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Passion to Purpose: An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry into the Development of the Summer ACE Program

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Passion to Purpose: An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry into the Development of the Summer

ACE Program

by

Owen Hooper

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Education
with a concentration in Educational Innovation
Department of Language, Literacy, Ed.D., Exceptional Education, and Physical Education
College of Education
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ABSTRACT

Students transitioning from high school to college are met with many challenges beyond academics including social acclimation, campus culture integration, and holistic wellness. Researchers agree that a successful and purposeful transition for incoming college students requires involvement and engagement with peers to help students adapt and increase their likelihood to graduate (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 1998). This autobiographical narrative inquiry reflects on past experiences in assessing the needs of transitioning students at the University of South Florida and developing a purposeful programming model to support students. I aim to help the reader understand my personal commitment to these programs through a reflection of self and guide the reader through critical decision points in the growth of the Academic and Cultural Engagement program (ACE), a summer transition program that originated for out-of-state and international freshmen. Concluding thoughts focus on variables that impact program development, defining strategic priorities and relationships, balancing inconsistencies in authority and accountability, and the power of pivoting.

Chapter One: Introduction

Personal Overview

In over a decade of working in summer administration in higher education, I still scratch my head on how I got here. When graduating high school with 82 of my peers from the only high school in a county with one-stop light, summer school was never an option. I was an “A” student during K-12 and, being raised in a single-parent home, the summer was for work. The connotation around summer school in both K-12 and undergraduate environments was that summer was for catching up for students at a deficit. It was not until about a year after I graduated undergrad that I moved back home to aid my grandparents with life-threatening conditions that my narrow view of summer sessions began to widen with purpose.

In helping both of my grandparents transition out of the hospital, I was met with extreme emotion in watching them struggle to do trivial tasks. Three months of intensive caregiving was ripe with meaningful conversations. In the beginning, sitting and staring at one another was about all they had the energy to do. Conversation revolved around the purpose of our lives, not wasting time while you're young, and making the most out of every experience. Just as much as I helped them heal, they helped me grow and foster a dedication to caring and supporting students.

I graduated undergrad in four years, but also changed my major four times. I was interested in everything and could not settle on one path. I ultimately landed on Sports Management, with the emphasis on service learning and risk management being greatly beneficial later in my journey. I also thank it for having the most free-elective credits of any

major at the university at the time. My time there was anchored in my involvement in the Students Advocating for Youth Living-Learning Community (SAY). I spent my freshman year as a participant while becoming the president of our building's Hall Council. In my sophomore year, I served as an Educational Advisor (EA) helping the new freshman transition into the community and, in my third year, I served as one of the floor's Resident Advisors. It was essential for me to work in a position that paid for my housing, but it was not until sitting with my grandparents that I understood it's true purpose.

As my grandparents became increasingly able to care for themselves, they posed the question of what was my purpose? The months of caring for them allowed me to shift my mindset from the normalized process of graduating, finding a full-time job and committing 30 years. These conversations reflected on whom I could most positively impact through my lived experience, which ultimately shifted my trajectory. It was then that I began a career in helping students through critical transitions. I then returned to earn my master's in counseling with an emphasis in higher education.

Purpose finds you. The first week into my graduate program, I received an email about a new assistantship being offered by Enrollment Management and Services focused on the creation and facilitation of a summer transition program for incoming freshmen. I held that assistantship until it shifted into a full-time position just before I graduated.

The summer of 2021 will be my 12th summer operating a program focused on the freshmen transition. When I say I have found purpose and am living it, I think back to every summer and the pathway that was created for each student to identify what success meant to them and how to achieve it. I think back to the relationships fostered at both the student and staff level that is the bedrock of chosen family. I quickly understood that summer was an

underutilized vehicle for student success. The summer term was unique in its diverse possibilities for intentional experiences. It was here that I began fighting the negative deficit-based stigma of summer and identifying ways to transition it to a value-added opportunity for students and faculty through intentionality and innovation.

Rationale

Students transitioning from high school to college are met with many challenges beyond academics including social acclimation, campus culture integration, and holistic wellness. Researchers agree that a successful and purposeful transition for incoming college students requires involvement and engagement with peers to help students adapt and increase their likelihood to graduate (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 1998). This study aims to reflect on past experiences by assessing the needs of transitioning students at the University of South Florida and developing a purposeful programming model to support students as they transition. I aim to help the reader understand my personal commitment to these programs through a reflection of self and guide the reader through critical decision points of the Academic and Cultural Engagement program (ACE), a summer transition program that originated for out-of-state and international freshmen.

The University of South Florida is a research-intensive public university located in the Tampa Bay region of Florida. Newly consolidated for accreditation as of July 1, 2020, USF is comprised of campuses in Tampa (main campus), St. Petersburg, and Sarasota-Manatee. USF enrolls an incoming First-Time in College (FTIC) student population of approximately 6,000 each academic year. What is traditionally referred to as incoming freshman, the state of Florida classifies as FTICs due to an increasing number beginning their college careers with credits towards their degrees through dual enrollment or other means while in high school.

In the state of Florida, funding is awarded to colleges based on their ratings of performance defined both by the state legislature and the state government’s education body, the Board of Governors (State University System of Florida, 2018; State of Florida, 2017). The success of a FTIC student is measured differently by each governing body and is referenced in Tables 1.1 and 1.2.

Table 1. Florida State Legislature Preeminent University Metrics

Metrics Common to All Institutions	
(a) An average weighted grade point average of 4.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale and an average SAT score of 1800 or higher on a 2400-point scale or 1200 or higher on a 1600-point scale for fall semester incoming freshmen, as reported annually.	(g) Total annual research expenditures in diversified nonmedical sciences of \$150 million or more, based on data reported annually by the NSF.
(b) A top-50 ranking on at least two well-known and highly respected national public university rankings, including, but not limited to, the U.S. News and World Report rankings, reflecting national preeminence, using most recent rankings.	(h) A top-100 university national ranking for research expenditures in five or more science, technology, engineering, or mathematics fields of study, as reported annually by the NSF.
(c) A freshman retention rate of 90 percent or higher for full-time, first-time-in-college students, as reported annually to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).	(i) One hundred or more total patents awarded by the United States Patent and Trademark Office for the most recent 3-year period.
(d) A 6-year graduation rate of 70 percent or higher for full-time, first-time-in-college students, as reported annually to the IPEDS.	(j) Four hundred or more doctoral degrees awarded annually, including professional doctoral degrees awarded in medical and health care disciplines, as reported in the Board of Governors Annual Accountability Report.
(e) Six or more faculty members at the state university who are members of a national academy, as reported by the Center for Measuring University Performance in the Top American Research Universities (TARU) annual report or the official membership directories maintained by each national academy.	(k) Two hundred or more postdoctoral appointees annually, as reported in the TARU annual report.
(f) Total annual research expenditures, including federal research expenditures, of \$200 million or more, as reported annually by the National Science Foundation (NSF).	(l) An endowment of \$500 million or more, as reported in the Board of Governors Annual

