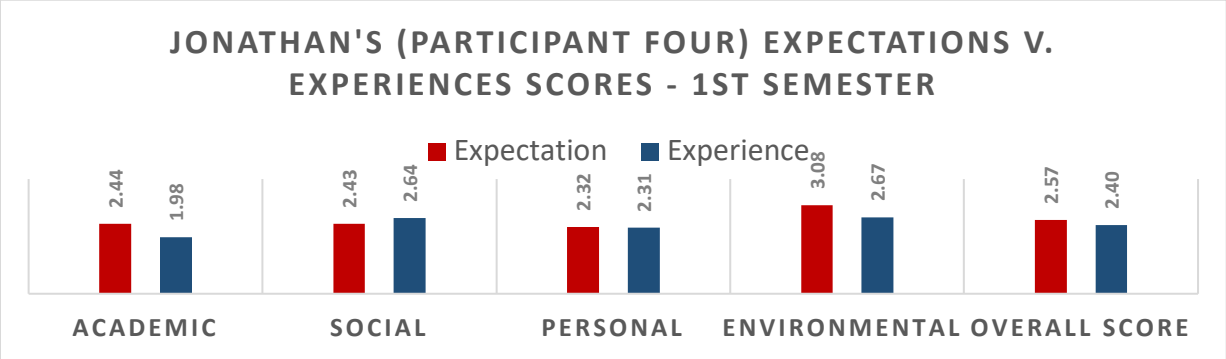


Figure 4f
Jonathan's Expectation v. Experience Category Scores and Average Category Scores

Participant Five

Andie is a female, Caucasian first-year student who was enrolled as an in-state student. She was studying communications disorders, was living off-campus at home with family during her first year of college and had current plans on going into a graduate program after graduating college to become a teacher. She had expectations of making a B-average GPA (between a 3.0 and 3.9) starting her first semester but ended up reporting a B-average GPA for her first semester. When asked what advice she would give to another incoming first-year college student, she advised buying a planner, using every available resource (for both academic, mental, and physical well-being), and taking care of themselves. Andie's Expectation and Experience

Category Scores can be found in **Figure 4g** below. Andie's overall Expectation-Experience scores placed her centrally in the Aligned Expectation area of the alignment spectrum.

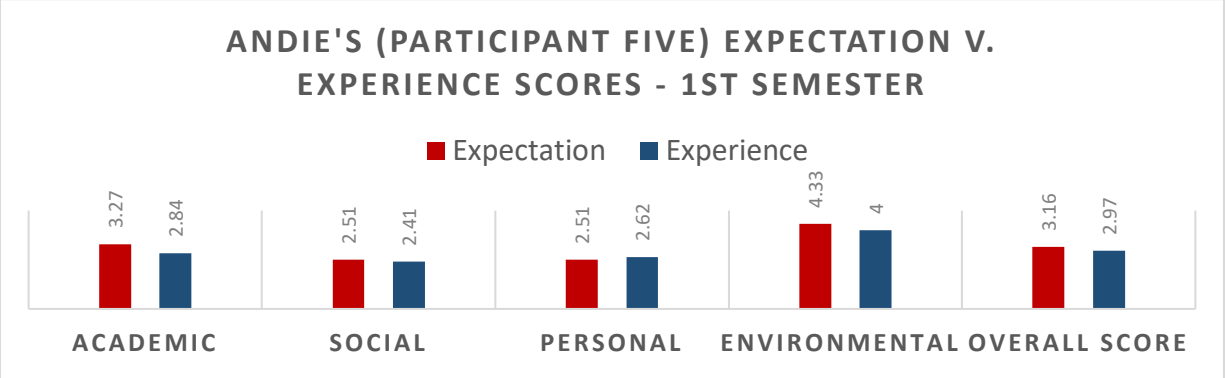


Figure 4g
Andie's Expectation v. Experience Category Scores and Average Category Scores

Participant Six

Bethany is a female, Caucasian first-year student who was enrolled as an in-state student. She was studying communication disorders, was not participating in any university-sponsored programs (or did not fall into any of the other special-population student categories of the sample) and had current plans on going into a graduate program after graduating college to become a speech pathologist. She had expectations of making an A-average GPA (4.0) starting her first semester and ended up reporting an A-average GPA for her first semester. When asked what advice she would give to another incoming first-year college student, she encouraged new students to understand that college is different than high school and to not underestimate the academic course load. Bethany's Expectation and Experience Category Scores can be found in **Figure 4h** below. Bethany's overall Expectation-Experience scores placed her on the Underestimated Expectation end of the alignment spectrum.

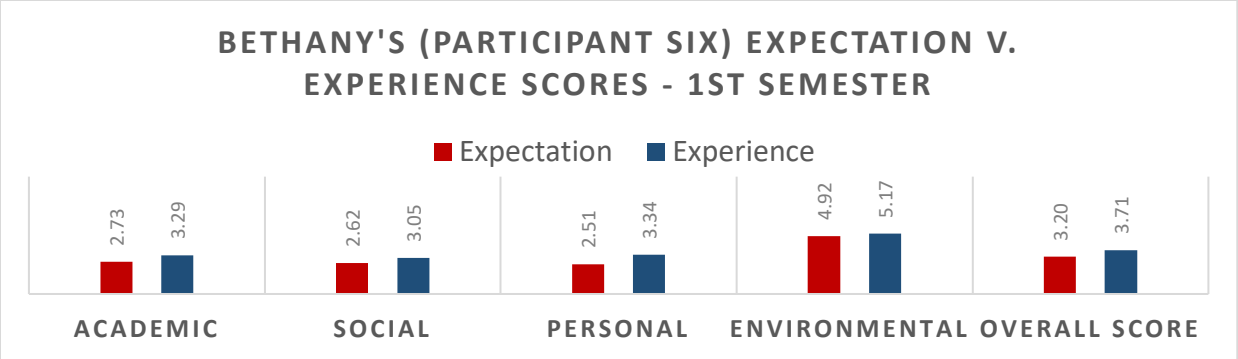


Figure 4h
Bethany's Expectation v. Experience Category Scores and Average Category Scores

Qualitative Findings

Thirty-one codes were developed from the interviews conducted with the participating first-year students and were further refined into six themes utilizing Thematic Analysis. **Table 4.26** provides a brief descriptive overview of the six themes.

Table 4.26
Theme Descriptions

Themes	Description
Theme One – Managing Mindset	Students can take a more active role in their college experience if they re-evaluate and adjust their attitudes when necessary
Theme Two – "Oh crap, I might need to learn how to study."	Students learn quickly that the academic expectations of college are more rigorous and often require that old studying and academic habits be re-examined and updated in order to be a successful college student
Theme Three – Driving Forces: Motivations and Experiences	Students must learn from their experiences and be motivated to re-frame expectations when their experiences do not match
Theme Four – Academic Engagement Through Content and Connections	Students hold varying expectations for what their academic experiences and relationships will be in college

Table 4.26 (Cont.)
Theme Descriptions

Themes	Descriptions
Theme Five – Friendship Focused	Students place a large emphasis on developing new friendships in college – this is a driving focus that impacts all other areas and expectations of college
Theme Six – Trusted Sources: Shaping College Expectations	Students enter into college with expectations that are shaped from trusted sources, some of these come from personal sources while others come from the content they interact with

Table 4.27 outlines the six developed themes of the study along with their encompassed codes.

Table 4.27
Developed Themes of the Study Along with their Encompassing Codes

Themes	Codes
Theme One – Managing Mindset	Approaching college with a resiliency mindset; Lowering expectations to avoid disappointment; Mindset matters
Theme Two – "Oh crap, I might need to learn how to study."	College academic rigor is more demanding; Developing personal studying/academic strategies; Having the right resources allows students to succeed; High School didn't prepare them for the academic rigor of college
Theme Three – Driving Forces: Motivations and Experiences	Accept and learn from the past, then move on; Accept that the college transition is difficult; Career goals motivate actions; Challenges and self-reflection aid personal growth; First semester is a trial run for the future; Reflecting on poor performance spurs motivation; Utilizing the break as a period of reflection and re-adjustment

Table 4.27 (Cont.)
Developed Themes of the Study Along with their Encompassing Codes

Themes	Codes
Theme Four – Academic Engagement Through Content and Connections	Benefitting from faculty relationships; Class structure impacted ability to form friendships; Engaging classes enhance experience; Found value in non-major classes; Recognized effort of faculty and staff; Selection of major contradicts interests/abilities; Trying to form meaningful relationships with faculty
Theme Five – Friendship Focused	Academic and social balance is key; Early social connections through Greek Life; Feeling disconnected – loss of support system; Friendships enhance college experience; Looking for a fresh start; Social relationships based off shared interests; Taking social risks pays off
Theme Six – Trusted Sources: Shaping College Expectations	Forming expectations based off social media/movies; Forming expectations based off trusted personal sources; Used peers' experiences to form expectations

The remainder of this section will go into each of the themes in more detail, completing step six of Thematic Analysis (developing a report and describing the findings utilizing the study's themes).

Theme One: Managing Mindset

Managing mindset is a term used in this dissertation to describe how the first-year students framed their expectations from the start of or prior to beginning college, as well as how their mindset impacted their attitudes toward college overall. Three codes were assigned to this theme, with five of the six participants expressing intentionality in how they were going to approach or view their college experience as a new student. The following sections will go into

greater analysis of the “Managing Mindset” theme, looking at two core components of the theme: lowering expectations and checking attitudes.

Lowering Expectations

Participants provided insight into their thought process for developing their expectations, citing that avoiding disappointment was a motivating factor and rationale for some. Marissa indicated that she set expectations low for new situations on purpose in an attempt to avoid future disappointments.

> I think I'm just the type of person that I don't set my expectations too high, so that's probably a big reason of why it ended up better than I thought it was gonna be. 'Cause I don't know. I just, I went in. I always go in situations expecting the worst and hoping for the best.

Similar to Marissa, Bethany mentioned a desire to lower expectations because she believed it was a way to align an outcome more closely with reality or her experiences.

> I didn't want to have too many expectations because like I, I didn't want to like get my hopes up or I don't know. I just I wanted to be more real about it, 'cause I really didn't know what to expect entirely, and so I didn't want to expect something and then it not be true.

Anticipating and accepting that there would be ups and downs during college – some in their control and some not – was noted by five of the participants. Being honest and accepting that a person is not always perfect was a revelation that Andie shared during her interview.

> Making sure that you're doing okay and it's okay, like, not to be okay. You can set standards for yourself, but don't be like discouraged if you can't meet them, 'cause it's not gonna always be perfect every time.

Checking the Attitude

Participants also mentioned that their attitudes shaped and affected their mindset and would play a role in their overall college experience. Karly was not initially excited about attending college at the particular school she enrolled in but decided to be open minded and embrace their circumstances. “If I just sit and sulk for four or five years then I'm definitely going to have a bad time, but if I try and have a good time then I might end up having a good time.” Karly also mentioned that her attitude adjustment took place between her first and second semester during a conversation with her mother, which helped to reframe her situation more positively.

> We just kind of like had a conversation. She's like “[name redacted] I get that you don't like this school, but you have to make the most of it because it's what your option is.” And I just kind of realized that she was right. Like even though I don't like it, that doesn't mean that I can't have a good time and that I can’t make the most of it.

Finally, Marissa mentioned the culture in which she grew up in and how that might be a factor in the resilience of her generation, shaping how they approach adversity or difficult situations.

> I think like the younger generation is definitely much more flexible with their situations. Just because, like when you think about it, like we’ve just grown up with like roadblocks. Like we started like 9-11 and then just like from there…I guess like today's society, like the younger generation’s like desensitized to like bad things that might happen, which is horrible, but it also gives us the tools to work around it and help adapt from them.

Theme Two: "Oh crap, I might need to learn how to study."

The title of the second theme came from a direct quote of Andie. This theme

is used in this dissertation to describe how the first-year students discussed their expectations regarding their academic performance as a student and their expectations towards the academic rigor of their college experience overall. Four codes were assigned to this theme, with all six of the participants discussing academics. The following sections will go into greater analysis of this academics-focused theme, looking at how students feel unprepared academically, which leads to the realization that they need a new approach to academics.

Feeling Unsure and Underprepared

Four of the six participants mentioned that they did not believe that their high school experience set them up to succeed academically in college. Andie noted in particular that she did not know how to study efficiently for her classes.

> Academically, I knew like college is gonna be way different from high school and so I was a little bit nervous for like my studying habits, because in High School we just had to like memorize stuff and that was it. And so college was definitely different. When I first came in, like syllabus week happened. I was like "Oh crap, like I might need to learn how to study," basically.

Bethany echoed Andie's concerns, in particular adding that not having strong study skills made it even more difficult to take classes in new subjects.

> It was a lot different than I expected it to be. In high school, I didn't really know how to study as well as I learned to during the first semester, 'cause I did take biology and that took a lot to learn how to adapt to studying for that class. So it was definitely different than I expected and the first semester was a lot harder than I thought it would be.

Academically speaking, multiple participants indicated that they were aware that there was a difference between being a student in high school and a student in college. Dennis stated

that he had been told this a lot growing up, but that he did not understand fully the extent of the difference before his first college class.

> You hear about how different college is from high school and everything and so being able to go into those classes knowing that… having all these expectations that it's going to be so different and everything.

Additionally, the participants underestimated the academic rigor of their college classes, with two participants outright saying that they thought classes would be easy (or at least equivalent to what they had experienced in high school). Marissa underestimated the amount of work that she would need to put into managing her time to stay on top of her homework.

> I just thought you kind of go to class and then you'd be done and then you can kind of do whatever you want, but it's definitely not like that. You have to come home and do like hours of homework. And so I just wasn't expecting this school to be. I mean I should have, but for some reason I didn't think that school would be as hard as it was.

A New Academic Approach

Some participants indicated that they developed new study and organizational skills and behaviors to address the shift in academic rigor and requirements. Marissa reflected that she has developed new skills since starting college to help her succeed academically, stating that "I think in college I've kind of learned better how to study more... I've had to figure out new techniques and stuff and how to study."

When Bethany was asked about how she now prepares for a class exam, she indicated that she had developed an extended study schedule and a new technique to review material.

> I really learned that I had to write everything out by hand to be able to put it to memory. And so then I was like I would start I was at the beginning, starting like a week or so

> before, but then I learned I probably need to start a little bit sooner, so I would actually start like two weeks in advance.

Jonathan mentioned that he had participated in a summer college preparation program a few weeks prior to the start of his first semester of college, which helped him to demystify the academic experience to an extent early on in his college experience.

> I did a summer program, it's [program name redacted] summer program, so I took two three-credit-hour courses and [a] one-credit-hour course over the summer before my first semester. I guess I kind of realized it's not really that much different than high school.

Theme Three: Driving Forces: Motivations and Experiences

"Driving forces: Motivations and Experiences" is a theme that explores how students learn to re-frame their expectations when they do not align with their experiences. This theme also explores more deeply what motivates these students to make these adjustments and continue to push through their mismatched experiences. Seven codes were assigned to this theme, with all six of the participants discussing various motivations that reinforced their decision to remain enrolled in college and helped them to adapt their expectations and behavior to better match their expectations. The following section will explore more of the thought processes behind these motivations: recognizing that the transition period is difficult, using self-reflection to motivate themselves, viewing the first semester as a trial run, and using long-term goals as motivation.

Recognizing that the Transition is Difficult

All six of the participants mentioned during their interviews that there are inherently challenges that all students face during their transition into college. Though some of the challenges experienced in college may be unique to the individual, most are common to a lot of students, with Andie saying, "I had to tell myself, like, I'm not the only one that's probably going

through this." Karly also normalized the struggles she experienced especially at the start of her first semester when students are bombarded with a lot of information all at once, saying that "it was definitely a lot harder than I expected it to be, but I think that's normal, like a lot of people just experience the culture shock of, like all that happening at once." Dennis mentioned that he participated in some of the new student programming during his orientation and during the first few weeks of the semester. He recognized these programs as helpful to his transition but did not feel that he was in the right mind frame (there was too much happening all at once) to absorb and process the information on resources and student success tips that he received.

> [I] was going through enrollment and all of your guys' activities [university welcome and transition programs] and stuff, definitely it just kind of like rolls off of you because you're getting so bombarded with all of the different groups and everything, but your guys' stuff [programming for new students] is important, so it definitely makes a big impact down the road.

Self-Reflections Motivate Action

Dennis talked about how there was a clear moment of reflection at the end of his first semester of college, after he had completed his final project for the semester, where his growth and experiences really hit them.

> Kind of taking a sigh [a moment] of knowing that, "Wow, my first semester is already over," but also that it was just such a good time and I kind of reminisced on like all the friends that I had already made, and how different I already was. Kind of comparing myself to how I was that last semester of senior year [of high school] versus the first semester freshman year. It was such a difference.

Although Dennis reflected back and mentioned a more overall positive experience when thinking about his first semester of college, some of the other participants thought more specifically on some of their lower experiences and began to think about ways of adapting for the next semester.

Five of the participants mentioned that they had a moment (or moments) of reflection either during or after their first semester of college where they identified and recognized areas where they could improve themselves and their college experience. Andie noted that she was using her first semester as a template for how to act and what to expect for the rest of her college experience.

> I figured out what college was and so first semester I was just trying to like, I just got thrown in there basically, like everyone else. And so, I was just trying to figure out like "What is college?" But then second semester I was like, "OK I know what to expect now."