Note. Adapted from State of Florida (2017)

Table 2. Florida Board of Governors Performance Metrics

Metrics Common to All Institutions	
1. Percent of Bachelor's Graduates Employed (Earning \$25,000+) or Continuing their Education	6. Bachelor's Degrees Awarded in Areas of Strategic Emphasis
2. Median Wages of Bachelor's Graduates Employed Full-time	7. University Access Rate (Percent of Undergraduates with a Pell-grant)
3. Average Cost to the Student (Net Tuition per 120 Credit Hours)	8a. Graduate Degrees Awarded in Areas of Strategic Emphasis 8b. Freshman in Top 10% of Graduating High School Class – for NCF only
4. Four Year Graduation Rate (Full-time FTIC)	9. Board of Governors Choice - Percent of Bachelor's Degrees without Excess Hours
5. Academic Progress Rate (2nd Year Retention with GPA Above 2.0)	10. Board of Trustees Choice

Note. Adapted from State University System of Florida (2018)

Regarding the FTIC population, Metric 4 is based on the four-year graduation rate and Metric 5 is based on the academic progress rate, defined as retention of students entering their second year above a 2.0 GPA (State University System of Florida, 2018). The State of Florida Legislature (2017) has two metrics as well for this population: student profile as determined by the average of students' weighted grade point averages (GPA) and standardized test scores for the incoming fall class and secondly, the first-year retention rate for all students. With these metrics closely aligned, strategic interventions benefitting both populations could increase USF's success of achieving these metrics.

It was clear in my first week at USF in October of 2014, performance metrics were central to decision making. After being invited to join the Enrollment and Planning Management (EPM) team, I soon learned the emphasis metrics play even in the foundation of admissions. The state of Florida is unique in many regards, but performance metrics have changed the landscape. In response to the metric focused on a competitive GPA and standardized test scores of the fall

term starting FTICs, Florida University System schools had the opportunity to begin admitting a large percentage of their undergraduate population in the summer term. My experience and expertise in summer transition programs became a topic of further inquiry within EPM as they reflected on the metrics of the incoming class.

In a critical review of the new admission's cycle data, the university was close to receiving top marks for the incoming FTIC metrics. However, there was a population of out-of-state (OOS) and international FTICs that met the summer admissions criteria but were having to be admitted into a more competitive fall cohort because of a conflict with their high school graduation and the start of the summer term for FTICs. With OOS and international students paying premium tuition based on residency, it was important to maximize their enrollment at the university while ensuring the fall admit admissions metrics. A solution was needed to remove them from the fall profile and have them begin in the summer term. Those circumstances led to the creation of the Summer Academic and Cultural Engagement program (ACE) that I piloted in the summer of 2015.

Despite the obstacles of its unique needs within processes and procedures of a large public institution including that of a global health pandemic, ACE has remained true to its goals. Since its inception, the program has responded to these challenges and evolved to meet the needs of students and the university through a continual pursuit of intentionality and advocacy.

Purpose of the Study

Leadership and the development of transition programs require administrators draw from prior experiences, knowledge, and skills to identify the intersection of both student and university needs. The purpose of this study is to explore foundational experiences that have shaped the ACE program and sustained its success in both student and university outcomes.

Research Questions

1. How did I come to understand the ways that USF influenced the creation and implementation of the ACE program?
2. What did I perceive as opportunities for the program given perceived university and student needs, and how were they implemented to align with the goals of the program?
3. How did I come to define success for the ACE program?

Approach to Investigation

Using a critical events approach to narrative inquiry, autobiographical narrative episodes are provided to discuss the formation of the ACE program and pivotal events to its continued development. Dissecting these critical events identifies barriers to success and how they were navigated to promote a positive experience for students.

The methods chapter (chapter three) discusses in detail the methods used to investigate the stated research questions and express how this framework provides an opportunity for a valid, rigorous, and trustworthy account of the lived experience with the ACE program.

Contexts Impacting Study

While universities have similarities in supporting the goals of students for degree attainment, research agendas, among others, it is important to reflect on how different cultures permeate from one university to the next. This section aims to understand the foundation that led to the positionality of myself and the ACE program.

Summer Session in Context

Working in summer session administration for 12 years, I have found perspectives on the purpose of summer sessions for undergraduates to be both vague and archaic. For many, the deficit and remedial approach of summer school in the K-12 system follows into higher

education. As a summer administrator, this can be frustrating as the term is an opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to be goal driven in not only catching up but getting ahead including involvement in experiential learning opportunities that may not fit into busy fall or spring schedules.

Most universities, public and private, approach summer differently regarding finance and operations than the traditional fall and spring semesters (Harbor & Nemelka, 2016). Most faculty members work nine-month contracts that begin with the start of fall semester and end in the spring (Harbor & Nemelka, 2016). Naturally, the concepts of student and faculty needs related to course schedules, internships, research, and service are shaped by this standard. This ultimately influences the university's ability to structure a meaningful summer session. These potential limitations are not only seen in the academic realm but within funding for student support programming. For example, student governments typically transition power over the summer, creating a gap of programming and student engagement. Furthermore, many student affairs and academic advising units focus the summer term on onboarding new students in orientations, limiting access to continuing students in need of their services. As these concepts and needs are unique to the goals and resources of each individual university, the operation of summer sessions varies widely-- not just across the United States-- but within each state's public university system.

History of Summer@USF in Context

The first Director of Summer@USF was hired in 2013 and reported directly to the Provost. Dr. DeLuca was a prominent figure in the North American Association of Summer Sessions where she had recently completed her term as the organization's president (North American Association of Summer Sessions, 2021). The initial director position at USF was

charged with providing more intentionality to the summer term, a needs assessment, and initiatives that would lead to increased enrollment and four-year graduation. After one year in the role, Dr. DeLuca was promoted to Associate Vice President of Innovative Education, which has an expanded portfolio of services and responsibilities beyond the summer session. This move created a vacancy in the Director of Summer Sessions position, which I now serve in reporting directly to Dr. DeLuca. Since beginning in the role as an Assistant Director in 2014, I have been elevated to Director and created intentional initiatives around freshman transitions, intersessions, certificate completion programs, summer graduation scholarship programs, and pre-college programs in support of student and the university goals.

It is important to note that there is not an operating budget to run programs over the summer or to incentivize course offerings. USF operates summer sessions in a decentralized model, in which colleges and departments have complete budget and decision authority to hire faculty and offer courses regardless of external or university-wide needs. This power dichotomy limits the ability of impact on student success in that we can advocate for the needs of the students but do not have the authority to prioritize or require action in that pursuit. Our success depends on the relationships and shared goals of our partners.

Reflexivity in Context

In addition to what was stated in the personal overview section, it is important to know about my history to understand the framework from which I operate. I come from a long familial line of educators. From a very young age, I understood the importance of education as well as moral integrity. My grandparents were very involved in the school and church community in the rural area in which I was raised. My grandparents were defined by being servant-leaders and they passed that feeling of purpose down to me. This moral compass has shaped my educational

experience and informed my view of education as a right and a public service. In line with that belief, I hold a strong commitment to access and student success. My life experiences have shaped who I am and provide context for positionality in this research. I believe understanding certain elements about my life will bring greater context to interpreting the purpose of this study.

Care recipient before caregiver. Context that is only clear to me now in looking back, is that caregiving has been an essential theme throughout my life and shaped who I am. The truth is, I should not be here. Two near death experiences before I was in high school defined who I am today. Two weeks before the start of 7th grade, my mom and I were in a collision by a driver running a red light at a highway intersection. I still remember the highway patrolman coming to the window and being shocked that we were alive. I was rushed into emergency surgery to reconstruct my intestines that were ripped apart in three places. The doctor instructed my family to say their goodbyes as it wasn't likely I would make it out of surgery. A closed curtain doesn't hide those words, which still resonate with me today. Even after making it through surgery, I had a long path to adapting to the new challenges that would be by normal life. My family cared for me during three months of bedrest before I eventually returning to school on a limited basis. As my parents worked, my grandparents took shifts in staying with me and urging me to stay positive and continue my studies independently.

My grandmother believed experience was the best educator. She grew up in rural areas and had an affinity to learning about different ways of life and cultures. As a present for living, she booked a trip for my grandparents and me to go to Switzerland over Christmas in my 8th-grade year. This trip was the furthest one to date. Switzerland was my first immersion to a place where a language other than English was dominate. What made the trip even more interesting was the fact that we were with a tour group of folks from all over the United States. We went to

multiple cities, and, through those travels, I heard stories from Texas, California, Wyoming, and New Jersey that were so different than my rural southern upbringing.

Christmas Eve of 1998 was my second near death experience. I became very ill that night and was rushed to the town doctor who initially believed that I must have picked up a local Switzerland bug and directed me back to the hotel for rest. As my illness increased, my grandparents rushed me to the hospital where a doctor asserted that scar tissue from my original surgery had cut off blood flow and gang-green had begun to set in. After another emergency surgery, it was revealed that had I not sought emergency assistance, I would not have survived the night. For a teenager trying to lead a normal life, this was another critical moment that shaped my perspective and world view.

I found myself focused on trying to identify my purpose at 13. I found a newfound interest in church – listening to the sermon, instead of doodling on the bulletin. I became engrossed by the concept of nothing is promised, every day is a blessing – and most importantly a responsibility to do right by others. Throughout high school, I focused on doing well in school and staying involved in the community. I played multiple sports and was active in church and service-oriented activities. Diverse communities and involvement created a ripe opportunity to understand empathy and meeting others where they are. While I had physical disabilities from past health emergencies, they were externally invisible to others. My family balanced the needs of health and development by trying not to limit my involvement in multiple areas, for which I am grateful. The lesson learned from these experiences was to embrace everyone as individuals with their own unique needs and talents, as we never know what life circumstances have shaped their perspective.

My transition shapes me. After graduating from a very small high school in rural North Carolina, I transitioned to college at North Carolina State University, which at the time was the largest university in the state. While I experienced some transition issues, it was the living learning community that connected me to likeminded peers and provided opportunities to get involved in the local area. In reflecting on my own transition experience and those for students I have served, I learned that every newly enrolled student is at risk for reasons that at first may seem unclear. While everyone's path is different, so is their level and type of risk. In my personal framework, I believe students are at risk academically, socially, and/or in acclimating to campus.

After graduating during the economic recession of 2007 and moving back to take care of my grandparents, I did some soul searching and decided to follow in my family's commitment to education. I reflected on my times as a student mentor and resident advisor, and the uphill battle students from rural areas experience at large institutions. My initial scope of focusing on the transition of rural students grew to support for students of all backgrounds.

During my first week in graduate school, I secured a graduate assistant position reporting to Dr. DeLuca, the AVP of Enrollment Management. Over the last decade, I have reported to Dr. DeLuca for a total of 10.5 years at two institutions. From her mentorship and my experience with the North American Association of Summer Sessions (serving on the Administrative Council for two years, a member of the Quality and Research committee for seven, and currently a member of the Strategic Planning committee), I have become a recognized expert in summer sessions with an emphasis on summer transition programs and intersessions.

With my previous summer experience and current position at USF, my involvement in a dual role as researcher can be questioned. This statement of reflexivity is important to

demonstrate trustworthiness; that my expertise in summer sessions and working relationships with USF leadership yields a deep understanding of both student needs and university bureaucracy. Reinharz (1992) stated that “researchers who self-disclose are reformulating the researcher’s role in a way that maximizes engagement of the self but also increases the researcher’s vulnerability to criticism, both for what is revealed and for the very act of self-disclosure” (p. 34). Knowing that I am deeply involved with all aspects of this study, it is important for me to continuously be open and honest with my colleagues.

Student Success in Context

The term *student success* is found in the mission and primary value statement of the University of South Florida. It has been ingrained within the culture of USF in many forms as it serves as the bedrock to the work that is done. In November of 2009, USF launched the Student Success Task Force which developed a 10-year plan to increase retention and graduation rates for undergraduate students. Since its inception, these rates have dramatically increased. In 2016, the Office of Student Success (traditionally Enrollment Management) merged with Student Affairs and Undergraduate Studies to align these efforts in pursuit of this goal. The unit is now referred to as Student Success.

With the combination of these units, the USF Student Success Website (2021) defines itself as “supporting our students as they enter the admissions queue, take their first steps on our campuses, navigate their options, and finally walk across the stage to receive their hard-earned diploma” (para. 1). With performance metrics central to the funding of the university, Student Success is motivated by initiatives to increase performance of the metrics. With this focus, there are two sides to every decision: was this decision driven by metrics or driven by expressed student need? With decisions in the upper tiers of leadership made in response to metrics, it is

up to the functional leaders and staff to structure initiatives that have the most direct benefit for students.

Academic and Cultural Engagement Program in Context

As mentioned earlier, the ACE program was developed in response to a need for OOS students to begin in the summer and removed from the FTIC fall incoming profile metric. It was identified that OOS and International students were having to be admitted into the fall term due to their high school graduation date conflicting with the standard summer term. As students that pay OOS tuition are needed for the university to stay financially viable from tuition revenue, there was a need to develop an alternative calendar program to maximize their essential benefit to USF. The process of how ACE was created will be discussed in chapter four of this dissertation, but it is important to understand the reason for its creation and goals as it supports the significance of this study.

The data that was used to identify this need was reviewed one month prior to the launch of that cycle's Admissions decisions. In two-weeks' time, I developed the bones of the program so marketing could be created alongside admissions decisions. In supporting performance metrics and long-term student success, I focused on creating a program that fostered student community building through an intentional academic experience. The following was created as the founding documents of the program for approval:

Mission:

To support, challenge, acclimate and prepare out of state students beginning their college experience at the University of South Florida. Summer ACE provides a coordinated academic and community structure that reflects higher education values and institutes

high impact practices developing participants' skills and awareness fundamentals for academic and personal success at USF.