Instead of letting these roadblocks discourage them, these students found constructive and proactive ways to not repeat old mistakes to better align their behaviors and expectations with their desired experiences. Bethany mentioned that she thought that "a lot of my failures actually like, motivated me more than it did discourage me." Andie had similar thoughts, "you just have to like learn from your mistakes" and started out her second semester of college with a new outlook on utilizing campus resources to help her meet her goals and improve her college experience overall. Andie realized that putting in the effort and putting aside the discomfort of asking someone that she did not know for help could pay off and set her up for success academically in the long run.

> First semester, I was like, "No, I'm not going to office hours like that's crazy. I don't know. I don't know these people." But then second semester, I was like, "If I want my

> grades to go up, I would use every resource I had." And not just like office hours but like the, like [on-campus health center's name redacted] and like the psychology center and stuff like that.

A Trial Run

Some of the participants noted that they viewed their first semester of college as a trial run, or a template off which to base the rest of their college experience and that any issues or roadblocks they encountered should be used as a learning opportunity to adjust expectations and behaviors for the remainder of their time in college. Karly said that her mistakes in her first semester made her feel better prepared for the future.

> I just think first semester is kind of like a trial run of what it was going to be like and then second semester I kind of like knew the basics and what to work off of. And then I went from there.

Karly's thoughts on using her first semester as a template for what to do (and not do) in her remaining semesters of college was echoed by Dennis.

> So I think it was that first semester was like building the foundations... even though that first semester wasn't exactly the best socially that I was expecting. I think it made the right building blocks to go and basically blow those expectations out of the water this semester.

Participants communicated that developing a routine and understanding limits (personal and time) is important when framing expectations. Having made it through her first semester and learning from that experience, Bethany had a better game plan for not overextending herself in the future.

> Once you get your routine down, then you can start adding in more activities and being able to juggle those on top of everything, but not biting off more than you can handle in the beginning and just like growing, learning where you can put yourself.

Andie also talked about how success and personal growth as a student comes from understanding herself as a student in the college environment and adapting to that.

> A successful college student isn't just someone that maintains like a good academic standing, but someone who finds [themselves] in the midst of that. So, like finding your perfect study habits, finding like just who you are as a person...when you get into college, there's all of these opportunities to just like let yourself find yourself basically. And so, I think like successful is when you are able to meet both academics and finding yourself.

Long-Term Motivations

Five of the six participants discussed long-term goals as a driving and motivating factor for them to continue to persist on and make it to graduation. Jonathan spoke at length about how his future goals kept him motivated to complete college.

> I try to set long term goals. But I think yeah, someone that has really long-term thinking, 'cause it's, I think it's more beneficial, and maybe easier, or at least to me, to focus on long-term goals. 'Cause then it kind of lets you see like why are you doing what you are doing.

Four of these participants specifically mentioned a desire to continue to graduate school for additional education and special training. Andie said that she wanted to become a special education teacher, saying that she “definitely” was going “to get my master’s, and then after that my plan is, I really want to work with kids with disabilities.” Jonathan said that “I switched to psychology this semester 'cause I always had the intention of going to law,” and he had the

perception that by enrolling in the college that he did, he would increase his odds of getting into a good law school later on.

Marissa's goal of attending graduate school helped her to refocus on her academic performance and her behaviors moving beyond her first semester of college because she recognized that she needed to raise her GPA in order to be able to get into graduate programs. Marissa was applying to be considered for a five-year teaching program, which included a seamless transition into the Master of Arts in Teaching program upon completion of her bachelor's degree.

> My last test records aren't impeccable, but so I'm having to make up for it 'cause I apply, this fall is when I apply for the program. So, I'm having to really like work extra hard to bring it – my GPA – up even more too. So yeah, it definitely motivates me to try and get in that program.

Theme Four: Academic Engagement Through Content and Connections

"Academic Engagement through Content and Connections" is a theme that describes how the participants felt about various academic experiences, including their in-the-classroom experience, their interactions with their faculty members, and their academic course load. Seven codes were assigned to this theme, with five of the six participants discussing their various academic expectations and experiences during their first semester of college. The following sections will further explore the "Academic Engagement through Content and Connections" theme: classroom connections and coursework and faculty relationships.

Classroom Connections and Coursework

During the interviews, the participants were prompted to reflect on how the in-classroom experience and atmosphere impacted their academic experiences. Dennis mentioned that

although the course material was difficult in one of his classes in particular, he enjoyed the experience and was able to build relationships with his peers. “It was tough, but it was a lot of fun. I got to meet people, I got really close to those people.” Making connections with her fellow classmates was also the hope of Karly, but the size and format of her classes made that difficult for her. She explained, “I thought it would be a lot easier to meet them in classes, but all my classes were lecture classes with like 300 people. It was just rough.”

The large class size made engaging in class discussions and asking questions difficult for some students, who found the setting and the number of peers in the classroom intimidating. Marissa, although not comfortable speaking up in class, said that her in-classroom discomfort did not block her from getting help when needed.

> Well I never talked in class, like I would never raise my hand or anything, but I would email and stuff... I definitely reached out a lot to them. Not in class though because I was too chicken, but definitely, I would email or show up at office hours.

There did not appear to be any major issues or dissatisfaction regarding the participants’ perception of their courses and their relevancy to their interests, major, and long-term goals. Contrarily, Jonathan expressed that his non-major specific classes were interesting, enjoyable, and beneficial.

> A human geography course, which I was forced to take for my, to get my core credits out of the way, and I actually enjoyed that like a surprising amount. I really like, I really enjoyed that class.

Jonathan noted that he was aware of the stigma of taking “unnecessary” classes, such as electives or non-major specific classes, but said “the whole because I'm an engineer, I don't need to take philosophy is… that's not true.” Dennis talked about how, as a student in the art program, he was

encouraged during his first art class to keep his mind open. Dennis said that "the main thing with the whole art program is they just want you to learn from everything and just try and be inspired by things around you." This connected with an anecdote during his interview about answering questions in another class by applying some of the principles that he had learned in a film class to a photography lab working in a dark room, "How would I have ever known that if I hadn't taken that [film] class?"

Faculty Relationships

Half of the participants discussed their perceptions of and relationships with their faculty members. The participants understood the importance of building personal relationships with their faculty (not only getting to know them but having faculty that know students individually as well), but as Jonathan noted, "I knew it was good to kind of meet with instructors outside class, but then you know I needed an actual reason, not just kind of small talk."

Andie indicated that she thought that being in a large class would negatively impact her ability to build a relationship with her instructor and was relieved that was not true.

> The teachers were like, "Yeah, come to office hours." And you're in this huge university and you're in a class with like 500 kids and you're like that teacher wouldn't care about me. I'm just one of like a number, but that's not true at all.

Dennis agreed with Andie, saying in his interview that his "professors were extremely approachable. My film professor was extremely approachable, like everyone was so nice and just there for you to learn."

It should be noted that the perception of a welcoming attitude from the faculty was not a universal experience for all students. Jonathan got the impression that his faculty were too busy

and would not take the time to get to know their students and felt that he had not been able to connect with many of his faculty members.

> Most either got too involved in their research or don't care. Not don't care, but don't care to form any kind of, you know, like relationships with their students. Yeah, out of I think I guess 12 professors now [instructor's name redacted] is the only one who would talk to me at all.

Making the effort to build relationships with their faculty helped some of the participants explore additional academic avenues. "I went to talk to him one day after class about research and I don't know we talked a few more times. And then I applied for his, to be an SI instructor for him," said Jonathan, who was one of three participants to specifically mention a faculty member helping them with career advice or helping them to explore other academic pursuits, such as becoming a tutor, conducting research, and learning how to get summer internships.

Theme Five: Friendship Focused

"Friendship Focused" is a theme that describes the attention and importance participants placed on social interactions and building relationships with peers early in their college experience. The conversations of the participants ranged from finding friends and having new social experiences, to the fears of isolation and loneliness they had while in college. Seven codes were assigned to this theme, with each of the six participants mentioning social interaction and friendship as a major expectation, mentioning it on average nine to 10 times each during their interviews. The following sections explore this emphasis on friendship, examining how students make friendship a priority, go about making connections, put themselves out there, react when they feel disconnected, and view new friendships as an opportunity for a fresh start.

A Major Priority

The importance of making friends and building a solid social network of peers for support and company was at the forefront for all the participants. For Marissa, like most of the students interviewed, there was a sense of both excitement and anxiety towards making those connections.

> I was most excited for it but I was scared for it at the same time, was like finding my friend group and finding kind of where I fit in... But I was nervous, 'cause I was like, what if … if I don't have any friends or anything.

While conducting the interviews, it was clear that making friends was very important to the participants, although how many friends students made was not always clear during the interviews. Dennis mentioned that although he had made successful friendships, he felt that he should have made more or expanded his social circles more than he did.

> Socially, I would say first semester was not… It wasn't like exactly what I was expecting. Like I made really close friends with my art friends and my roommates, but beyond that I didn't make it… like I probably didn't go out as much as I should have and make all those friends that I could have.

It was also clear from the interviews that there was a heavier emphasis for most participants on social achievements above academic ones. Andie mentioned that she recognized that her focus on social integration and connections, especially starting her college experience, might have come across as not “right” in terms of where her priorities should have been as a student; nevertheless, she kept her focus and energies on making friends.

> I know it sounds like, bad, like I should've like focused on school, but that [making friends] was the main goal, so I had like people that I knew and like could go to games with and stuff like that.

In a similar reflection of the start of their college experience, Bethany reflected positively on her time spent with friends and being social. Framing these experiences as a goal, or the correct way to experience college.

> I was like this is how it should be. I was like this is what I need to be doing all the time. Just having fun with my friends. Just experiencing all the moments because it wasn't gonna last.

Making the Connections

Reflecting back to how their semesters started, multiple participants reflected back on their feelings toward making friends, noting that although making friends was a major priority, it was not always easy. Andie, for example, noted that just because she had the desire to make friends did not make it an automatic or easy task for her to accomplish.

> I definitely thought that like going into college, I would make friends as soon as I got there… so my like first semester, I walked in and I thought that as soon as I walked in I'd be able to make friends. But it was completely different from that. I had to actually try.

Bethany echoed Andie's sentiment, mentioning how not making friends right away made her feel very discouraged – a feeling that she perceived that others also probably felt.

> I was kind of discouraged at first, 'cause I was like thinking it should have been an immediate thing. And for a lot of people it isn't, and I was just kind of expecting it to be, and so that was a little bit hard on me at first.

Thoughts on Greek Life. A notable source of friendship came from conversations about campus involvement in the Greek Life system. Half of the participants either discussed getting involved in this system or talked about its impact on building social relationships. Some mentioned that it was both a draw for them to enroll in the college that they chose, and that it was a good system that allowed students to build fast and easy connections with others. Marissa said that she "was excited about [being] in Greek Life. And so I was really excited for that. I thought that would be the perfect opportunity to meet people and kind of get my friend group."

Not all participants had a positive experience with the Greek Life System. Karly explained that she thought it was a system that only benefits its members and serves as an early barrier to making friends for those not affiliated with a Greek chapter on campus.

> Also [college name redacted] is like 90% Greek life, and I didn't rush. I noticed a lot of people, I guess I would say like mostly girls, when I would like try to talk to them, they'd be like, "Oh what sorority are you in?" When I would be like, "I didn't rush" and then they wouldn't really have an interest in like continuing the conversation... now I see that it's not as big of a deal. But I think it's definitely just like a status thing when you're first entering college. That if you're in a sorority you don't really want to like be friends with people who aren't in a sorority.

Putting Themselves Out There

All six of the participants talked about the difficulties of stepping out of their comfort zone by putting themselves in new social situations. Risk taking, in regard to putting oneself out there to meet new people, was advice that most of the participants said they would share with the next class of first-year students. Karly noted that a lot of the social connections that she made in her first semester happened during unstructured events (not necessary facilitated by the college).

> I think a good thing for incoming freshmen to do – um, you know [college's name redacted] is a huge party school just because of all the frats, so it's not that hard. Just like actually like go to parties and meet people…but I was actually like making connections with people and having a good time. So it's important to like go out and meet people in a non-formal setting.

Taking social risks was more difficult for some than others. Marissa mentioned an initial concern about being judged by her peers, but upon reflection she found that the risks were worth it.

> I came in and I was so nervous and scared, and I think that towards the beginning I was very like, kind of nervous to talk to people because I thought they would judge me or whatever, but it's definitely not like that at all… I would just say it's [trying new things] not as nerve wracking as they would think it would be. It's not as bad as I thought it would be.

Feeling Disconnected

For some participants, the difficulties of starting college away from their home, families, and high school friends was a driving force to seek out new relationships. The fear or worry of becoming isolated or remaining isolated without a supportive group of friends served as an additional stressor for the participants. A few were able to build friendships or at least positive connections with their roommates, but that was not the case for all. Bethany explained that she wished that her roommate was around more to help her feel less lonely.

> I wasn't expecting to miss home as much as I did, and since I do only live like 45 minutes away from the university, I wasn't expecting to miss it as much. And I actually did, so that was harder on me. And I think what made that harder was my roommate was going home a lot more than I did, and so I was alone a lot on the weekends.

Three participants discussed having what they described as a major falling out or relationship break from their closest friends prior to starting college, including Karly, who mentioned that at "the very beginning of first semester, like me and my best friend of two years just like stopped being friends. So that was rough." Andie reported a score of five out of ten for her first semester after a difficult start socially. She too had experienced a loss of relationships, leaving her feeling more isolated while starting college.

> First semester? Bad. Five out of ten…It wasn't good. Um, so like I said, when I left high school I kind of like didn't – I left my old friends behind 'cause of personal stuff...then my ex-boyfriend and I broke up.

Feeling disconnected and not making friends was a particularly serious concern to Dennis, who revealed during his interview that the stress and disappointment in his lack of progress socially during his first semester became a factor that he weighed seriously while considering whether or not he wanted to remain in college.

> There were a few points where I was like, "I don't know if I can do this." I think it was nearing the – I think it was like the two weeks before finals, um, in that like November/December time where I got really down on myself, and I was like, "You know, I'm just not making, uh, the friends that I want."

A Fresh Start and Self-Growth

Five of the participants said that a driving force for meeting new people was specifically to "start fresh" as an adult, free from their family and old friends. Jonathan was hopeful that by meeting new people he would have the opportunity to grow and figure out who we wanted to be himself in college.

> I was really excited to move out. Um yeah, and be in [redacted city name] and then really to kind of start a new thing, um yeah, with college… I was really excited to start a new, I don't know, a new period in my life.

Like Jonathan, Dennis echoed his desire to have a fresh start and was motivated to choose the college that he did because of its physical distance from his hometown and comfort zone.

> I definitely was looking forward to meeting new people. That was one of the main reasons I chose [redacted state] in the first place, is it was just something – it was a place that not very many people from my high school were going to go to, and I wanted to just like totally restart, meet new people, just kind of expand my horizons.

Karly also shared this desire, but because she went to high school in the local area and knew that a lot of her high school classmates would also be attending the same college, she had a concern that a fresh start might be difficult to accomplish.

> Just the thought of going to college with everyone that I went to high school with wasn't super exciting to me, but I met some people who I didn't go to high school with, so that helped.

Making friends was not just a goal in itself but provided additional avenues for growth. When reflecting about the difference between her first and second semester up to that point, Bethany credited her friend group as a needed catalyst for self-growth and discovery – something that was not really possible in the first semester when the focus was on building a community and support system of peers.

> The second semester was definitely a lot easier since I did have those friends. So, I feel like I grew in that aspect, 'cause I wasn't like sitting alone, or like being sad in that way,

> so I think that's definitely where I got my personal growth from was finding that friend group.

Theme Six: Trusted Sources: Shaping the College Expectations

"Trusted sources: Shaping the college expectations" is a theme that describes where the first-year students indicated they were getting their information from (the sources) to help them build their college expectations. These sources ranged from personal stories from friends and families, to non-personal sources such as the entertainment industry, pop culture, and the internet. Three codes were assigned to this theme, with half of the participants explicitly explaining how outside sources impacted and shaped their expectations prior to starting college. The following sections will explore the types of personal and other sources that helped students form these expectations.

Personal Sources

Peers and family members provided a reliable source of information through stories of similar or lived experience. For Dennis, hearing stories from his older friends or from his parents provided him with an opportunity to form expectations and gain information based on lived experiences from a trusted source.

> Most of my expectations were based on my older brother, who's just graduated this winter. And he's got into grad school. My other… like a lot of expectations were from family, like my – I grew up hearing all of my dad's stories about all the friends he made in college and everything, and then obviously like media like movies and stuff like that.

Andie had an additional reliable source of information to build her expectations, a sister who was currently attending the same college that Andie was, which provided specific and firsthand

information for what it is like to be a present-day student at that particular college. Andie noted that even though she had this direct support, she still had struggles adjusting.

> Before I went to campus, I never did like a tour I guess, and so I just had my sister show me around. We went around campus and she just gave me, like, how to get to classes without taking 15 minutes in like shortcuts and stuff. So, I was pretty prepared but still like the first day I got lost.

Other Sources

The other sources of information came from sources that were not from personal connections, but instead via the internet and the entertainment industry, which many students viewed as trusted sources. Marissa mentioned that she received some hints and questions from movies as a framework for her college expectations.

> You know the movies. I was like people are just going to be having fun and partying all the time, not – I mean – I'm just saying that's what I thought.

While other participants also mentioned movies and the media as a source of information for framing their expectations, two participants mentioned social media as an additional non-personal source. Andie specifically mentioned how social media influenced her perception of her own abilities to make social connections and friendships in college.

> I would make friends as soon as I got there and that like I would get the whole college experience like you see in the movies and like you see on social media. I definitely got the impression off of like social media that college was going to be like a breeze.

Chapter Summary

This chapter serves as a presentation of the findings of this study and describes what participants' expectations and experiences were, where (mis)alignment took place, and how they

interpreted the (mis)alignments experienced during their first semester of college. The mixed method design allowed for a thorough understanding of students' perceptions of their expectation-experience (mis)alignments. The findings reported in this chapter will be the basis for the final chapter of this dissertation, where the significance of the results will be discussed in detail.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine what expectations and experiences first-year college students had about their first semester and how they interpreted both alignments and misalignments between their expectations and experiences. This chapter begins with an overview of the study, including the study's purpose, the data collection, and analysis methodology. This chapter then goes into a discussion of the results of the study, connecting these results to the theoretical frameworks discussed in the first two chapters and highlighting the significant findings and their implications for the field of higher education broadly. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the limitations of the study, recommended applications of this research and its findings to future research, practice, and policy, and concludes with a succinct chapter summary wrapping up this dissertation project.

Overview of the Study

Understanding how and what new students are thinking and hoping to experience as they transition into college versus what they are experiencing as a student can better help university staff and faculty prepare for and support these students in the ways they need to be academically, socially, and personally successful. Five research questions guided this study, which this chapter will discuss and answer:

(R1): What academic, social, personal, and person-environmental expectations do college students hold about their first semester of college?

(R2): What academic, social, personal, and person-environmental fit experiences do college students have during their first semester of college?

(R3): What are the areas in which student expectations and experiences align?

(R4): What dimensions of the college experience are the most disconnected in terms of expectations and experiences?

(R5): How do students interpret any (mis)alignments between expectations and experiences?

This study used an explanatory sequential design, as outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) as the structure for collecting the data for this study. The participants and data collected during the quantitative phase of this study at the start and end of the fall 2019 semester were used to select participants for the follow-up qualitative interviews to provide more data and a better understanding of what (mis)alignments were experienced by the student participants. The quantitative data analysis included collecting descriptive data to examine differences in the means and standard deviations from the delivered pre- and post-survey scores to address the first and second research questions. A paired samples *t*-test analysis was conducted to explore and quantify what (mis)alignments between expectation and experience scores were reported, addressing the third and fourth research questions. The final research question was explored through qualitative interviews using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six steps of Thematic Analysis.

The quantitative results of this study highlight the various ideas and expectations of the college experience that students bring with them when starting college as well as provide a snapshot of the realities of the first semester and provide better insight into where specifically any (mis)alignments in expectations and experiences are occurring. Overall, true alignments of expectations and experiences were rare (only three expectation-experience items aligned), and across all created categories (academic, social, personal, and person-environmental), mean expectation scores (M= 3.15, SD = 0.51) were higher than mean experience scores (M= 2.94, SD= 0.51). Of the subcategories, the paired *t*-test analysis only showed that the academic and

social expectation and experience differences were statistically significant. The question then turned to the directionality of each item within the categories, specifically if was an under or overestimation in expectations. There were 34 items that were found, through a paired *t*-test analysis, to be categorized as not only an overestimation in expectations (determined through a difference of means calculation) but were all statistically significant ($p < .05$). Nine items were found to fall under the underestimation of expectations, but none were statistically significant.

The qualitative findings help to provide more insight into how the students feel about, process, and are impacted by the (mis)alignments of expectations and experiences they reported during their first semester of college. Exploring the fifth research question, the qualitative interviews led me to the creation of six thematic categories: 1) Managing Mindset; 2) "Oh crap, I might need to learn how to study;" 3) Driving Forces: Motivations and Experiences; 4) Academic Engagement Through Content and Connections; 5) Friendship Focused; and 6) Trusted Sources: Shaping College Expectations. Each of the interviewed participants was prompted to talk about the different expectations that they had for college, where they came from, how they changed, and what it meant to them when they noticed or experienced an expectation (mis)alignment during their first semester. These students shared insight into their expectation and experience survey scores and provided rich, qualitative data about the mindset and wellbeing of young adults navigating their first semester of college. The following section will further connect the results of this study to the larger theoretical and research knowledgebase that shaped this research project.

Discussion of the Results of the Study

It was clear from examining the results of this study that students enter college with various expectations (good and bad) of what college is like and how they will fare during this

new chapter of their lives. Students have expectations for themselves (personal, academic, and social goals) that are both short-term (like getting a 4.0 in their first semester) and long-term (like attending graduate school after graduating) and have expectations for what their college can do or provide for them (faculty relationships, campus facilities, access to resources) (Iyeke et al., 2018; Lam & Santos, 2018; Nadelson et al., 2013). The bottom line is that all students are entering into college with their own individual set of expectations, hopes, fears, and goals, and these expectations matter. The following sections connect some of the study's results to the larger expectation literature and research as outlined initially in Chapter Two.

Understanding the Expectation and Experience Scores

While answering the first four research questions (what expectations students have, what experiences college students are reporting, and what are the (mis)alignments of these expectations and experiences), the data collected overwhelmingly indicated that there were (mis)alignments across all sections of the pre- and post-surveys. To make sense and organize all the data collected, I assigned items a numerical score and then placed them into one of the following thematic categories: Academic, Social, Personal, or Person-Environmental. The scores of these related items were combined and averaged to create four category expectation-experience (mis)alignment scores, and an overall expectation and experience score for all participants. As outlined and reported in Chapter Four, I structured the surveys to create a mean score for each item. The Academic and Social category mean expectation and experience difference scores were both the largest and equal (means equaling 0.26) and were also the only two categories that had a significant *($p < .05$)* paired *t*-test results relationship. The bulk of the expectation literature reviewed for the study made mention of these two expectation categories

as major areas where expectations were not always met. Further discussion on these academic and social disconnects will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

Across all categories created, the average mean expectation scores were higher than the reported mean experience scores, with a mean of 3.16 and 2.94 respectively. This aligns with the bulk of the literature that states that most (if not all) students fall victim to what was described as the "Freshman Myth," which is the tendency for new college students to start their college experience from an overly optimistic mindset, especially in terms of both their academic and social transition (Ailes II et al., 2017; Mu & Cole, 2018; Nadelson et al., 2013; Schilling & Schilling, 1999; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Stern, 1966). Though the results of this study indicate that the "Freshman Myth" is present (higher mean category expectation scores across all categories), the findings of my study do not match the student repercussions that are outlined as part of the myth. The myth implies that when college expectations are found to not be accurate, a student may have trouble processing this, impacting their confidence in their decision-making process, goals, and self-belief to be able to successfully navigate college overall (George & Dane, 2016; Garriott et al., 2015; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Stern, 1966). The qualitative interviews provided competing student reactions to this more drastic or stark reaction to the expectation-experience mismatch. The student interviews outlined various challenges and moments of realizations from the students – when what they thought or hoped was not realistic or accurate, instead of collapsing and giving up as the literature warns, these students self-reflected, adapted, and shifted their attitudes.

Change in Mindset and Driving Forces

This ability for students to readjust and adapt their attitudes and thought processes when they realize that their expectations are unreasonable was explored in this study during the

qualitative analysis. Two of the qualitative themes developed out of the interviews were Theme One: Managing Mindset and Theme Three: Driving Forces. Theme One covered the practice of lowering expectations when necessary to avoid disappointment and developing resiliency skills. Theme Three covered ideas such as accepting that college is difficult, that self-reflection leads to self-growth, a focus on future career goals is helpful, that the first semester can be viewed as trial semester, and that when mistakes are made, it is a chance to try harder and do better next time. The creation of these themes emphasized a shared way of thinking that all interviewed students mentioned in our interviews – things do not always work out and that is okay. Students expressed that mistakes and roadblocks happen, especially in the first semester of college, and that these problems should not become overwhelming and destructive long-term, but should be seen and processed as valuable learning opportunities to do better in the future. These college students were building their expectations largely from what were essentially guesses, and they were, through trial and error, filling in the gaps to make informed decisions to set more realistic goals and expectations. This directly contradicts the more severe consequences outlined in the "Freshman Myth" and in the bulk of the expectation literature, and shines a new light onto the adaptability, strength, and resiliency in the face of challenges of the students in this study.

Included in this study's literature review, Keup's (2007) qualitative study was the only article I came across that hinted at the idea that students can bounce back when faced with unrealistic expectations. This dissenting viewpoint was echoed again and again in the student interviews where students managed to both adapt and learn from these mistakes to know how to deal with them in the future or to shift their thought process to avoid the disconnect altogether. The mindset of the interviewed participants matches those attributes of the Gen Z students outlined in the research, which describes them as hardworking, adaptable, motivated, and willing

to put in the effort to learn in new ways and on their own when necessary (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018; Rickes, 2016; Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

Magical Thinking and (Mis)Alignments

Not surprising, the results of this study highlighted that all of the student participants had various unrealistic expectations about their college experience, which echoes much of what is found in the current expectation research and literature – students were likely to fall victim to having higher expectations about their first semester of college than they reported having or experiencing at the end of their first semester. In the literature, this overestimation of expectations falls under the concept of magical thinking, which is a psychological concept that explains why people tend to overestimate their expectations. The concept is rooted in the idea that the more effort, energy, or want for a particular outcome to occur that an individual has, the more likely that outcome will come to fruition (Dunning et al., 2003; Johnson, 2018; Piaget, 1929, 1971; Subbotsky, 2014; Vroom & Jago, 1978; Wargo, 2012). In this study, 34 paired items from pre- and post-surveys were found to have a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in mean scores (determined through the paired *t*-test) that all fell under the classification of being an overestimated expectation item. Of those 34 items, 13 related to academic expectations (the creation of academic products and relationships with faculty members), 12 related to social expectations (interacting with others and getting involved on campus), five related to personal expectations (setting personal goals and being open to personal growth), and four related to person-environmental expectations (utilizing campus spaces and attending community events). Andie provided a quote that I believe highlights what many of my participants were thinking and helps validate why social and academic expectations are so important to new students:

> A successful college student isn't just someone that maintains like a good academic standing, but someone who finds themselves in the midst of that, so like finding your perfect study habits, finding like just who you are as a person...When you get into college, there's all of these opportunities to just like, let yourself find yourself basically, and so, I think like successful is when you are able to meet both academic and finding yourself.

This quote helps to validate the study's quantitative results indicating that social and academic expectations and experiences are the most impactful and significant aspects in new students' college transition and experience, and it sheds further light onto why (mis)alignments in these areas are so impactful on their experience overall. The following sections outline the social and academic (mis)alignments results of this study as it relates to the current literature and research on student expectations.

Social (Mis)alignments

The students' largest social (mis)alignments centered primarily on building relationships with friends and managing their evolving relationships with their families.

Making Friends and Building Connections. From the surveys, students indicated that they had the expectation of meeting and making a large variety of friends during their first semester of college. However, as the surveys and later the interviews have illuminated, the actual experience of making friends did not fully meet their expectations. Across all questions related to making friends, students' expectations were higher than their reported experiences. That's not to say that they didn't make friends, but either the ease of making friends, the type of friends they made, or the number of friends they made did not meet their expectations. Inherent in how the survey questions were written was the assumption that they would make friends, and I was

interested in what types of friends they thought they would make. Interestingly enough, students expected that they would make friends who came from different and diverse backgrounds. The most statistically significant overestimation students made regarding friends focused on those whose 1) interests ($t(51) = 2.497$, $p = .016$, $d = .41$), 2) family background (economic, social) ($t(51) = 2.827$, $p = .007$, $d = .35$), or 3) race or ethnic background ($t(51) = 3.753$, $p < .001$, $d = .61$) differed from their own. Those were the areas where they least met their expectations for diversifying the types of individuals in their friend groups.

Although the surveys focused on the types of friends that students were anticipating making and the diversity of those relationships under the assumption that many of the students have come from homogenous hometowns or high schools, when it came to the interviews, students expressed more concerns about making friends in general, and none of the participants mentioned diversifying their social circles. They had struggles with making friends on a base level, even with students who looked like them or even lived with them. One of the qualitative themes developed out of the interviews was Theme Five: Friendship Focused. This theme covered the need to find balance between social and academic requirements, the feeling of being disconnected to their home support system, using college as a time to create a fresh start, and the idea that stepping out of one's comfort zone socially pays off. The literature review on this topic covered the importance that students place on making friends and creating a support system of peers that reflect their interests and values (Ailes II et al., 2017; Higgins et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2005; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Samura, 2015). Being in a new environment meant that they were free to meet and grow with different types of people, and taking the time to rebuild their friend group also gave these students the opportunity to re-brand themselves socially if that was something that they wanted.

In both the literature and from the findings of this study, friend groups were coveted because they helped students with a range of personal, social, and academic needs, including helping with homesickness, having someone to eat meals with, having a group to go to campus and community events with, and even having peers to share new and sometimes riskier experiences with (like going to parties, drinking, traveling, and dating) (Keup, 2007; Samura, 2015). A majority of the participants during their interviews mentioned feeling uncomfortable stepping out of their comfort zones to try new things and meet new people but felt safer and more encouraged to do so with the help of a friend or group of friends. These students reported feeling very happy that they had been pushed to try new things, saying the social and personal benefits greatly outweighed any anxieties and discomfort that they were feeling while trying to make friends in school.

An area of connection between the results of this study and the expectation literature was the high level of emphasis (importance and urgency) that students placed on making friends (Samura, 2015). Where some studies indicated that students thought it would be easy to make friends (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005), others indicated that students were concerned that making friends would be difficult and take a lot of effort (Krallman & Holcomb, 1997). The students interviewed for this study were split in their reported experiences in making friends, with some of them easily making connections and friends with others (some by getting involved in Greek Life) while others had a lot of trouble – noting that they did not know the best way to go about doing that easily.

The literature also indicates that students have high expectations connected to the relationship built with their roommates, whom they rely on to have shared social experiences with and lean on to support them through their academic and personal struggles (Ailes II et al.,

2017; Miller et al., 2005; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). In the interviews, the participants noted that they shared these high roommate relationship expectations. Two of the six participants talked extensively about not having the best relationship with their roommate (one was never in the room, and the other did not get along with their peer) and this was a source of stress and disappointment. The other participants had built a supportive relationship with their roommates, mentioning specifically how they supported each other academically, acting as study and accountability partners by providing gentle reminders to take time to study and complete assignments.

Changing Family Dynamics. Unfortunately, the survey did not include questions exploring the relationship that new students had with their families and old support systems back home, though the surveys did indicate that they had a non-significant overestimation of expectations to talk to their friends and families about what they learned in class ($t(51) = 0.256$, $p = .799$, $d = .04$). The interviews, however, provided more opportunities to explore their relationships with their support systems (friends and family) back home. As students begin to build their new support systems, made up of their friends and peers while on campus, they experience changes in their foundational support systems, namely their families and childhood friends from home. The expectation research points to a student's family as a trusted source from whom advice is used to form their college expectations. One of the qualitative themes developed out of the interviews for this study was Theme Six: Trusted Sources – Shaping College Expectations. This theme covered how expectations are shaped from things like social media/movies, from trusted personal sources (namely family members), and from their friends' experiences. This theme aligned closely with the expectation literature, which outlined the variety of personal and external sources from which students pull information from while

creating their college expectations, including parents, siblings, older friends, the media, and the entertainment industry (Ailes II et al., 2017; Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014; Olso, 1996, Smith & Werlieb, 2005).

The research outlines how parents are often a trusted source for the development of expectations, particularly from those parents who went to college themselves (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). The experiences and stories shared by those family members helped to provide critical insight and fill missing gaps that help students in planning out their college expectations. Some obvious issues can arise despite the parents' best intentions, as what it means to be successful in college has more than likely changed since their parents attended, thus turning their help and advice into mythic stories that are less useful than purported (Miller et al., 2005; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Wells & Lynch, 2012). Multiple participants in this study said that for the most part they found the advice given to them by their parents helpful, and they were able to use that as a foundation or a template, rather than using it as specific directions on how to navigate college. In at least one case, a participant talked about their parent being an ongoing source of support whom they turned to for advice when they were struggling. This participant was struggling with meeting peers and building a support network on campus, so she returned to a trusted source – her mother – to talk through the difficulties she was having and find out what she should do next. This ultimately ended up being good advice for her, and she applied it and achieved positive results. The literature discusses how students become more and more reliant on their peer network for support, namely those they have built around them on campus (Ailes II et al., 2017; Crisp et al., 2009; Keup, 2007; Miller et al., 2005; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Samura, 2015). And for the most part, my participants talked about their parents as a resource for building their campus expectations beforehand, not as an ongoing source of primary advice throughout the

semester. When they mentioned their support groups, they talked almost exclusively about support in terms of the friends they had made on campus, which is interesting because these peers are no more knowledgeable than the students themselves are, meaning they are turning to these individuals less for advice and more for validation that they are not alone in their experiences.

A few students in the study had siblings who were attending the university, and they were able to provide the new students with advice on a more realistic spectrum since they were currently living life as a college student, mirroring some of the research that talked about the benefits of using siblings as sources for advice and expectation formation (Miller et al., 2005; Samura, 2015). Having a sibling on campus is a unique opportunity because they are like a peer and they are a member of their old system of support, so they can serve as a bridge between these worlds. One student talked about a sibling physically walking them around campus and giving them small-picture day-to-day advice that was more tangible for living and learning on campus, whereas the parents offered more big-picture, general advice on things like getting involved and studying.