Objectives:

1. To provide a supportive environment within which each student can be recognized as a unique and capable learner, confident in their own potential for academic and personal success, as well as general wellness at the college level.
2. To provide realistic academic and personal challenges that stimulate intellectual and interpersonal growth, including the acceptance of responsibility for one's own decisions, behaviors, and successes.
3. To provide access and awareness of Education Abroad and community service/service-learning opportunities to foster engagement globally and at USF.
4. To incorporate working relationships with student resource staff and individual student's college faculty and staff to foster early support and guidance for academic direction and success.
5. To simulate the realities of a full academic semester within a 4-week summer experience such that transition shock is minimized, awareness and access of university resources (programmatic and personnel) are in place, and that curricular and co-curricular habits that lead to success are familiar and practiced.
6. To expose students to the Global Citizens Award by celebrating diversity and its components focused on bringing students from differing backgrounds closer together through providing opportunities for global and cultural engagement (Hooper, 2014, p.1)

With a focus on supporting retention and timely graduation, it was important to build a program that aligned with the university's strategic plan to create buy-in for the units where partnership was essential. The creation of an alternative calendar program to align with OOS high school graduations came with its own challenges, requiring exceptions for almost every onboarding step. Processes had to be amended in the Office of Admissions, the Office of Orientation, University Housing and Residential Education, the Office of Financial Aid, the Cashiers Office, and Dining. These changes were large pivots for each unit well into the admissions cycle.

Significance of the Study

The current construct of higher education as a balance between big business and a positive development of society demands a thorough understanding of the constructs university leaders use to make decisions. Within any bureaucracy, there are competing priorities and a hierarchy of layers of approval to finalize any decision. At the core of decision making in higher education, there should be an emphasis on supporting students with the assumption it will strengthen the university through the success of its students. With differing metrics of accountability placed on different units, there are limitations to making clear decisions that support the best interest of all students and university units simultaneously. Drawing attention to short- and long-term decisions with multiple variables is critical to success in higher education.

This narrative research approach details the exploration of key events to the development of the ACE program from its inception to present day. As the program was declared a relevant university need based on performance data versus the direct demands of students, the program has evolved each cycle to foster a quality transition environment for students that met the needs of USF leadership. This dissertation offers a glimpse into pivotal moments of development for

the ACE program as a demonstration of the balance between competing priorities and fostering an environment for student success.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The University of South Florida (USF) states within its mission that it “ensures student success in a global environment” (University of South Florida, 2013). The shift of funding appropriations to performance metrics has changed the landscape and practices of the SUS, especially as it relates to the approach to student success. Based on this funding model and USF’s goal to continue to increase in prominence, strategic decisions for innovation and investment have aligned with strengthening performance outcomes and rankings. This area of strategic emphasis led to the creation of the ACE program.

While ACE was created based on a need to meet performance metrics, the program was built on solid theoretical practices for student success. To provide continued context for the basis of this study and narratives, this literature review serves to outline important topics in student success that impact the way in which I view my work and have operated in higher education. I begin with a quick perspective of performance funding, followed by a dive into relevant topics in student success and summer programming.

Performance Funding

Dougherty et al. (2014) defined performance funding as “state appropriations directly to a college’s performance on outcomes such as student retention, graduation, transfer, and job placement” p. (164). While performance metrics seem to incentivize student success, one can argue they only incentivize strengthening the data points around the metrics. When looking at data, one can alter the input to impact the output. It is important to note that changes in

university policy can be presented outwardly as student focused but be motivated by shifting metric scores.

One such example of this type of manipulation can be seen in the Admissions process. As some metrics are solely based on students admitted in the fall semester, admissions offices have an opportunity to admit students with lower GPA's and test scores into summer and spring terms – without impacting the perceived “quality” of the incoming class.

Umbricht, Fernandez, and Orlagus (2017) conclude that many of the performance funding policies are tied to factors those institutions cannot alter such as the students' backgrounds prior to applying to the school. As it is widely discussed that standardized tests put minority takers at a disadvantage, many students that have a high propensity to succeed (regardless of their test score) are admitted directly into the summer or spring semesters. Without a clear program or support structure established for the spring and summer, students can find themselves marginalized by not getting a traditional start. As USF has continued to climb in many national and international rankings since 2016, it is positively correlated to the proportional size of the summer class to that of the fall.

Reframing Retention Through the 4 Ps Framework

Kalsbeek (2013b) states that “retention and graduation rates, like any other enrollment management goal, are broad enrollment measures to be assessed and addressed as institutional attributes and outcomes” (p.7). It is important to think of how these numbers are typically gathered, assessed, and reported. Most tracking occurs within institutional data offices on campuses and are simply numbers within the system. As numbers are reported, administration will draw criticisms for low rates and typically try to identify the sub population that is showing the most drastic dip against the average. Unfortunately, retention is not this simple. Retention

has many contributing factors that cannot be simply reflected in a number. With researching outlining numerous factors influencing the retention of one singular student, universities tend to have difficulty establishing overarching plans to increase retention across the entire population.

In reflecting on this principle, DePaul University created and implemented the “4Ps of Student Retention” framework in 2013. DePaul University’s Enrollment Management and Marketing (2013) described the framework as an integrated approach which includes:

shaping the **profile** of new freshmen and transfers with a goal of improved degree completion; ensuring students’ initial and continuous academic **progress** toward degree completion; improving and integrating all **processes** and services related to student enrollment; and ensuring that all students’ experiences are consistent with the **promise** of DePaul’s mission, purposes and brand. (para. 1)

Kalsbeek (2013b) poses that the 4 Ps approach may be the most effective in instituting institutional improvement. Knowing that retention is the culmination of many separate metrics and learning outcomes, the 4 Ps approach helps universities reframe, connect, and expand on student success initiatives. It is clear how each can play a part in the retention and success of first-year students.

Profile

The basis of profile is the understanding of the student population entering and currently enrolled at the university. DePaul University Enrollment Management and Marketing (2013) concludes that “a comprehensive strategy recognizes that the strongest driver of retention is the student profile (academic, financial and demographic characteristics)” (Profile section, para. 2). While thoughts of admitting a stronger freshman cohort in the realm of academic and financial ability may influence increases in retention and graduation, the ethical side of this argument is

damning. If we only educate the students that are from affluent backgrounds with high GPAs, where will the masses be educated. A win for a university metric, is not necessarily a win for society as a whole. Universities must focus on instituting practices that meet students where they are to influence better student outcomes for all populations.