As much as they valued their family's support and advice, many participants noted that they were very excited to have independence and autonomy over their actions and decisions, free from their parents and their old friend groups. Students using their time in college for self-discovery was a repeated theme in the literature, and it focused on the ability of students to utilize their newfound freedoms as young adults in college who, for many, are free for the first time in their lives to make their own decisions regarding things like personal care (like choosing when to sleep), time management, social relationships, and academic preparation (choosing how and when to study or prepare for their classes) (Keup, 2007; Krallman & Holcomb, 1997;

Samura, 2015). Although my participants appreciated the advice and support from their families, many of the students were excited to have the opportunity to be separated from their families and venture out on their own. Looking to challenge themselves and grow, they felt that they needed to be away from home and free to make choices for themselves to really flex their independence. Some mentioned that they had chosen to enroll in the school because it was far from home and they would be forced to have to figure things out for themselves.

While some of the participants mentioned making intentional disconnections from their families and their childhood support systems in an effort to grow, others reported having fallouts, particularly with their friends, prior to coming to college. Although they did not go into detail about the cause of that, a few mentioned that they felt like they had permanent losses, which made them feel uneasy as they started college since they had not made new friends in college yet and they had lost their friends from back home. Feeling like they had lost friends back home and not having new friends yet is a possible driving force behind why students put such an emphasis on new social connections. Even if they have not lost friends from back home, new social connections allow them to have the opportunity to choose from among their connections for support. The pre- and post-surveys for the study asked specifically about building relationships with people who were different from what they were used to, or finding people with shared values, and the majority of respondents said that both were a priority for them coming into college. It appears they are looking to play the field in a sense, or feel out what kind of friends they can bring into their lives, which is likely different than back home where they could have had friends of convenience instead of friends of choice due to limited friendship pools.

Finally, because of its existence in the literature, it is warranted to include a note on the impact and influence of the media and entertainment industry on the formation of expectations as

a source that is trusted. In the literature, particularly in the case of movies, the college experience is presented in ways that overexaggerate certain aspects of the college experience, heavily focusing on the social aspects and often vilifying or ignoring completely the academic side of the college experience and those who oversee it like deans and faculty members (Ailes II et al., 2017; Krieg, 2013; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Nuñez, 2018; Reynolds, 2014; Singer, 2003; Sorkhabi & Strage, 2016; Snow, 2017; Stern, 1966; Thompson, 2007; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Wasylkiw & Currie, 2011; Wright, 2013). Two participants mentioned movies and the media as a source of information in their interviews. However, it was my perception that they were consuming those films as satire and entertainment, not as a legitimate source of information to base their expectation formation process on. What was more interesting was that two other participants mentioned social media as an additional source of information that they were paying attention to. Andie specifically mentioned how social media influenced her perception of her abilities to make social connections and friendships in college – it made it look easy, and she ultimately found that was not the case. I believe that there is a slight disconnect between the findings of the study and the literature base because the current students (Gen Z), as consumers of information, use the internet and social media platforms to communicate, learn, and inform their decisions on a more consistent basis than any other generation (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018; Levin & Wadmany, 2006; Rickes, 2016). While it is true that social media is used often as entertainment, it is also true that young adults and students are learning from it (whether the information is accurate or not) and there is no rule that information has to be both entertaining and accurate. It would be a fair assumption that because this generation is comfortable documenting and uploading a lot of their personal daily experiences as content, they are talking about various aspects of college life and that those watching are using those clips and posts to

build their expectations consciously and subconsciously. I would argue that watching 50 15-second clips on a platform like TikTok from different students talking about making friends in college would have more of an impact than a movie or TV show mentioning that as a plot point.

Academic (Mis)alignments

Whereas social expectations might hold more initial priority value to new students starting college, academic expectations are, if not equally as important, a practical reality that must be addressed by all students. The results and findings of this study indicated that the largest academic expectation (mis)alignments that students reported were related to their confidence in their academic skillset to be successful and underestimating the complexity of the college academic system.

Enhancing Study and Academic Skills. One of the qualitative themes developed out of the interviews was Theme Two: "Oh crap, I might need to learn how to study." This theme was rooted in the idea that high school did not properly prepare the students academically for the rigorous academic requirements of college. The majority of those interviewed talked about having poor study skills and not expecting the academic intensity of their coursework nor the effort required to perform to the level that they hoped. The literature review on this topic heavily focuses on new students' fixation on the endgame of their college experience, graduation, and underestimating and overlooking the steps needed to get to that achievement like learning how to study, take notes, and complete class assignments (Cerdeira et al., 2018; Krallman & Holcomb, 1997; Keup, 2007; Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2007).

Mirroring the literature that indicates a student's focus on future goals, the post-survey (completed at the end of their first semester) asked students to reflect about how what they have learned and experienced thus far in college will help them with their future goals and careers,

with most indicating only some growth and benefit in this goal (*M* = 2.34, *SD* = 0.86 on a scale from one being very little gains and four being significant gains). A mirroring questions that was asked on both the pre- and post-survey regarding a student's perception that at their institution, there was an expected emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competency had a mean score of 6.68 (one being a weak emphasis and seven a strong emphasis) (*SD* =1.38), when in reality they reported a lower experience score mean of 5.48 (*SD* =1.58). This indicates that for many students, there is an overestimation of expectations that they will begin to build skills and knowledge that will assist in their future careers, yet for many this does not occur to the degree they expected, or at least not at this point in their college careers. The students may also have a disconnect in what they say they want as far as future career skill-building and preparation, and what they actually set out to achieve and make happen through their own initiative.

Sumra's (2015) article mentions how overconfidence is a major issue for many students because they start college thinking that the habits, efforts, and strategies that they used in high school for classwork and studying will be sufficient for their college coursework – this is particularly true for those students who reported that high school was easy or who had to put little effort into their coursework to be successful and for those who had taken Advance Placement (AP) in high school and who believed these classes were equivalent in difficulty to what they would have to work through while in college (Bryan et al., 2018; Rickes, 2016).

Students run into trouble because they have shaped their expectations from their study habits and course preparation ideas from high school and have not (or were unable) to factor in the additional levels of complexity and difficulties that they will have to balance as a college student, like building their own class schedules, balancing additional factors on their time (like

jobs and social involvements), and the amount and type of help and instruction they will receive from their faculty (Crisp et al., 2009; Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018; Krallman & Holcomb, 1997; Levin & Wadmany, 2006; Samura, 2015; Voss et al., 2007). Four of the six participants of the study mentioned explicitly in their interviews that they did not believe that their high school experience set them up to succeed academically in college, contrasting to a statistic reported in Krallman and Holcomb's study (1997) that showed that 88% of the student participants believed that their reading skills and strategies they developed in high school would be sufficient for their college classes. Andie and Bethany noted in particular that they did not know how to study efficiently for their classes because in high school they just had to memorize facts, but they found that their coursework required more critical thinking. This is an important point because most major-specific courses (especially third- and fourth-year classes that have prerequisites for enrollment) rely on students not only having a base knowledge of the subject, but knowledge about how to understand new research, and how branches of that field overlap, intersect, contrast, and strengthen a student's overall mastery of that subject. Far exceeding simple memorization of definitions and facts, college students are expected to be learning how to think critically and effectively to understand complex theories and to be able to combine information into new thoughts.

The Grade Point Average (GPA) results from the surveys provided a more standardized indicator of the student's academic ability, resulting in overall higher expectation mean score (M = 3.31, SD = 0.51) than reported experience mean score (M = 3.09 SD = 0.68). From the surveys, 97% of students believed they would make either As or Bs, with 20% reporting actually earning a C average for their first semester. Interestingly enough, despite students believing they were prepared academically to do well in college, the survey results indicated that students came into

college with the following academic (mis)alignments related to academic activities: 1) expecting that they would utilize academic resources on campus to enhance their academic performance and skills (*M* = 2.38, *SD* = 0.97) more than they reported at the end of their first semester (M =1.67, *SD* = 0.92); and 2) students reported expecting they would need to create summaries of their notes and study guides more (*M* = 3.17, *SD* =0.82) than they reported doing at the end of their first semester (*M* = 3.09, *SD* = 0.79). Combining these data points with their reported academic performance (via GPA scores) would indicate that students expected that if they put in more effort and utilized campus resources that they would have good grades. Whether or not that is an accurate assumption for the students to make is unclear, because, in reality, fewer students reported taking those steps and more students reported grades of Bs and Cs, grades that were lower than expected.

Academic Engagement. One of the qualitative themes developed out of the interviews was Theme Four: Academic Engagement Through Content and Connections. This theme covered the benefits of building faculty relationships, engaging in class content and discussions, and exploring academic interests. The literature review on this topic covered a range of students' perceptions of academic expectations and underestimating the overall complexities of the college academic system that exist beyond developing study skills and going to class. This literature base covered student academic expectations toward 1) the value and relevancy of their classes to their major, their interests, and goals, and 2) developing meaningful or helpful relationships with their faculty.

Students reported expecting timely and specific feedback on assignments and drafts, to gain personal skills to make them better students (like time management and critical thinking), and that their faculty would work to provide opportunities for them to practically connect what

they were learning in class to career-building opportunities (like internships) (Brinkworth et al., 2008; Crisp et al., 2009; Krallman & Holcomb, 1997; Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Finally, the conclusions made in Brinkworth et al.'s 2008 study indicate that despite the inaccurate academic expectations that students enter college with, institutional staff and faculty do have the ability to effectively correct or shape these expectations, but it is a process that takes dedicated time and effort to achieve.

The quantitative results of this study (though not statistically significant) indicated that students held the following (mis)alignments: 1) higher expectations for finding relevancy in their class subjects to their interests and long-term goals (M = 6.65, SD = 1.46) than they reported experiencing (M = 5.09, SD = 1.63), 2) higher expectations that their faculty would provide feedback on their class performance (M = 2.30, SD = 0.95) than they reported experiencing (M = 2.18, SD = 0.77), and 3) an alignment of expectations (M = 5.29, SD = 1.32) and experiences (M = 5.29, SD = 1.42) in the overall relationship built with their instructors. A final post-survey only question asked students if they found that they ended up working harder than they thought they would to meet the instructor's academic expectations and standards, and over half (54%) indicated that they often or always worked harder than expected to meet the expectations of their instructors (M = 2.60, SD = 1.00). In the student interviews, some of the participants mentioned having trouble feeling intimidated by the college academic experience, due to both the physical space in which their class was set (namely the large auditoriums with over 100 classmates made it difficult to connect with their peers and their instructors) and from a perception that some of their faculty were unapproachable because they appeared too busy to have the time to provide help. On a more positive note, four of the six participants mentioned that they had overall positive interactions with their faculty, and that they felt comfortable asking for help (though not

always in class, but also after via email or at office hours) and asking for advice for how they can get internships in the future.

Both the data from the surveys and the interviews provide an important perspective for those working with and teaching this population of students. Often new students are enrolled in introductory courses that are set in large classrooms or auditoriums out of necessity by the university to get them into foundational and elective courses. Though this trend seems unavoidable, as there are only so many rooms and instructors to accommodate these students, extra care should be made to break down perceptions that faculty are unapproachable as early as possible in the semester, and that students know that faculty (as well as other campus academic resources) are available and should be utilized early and often to avoid long-term academic performance issues. The literature and the student responses to this study also highlight the expectation and need for feedback on academic progress and performance throughout the semester. This is even more important for first-year college students who, as the literature base and the results of this study show, are starting their college careers with unrealistic academic expectations rooted in an overestimation in the transferability of their academic strategies used in high school and an unfamiliarity with the complexities of various academic-related factors – like developing strong study skills, knowing how to utilize campus resources, and feeling comfortable building personal and professional relationships with faculty members. These factors also make a difference in the students' ability to be successful and reach their goals of graduation.

Theoretical Framework Connections

Chapter One included an in-depth description and overview of the two theoretical frameworks that I chose for this study, Expectancy-Value Theory and Ecological Systems

Theory. How the expectation and experience results of the study fit into these models will be considered in the following sections.

Expectancy-Value Theory

Vroom's Expectancy-Value Theory (1978) helped to create a formula to predict how motivated a student would be to push themselves to learn and achieve academically. The motivation formula was made of three parts: Motivation = Valence (the value or importance of the learning outcome) x Expectancy (the quality of expected outcome based on the effort applied) x Instrumentality (the belief that through effort, the desired outcome is achievable) (Vroom & Jago, 1978). Though somewhat dependent on a student's ability to accurately measure their Expectancy (how good their effort truly was), Vroom's model operates under the assumption that the appropriate level of effort and skill from the student is being applied to their learning goals (Dunning et al., 2003; Piaget, 1929; Vroom & Jago, 1978; Wargo, 2012). Student motivation impacts various aspects of the student experience, including shifting their attitudes on developing study habits and learning new content, their ability to set long-term goals (like career aspirations), and helping them understand the importance of building and maintaining relationships with faculty who can provide critical personal, social, and academic support during their college journey and beyond (Griffin et al., 2014; Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). This theory also has wider applications, as the motivational formula for learning can apply to learning not only in the classroom, but also apply to the development of skills, such as building relationships, learning how to network and get involved on campus, thinking critically, and learning new abilities (like how to study or manage time more effectively).

During the qualitative interviews, some of the students mentioned that career aspirations were driving factors for them to try hard and do well in their courses. Other students mentioned

that they learned a lot from their perceived failures (like having trouble meeting friends or not feeling like their study skills are up to par) and instead of letting those moments derail or detour them, they instead used that information to better themselves and make better decisions in the future to avoid those mistakes again (they learned to step out of their comfort zones to meet more people, and learned how to leverage their relationships with their faculty to develop better academic skills).

This is important because it shows a resiliency in the participation group and in this generation of college students that, despite what the literature indicates, shows that instead of feeling defeated and jeopardizing their future confidence in themselves to be able to accomplish the task of reaching graduation, they can grow, adapt, and always try again. This shows development and growth in their resiliency skills, which is advantageous to their overall college experience, and it appears that for some, this process and skill development begins as early as their first semester of college. Problems are naturally and unavoidably going to occur throughout their lives as well as during college, so building skills and driving forces that are rooted in motivated failures are ultimately life lessons that will guide future expectations and decision-making processes.

Ecological Systems Theory

The second theoretical framework used for this study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model, which proposes that human development is the result of an environment of continuous interaction with other people (friends, family, community) and diverse ideas (social, political, religious, ethnic) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993, 1994). This model connects with the concept of institutional fit, which emphasizes the important impact that the physical environment on campus (classrooms, residence halls, and library), the student services available, campus

community, and institutional values have on students' daily experiences and overall satisfaction with their college selection (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Spady, 1970; Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001).

This theoretical lens connected with the results of this study because both the quantitative and qualitative results showed that students entered college with various expectations about what sort of environment they would be living, working, and growing in. The participants held higher expectations about things like making friends, building a bond with their roommates, and interacting with faculty members than they reported experiencing, but that did not mean that they were dissatisfied with their first semester of college. Bronfenbrenner's model of development relies on the fact that individuals are constantly growing, learning, and getting challenged by their surroundings, and in that regard, I believe that this was accomplished. As the results of this study show, it was not always necessary for all experiences to be positive or to work out (align) in the way they had envisioned because, regardless of the initial outcome, they had to develop skills to cope with, learn from, and adapt their thought processes. I believe that these resiliency skills are a byproduct of being engaged with the campus and community as a student and might be one of the most important learning outcomes or takeaways that new students can have to thrive in, though, and beyond this collegiate experience.

Study Limitations

Though it is still my belief that utilizing a mixed-method study design created the strongest foundation to explore the research questions of the study, there remains some limitations of the study that need to be discussed.

Sample Limitations

Firstly, the participant pool in which students were selected from for this study came from a single, large, public research university with very high research activity, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to all first-year students and other institution types (two-year, technical, professional, and small- and mid-sized institutions). The sample was purposefully restricted to students who fell under traditional first-year student definitions (first-time, full-time students who enroll into college right after high school) who were (for the practicality of this study) also enrolled in a first-year student success seminar, which not all first-year students are required to enroll in depending on their college affiliation (no business, architecture, or engineering majors were included in the possible participant pool for this reason).

Secondly, the sample for this study also lacked in a few areas of participant diversity, namely gender (nearly 80% of the respondents were female) and student residency status (nearly 70% of the respondents were in-state students when the general population of students for the institution was closer to 50-50 in-state to out-of-state.)

Data Collection Limitations

The data for this study were collected over one semester for Phase One's pre- and post-surveys. Collecting data over this extended period runs the risk of the study having issues with participant attrition. This attrition risk was further compounded because of the need to wait until the next semester to reach out to participants to invite them to participate in the qualitative interviews. I did not want to add stress or an additional time restraint by asking first-year, first-semester college students to have to participate in interviews while also studying for and taking their first college finals. I therefore waited to contact them in a new year and term (spring 2020), which meant that their reactions to any reported (mis)alignments of expectations and experiences

were less fresh (or possibly relevant) on their minds, which could have impacted their interview answers (Polit & Beck, 2014).

Though this study utilized well-established (both in validity and reliability) instruments for the quantitative portion of data collection (the CSEQ and CSXQ), the scope of this study focused on only a single semester, whereas these instruments are usually utilized over the course of an entire academic year (Gonyea et al., 2003; Pace & Kuh, 1998, 1999). Though there was nothing found in the literature review for this study to indicate that there would have been any major pre- and post-survey score differences (between examining expectation and experience scores) over a single semester versus a year, it should be noted that with more time to reflect about their experiences and time to implement new learned skills from their first semester of college, students might have had slightly different experience scores.

Finally, this study was undoubtably, if not directly, impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants surveyed for this study had a “normal” first semester during the fall 2019 term, so the collected data during that time should not have been impacted, but the interviews and qualitative data collected from the participating students for this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic after the institution had already gone fully remote. It should be noted that this shift to learning remotely meant that student interviews had to be conducted remotely utilizing video conferencing, which was not the original plan (although the intent was always to record the interviews). Despite the physical distance and the reliance on technology to facilitate the interviews, I believe that this method was the best option amid a difficult situation and that the data collected is still meaningful and addresses the research questions that I set out to explore. Though this study did not specifically ask questions about their COVID-19 related

experiences (only about their fall 2019 semester experiences), the impact of the pandemic on their college experience and wellbeing at that point should be taken into consideration.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a few recommendations that I would suggest for future research into better understanding student expectations. To address some of the outlined limitations from the previous sections, I would recommend conducting studies that help to address some of the demographic shortcomings that befell this study, such as actively trying to balance the participants more by gender and residency status, including students from all majors, and various institutional types. Expanding the data collection to specific student populations that are not considered traditional first-year students – such as veterans, transfer students from non-residential community colleges, and international students – could produce data that could be very helpful for staff who work with or advocate for those nontraditional students who may have their own unique expectations and needs.

An interesting additional set of data to collect in addition to what this study collected would be to include personality types and some sort of instrument that measures how individuals make decisions. For example, factoring in how a more analytical-leaning student versus a creative-leaning individual makes decisions might help show how different expectations are created and the value that individuals of different personality types place on those expectations.

Future researchers should also look to collect expectation data from earlier points in the transition process. This study collected expectations scores during the first few weeks of the student's first semester, but an earlier summer data collection period (perhaps sent out before or after the students attend new student orientation) could provide expectation scores that are fully without any lived experience being on campus. An additional step would be to create some sort

of program or resource that new students would get when they move in (created by the university) that would aim to fill in gaps or more realistically align student expectations to reality to preemptively address any negative experience associated with reported (mis)alignments.

As more of this current student population (Gen Z) are using and engaging with one another on social media platforms, an interesting research project could look at the various experiences being shared from current college students and measuring how an incoming student interprets these posts or videos in terms of their expectation formation process. Because most young adults are using these platforms on a regular basis, it would be interesting to see how they are processing and internalizing the messaging of these videos.

Finally, although the quantitative surveys of this study provided clear data on what expectations and experiences students had and whether those (mis)alignments occurred and were significant, the qualitative interviews opened a lot of opportunities to explore how the students felt about their (mis)alignments. Future qualitative studies could explore how decisions change over time and are impacted by lived experience by scheduling multiple interviews during the students' first semester to follow up on the specific problems and changes they are experiencing in real time. Future quantitative studies could include items that explore how students feel about various subject matters, including the importance and ease of making friendships, the value of developing academic skills that help them to manage and excel in their classes, the importance of academic exploration and developing relationships with faculty and staff, and about the difficulty and importance of being away from their home support network (such as family). Although it is important to collect data that explains what expectations and experiences students have during their first semester or year, it is also useful to contextualize these thoughts and experiences in terms of their value to the student and their overall satisfaction and development.

Recommendations for Application: Practice and Policy

In this section, recommendations will be presented for the application of this study's results into practice and policy for working with, better understanding, and shaping the expectations of college students. Specific practical and application recommendations for university faculty, staff, and administration will be provided, stemming from the data collected from this study. Finally, four thematic or big-picture recommendations will be discussed which address the larger context of the student expectation and experience (mis)alignment.

Supporting and retaining first-year students is a very important goal for institutions for various financial (students provide a revenue through their tuition and fees), political (state legislatures often connect state funding to things like first-year retention rates), and prestige (statistics like acceptance, retention, and graduation rates help with national college rankings) reasons (Burrell, 2019). When university staff and faculty better understand how, where, and what students expect (both in what they need, like learning to study more effectively, or what they want, like having nice residence halls and coffee shops to study and meet friends while out on campus), they can better plan how to best serve and support their students. This study focused on students during their first semester of college, and it was clear from looking at the survey data and interviews that despite the wide variety of hopes, difficulties, and successes that the participants reported, students did not view their college experiences in terms of silos of different areas, but rather viewed their transitions as a connected overall experience. Institutions of higher education are set up and operated within different siloed functional areas, (academics, student affairs, administration, etc.) and each have their own touch points with students and separate priorities. From the student perspective, those areas overlap and are all mixed, thus a good or bad experience in any facet of their life as a student can impact their overall college experience. This

means that all members and units of a university have to be invested in the holistic student experience and need to work collaboratively to promote unified messages and student services that can help students create reasonable expectations and build life skills that will allow them to successfully navigate their academic, social, personal, and environmental experiences.

Practical Application Recommendations

The following are my specific practical and application recommendations for university faculty, staff, and campus administration.

Faculty

Based on my findings and analysis, faculty should consider the following:

- During the interviews, a common experience that every student reported was a moment of realization where they decided that they needed to reevaluate their academic priorities and develop better or more disciplined academic practices (study skills). Although students reported taking notes in class at the level that they expected, they reported having problems using them effectively to adequately prepare for their classes and exams. Faculty members (especially those teaching introductory courses to new students in the fall semester) could support their students by taking time at the beginning of the semester to provide examples and best practices for not only taking good notes, but also how to use those notes to better comprehend the material and prepare for assignments and exams;
- Students reported that the type of assignments (academic products) they expected to complete for their college courses were not matching their experiences — this was particularly true when it came to writing essays and being assigned group work. In a paradoxical turn of events, students were expecting for their classes to be easier (overall)

while expecting to have to write more papers, but what they reported was that they found the classes harder and did not produce as many written assignments as they thought they would. The difficulties that students reported came not from work itself, but rather their inability to navigate it to the level they expected or wanted — this is mostly related to their poor study skills and trying to continue to prepare for their courses the way they did in high school. Faculty who are interested in providing a more aligned expectation-experience semester in terms of academic products could easily do so by taking an expectation poll on the first day of class to learn what types, amount, and depth of assignments their students are expecting to have to complete over the semester. With this information, a faculty member could create a more collaborative syllabus with their students to try to balance the workload with their learning objectives as an instructor; and

- Finally, faculty could take a few different steps to build more aligned relationships with their students. While some of the students during their interviews had opportunities to develop personal relationships with their instructors, the general survey data indicated that most students were not building relationships with their instructors. Students reported wanting to spend more one-on-one time with their instructors to receive feedback, get help with assignments, and talk about career goals related to their major. It may not be practical for all instructors to provide individual feedback for each student, so letting students know right from the start how to use office hours (and inviting them to come throughout the semester), providing a timeline for expected grading schedules, and sharing what type of feedback they can expect to get throughout the course could be beneficial. Faculty members should take extra steps with new students to be inviting and genuine in their offers to connect with their students one-on-one because many students

are looking to build that connection but may feel unsure or uncomfortable trying to take that step (particularly later in the semester when they may feel that it is too late to seek help and not take the steps they need to take to reach their academic goals).

Staff

Based on my findings and analysis, staff should consider the following:

- During the interviews, a common struggle students mentioned was that making friends was much more difficult than they expected, and that because this was one of their top priorities (above almost all else for their first semester) they spent a lot of energy, time, and thought on this goal. Staff can assist in this process by developing and advocating for the implementation of a wide variety of student programs that provide students the opportunity to build connections and friendships with other students through a combination of various interest-based programming (to help students build communities based on shared values, interests, and passions), large-scale social mixers (to help students meet a wide-variety of students outside of their major-specific courses, residence halls, and student organizations), culture-specific events (which encourage the skills of empathy through the exploration of other cultures, traditions, and ways of life), and provide opportunities for students to meet others by exposing and inviting them to interact with the community in which their campus is rooted;
- Staff should also place a heavy emphasis on exploring different involvement opportunities on and off campus and learning how to balance their social, personal, and academic responsibilities and interests rather than encouraging them to take on leadership roles in their first semester. Developing leadership skill building programs and encouraging students to seek leadership roles on campus should be a focus in later

semesters (or in their second year) once they have better established their priorities and have a better grasp on how to navigate college; and

- Finally, students reported a lot of different stressors during their college transition (missing home, not making friends, struggling in their classes). Staff should continue to promote a wide range of wellness activities and involvement opportunities for new students. These experiences should cover a wide range of skills and involvements because some students are looking to develop new skills and routines (such as learning how to eat healthy, practice their mindfulness skills, or start working out) while others are looking for experiences to build on skills they already have or are looking to stay active and connect with others who share a passion or interest through experiences such as group fitness classes, club sports, or intramural team competitions.

Campus Administrators

Although students likely do not understand the role and impact that college administrators have, they do see the effects of their efforts. Based on my findings and analysis, administrators should consider the following:

- Despite students not using dedicated spaces of learning (like libraries, study halls, and learning labs) around campus as much as they expected in their first semester of college (according to this study's surveys), campus administrators should continue to conduct periodical assessments to make sure that campus facilities are providing adequate space and are functioning as intended (they provide the services, space, and amenities desired and needed by the students to succeed). The results of the surveys and interviews provided more indications that students were really looking for and aware of the need for spaces around campus that allowed them to focus on their academic needs (for example

spaces for studying, receiving tutoring, computer labs). Highlighting the resources and physical spaces available where students can learn during the admissions and onboarding process ahead of students' first semester can better create a cultural expectation that academics are (or should be) important to students.

- Campus administrators have the unique opportunity to shape and lead the institution by establishing campus priorities, impacting the enrollment size and makeup, and by hiring staff and faculty who expand and promote the institutional values. The results of this study highlight an unmet want of these new students to be a part of a campus culture and climate that is rich with diverse thought, culture, and experiences. Students, as part of their college experience, want to be challenged and enriched by living and learning in this sort of diverse educational context. I would recommend that campus administration continue to support initiatives that actively search for diverse campus community members via student recruitment and through the staff and faculty hiring process. It will be necessary that they apply financial resources to publicly showcase and celebrate these efforts on a regular basis. This will create an authentic learning environment and help to establish and market the campus as a diverse and inclusive learning environment;
- Finally, some students are ready to begin thinking about their educational experience in regard to their long-term professional and personal goals, even from their first semester. It is my recommendation that campus administrators support early career exploration as soon as possible because it can provide a useful framework for both the students who already knows their end goals and for those who are still discovering their future career path.

Thematic Recommendations

The following are four thematic or big-picture recommendations that address the larger context of the student expectation and experience (mis)alignment.

My first thematic recommendation would be to take a step back and find ways to propagate realistic expectations for students before they are even applying to colleges, intervening in the expectation formation processes of junior high and high school students. This could help to both validate the accurate personal anecdotes they are hearing from their family, friends, and society (trusted sources) as well as combat the misinformation that they encounter, allowing them to build a more realistic worldview of what their college experience will be like. So much of the college preparation given to these students is focused on helping them get into college and does nothing to prepare them for actually starting and excelling in college once they are there. This type of intervention could look different depending on the resources of the schools in different states. Any combination of pre-college planning programs that utilize peer-mentors (current college students), college-curated seminars and educational sessions facilitated by high school counselors, and social media campaigns utilizing platforms that are popular among those age groups could all serve as interventions that help to demystify the college experience. Though it may be difficult for a college or university to infiltrate and shape the various factors that impact the expectation formation process for their students, what higher education professionals can focus on are the early intervention steps when new students arrive on campus. Finding ways to personalize the transition into college experience for each student can have immediate effects on the early expectation formation process, and long-lasting retention benefits.

My second recommendation is to find ways to integrate expectations data (and their continued experiences) into a student's records for administrative use and interventions. Developing a tool or survey that enrollment, housing, new student programming offices, and academic advisors can collaboratively use to gauge their students' academic, social, personal, and person-environmental attitudes and expectations early on will help higher education professionals immensely in the development of events, services, and interventions to help guide students through their transition into college. The survey could be shorter and more targeted (specialized) to the institution, but a data report like what I created for my interview participants could be attached to a student's file, where faculty and staff could access that data to help them provide better services and assistance both proactively and when approached for help. Imagine a resident assistant of a floor of new first-year students receiving a report on their students' social, academic, and personal goals (and their progress), which they can reference to provide specific check-ins with students who have expectations that are significantly not realistic, or they can use that information to develop floor-specific programming to educate their floor on how to develop the skills they need (whether they know it or not) to be successful.

The results of this study echo the literature base indicating that students form their college expectations based off what they are told (from trusted sources) and are pieced together from their previous school and social experiences to form a best guess as to what to expect for the majority of their first year of college. The results of this study concur that students do often have high hopes and expectations that are not always met, but that does not mean that this disconnect is completely detrimental to their college experience and social, academic, and personal growth.

The third recommendation that I will make would be to incorporate more resilience skill-building training into first-year programs and services. It might be hard (or impossible) to fully predict the needs of the incoming first-year class, or to provide blanket resources to shape their expectations, since every student will hold unique goals, hopes, and fears for what to expect in college. However, when students are taught that it is not only okay, but normal for them to hit roadblocks, change their priorities, and for things to not always go as they plan, they can mentally prepare for that instead of being blindsided and completely thrown off. If they are taught these skills during their first year or semester of college, proactively, they will be able to maximize their growth potential by reshaping their goals, behaviors, and expectations both broadly and specifically. These goals could be incorporated into first-year seminar style classes, which are a fairly common requirement for first-year students to take during their first year of college.

A final recommendation would be to have a first-year journal or reflection piece program started for all incoming new students. When I had students reflect on their expectation and experience category scores during their interview, most found that process enjoyable and helpful. The reflection process made them stop and recognize both what and how they were thinking about college and recognize that their lived experiences could help them know what to do (or not do) in the future to continue being successful in college. Self-reflection can be a very powerful tool for retention and student satisfaction moving beyond the first year of college, but it is not something that comes naturally or easily to everyone. Incorporating this self-reflection exercise into a student's first semester or even year (tracking important milestones, prompting them to think about their academic interests, and giving them experiential assignments to try new things like joining a student organization) would be a beneficial experience that could be mass executed

across the freshman class, yet still feel like a personalized experience for each student. Although the easiest way to do this would likely be through journaling, other creative avenues could be explored to capture the essence of self-reflection, such as a first-year photo project. Much like a common reading program, a journaling program like this could be tied to a required first-year seminar course, completed through housing (as a requirement of living on campus), or it could be completed through the composition courses that are often taken in students' first year of college.

Chapter Summary

This chapter serves as an overview and final discussion of the results and impact of this research project. The purpose of this study was to examine what expectations and experiences first-year college students had about their first semester and how they interpreted both alignments and misalignments between their expectations and experiences. The mixed method design resulted in a well-rounded collection of scores and qualitative stories from first-year college students that can better help colleges and universities understand what their students' perceptions and needs are in hopes of providing information and services to bridge the expectation-experience (mis)alignment gap.

The results of this study echo the general literature and research base on student expectations – they do matter, they come from a variety of sources, they shape each individual's experience and perception of college in different ways, and students more often than not tend to hold higher expectations than they should. This study highlights that academic and social expectation and experience (mis)alignments are the most significant and crucial areas to support students in during their transition to college. The study also, in refutation of some of the formulaic assumptions of expectation research (disconnect in expectations and experiences

equals a spiraling derailment of the students' wellbeing and ability to succeed as a student), highlights that when students inevitably do find that their expectations fall short in some area of their college experience, this revelation may not be as damaging or long-lasting as feared. The student interviews outlined various challenges and moments when they realized what they thought or hoped was not realistic or accurate, and instead of collapsing and giving up as the literature warns, these students persevered. Generally, these students are more than capable of becoming adaptable and resilient in their response and ability to change, learn, and grow to create thought and decision-making processes more in line with realistic expectations.

Future research on this topic could build off the work of this study by exploring how social media posts and videos are impacting the expectation formation process for a generation that is very comfortable and reliant on these platforms for social interaction and as sources of information. Additional research could look at taking collected data and creating programs and resources that provide information and opportunities for students to develop more realistic expectations. Finally, as the findings and results of this study are considered for practical use and policy, it is recommended that 1) interventions for the expectation-formation processes surrounding college begin at the junior high and high school levels; 2) institutions continue to take steps to understand on an individual level the ever-changing needs and expectations of their students as an integrated part of their retention planning; 3) that campus staff, faculty, and administrators teach and support building resiliency skills because, although it may be hard to predict or control a student's college expectations, it is always possible to help them proactively learn how to manage their goals, behaviors, and expectations to maximize their chances of student success; and 4) institutions implement a first-year reflection project.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

To:	Matthew Gregory Meyers BELL 4188
From:	Douglas James Adams, Chair IRB Committee
Date:	09/12/2019
Action:	**Expedited Approval**
Action Date:	09/12/2019
Protocol #:	1809142932
Study Title:	Exploring First-Year Students' Expectations and Experiences
Expiration Date:	09/02/2020
Last Approval Date:	

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate in Pre-Survey and Follow-Up Reminder Email Template – Fall 2019

Initial Email with link to the Qualtrics pre-survey:

Hello,

You are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation research study, "Exploring First-Year Students' Expectations and Experiences." My name is Matthew Meyers and I serve as an Assistant Director of New Student & Family Programs and R.O.C.K. Camp.

The purpose of my research project is to understand what expectations new college students have about their college experience and to compare that to what they actually experience to find better ways to create support programs for future new students that will help them be successful in college, especially during their transition into their first semester.

You were selected to participate in this study because you are a new student and are enrolled in a 16-week session of the freshman seminar course during your first semester of college. Your First-Year Seminar instructor has allowed me to invite you to participate, and I stopped by your class to discuss this study more in detail as well as talk more about the research process in general.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete two online surveys (one at the start of this semester, and one at the end). Each survey will take approximately 12 – 15 minutes max to complete.

As a bonus for participating, students who complete both surveys during the fall semester will be put into a drawing for one of four $50 Amazon gift cards!