In summation of the importance of profile, Kalsbeek (2013a) concludes that “embracing *profile* as the first “P” of a student retention framework grounds retention efforts in the most strategic of contexts and connects it to the entirety of the institution’s strategic purposes” (p. 9). As the profile of the incoming class changes, the university must be tasked with reshaping programs and initiatives that encapsulate the current needs of the population. Universities must understand this target is constantly moving and without adequately defining the anticipated population, campus partners are placed in a precarious position. Not grasping the profile can lead to programming that does not meet the need of students which wastes resources and opportunities to influence retention in a positive direction.

Progress

In discussing meaningful student experience and purposeful metric tracking at the university level, progress aligns itself as the most important P. DePaul University Enrollment Management and Marketing (2013) asserts that:

Improved retention requires a greater emphasis on cultivating, supporting and measuring student progress to degree completion. A comprehensive strategy addresses the curricular structures, advising practices, tuition pricing and financial aid policies that are not adequately focused on patterns and programs leading to timely degree completion. Clarifying and reinforcing optimum course scheduling and implementing a more coordinated approach to academic and financial planning also help ensure a more “future-

directed” undergraduate experience focused on progress and degree completion.

(Progress Section, para. 2)

Inhibitors to progress can be seen in all aspects of a student’s experience on campus. Part of the issue at the university level is solely looking at retention and missing this crucial element.

According to Kalsbeek (2013a), by focusing on retention we are constantly looking in the past, but if we shift our focus to progress, we are measuring against future goals. By shifting the singular focus of retention to one that includes progress towards degree, universities will enact a sense of purpose for their students by charting a path toward graduation. It simply is not enough to retain students. We must ensure they are making the necessary progress to complete degree requirements. By increasing the quality of persistence, through emphasis on progress, universities should see a positive trend in timely graduation.

Process

Policies and procedures enacted by universities have a direct effect on students’ experiences on campus. DePaul University (2013) stated the importance of process is to “improve and integrate all processes and services related to students’ enrollment” (Process section, para. 1). In many cases, individual offices are run in “silos” that cause an indirect path that is difficult for incoming students who are not familiar with the system to follow. By integrating all important messaging and tasks, students have better access to pertinent information and a map for completion.

Kalsbeek (2013a) jovially describes process in stating, “just as a rising tide lifts all boats, improving broad processes that affect the greatest number of students is the optimal institutional focus for retention strategy” (p. 10). In the current university climate, the long-standing focus on retention has seemed to revolve around at-risk populations, many of which are identified before

they step foot on campus. Kalsbeek (2013a) believes that by putting the individual group's student outcomes over the larger population, a disproportionate share of resources is funneled to that cohort. This disproportionate allocation limits the overarching goal of influencing an effective progress for all students. In aligning processes that speak to the university's goals and differing demographics of students, it is best to identify the processes that inhibit the majority of students and then, with available funding, work into the identified at-risk populations.

Promise

With all the enrollment strategies used in recruiting, it is important for universities not to oversell the student experience at their university. DePaul (2013) articulates the need to "ensure all student's expectations and experiences are consistent with the promise of DePaul's mission and brand" (Promise section, para. 1). In their definition of the concept, there are truly three sides of the promise; the perception of students of the mission and brand vs. the university's perception of how students are articulating their mission and brand vs. the actual campus experience. All sides of this tug-of-war require soul searching and understanding that the expectations they set impacts the experience. Process is closely tied in with promise by being responsible in providing all students with equal opportunity. In discussing the communication of institutional values and expectations, Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) hypothesize that "to do this effectively, a school must first understand who its students are, what they are prepared to do academically, and what they expect of the institution and themselves" (p. 555).

As students face the difficult decision on deciding which of the ever-increasing number of institutions to apply to and enroll, they are consistently told these next four years will be the best of their lives. This concept solidifies lofty expectations for the university to meet and

exceed the brand promises they have used in marketing. Kalsbeek (2013b) discusses a potential issue by affirming that “to the extent that student attrition is a function of unmet expectations, it is a function of an unrealized brand promise” (p. 12). In thinking through these ramifications, it is important to again reflect on the compartmentalization of university offices. With many different colleges and departments, marketing is typically decentralized, including university communications offices. Branding a university externally is typically done through highlighting the achievements and opportunities of the few. In an economic climate where money drives decisions, universities are left with the consequences of tapering their message towards the middle, which gives realistic expectations but may cause a decline in applications compared to universities with loftier messaging. This trade-off may cause a loss of revenue when first instituted, but by recruiting students that are tied into the brand promise, the likelihood of them persisting to graduation is stronger.

Factors Influencing Student Persistence

Student Engagement

Kuh et al. (2008) defines student engagement as “both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practice” (p. 542). It is important to note that this definition of engagement goes further than the initial theories of student involvement in that it centers around the energy students invest in purposeful activities, not just time spent doing things. Kuh et al. (2008) revealed through their findings that “student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is positively related to academic outcomes as represented by first- year student grades and by persistence between the first and second year of college” (p. 555). These results were found even after they controlled for pre-college characteristics. Kuh et al. (2008) found that while the benefits of engagement were experienced by all, lower ability and minority student populations

saw more substantial benefits than white students. This concept goes directly back to Process, in the 4Ps framework. Universities should focus on strategies to promote purposeful educational opportunities for all, and with that, select strategies to further influence identified at-risk populations to attend. In focusing on these findings, it is important to note that engaging in purposeful educational activities takes place both in and outside the classroom, with purpose defined by the individual student.

In this theory of student engagement, pressure is laid on faculty and staff “because students generally benefit most from early interventions and sustained attention at key transition points” and more specifically that “faculty and staff should clarify institutional values and expectations early and often to prospective and matriculating students” (Kuh et al., 2008, p. 255). This is most relevant to commuter students, who spend most of their time on campus in the classroom. Additionally, increased pressure is placed on faculty as they must balance the varying levels of preparation of students in their classes to create a strategy that engages all. Knowing that each class will be different, faculty and staff must be ready to adapt courses as they progress through the curriculum. Universities incorporating a clear admissions plan will be more likely to encourage an easier path for faculty and staff through a shared expectation fostered by acknowledgment of the profile portion of the 4Ps.

In identifying influential ways for students to persist, Kuh et al. (2008) found that “when students are required to take responsibility for activities that require daily decisions and tasks, they become invested in the activity and are more committed to college and their studies” (p. 557). This challenge brings the conversation back to specialized cohorts. When discussing these cohorts, most attention goes to the at-risk populations, but it is important to also highlight high achievers. If a curriculum is not challenging students to expand and grow, it is important to offer

either the opportunity for advanced courses or activities outside of the classroom for them to be further stimulated and increase their level of engagement.

Student engagement is an important concept as it measures the level in which students are embedded into the university's way of life. When reflecting on the 4Ps, it is important for a university to foster not just a multitude of opportunities, but ones that will help a student find purpose in their time on campus and beyond. When a student identifies as part of the university with a purpose, they are more likely to be retained and graduate.