If you are interested in participating, click on the Qualtrics link here or at the bottom of this email: **XXXXX**. If the link does not work, you can copy and paste the URL into your browser. You will be asked to read a consent form and agree before participating in the study. **You will need to complete the first survey by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, September 9, to be counted in this research project.** You will be emailed the second survey link and a reminder before finals at the end of the semester.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact me by email at mgmeyers@uark.edu or by phone at 479-575-5002.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Matthew Meyers, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Program
Assistant Director – New Student & Family Programs

Survey Link: XXXXX

Follow-up Reminder Email with link to the Qualtrics pre-survey:

Hello,

I am emailing you to remind you that you have been invited to participate in my doctoral dissertation research study, "Exploring First-Year Students' Expectations and Experiences."

As a reminder, the purpose of my research project is to understand what expectations new college students have about their college experience and to compare that to what they actually experience to find better ways to create support programs for our future new students that will help them be successful in college, especially during their transition into their first semester.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete two online surveys (one at the start of this semester, and one at the end), each of which will only take about 12 - 15 minutes max to complete.

As a bonus for participating, students who complete both surveys during the fall semester will be put into a drawing for one of four $50 Amazon gift cards!

If you are interested in participating, click on the Qualtrics link here or at the bottom of this email: **XXXXX**. If the link does not work, you can copy and paste the URL into your browser. You will be asked to read a consent form and agree before participating in the study. **You will need to complete the first survey by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, September 9, to be counted in this research project.** You will be emailed the second survey link and a reminder before finals at the end of the semester.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact me by email at mgmeyers@uark.edu or by phone at 479-575-5002.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Matthew Meyers, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Program
Assistant Director – New Student & Family Programs

Survey Link: XXXXX

Appendix C

Invitation to Participate in Post-Survey and Follow-Up Reminder Email Template –

Fall 2019

Initial Email with link to the Qualtrics post-survey:

Hello,

I am emailing you to remind you that you have agreed to participate in my doctoral dissertation research study, "Exploring First-Year Students' Expectations and Experiences."

As you might recall, you participated in the first part of my dissertation research at the beginning of this semester by completing a brief survey, which asked you about what your expectations were for your first semester of college. Now I'd like to follow up with you to see how your semester went!

This short survey will only take about 15 minutes to complete, and by doing so, you'll be in the drawing for **one of four $50 Amazon gift cards** as a token of my gratitude for your time.

Please click on the Qualtrics link here or at the bottom of this email: **XXXXX** to access the survey. If the link does not work, you can copy and paste the URL into your browser. You will be asked to review the survey's consent form and agree to participate again before starting the survey. **You will need to complete this survey by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, December 13 (Dead Day), to be eligible for the gift card drawings.** I will email you next week with a reminder before finals start.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact me by email at mgmeyers@uark.edu or by phone at 479-575-5002.

I hope that your first semester has gone well and I hope to see your survey submissions soon!

Matthew Meyers, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Program
Assistant Director – New Student & Family Programs

Survey Link: XXXXX

Follow-up Reminder Email with link to the Qualtrics post-survey:

Hello,

I am emailing you as a final remind that you have agreed to participate in my doctoral dissertation research study, "Exploring First-Year Students' Expectations and Experiences."

You participated in the first part of my dissertation research at the beginning of this semester, by completing a brief survey that asked you about what your expectations were for your first semester of college. Now I'd like to follow up with you to see how your semester went!

This short survey will only take about 15 minutes to complete, and by doing so, you'll be in the drawing for **one of four $50 Amazon gift cards** as a token of my gratitude for your time.

Please click on the Qualtrics link here or at the bottom of this email: **XXXXX** to access the survey. If the link does not work, you can copy and paste the URL into your browser. You will be asked to review the survey's consent form and agree to participate again before starting the survey. **You will need to complete this survey by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, December 13 (Dead Day), to be eligible for the gift card drawings.** I will email you next week with a reminder before finals start.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact me by email at mgmeyers@uark.edu or by phone at 479-575-5002.

Best of luck with your upcoming finals, and I hope to see your survey submissions soon!

Matthew Meyers, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Program
Assistant Director – New Student & Family Programs

Survey Link: XXXXX

Appendix D

Permission to Use and Adapt the CSXQ and CSEQ for this Study

CSEQ

Item Usage Agreement
College Student Experiences Questionnaire
Assessment Program

The College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program is part of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. The CSEQ Assessment Program is home to the *College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ)* and the *College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ)*. These are copyrighted survey instruments, and the copyrights are owned by The Trustees of Indiana University. Any use of survey items contained within the *CSEQ* or *CSXQ* is prohibited without prior written permission from Indiana University. When fully executed, this Agreement constitutes written permission from the University, on behalf of the CSEQ Assessment Program, for the party named below to use an item or items from the *College Student Experiences Questionnaire* or *College Student Expectations Questionnaire* in accordance with the terms of this Agreement.

In consideration of the mutual promises below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

1) The University hereby grants **Matthew Meyers** ("Licensee") a nonexclusive, worldwide, irrevocable license to use, reproduce, distribute, publicly display and perform, and create derivatives from, in all media now known or hereafter developed, the item(s) listed in the proposal attached as Exhibit A, solely for the purpose of including such item(s) in the survey activity described in Exhibit A, which is incorporated by reference into this Agreement. This license does not include any right to sublicense others. This license only covers the survey instrument, time frame, population, and other terms described in Exhibit A. Any different or repeated use of the item(s) shall require an additional license.

2) In exchange for the license granted in section 1, Licensee agrees:

   a) to provide to the *CSEQ Assessment Program* frequency distributions and means on the licensed item(s);

   b) in all publications or presentations of data obtained through the licensed item(s), to include the following citation: "Items *xx* and *xx* used with permission from the *CSEQ Assessment Program, Indiana University,* Copyright 1998, The Trustees of Indiana University";

   c) to provide to the *CSEQ Assessment Program*, a copy of any derivatives of, or alterations to, the item(s) that Licensee makes for the purpose of Licensee's survey ("modified items"), for the *CSEQ Assessment Program's* own nonprofit, educational purposes, which shall include the use of the modified items in the *CSEQ, CSXQ* or any other survey instruments, reports, or other educational or professional materials that it may develop or use in the future. Licensee hereby grants the University a nonexclusive, worldwide, irrevocable, royalty-free license to use, reproduce, distribute, create derivatives from, and publicly display and perform the modified items, in any media now known or hereafter developed; and

Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research
1900 East Tenth Street • Eigenmann Hall, Suite 419 • Bloomington, IN 47406-7512
Phone: (812) 856-5825 • Fax: (812) 856-5150

d) to provide to the *CSEQ Assessment Program* for its own nonprofit, educational purposes, a copy of all reports, presentations, analyses, or other materials in which the item(s) licensed under this Agreement, or modified items, and any responses to licensed or modified items, are presented, discussed, or analyzed. The *CSEQ Assessment Program* shall not make public any data it obtains under this subsection in a manner that identifies specific institutions or individuals, except with the consent of the Licensee.

The undersigned hereby consent to the terms of this Agreement and confirm that they have all necessary authority to enter into this Agreement.

For The Trustees of Indiana University:

8-30-18

Robert M. Gonyea
Associate Director, Center for Postsecondary Research
Director, CSEQ Assessment Program
Indiana University

Date

For Licensee:

8-30-18

Name: Matthew Meyers
Title: Assistant Director – New Student Programs
Institution: University of Arkansas

Date

Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research
1900 East Tenth Street • Eigenmann Hall, Suite 419 • Bloomington, IN 47406-7512
Phone: (812) 856-5825 • Fax: (812) 856-5150

Appendix E

Pre-Survey: First-Year Expectations (Adapted CSXQ) - Fall 2019

The purpose of this study is to understand what expectations new college students have about their college experience and to compare that to what they actually experience to find better ways to create support programs for future new students that will help them be successful at this institution, especially during their transition into college.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Declining to participate will involve no penalty. You are free to skip any question that you are not comfortable answering. Your responses will be automatically compiled in a spreadsheet and your answers and will be kept confidential. The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only, and will help to provide better programming, communication, and service for our future students.

There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Full participation in this survey should only take about 12 to 15 minutes, and will provide you a space to think critically and plan for your first semester of college and to begin to develop action plans which will set you up for success.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's IRB Coordinator, Ro Windwalker, 109 MLKG Building, 479-575-2208, irb@uark.edu.

You can also contact the researcher Matthew Meyers, M.Ed. (mgmeyers@uark.edu) or his faculty advisor, Dr. Ketevan Mamiseishvili (kmamisei@uark.edu) if you have any additional questions about the study.

Your willingness to participate is very important and very much appreciated. Thank you!

By continuing to the next page of the survey, you are consenting to participate in this study.

College Activities					
During the comnig semester in college, how often do you expect to do the following? Indicate your response selcting a values (Never, Occasionally, Often, Very Often).					
Library and Information Technology	Use the library as a quiet place to read or study.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Use a database (online or in the library) to find material on some topic.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Develop a bibliography or set of references for a term paper or other report.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Use e-mail to communicate with an instructor or classmates.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Participate in class discussions using an electronic medium (e-mail, list-serve, caht group, Blackboard, e	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Experiences with Faculty	Ask your instructor for information related to a course you are taking (grades, make-up work, assignmer	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Relationship with Faculty	Discuss your academic major or course selection with a faculty member.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Discuss ideas for a term paper or other class project with a faculty member.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Discuss your career plans and ambitions with a faculty member.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Socialize with a faculty member outside the classroom (grab lunch, a coffee, etc.)	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Ask your instructor for comments and criticisms about your academic performance.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Work with a faculty member on a research project.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Course Learning	Complete the assigned readings before class.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Academics	Take detailed notes during class.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Contribute to class discussions.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Try to see how different facts and ideas fit together.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Apply material learned in a class to other areas (a job or internship, other courses, relationships with frie	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Summarize major points and information from your readings or class notes.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Use information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in cl	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Prepare a paper or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Working on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Memorize formulas, definitions, technical terms and concepts.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Writing and Reading	Ask other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Refer to a book or manual about writing style, grammar, etc.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Revise a paper or composition two or more times before you are satisfied with it.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Ask an instructor or staff member for advice and help to improve your writing.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Write a major report for a class (20 pages or more).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Campus Facilities	Go to an art exhibit/gallery or a play, dance, or other theater performance with other students, friends, o	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Campus Environment and Facilities	Attend a concert or other music event on or off campus.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Use a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Meet other students somewhere on campus (union, dining hall, etc.) for a discussion.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Attend a lecture or panel discussion.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Attend a cultural or social event on campus or in the community.				
	Use a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Use campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Play a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Follow a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Clubs, Organizations, Service Projects	Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Involvement	Work on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student governmer	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Work on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, communi	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Meet with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Manage or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Student Acquaintances	Make friends or interact with students whose interests are different from yours.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Relationship with Peers	Make friends or interact with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from your	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Make friends or interact with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Have serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different frc	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Have serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Have serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Have serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic identification is very different from yours.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often

Conversations					
In conversations with others at college during the coming semester, how often do you expect to talk about each of the following?Indicate your response selcting a values (Never,					
	Current events in the news.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Different lifestyles, customs, and religions.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	The ideas and views of writers, philosophers, historians.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	The arts (painting, poetry, theatrical productions, dance, symphony, movies, etc.).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Computers and other technologies.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Social and ethical issues related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, geneti	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	The economy (employment, wealth, poverty, debt, trade, etc.).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	International relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.).	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
In these conversations, how often do you expect to do each of the following?					
	Refer to knowledge you acquired in your reading or classes.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Explore different ways of thinking about a topic or issue.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Refer to something one of your instructors said about a topic or issue.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Subsequently read something related to the topic or issue.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Change your opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
	Persuade others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited.	Never	Occasional	Often	Very Often
Reading and Writing					
During the coming semester, about how much reading and writing do you expect to do? Fill in one response for each item listed.					
	Reeding Non-assigned books	None	Fewer than	Between 5 and	Between 11 and
	Reeding Textbooks or assigned books	None	Fewer than	Between 5 and	Between 11 and
	Writing Term papers or other written reports	None	Fewer than	Between 5 and	Between 11 and
	Writing Essay exams for your courses	None	Fewer than	Between 5 and	Between 11 and
Opinion About College					
	How well do you think you will like college?	I won't like it.	I will be more or less neutral about it.	I will like it.	I will be enthusatic about it

The College Environment								
During the coming semester, to what extent do you feel that each of the following will be emphasized at this institution? Indicate the level that best represents your impression on each of								
	Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Strong emphasis) 7**
	Emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Strong emphasis) 7**
	Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Strong emphasis) 7**
	Emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Strong emphasis) 7**
	Emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources)	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Strong emphasis) 7**
	Emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competence	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Strong emphasis) 7**
	Emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Strong emphasis) 7**

The next three ratings refer to relationships among people at this college? To what extent do you feel that each of the following will be								
	Relationships with other students or student groups	**1 (Competative, Uninvolved, Sense of Alienation)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Friendly, Supportive, Sense of Belonging)**
	Relationships with faculty	**1 (Remote, Discouraging, Unsympathetic)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Approchable, Helpful, Understanding, Encouraging)**
	Relationships with administrative personnel and offices	**1 (Rigid, Impersonal, Bound by Regulations)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Helpful, Considerate, Flexible)**

Background Information							
Indicate your response by indicating the answer as it applies to you.							
	Gender	Man	Woman				
	Are you an in-state or out of stae student?	In-state	Out-of-				
	What do you expect your college grade point average to be at the end of this semster?	D (1.9 or	C (2.9-2.0)	B (3.9-3.0)	A (4.0)		
	Did either of your parents graduate from college?	no	yes, both parents	yes, mother only	yes, father only		
	Do you expect to enroll in an advanced degreee wihen, or if, you complete your undergradute degree?	yes	no				
	During the semester in this upcoming semester about how many hours a week do you expect to spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, ect.?	5 or fewer hours a week	6 to 10 hours a week	11 to 15 hours a week	16 to 20 hours a week		
	In this upcoming semester, about how many hours a week do you plan to work for pay in an on-campus job?	1 to 10 hours a week	11 to 20 hours a	21 to 30 hours a week	31 to 40 hours a week		
	In this upcoming semester, about how many hours a week do you plan to work for pay in an off-campus job?	1 to 10 hours a week	11 to 20 hours a	21 to 30 hours a week	31 to 40 hours a week		
	What is your racial or ethnic identificiation (Select all that apply)	American Indian or other Native American	Asian or Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	LatinX	Additional Options (Fill in the Blank)

Appendix F

Post-Survey: First-Year Experiences (Adapted CSEQ) - Fall 2019

The purpose of this study is to understand what expectations new college students have about their college experience and to compare that to what they actually experience to find better ways to create support programs for future new students that will help them be successful at this institution, especially during their transition into college.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Declining to participate will involve no penalty. You are free to skip any question that you are not comfortable answering. Your responses will be automatically compiled in a spreadsheet and your answers and will be kept confidential. The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only, and will help to provide better programming, communication, and service for our future students.

There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Full participation in this survey should only take about 15 minutes, and will provide you a space to critically reflect on your first semester of college which will help in your preparation for the new semester and can help you re-align your priorities and goals while in college.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's IRB Coordinator, Ro Windwalker, 109 MLKG Building, 479-575-2208, irb@uark.edu.

You can also contact the researcher Matthew Meyers, M.Ed. (mgmeyers@uark.edu) or his faculty advisor, Dr. Ketevan Mamiseishvili (kmamisei@uark.edu) if you have any additional questions about the study.

Your willingness to participate is very important and very much appreciated. Thank you!

By continuing to the next page of the survey, you are consenting to participate in this study.