Goal Setting

Further factors are influential in the retention and success of students including goal setting. Morisano et al. (2010) conclude that “many general factors including lack of goal clarity, decreased motivation, disorganized thinking, mood dysregulation, financial stress, and relationship problems—can hinder academic performance and increase the probability of course dropout” (p. 255). With students being motivated to drop out from one or more of these characteristics or others, it is difficult to track with any certainty why students are not returning. The benefits of goal setting are to help students visualize their future and work backward to identify ways they can get there. Morisano et al. (2010) show that “goal clarity increases persistence, making individuals less susceptible to the undermining effects of anxiety, disappointment, and frustration that appear to help individuals discover and use ever more efficient strategies and modes of thought and perception” (p. 256).

Goal setting is shown to help individuals in all aspects of their life. By developing academic, social, and engagement goals, students are more inclined to persist. Morisano et al. (2010) found that students that participated in their goal setting program increased their GPA and were found to register for and complete more credit hours in the following semester. In

reflecting on the progress portion of the 4Ps, goal setting is shown to increase the level of persistence, a student's GPA, and the amount of credit hours they complete a semester. Instituting strategies that infuse goal setting into the curriculum can ultimately lead to a student expediting their way to degree completion.

High Impact Practices

While goal setting has been shown to positively influence a student's persistence and progress, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has developed a list of ten high impact practices that are, in essence, ways to encourage student engagement. Kilgo et al. (2014) state that:

the AAC&U has called for postsecondary institutions to embrace four essential learning outcomes for student success in the twenty-first century, including “knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative learning”—outcomes designed to ensure that students gain the knowledge, skills, capacities, and competences to engage locally and globally, to solve significant problems, and to interact with diverse others (p. 509-510).

While these four concepts are thought to be linked to a liberal education, they provide depth to a student's purpose, meeting the needs of society. As high impact practices are focused on personal growth that transition into career readiness, a positive correlation is seen with student engagement. While Kuh (2008) outlined a list of eleven high impact practices, not all are relevant to this study. The following eleven areas are listed by the AAC&U, and I have bolded ones that align with the ACE program: **first-year seminars and experiences**, **common intellectual experiences**, **learning communities**, writing-intensive courses, **collaborative**

assignments and projects, undergraduate research, **diversity/global learning**, service learning and community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects.

Collaborative assignments and projects. Davidson and Major (2014) have “shown strong evidence indicating that students working in small groups outperform their counterparts in a number of key areas including knowledge development, thinking skills, social skills, and course satisfaction” (p.7). There are several types of approaches to group learning, which Davidson and Major (2014) describe as cooperative, collaborative, and problem-based learning. As the AAC&U developed the list of high impact practices to influence skill development post degree, these three types of learning approaches focus on different aspects of teamwork and knowledge facilitation. Collaborative learning is defined as “the main idea in all the cooperative learning approaches is that students work and learn together actively in small groups to accomplish a common goal in a mutually helpful manner” (Davidson & Major, 2014, p. 14). The difference between cooperative and collaborative learning is that collaborative learning is similarly done in student groups, but also done in tandem with the instructor (Davidson & Major, 2014). By including the instructor in the quest for the solution, knowledge becomes the authority in the classroom. Problem-based learning, like the name implies, is concentrated around a problem. In this group approach, students are required to use higher level thinking skills to solve real world problems (Davidson & Major, 2014).

When thinking of the implications of each approach, they seem to be on a continuum with overlap. In working towards developing meaning of how all three learning approaches mesh and prepare students for the real world, Davidson and Major (2014) state:

- Cooperative learning fosters interdependence through a combination of goals, tasks, resources, roles, and rewards, while collaborative learning employs only goals, tasks, and, occasionally, limited resources to foster interdependence. (p. 34)
- Students with well-developed social skills and teamwork skills developed through structured cooperative learning eventually need less structure and are able to participate in any form of group work. (p. 46)
- Students with experience in more structured problem- based learning will be enabled to participate in both cooperative learning and less structured collaborative learning, as PBL will provide them with mental models necessary to understand and engage in problem solving. (p.46)

In their research, Kilgo et al. (2014) found that “active and collaborative learning were consistently significant, positive predictors for nearly all of the liberal arts educational outcomes” (p. 521). When faculty and staff focusing on infusing these types of learning through their curriculum, from lower-level courses to capstones, students will be prepared for team-based careers and the intricacies of society.

Freshmen learning communities. While learning communities come in many shapes and sizes, they are administered as ways to bring many aspects of high impact practices and successful transition skills directly to target populations of students. Goldman (2012) idealizes learning communities as:

supporting the dimensions which define a successful first-year student: the development of intellectual and academic competence, establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, identity development, program considerations and career goals, maintenance of health and wellness, internalization of beliefs and values, development of

an awareness of and appreciation for diversity, and the creation of community and civic responsibility. (p.1)

Establishing learning communities aims to increase the level of student engagement by introducing concepts of educational experiences across all aspects of an incoming student's campus life. Smith (2015) postulates that a successful learning community brings peers together to foster mutually beneficial academic and social relationships.

Through his research, Goldman (2012) characterizes the student experience as having “four primary elements: student satisfaction with their course, satisfaction with their grades, connection to a community on campus, and a supportive campus environment” (p. 15). It is the goal of learning communities to foster a successful acclimation process for students that resonate across the 4Ps.

As incoming students transition into the university, it is important to understand that there are different aspects of a successful transition. For the highest likelihood of persistence, students must have successful transitions across the academic, social, and developmental realm.

Goldman (2012) defines these realms in stating that:

- Academic transition involves understanding and developing the strategies and skills needed to be a successful university student in an environment where students are responsible for their own learning.
- Social transition involves making new friends and developing a supportive peer network.
- Developmental transition involves managing health and developing an identity, a sense of purpose, values and ethics, and independence from parents. (p. 13)

It is important to reflect on the 4Ps when discussing these realms. The university's promise must properly outline life on campus and provide ample resources in helping students fully transition successfully from arrival through departure. By establishing learning communities, universities are focused on providing a successful path through process leading to increased progress towards degree.

Each individual university articulates these points in different ways and must clearly outline their reasoning behind establishing learning communities. Pike et al. (2009) identify that meeting certain goals requires different practices for:

- cognitive development, campus leaders should consider ways of using learning communities to set high expectations for academic effort, while simultaneously creating effective support systems that will enable students to meet expectations.
- improved affective development, learning communities that facilitate collaboration among peers and interaction with faculty members may be most appropriate.
- increasing students' experiences with diversity and intercultural competence should consider structuring learning communities to encourage interactions among diverse peers

It is important to note that these are just a few examples of why learning communities are created. The variability of learning communities is seen not only in principle, but in student requirements.

Pike et al. (2009) prove that learning communities were positively and significantly related to academic effort, integrative and higher-order thinking, diversity experiences, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and view of a supportive campus

environment. Learning communities truly tie in the positive attributes of student engagement and provide a vehicle for the inclusion of many high impact practices.