College Activities					
During the comnig semester in college, how often did you do the following? Indicate your response selcting a values (Never, Occasionally,					
Library and Information Techn	Used the library as a quiet place to read or study.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Used a database (online or in the library) to find material on some topic.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Develop a bibliography or set of references for a term paper or other report.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor or classmates.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Participated in class discussions using an electronic medium (e-mail, list-serve, chat group, Blackboard, etc.)	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Experiences with Faculty	Talked with your instructor about information related to a course you are taking (grades, make-up work, assig	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Relationship with Faculty	Discussed your academic major or course selection with a faculty member.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Discussed ideas for a term paper or other class project with a faculty member.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Discussed your career plans and ambitions with a faculty member.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Socialized with a faculty member outside the classroom (grabed lunch, a coffee, etc.)	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Asked your instructor for comments and criticisms about your academic performance.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Worked with a faculty member on a research project.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Worked harder than you thought you could to meet the istructor's expectations and standards.				
Course Learning	Completed the assigned readings before class.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Academics	Took detailed notes during class.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Contributed to class discussions.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Tried to see how different facts and ideas fit together.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Applied material learned in a class to other areas (a job or internship, other courses, relationships with friend	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Summarized major points and information from your readings or class notes.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Used information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Tried to explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Worked on a paper or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Worked on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Memorized formulas, definitions, technical terms and concepts.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Explained to another person the scientific basis for concerns about scientific or environmental issues or simil	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Writing and Reading	Asked other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Referred to a book or manual about writing style, grammar, etc.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Revised a paper or composition two or more times before you are satisfied with it.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Asked an instructor or staff member for advice and help to improve your writing.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Prepared a major report for a class (20 pages or more).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Campus Facilities	Went to an art exhibit/gallery or a play, dance, or other theater performance with other students, friends, or fa	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Campus Environment and Facilities	Attended a concert or other music event on or off campus.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Used a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Met other students somewhere on campus (union, dining hall, etc.) for a discussion.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Went to a lecture or panel discussion.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Attended a cultural or social event on campus or in the community.				
	Used a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Used campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Played a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Followed a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Clubs, Organizations, Service I	Attended a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Involvement	Worked on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student government,	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Worked on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Met with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Managed or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Student Acquaintances	Made friends with students whose interests are different from yours.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Relationship with Peers	Made friends or interacted with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Made friends or interacted with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Had serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from you	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Had serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Had serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
Conversations	Had serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic identification is very different from yours.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
in conversations with others (students, family members, co-workers, ect.) outside the classroom during this semester, about how often have you talked about each of the following? Indicate your response selcting a values (Never, Occasionally, Often,					
	Current events in the news.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Different lifestyles, customs, and religions.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	The ideas and views of writers, philosophers, historians.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	The arts (painting, poetry, theatrical productions, dance, symphony, movies, etc.).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Computers and other technologies.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Social and ethical issues related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, genetics, m	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	The economy (employment, wealth, poverty, debt, trade, etc.).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	International relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.).	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Referred to knowledge you acquired in your reading or classes.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Explored different ways of thinking about a topic or issue.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Referred to something one of your instructors said about a topic or issue.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Subsequently read something that was related to the topic or issue.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Changed your opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very
	Persuaded others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very

Reading and Writing								
During the current semester, about how much reading and writing did you do ? Fill in one response for each item listed.								
	Read Non-assigned books				None	Fewer than 5	Between 5 and 10	Between 11 and
	Read Textbooks or assigned books				None	Fewer than 5	Between 5 and 10	Between 11 and
	Wrote Term papers or other written reports				None	Fewer than 5	Between 5 and 10	Between 11 and
	Wrote Essay exams for your courses				None	Fewer than 5	Between 5 and 10	Between 11 and
Opinion About College								
	How are you liking college thus far?				I won't like it.	I will be more or less neutral	I will like it.	I will be enthusatic about it
	If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?				No, definitley	Probably no	Probably yes	Yes, definitely

The College Environment								
Colleges and univerisites differ from one to another in the extent to which they emphasize or focus on various aspects of students' development. Thinking of what you've experienced thus far in college, to what extent do you feel that each of the following are emphasized at this institution? Indicate the level that best represents								
	Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities.	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Strong emphasis)**
	Emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities.	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Strong emphasis)**
	Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities.	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Strong emphasis)**
	Emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity.	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Strong emphasis)**
	Emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources).	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Strong emphasis)**
	Emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competence.	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Strong emphasis)**
	Emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses.	**1 (Weak emphasis)**	2	3	4	5	6	**7 (Strong emphasis)**

The next three ratings refer to relationships among people at this college? Thinking about your own experiences, please rate the quality of these reltionships on each.								
	Relationships with other students or student groups	**1 (Competative, Uninvolved, Sense of**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Friendly, Supportive, Sense of Belonging) 7**
	Relationships with faculty	**1 (Remote, Discouraging, Unsympathe**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Approchable, Helpful, Understanding, Encouraging) 7**
	Relationships with administrative personnel and offices	**1 (Rigid, Impersonal, Bound by Regulations)**	2	3	4	5	6	**(Helpful, Considerate, Flexible) 7**
Background Information								
Indicate your response by indicating the answer as it applies to you.								
	You'll end this semster with a grade point average of:	D (1.9 or lower)	C (2.9-2.0)	B (3.9-3.0)	A (4.0)			
	Do you expect to enroll in an advanced degreee wihen, or if, you complete your undergradute degree?	yes	no					
	Are you in the same major today that you were at the beginning of the semster?	Yes	No					
	During the semester in this upcoming semester about how many hours a week do you spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, ect.?	5 or fewer hours a week	6 to 10 hours a week	11 to 15 hours a week	16 to 20 hours a week	21 to 29 hours a week	26 to 30 hours a week	more than 30 hours a week
	During the semester, how many hours a week did you to work for pay in an on-campus job?	1 to 10 hours a week	11 to 20 hours a week	21 to 30 hours a week	31 to 40 hours a week	more than 40 hours a week		
	During the semester, how many hours a week did you to work for pay in an off-campus job?	1 to 10 hours a week	11 to 20 hours a week	21 to 30 hours a week	31 to 40 hours a week	more than 40 hours a week		
Personal Experiences								
	Asked a friend for help with a personal problem or concerns.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very			
	Read articles or books or watched videos online about personal growth, self-improvement, or social development.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very			
	Taken a test or quiz to measure your abilities, interests, attitudes, or skills.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very			
	Asked a friend to tell you what they really thought about you.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very			
	Talked with a faculty member, counselor or other staff member about personal concerns.	Never	Occasiona	Often	Very			
Estimates of Gains								
Thinking about your college experience up to now, to what extent do you feel you have gained or made pogress in the following areas? Indicate the extent for each of the								
	Obtaining knowledge and skills applicable to a specific job or type of work (career preparation).	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Gaining a broad general education about different fields of knowledge.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Gaining a range of information that may be relevant to a career.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Gaining knowledge about other parts of the world and other people.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Writing clearly and effectively.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Presenting ideas and information effectively when speaking to others.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Becoming aware of diffeent philosphies, cultures, and ways of life.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Developing your own values and ethical standards.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Understanding yourself, your abilities, interests, and personality.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Developing the ability to get along with different kinds of people.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Developing the ability to function as a member of a team.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Developing good health habits and physical fitness.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Becoming aware of the consequences (benefits, hazards, dangers) of new applications of science and technology.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Thinking analytically and logically.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Putting ideas together, seeing relationships, similarities, and difference between ideas.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Learning on you own, pursuing ideas, and finding information you need.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			
	Learning to adapt to change.	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very			

Appendix G

Invitation to Participate in Phase Two Interviews Email Template - Spring 2019

Initial Email with link to the Qualtrics post-survey:

Hello,

Last semester, you participated in my doctoral dissertation research study, "Exploring First-Year Students' Expectations and Experiences," and completed a survey at the start and end of the fall 2019 semester.

These brief surveys asked you about what your expectations were for your first semester of college and asked you to tell me what your first semester of college was like.

To wrap up my study, I am following up with several individuals in the spring semester to have a conversation about their first-semester of college and the results of their survey, and I wanted to see if you would be interested in talking with me.

This will be a very short interview that should only last about half an hour. We would chat over a video conferencing platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, and I am looking to schedule these interviews next week before finals. I have flexible availability all next week, and will do my best to find a time that works best for you!

If you have questions about this project, you may contact me by email at mgmeyers@uark.edu or by phone at 479-426-3488. Since the semester is wrapping up soon, I'd appreciate it if you could let me know either way at your earliest convenience.

I hope that you are doing okay, given the circumstances, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Matthew Meyers, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Program
Assistant Director – New Student & Family Programs

Follow-up Reminder Email with link to the Qualtrics pre-survey (forwarded from original email invitation):

Hello,

I just wanted to follow up with you from my email on Friday to see if you'd be interested in having a quick chat sometime this week to help me with my research project.

Let me know if you have any questions, and I look forward to hear back from you soon!

Hope that you're doing well!

Matthew Meyers, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Program
Assistant Director – New Student & Family Programs

Appendix H

Interview Informed Consent

Information and Purpose: The interview for which you are being asked to participate in is a part of a dissertation research study that wishes to explore what 1) expectations new college students have about their college experience, 2) experiences they have during this time, and 3) new students think about any alignments or misalignments that they have. This study will provide information that will help campus administrators, faculty, and staff provide better support for future new students that will help them be successful at this university and during their transition into college.

Your Participation: Your participation in phase two of the study will consist of an interview lasting approximately one hour. Participation in this interview should only take one hour or less. You will be asked a series of questions about your expectations and experiences about your first semester of college. You are not required to answer the questions, and may pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time, you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and your participation in the study. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation.

Benefits and Risks: Full participation in the interview will result in some target self-reflection about what you have accomplished thus far as a student. There are no risks associated with participating in this study.

Confidentiality: All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. The interview will be recorded for audio; however, your name will not be recorded on the tape. All data collected, including answers and your names and contact info, will be kept on a password protected external hard drive inside a locked office on campus. Your answers will be kept confidential, and no one other than the primary researcher, Matthew Meyers, will ever see your personal information connected to your response.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's IRB Coordinator, Ro Windwalker, 109 MLKG Building, 479-575-2208, irb@uark.edu.

You can also contact the researcher Matthew Meyers, M.Ed. (mgmeyers@uark.edu) or his faculty advisor, Dr. Ketevan Mamiseishvili (kmamisei@uark.edu) if you have any additional questions about the study.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix I

Interview Questions

1) What were some of the expectations that you had for your first semester of college?
    a. *Follow-up:* Where did these expectations come from?
2) When thinking about what your first semester of college would be like, what would you say was the thing that you were looking forward to the most?
    a. *Follow-up:* Did that happen for you in your first semester? Why/why not?
3) How do you think your first semester of college went overall? What are some of the things that you experienced during this time?
4) Let's take a look at the results of your expectation and experience scores from the fall semester expectations and experiences surveys. How would you interpret these scores and results? (*I will take a few minutes to talk about what the scores mean with you).*
    a. *Follow-up:* What surprised you the most? Why?
    b. *Follow-up:* What surprised you the least? Why?
5) Looking at your fall results, tell me how you feel about the areas that did not align?
    a. *Follow-up:* Tell me about the area that had the strongest (closest) alignment. How do you feel about this?
    b. *Follow-up:* Tell me about the area that had the weakest (furthest) alignment. How do you feel about this?
    c. *Follow-up:* Tell me about a particular time this past semester when it dawned on you that maybe an expectation that you held was unrealistic? How did that make you feel? What did you change or do differently because of this?
6) Suppose you are walking through the student union and run into a prospective student who is wanting to come here for college next year. What advice would you give them to prepare them for their first semester of college?
    a. *Follow up* (with appropriate additional questions if necessary)

7) What is your definition of a successful college student?

    a. *Follow up* (with appropriate additional questions if necessary)

8) Would you like to share anything else with me at this time?

Appendix J

Sample Individual Category Scores and Explanation Sheet

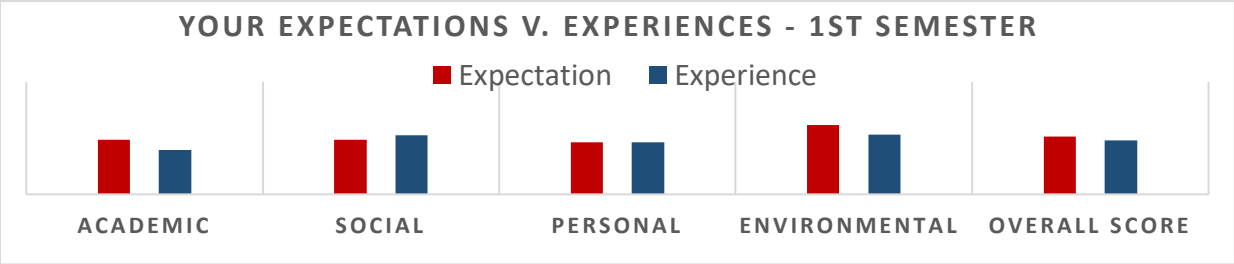
You participated in my dissertation study during the fall 2019 semester, taking a survey at both the start and end of your first semester of college. The items of this survey were used to gain a better understanding of what expectations you had for college (the start of the semester) compared to your actual experiences in college (at the end of the semester). I have divided the items into four categories, **Academic, Social, Personal, and Environmental,** to better highlight the different areas that are important to student experience. Below, I have briefly described what each of these categories relates to in regard to the surveys you took, while the chart shows your scores.

Academic Scores included items such as: study habits, assignment types (length, difficulty, and effort put into completing it), relationship with faculty members, in-classroom experiences, reflection on academic performance, applying or sharing what you learned in class with others in a non-class setting, developing new skills to enhance your learning/writing/comprehension, understanding course relevancy to academic major or career goals.

Social Scores included items such as: developing relationships with others in the college community (peers, faculty, staff), the significance and value you placed on these relationships as well as how you changed or grew by interacting and connecting with people who are different from you (religiously, politically, economically, racially, ideologically etc.), experiences outside of the classroom (getting involved on campus, going to events, etc.).

Personal Scores included items such as: seeking to grow/better yourself (academically, socially, personally) through experience, exploring interests (new/old), expanding your mind and worldview by possibly stepping outside of your comfort zone, identifying areas of self-growth and seeking help (from faculty, staff, peers), thinking about long-term goals and developing action plans to reach them, anticipating difficulties or challenges and developing solutions/taking action steps.

Environmental Scores included items such as: both utilizing the physical space of the campus (study rooms, workout facilities, athletic facilities, residence halls, classrooms, etc.) and in the community (using them to relax, study, hang out with others etc.) as well as understanding/recognizing how these spaces impacted your personal wellbeing, skill development, academic performance, and overall experience as a student.



Appendix K

Phase Two: Quantitative Audit Trail

1. After collecting and analyzing the pre- and post-surveys, the students' expectation-experience alignment was scored in the categories of academic, social, personal, and environmental and then given an overall category score. These overall category scores were organized into a spectrum, with the most aligned expectations and experiences in the middle and the most misaligned expectations and experiences (expectations exceeded experiences and experiences exceeded expectations) at the ends.
2. Students were selected to be contacted about follow-up qualitative interviews based on where their responses fell on the alignment spectrum. The five students with the highest category scores (expectations exceeded experiences), the eight students with the lowest category scores (experiences exceeded expectations), and nine students with the category scores closest to zero (experiences met expectations) were invited to participate. After two weeks, additional invitations were sent out to students who were next on the spectrum. Eventually 22 students were invited to participate in interviews and six agreed to be interviewed.
3. Students who agreed to be interviewed were sent Individual Category Scores and Explanation Sheet **(**Appendix J), which listed their expectation and experience category scores, provided a definition of how each category was defined, and the questions they would be asked during their interviews (Appendix I).
4. After the interviews, which were conducted and recorded through Microsoft Teams, the interviews were transcribed and sent to the student participants for verification and clarification of their words or phrases if they felt that was needed.

5. Both the researcher and a peer reviewer (who has a background in interviewing and higher education) read each transcript fully once through to familiarize themselves with each interview and begin looking for commonalities between the different student experiences.
6. Reviewers read each transcript again, independently identifying and highlighting each relevant and important quote or thought.
7. Reviewers then developed a descriptive code for each identified quote that reflected the essence of the idea that was shared during the interview. The phrasing for the initial codes was chosen by reviewers in order to describe participants' expressed thoughts from an academic and research-based perspective. Codes were developed by using phrases from the participants' own words where possible. However, for clarity of meaning, many codes were developed by paraphrasing participants' expressed thoughts.
8. Codes were repeated for similarly expressed views throughout all subsequent interviews.
9. Reviewers read through the interview transcripts a third time, checking to see that the codes accurately reflected the thoughts that participants were expressing, as well as whether there were any codes that overlapped.
10. Both reviewers went through each transcript together and compared codes, creating a master transcript of codes (See Table 4.22 In chapter four for a full list of developed codes). When the reviewers had differing codes, they chose the code that most accurately reflected the thoughts expressed by the participants.
11. Reviewers wrote out all the codes and reviewed them for duplicate meanings and clarity. Codes that only appeared once were removed, leaving them with 32 codes.

12. Reviewers began grouping codes with similar focal points together, such as friendships, academics, and motivations. After the initial grouping, those codes were re-examined, and six themes were developed: Taking Responsibility: Managing Mindsets; “Oh Crap! I might need to learn how to study”; Driving Forces: Motivations and Experiences; Academic Engagement through Content and Connections; First things First - Friendship; and Trusted Sources: Shaping College Expectations. To arrive at the six themes, the reviewers looked at how the ideas expressed in the codes related to one another, as well as what was most useful in regard to the research questions.
13. Codes that did not fit into one of the six themes were discarded.
14. After the six themes were identified, reviewers re-read the quotes that were associated with each code within the theme to make sure the theme encompassed those thoughts and also represented a clear idea. Reviewers also examined the (mis)alignment spectrum that was developed from the research in Phase One of the study to see how if the themes were reflexive of those findings.
15. The reviewers used all of this data to write descriptions of each theme and finalize the theme name. For example, the theme “First things First – Friendship” was changed to “Friendship Focused” to more accurately reflect the emphasis that college students expressed about making friends. The interviews with the participants showed that making friends isn’t just a priority for the students - the social aspect of college impacts nearly every other aspect of college. The final themes are: Managing Mindsets; “Oh Crap! I might need to learn how to study”; Driving Forces: Motivations and Experiences; Academic Engagement through Content and Connections; Friendship Focused; and Trusted Sources: Shaping College Expectations.