Global/diversity learning. Global/Diversity Learning (GDL) has been interpreted in many ways in higher education. Hovland (2014) identifies that while there is no agreement among scholars or practitioners on a singular definition of global, an important thread to how it is defined is the focus of sociocultural contexts that are not restricted by borders. When we take the time to look at what is impacting our way of life, global influences are woven into the fabric of our lives. In discussing global learning, Olson et al. (2006) identifies the competency that students “acquire through a variety of experiences that enable them to understand world cultures and events; analyze global systems; appreciate cultural differences; and apply this knowledge and appreciation to their lives as citizens and workers” (p. v). This appreciation and application of knowledge will not only support success in a student’s emergent adulthood, but these global impacts support lifelong success through career and social group navigation.

As USF continues its focus on global citizenship, it is important to identify a framework of becoming a world citizen. The table below is adapted from Gibson et al. (2008, p. 17) that articulates elements of a world citizen.

Table 3. Knowledge, Sills, and Attitudes and Values of a World Citizen

Element	Details
Knowledge	Understanding of culture, diversity, globalization. interdependence, global irregularities, peace, and conflict. nature and environment, sustainable development, possible future scenarios, social justice
Skills	Emphasize research and inquiry skills, theory testing, critical thinking, communication skills, and political skills essential for civic engagement in a global society, ability to challenge injustice and inequalities, cooperation, and conflict resolution
Attributes and Values	Appreciation of human dignity; respect for people and things, belief that people can make a difference, empathy toward other cultures and viewpoints, respect for diversity, valuing justice and fairness, commitment to social justice and equity, curiosity about global issues and global conditions that shape one's life, concern for the environment, and commitment to sustainable development

Again, I find myself looking at the values of certain components in the work that I have done and continue to do for students. This framework above provides opportunities to not only

influence the opportunity to help students learn content to be successful in courses, but in the global economy of today, these elements provide tangible concepts that propel students to reflect on their current values and worldview and adapt to be successful in a global environment.

I find this an interesting topic when looking at the ACE program as it began as a program targeted for OOS and international students. One can quickly glean that international students bring a global component, but a benefit is also found in the blending of different cultures that our OOS students bring. Diversity of ideas and culture are key to helping students articulate their positionality, determine if they belong, and get experience in areas that break down social confines and constructs meant to separate groups. In doing so, they become united through focusing on solutions.

The Core Commitments Initiative

Reason (2013) defined the Core Commitments Initiative at AAC&U as “focusing national discourse on the development of personal and social responsibility (PSR) among students in American higher education” (p. 73). In review of the dimensions of PSR, it is clear they are tied into goal setting and student engagement. Reason (2013) identifies the five dimensions of PSR as “striving for excellence, cultivating personal and academic integrity, contributing to a larger community, taking seriously the perspectives of others, and developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning” (p.73).

The conversation of infusing student development principles, namely personal and social responsibility, into the classroom sits at the precipice of the reason for higher education. Should a university’s mission be solely found on educating individuals to influence the career sector, or should education be founded in the concept of developing influential citizens of the global community? In some ways, the cross-section of this question is why the need of higher

education is seen as more important now than ever. Reason et al. (2013) discusses that the constant shift of multiculturalism, globalization, and the decline of moral development has demanded a need for informed students to be able to honorably address issues that are socially and economically relevant.

In discussion of social responsibility, Reason (2013) found that “students who reported more engagement in community service reported greater growth in the ability to analyze and make connections between diverse perspectives” (p.77). A curriculum that focuses on the interconnectedness of theory to practice is an interesting way to garner student engagement. By involving the community, one will not have an option, outside of working with others, in hopefully bettering the world around them. This type of teamwork can be tied back to the principles of active and collaborative learning.

In discussing the need to explore student value systems, Trosset (2013) stated that while research is limited on personal responsibility, what is available focuses on surface level concepts such as cheating and plagiarism, leaving issues such as academic commitment understudied. While these honor code violations are important and do tie back to student values, it seems they are focused on tangible actions and consequences. Personal responsibility can be tied into a student’s life goal. By helping students successfully goal set, faculty and staff can influence motivation and persistence, thus personal responsibility.

O’Neill (2013) sums it up well in saying “Campus environments are dynamic, messy, and always changing places, and educating students to think and act responsibly toward themselves and others is not possible through one-off, isolated activities” (p. 60). As curriculum is shifted and manipulated, the current level of infusion of globalization and diversity calls for a shift in general education requirements. By incorporating aspects of social and personal responsibility to

enhance course material, universities have an opportunity to impact persistence and success for incoming students through modifications of core curriculum.

Sense of Belonging

Baumeister and Leary (1995) established sense of belonging in stating “the belongingness hypothesis is that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 497). Belongingness was not defined as simple social contact, but as meaningful contact that aligned with the student’s core values or goals.

Sense of belonging on a college campus is important on many levels. At the macro level, a student must feel that they are making substantial contributions to the university and are a valued member of that community. At the micro level, a student must feel that they have beneficial relationships with peers and faculty and are involved in both curricular and co-curricular activities that further their mission. Through learning communities, students are more likely to engage with peers and faculty in ways that align with their needs and values during transition at both the macro and micro level to create a strong sense of belonging.

Early Start/ Summer Bridge Programs

Lytle and Gallucci (2015) claim that of the hundreds of new incoming freshman student-experience programs promoting student engagement and student success, few are offered outside the traditional fall and/or spring semesters. Barefoot et al. (2012) define summer bridge programs as “academic programs offered for students before the first year of college,” and state that the programs are designed to provide additional support in academics and social application before the student’s first term. Through their national survey of colleges and universities, Barefoot et al. (2012) found that less than half of the respondents had summer bridge programs

and nearly half of those required certain students to attend. It is important to note that there is not a wealth of research on incoming summer students and the variability of program types further dilutes the data.

In showing why students choose to opt-in to the Freshmen Summer Start Program at UC Santa Barbara, Lytle and Gallucci (2015) found that students ranked gaining confidence in being able to succeed at the university, connecting with other students and making friends, and graduating in four years as the top reasons for enrolling. The top goals for the students and the university are the same – successful transition in academics, creating a social group, and acclimating to the university climate (Lytle & Gallucci, 2015). With their goals aligned, it is the university’s responsibility to build a meaningful path in these areas so students can be successful. This is important to note that USF enters a class of over 2,000 students directly into a summer term with little emphasis placed on courses offered or a structured path to success. ACE and a few other smaller cohort-based programs do provide this intentional approach to cohort-based learning that aligns with these concepts.

Purpose Driven Education

In my career I have had the opportunity to lead many discussions in which I advocate for students and their success. As I look for common themes, I find myself repeating that “every student is at risk,” “students should individually define what success means to them,” and “helping students articulate their passions to purpose.” These elements have been guiding forces in the work that I have done and the perspective that continues to drive my work. While brief and not conclusive of all the reading and research within these areas, this literature review has served as an opportunity to focus on areas in which I find utility.