Appendix L

Expectation Descriptive Statistics

Pre-Survey: First-Year Expectations					
Q5 - During the coming semester in college, how often do you expect to do the following?					
#	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
5-1	Use the library as a quiet place to read or study.	2.55	1.03	1.07	96
5-2	Use a database (online or in the library) to find material on some topic.	2.35	0.85	0.72	96
5-3	Develop a bibliography or set of references for a term paper or other report.	2.31	0.87	0.76	96
5-4	Use e-mail to communicate with an instructor or classmates.	3.52	0.71	0.50	96
5-5	Participate in class discussions using an electronic medium (e-mail, list-serve, chat group, Blackboard, etc.).	2.97	0.93	0.87	96
5-6	Discuss ideas for a term paper or other class project with a faculty member.	2.44	0.87	0.75	96
5-7	Discuss your career plans and ambitions with a faculty member.	2.33	0.93	0.86	95
5-8	Discuss your academic major or course selection with a faculty member.	2.56	0.94	0.88	96
5-9	Ask your instructor for information related to a course you are taking (grades, make-up work, assignments, etc.).	2.84	0.91	0.83	96
5-10	Socialize with a faculty member outside the classroom (grab lunch, a coffee, etc.)	1.53	0.78	0.61	96
5-11	Ask your instructor for comments and criticisms about your academic performance.	2.30	0.95	0.91	96
5-12	Work with a faculty member on a research project.	1.72	0.85	0.73	96
Q6 - During the coming semester in college, how often do you expect to do the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
6-1	Complete the assigned readings before class.	3.40	0.74	0.54	95
6-2	Take detailed notes during class.	3.61	0.62	0.39	95
6-3	Contribute to class discussions.	3.00	0.88	0.77	95
6-4	Try to see how different facts and ideas fit together.	3.17	0.74	0.55	94
6-5	Apply material learned in a class to other areas (a job or internship, other courses, relationships with friends, family, co-workers, etc.).	3.11	0.82	0.67	95
6-6	Summarize major points and information from your readings or class notes.	3.17	0.82	0.67	95
6-7	Use information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments.	3.15	0.85	0.72	95
6-8	Explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member).	2.98	0.82	0.68	95
6-9	Prepare a paper or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources.	3.02	0.81	0.66	95
6-10	Work on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students.	2.82	0.89	0.79	95
6-11	Memorize formulas, definitions, technical terms and concepts.	3.23	0.89	0.80	95
6-12	Ask other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them.	2.84	0.95	0.91	94
6-13	Refer to a book or manual about writing style, grammar, etc.	2.48	1.07	1.15	95
6-14	Revise a paper or composition two or more times before you are satisfied with it.	2.98	0.95	0.89	95
6-15	Ask an instructor or staff member for advice and help to improve your writing.	2.72	1.05	1.10	95
6-16	Write a major report for a class (20 pages or more).	1.81	0.88	0.77	95
Q7 - During the coming semester in college, how often do you expect to do the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
7-1	Go to an art exhibit/gallery or a play, dance, or other theater performance with other students, friends, or family members.	2.36	0.98	0.96	92
7-2	Attend a concert or other music event on or off campus.	2.59	0.92	0.84	92
7-3	Use a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself.	2.97	1.00	1.00	92
7-4	Meet other students somewhere on campus (union, dining hall, etc.) for a discussion.	3.04	0.99	0.99	92
7-5	Attend a lecture or panel discussion.	2.65	0.97	0.93	92
7-6	Attend a cultural or social event on campus or in the community.	2.57	0.89	0.80	92
7-7	Use a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.).	2.38	0.97	0.94	92
7-8	Use campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.).	2.66	1.05	1.10	92
7-9	Play a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate).	1.84	1.07	1.15	92
7-10	Follow a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity.	2.41	1.05	1.10	92
7-11	Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group.	2.74	1.05	1.10	92
7-12	Work on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student government, special event, etc.).	2.32	1.02	1.03	92
7-13	Work on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.).	2.20	1.06	1.13	92
7-14	Meet with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization.	1.89	0.94	0.89	92
7-15	Manage or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus.	2.08	1.04	1.08	92
Q8 - During the coming semester in college, how often do you expect to do the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
8-1	Make friends or interact with students whose interests are different from yours.	3.16	0.81	0.66	89
8-2	Make friends or interact with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours.	3.27	0.70	0.49	89
8-3	Make friends or interact with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours.	3.35	0.66	0.43	89
8-4	Have serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours.	2.82	0.86	0.74	89
8-5	Have serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours.	2.67	0.89	0.79	89
8-6	Have serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours.	2.62	0.97	0.94	89

Q9 - In conversations with others at college during the coming semester, how often do you expect to talk about each of the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
9-1	Current events in the news.	2.68	0.86	0.75	88
9-2	Social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations.	2.62	0.96	0.92	89
9-3	Different lifestyles, customs, and religions.	2.69	0.85	0.72	89
9-4	The ideas and views of writers, philosophers, historians.	2.28	0.93	0.87	88
9-5	The arts (painting, poetry, theatrical productions, dance, symphony, movies, etc.).	2.31	0.97	0.95	89
9-6	Science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.).	2.20	0.80	0.64	89
9-7	Computers and other technologies.	2.13	0.88	0.78	89
9-8	Social and ethical issues related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, genetics, military use.	2.31	0.94	0.88	89
9-9	The economy (employment, wealth, poverty, debt, trade, etc.).	2.24	0.84	0.71	88
9-10	International relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.).	2.44	0.94	0.89	89
Q10 - In these conversations, how often do you expect to do each of the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
10-1	Refer to knowledge you acquired in your reading or classes.	2.75	0.77	0.60	89
10-2	Explore different ways of thinking about a topic or issue.	2.89	0.75	0.57	87
10-3	Refer to something one of your instructors said about a topic or issue.	2.92	0.76	0.57	89
10-4	Subsequently read something related to the topic or issue.	2.70	0.88	0.78	89
10-5	Change your opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others.	2.42	0.69	0.47	89
10-6	Persuade others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited.	2.46	0.83	0.68	89
Q11 - During the coming semester, about how many times do you expect to do the following in regards to reading and writing?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
11-1	Reeding Non-Assigned Books	2.39	1.11	1.24	79
11-2	Reeding Textbooks/Assigned Books	3.29	1.11	1.23	79
11-3	Writing Term Papers/Other Written Reports	3.18	0.98	0.97	79
11-4	Writing Essay Exams for Your Courses	2.96	0.99	0.99	79
Q12 - Opinion About College					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
12-1	How well do you think you will like college?	3.13	0.80	0.65	87
Q13 - During the coming semester, to what extent do you feel that each of the following will be emphasized at this institution?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
13-1	Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities	5.80	1.11	1.23	87
13-2	Emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities	4.99	1.52	2.32	86
13-3	Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities	5.45	1.26	1.58	87
13-4	Emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity	5.47	1.27	1.62	87
13-5	Emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources)	5.07	1.30	1.69	87
13-6	Emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competence	5.44	1.44	2.06	87
13-7	Emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses	5.31	1.56	2.45	87
Q14 - Rate your expected relationships with the following individuals in college.					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
14-1	Relationships with other students or student groups	5.58	1.43	2.06	85
Q15 - Rate your expected relationships with the following individuals in college.					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
15-1	Relationships with faculty	5.29	1.32	1.75	84
Q16 - Rate your expected relationships with the following individuals in college.					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
16-1	Relationships with administrative personnel and offices.	4.56	1.63	2.67	82
Q23 - During the semester in this upcoming semester about how many hours a week do you expect to spend outside of class on activities related to					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
23-1	During the semester in this upcoming semester about how many hours a week do you expect to spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?	2.56	0.78	0.6	86
Q24 - In this upcoming semester, about how many hours a week do you plan to work for pay in an on-campus job?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
24-1	In this upcoming semester, about how many hours a week do you plan to work for pay in an on-campus job?	1.15	0.48	0.23	84
Q25 - In this upcoming semester, about how many hours a week do you plan to work for pay in an off-campus job?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
25-1	In this upcoming semester, about how many hours a week do you plan to work for pay in an off-campus job?	1.40	0.77	0.59	82

Appendix M

Experience Descriptive Statistics

Post-Survey: First-Year Experiences					
Q5 - During the coming semester in college, how often did you do the following?					
#	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
5-1	Used the library as a quiet place to read or study.	2.21	1.19	1.42	52
5-2	Used a database (online or in the library) to find material on some topic.	2.08	0.79	0.62	52
5-3	Develop a bibliography or set of references for a term paper or other report.	2.14	1.06	1.12	52
5-4	Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor or classmates.	3.42	0.67	0.44	52
5-5	Participated in class discussions using an electronic medium (e-mail, list-serve, chat group, Blackboard, etc.).	2.65	1.05	1.09	52
5-6	Discussed ideas for a term paper or other class project with a faculty member.	2.21	1.02	1.03	52
5-7	Discussed your career plans and ambitions with a faculty member.	2.38	0.93	0.86	52
5-8	Discussed your academic major or course selection with a faculty member.	2.68	0.90	0.80	52
5-9	Asked your instructor for comments and criticisms about your academic performance.	2.18	0.88	0.77	52
5-10	Socialized with a faculty member outside the classroom (grabbed lunch, a coffee, etc.)	1.38	0.77	0.59	52
5-12	Worked with a faculty member on a research project.	1.19	0.49	0.24	52
5-13	Worked harder than you thought you could to meet the instructor's expectations and standards.	2.60	1.00	0.99	52
Q6 - During this semester in college, how often did you do the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
6-1	Completed the assigned readings before class.	3.17	0.88	0.77	52
6-2	Took detailed notes during class.	3.38	0.69	0.48	52
6-3	Contributed to class discussions.	3.05	0.88	0.77	52
6-4	Tried to see how different facts and ideas fit together.	3.12	0.83	0.69	52
6-5	Applied material learned in a class to other areas (a job or internship, other courses, relationships with friends, family, co-workers, etc.).	2.91	0.92	0.84	52
6-6	Summarized major points and information from your readings or class notes.	3.09	0.79	0.62	52
6-7	Used information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments.	2.73	0.91	0.83	52
6-8	Tried to explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-worker, family member).	3.12	0.90	0.81	52
6-9	Worked on a paper or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources.	2.77	0.96	0.93	52
6-10	Worked on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students.	2.42	0.89	0.80	52
6-11	Memorized formulas, definitions, technical terms and concepts.	2.95	0.93	0.87	52
6-12	Asked other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them.	2.61	1.01	1.02	52
6-13	Referred to a book or manual about writing style, grammar, etc.	2.23	1.06	1.12	52
6-14	Revised a paper or composition two or more times before you are satisfied with it.	2.60	1.03	1.07	52
6-15	Asked an instructor or staff member for advice and help to improve your writing.	2.03	0.99	0.98	52
6-16	Prepared a major report for a class (20 pages or more).	1.18	0.55	0.30	52
Q7 - During this semester in college, how often did you do the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
7-1	Went to an art exhibit/gallery or a play, dance, or other theater performance with other students, friends, or family members.	1.91	1.01	1.02	52
7-2	Attended a concert or other music event on or off campus.	1.72	0.93	0.87	52
7-3	Used a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself.	2.71	0.98	0.95	52
7-4	Met other students somewhere on campus (union, dining hall, etc.) for a discussion.	2.67	1.17	1.36	52
7-5	Went to a lecture or panel discussion.	2.10	1.09	1.19	52
7-6	Attended a cultural or social event on campus or in the community.	2.08	1.08	1.17	52
7-7	Used a learning lab or study center to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.).	1.67	0.92	0.85	52
7-8	Used campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.).	2.05	1.01	1.02	52
7-9	Played a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate).	1.25	0.68	0.47	52
7-10	Followed a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity.	1.58	0.82	0.68	52
7-11	Attended a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group.	2.34	1.20	1.44	52
7-12	Worked on a campus committee, student organization, or service project (publications, student government, special event, etc.).	1.89	1.13	1.27	52
7-13	Worked on an off-campus committee, organization, or service project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.).	1.78	0.98	0.96	52
7-14	Met with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization.	1.49	0.85	0.72	52
7-15	Managed or provide leadership for an organization or service project, on or off the campus.	1.65	0.93	0.86	52
Q8 - During this semester in college, how often did you do the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
8-1	Made friends with students whose interests are different from yours.	2.74	0.92	0.84	52
8-2	Made friends or interacted with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours.	2.86	0.90	0.81	52
8-3	Made friends or interacted with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours.	2.85	1.00	1.00	52
8-4	Had serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours.	2.51	1.05	1.11	52
8-5	Had serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours.	2.43	1.09	1.19	52
8-6	Had serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours.	2.40	1.12	1.27	52
8-7	Had serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic identification is very different from yours.	2.47	1.11	1.23	52

Q9 - In conversations with others (students, family members, co-workers, etc.) outside the classroom during this semester, about how often have you talked about each of the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
9-1	Current events in the news.	2.54	0.94	0.88	52
9-2	Social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations.	2.80	0.98	0.96	52
9-3	Different lifestyles, customs, and religions.	2.60	0.89	0.79	52
9-4	The ideas and views of writers, philosophers, historians.	2.20	1.01	1.02	52
9-5	The arts (painting, poetry, theatrical productions, dance, symphony, movies, etc.).	2.24	1.00	1.00	52
9-6	Science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.).	1.93	0.89	0.78	52
9-7	Computers and other technologies.	1.80	0.81	0.65	52
9-8	Social and ethical issues related to science and technology such as energy, pollution, chemicals, genetics, military use.	2.33	0.96	0.93	52
9-9	The economy (employment, wealth, poverty, debt, trade, etc.).	2.38	0.99	0.98	52
9-10	International relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.).	2.27	0.93	0.87	52
10-2	Explored different ways of thinking about a topic or issue.	2.60	0.87	0.76	52
10-3	Referred to something one of your instructors said about a topic or issue.	2.52	0.87	0.76	52
10-4	Subsequently read something that was related to the topic or issue.	2.48	0.92	0.84	52
10-5	Changed your opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others.	2.02	0.83	0.69	52
10-6	Persuaded others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited.	2.13	0.92	0.85	52
Q11 - During the current semester, about how many times did you do any of the following activities related to reading and writing?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
11-1	Read Non-Assigned Books	1.92	0.91	0.83	49
11-2	Read Textbooks/Assigned Books	2.81	1.13	1.28	49
11-3	Wrote Term Papers/Other Written Reports	2.68	1.01	1.03	49
11-4	Wrote Essay Exams for Your Courses	1.90	0.85	0.72	49
Q12 - Opinion About College					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
12-1	How are you liking college thus far?	2.96	0.85	0.72	51
Q13 - Opinion About College					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
13-1	If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?	3.20	0.83	0.68	51
Q14 - To what extent do you feel that each of the following are emphasized at this institution?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
14-1	Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities	5.51	1.37	1.88	52
14-2	Emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities	4.76	1.71	2.93	52
14-3	Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities	5.57	1.15	1.32	52
14-4	Emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity	5.42	1.59	2.52	52
14-5	Emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources)	5.03	1.59	2.51	52
14-6	Emphasis on developing career, vocational and occupational competence	5.48	1.58	2.49	52
14-7	Emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses	5.09	1.63	2.66	51
Q15 - Thinking about your own experiences this semester, please rate the quality of relationship that you had with the following individuals.					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
15-1	Relationships with other students or student groups	5.14	1.79	3.20	51
Q16 - Thinking about your own experiences this semester, please rate the quality of relationship that you had with the following individuals.					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
16-1	Relationships with faculty	5.29	1.42	2.01	51
Q17 - Thinking about your own experiences this semester, please rate the quality of relationship that you had with the following individuals.					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
17-1	Relationships with administrative personnel and offices.	4.28	1.96	3.82	51
Q19 - Do you expect to enroll in an advanced degree (graduate school), after you complete your					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
19-1	Do you expect to enroll in an advanced degree (graduate school), after you complete your undergraduate degree?	1.69	0.76	0.57	52
Q20 - During the semester, about how many hours a week do you spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
20-1	During the semester, about how many hours a week do you spend outside of class on activities related to your academic programs, like studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?	2.40	0.82	0.68	52
Q21 - During the semester, how many hours a week did you to work for pay in an on-campus job?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
21-1	During the semester, how many hours a week did you to work for pay in an on-campus job?	1.02	0.14	0.02	51

Q22 - During the semester, how many hours a week did you to work for pay in an off-campus job?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
22-1	During the semester, how many hours a week did you to work for pay in an off-campus job?	1.39	0.89	0.78	49
Q 23 - During the current semester, about how often did you do the following?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
23-1	Asked a friend for help with a personal problem or concerns	2.66	1.10	1.20	51
23-2	Read articles or books or watched videos online about personal growth, self-improvement, or social development	2.08	1.00	0.99	51
23-3	Taken a test or quiz to measure your abilities, interests, attitudes, or skills	2.19	1.03	1.07	51
23-4	Asked a friend to tell you what they really thought about you	2.09	1.15	1.32	51
23-5	Talked with a faculty member, counselor or other staff member about personal concerns	1.69	0.93	0.86	51
Q 24 - To what extent do you feel you have gained or made progress in the following areas?					
	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
24-1	Obtaining knowledge and skills applicable to a specific job or type of work (career preparation)	2.34	0.86	0.73	52
24-2	Gaining a broad general education about different fields of knowledge	2.54	0.87	0.76	52
24-3	Gaining a range of information that may be relevant to a career	2.52	0.94	0.88	52
24-4	Gaining knowledge about other parts of the world and other people	2.49	0.92	0.84	52
24-5	Writing clearly and effectively	2.44	0.92	0.85	51
24-6	Presenting ideas and information effectively when speaking to others	2.44	0.94	0.88	52
24-7	Becoming aware of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life	2.62	0.93	0.87	52
24-8	Developing your own values and ethical standards	2.80	0.89	0.79	52
24-9	Understanding yourself, your abilities, interests, and personality	2.92	0.84	0.70	52
24-10	Developing the ability to get along with different kinds of people	3.11	0.86	0.74	52
24-11	Developing the ability to function as a member of a team	2.85	0.92	0.84	52
24-12	Developing good health habits and physical fitness	2.35	1.01	1.02	52
24-13	Becoming aware of the consequences (benefits, hazards, dangers) of new applications of science and technology	2.33	1.06	1.13	52
24-14	Thinking analytically and logically	2.78	0.92	0.84	52
24-15	Putting ideas together, seeing relationships, similarities, and difference between ideas	2.83	0.86	0.73	52
24-16	Learning on you own, pursuing ideas, and finding information you need	2.97	0.83	0.69	52
24-17	Learning to adapt to change	3.30	0.76	0.58	52