Chapter Three: Methods

Using narrative inquiry through the scope of critical event autobiographical methodology provides an opportunity to reflect on the trials, tribulations, and success of building the ACE program. This chapter provides rationale for my narrative approach using critical events. I utilize Daiute's (2014) Action-Meaning System (AMS) framework to provide context for my narrative episodes in this study while using Woods' (1993) criteria to provide analysis of critical events.

Rationale

Narrative inquiry finds a purposeful regard in education research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) posit that "education and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and charters in their own and other's stories" (p.2). Narrative's fundamental discussion of human experience provides a holistic quality in which lessons can be learned. When the "narrative researcher is constantly involved in the process of the critique of stories exposing how they are constructed, they can contribute to enhancing human experience" (Murry 2018, p. 277). My hope in this dissertation is that my lived experiences will help provide others with a sense of understanding for what I deem as critical events that have impacted the curation and development of ACE over the years and the resulting impact on me.

An autobiographical methodology is the best fit for this study due to its ability to create deeper meaning from a primary individual's lived experience. Freeman (1993) highlights the rise in importance of autobiographies of ordinary people to offer understanding of traumatic events.

This highlighting of lived experience can not only be looked at through a lens of importance based on trauma or coping, but autobiography can also offer insight into lived experience and decision making.

Being from a rural area and growing up around family and church, power was placed in lived experience. These stories were not only looked at as forms of connection or entertainment but passing wisdom to other generations. I am not trying to characterize my narratives as wisdom for generations to come, but I desire to demonstrate how my lived experience has helped to guide my continued work for students and their success. Understanding myself through reflexivity aids in maintaining an ethical balance between my work to create environments that honor students' individualized goals while serving a larger institution.

Narrative has a basic aim to elicit understanding and purpose through naturally accessing context as the story is being told. Other forms of qualitative research with the use of multiple instruments can pull away from the deeper dive into the human experience, and through that surface level reflection, reduce the amount of connection to the material for the reader. Kramp (2004) supports this assertion by noting that “narrative inquiry readily access[es] such understanding[s] whereas impersonal research instruments reveal neither understanding nor meaning to the research, nor typically even to the one who had the experience and is telling the story” (Kramp, 2004, p. 108). With the intricacies in working in the public domain among numerous stakeholders and inherent cultural intersections, a narrative approach provides context of the positionality of the program at the university, the purpose of university decisions, the purpose of student decisions, and my personal context. For this reason, I believe narrative inquiry is the best methodology for this study.

Narrative Inquiry

"Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Traditionally stories have been passed down and reviewed over generations to not only provide information from the past, but also utilized to provide lessons. As a practitioner that finds utility in personal experience and learning from the experiences of others, narratives provide opportunities to share knowledge gained.

Polkinghorne (1988) notes the importance of narrative as "the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful" (p. 1). In this study, narrative inquiry creates an opportunity to provide meaning to my individual situations and their contextual evolution over time. Daiute (2014) suggests we can use narrative inquiry as a "sense-making function that utilizes lived experience as a tool to process what is going on in a specific environment, a person's positionality, and how to improve the situation for the future" (p.34). Narrative is not only for sense-making for the narrator, but the importance of narrative inquiry is helping others understand and benefit from the narrator's experiences.

In this light, Moen (2006) provided three basic claims about narrative research:

first ... human beings organize their experiences of the world into narratives.

Second, narrative researchers maintain that the stories that are told depend on the individual's past and present experiences, her or his values, the people the stories are being told to, the addresses, and when and where they are being told. The third claim, closely connected to the second, concerns the multivoicedness that occurs in narratives. (p. 60)

These three basic claims are principal to my views of the narrative approach. I appreciate the emphasis on values in outlining the narrative concept as decisions are typically made from our values system. When reflecting on past events, regardless of happiness or tragedy, conceptualizing our values and worldview are salient lenses for introspection and explanation. Through an examination of values, people find connection. Much like when discussing a sense of belonging, connection is important to building trust, respect, and purpose. Narratives allow for connections to be formed over similar life events, which are not necessarily tangible artifacts. A tangible example of this is that individuals can find similarities by saying that they have the same favorite movie, but they can truly connect with how they may have the same favorite scene that elicits an emotional connection. By highlighting lived experience, barriers are broken, which help us relate to one another while also providing the context for decisions and situations.

When narrative is defined as personal truth, it is important to reflect on the way in which we tell our narratives and how they are impacted by different settings and groups. Moen (2006) shares that, “human knowledge and personal identities are therefore continually constructed and revised” based on our setting and audience (p 60). An example of this is when we try to describe our job to others. What context they have for the field will impact the way in which you describe the job and situations that impact it. This resonates with me and my family. My wife works in higher education, so she gets the most detail as she can get into the weeds, my mother gets less as she doesn’t understand the politics in higher education, and my grandmother basically gets my job title with a simple explanation of I help students by xyz. We constantly are changing our positionality and context around situations, but it doesn’t make the events or their impacts any less true, it goes to show that through narrative we are trying to make the most sense of our lived experience for those we are interacting with. Within this dissertation, I aim to write my

narratives for higher education professionals, as the goal is that my experiences will aid them in their continued development.

Narrative inquiry adopts narratives as both the phenomena of study and the method. Kramp (2004) notes that “narrative inquiry readily accesses such understanding, whereas impersonal research instruments reveal neither understanding nor meaning to the research, nor typically even to the one who had the experience and is telling the story” (p. 108). With a shift in accepted research beyond a positivist approach to one of multiple truths and ways of knowing, findings can now be established through authenticity, utility, and/or trustworthiness, which are fundamental to narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) confirm that “embracing and executing the methodology of narrative inquiry, rather than an exclusive reliance on the assumptions of a positivistic paradigm, provides authentic and resonant findings” (p. 25).

The use of narrative inquiry with a focus on an autobiographical approach lends itself to not only providing an opportunity for me to construct and reconstruct experiences from working with the ACE program at USF, but also provides a vehicle for deeper reflection of meaning and insights.

Autobiography

With a deep reflection and examination of my own lived experience, an autobiographical approach translates into opportunities for deeper meaning and transferability. Given (2008) claims that “autobiography is among the most important and valuable vehicles for exploring the human realm in all of its depth, complexity, and richness” (p. 46). As autobiography can take on different meanings across the research spectrum, I conceptualize autobiography as outlined by Given (2008) in stating that autobiography results from:

the first-person interpretive reconstruction of either a life in its entirety or a significant portion of it, with the aim not merely of recounting “what happened when: but also understanding, from the vantage point of the current time, the meaning and movement of the past (p. 46-47).

Given (2008) goes on to explain that autobiography is among the most unrestricted sources of qualitative data as it embodies temporal wholeness for the individual that is the preferred unit of analysis. This fits well with this study of a review of one person’s experience over the course of 6 years.

It is important to note that time is a variable in the viability of truth and reconstruction of events. Time in this sense plays two roles, length of time from the narrative episode that is being recollected and perception of meaning over time based on growth and development. To help conceptualize this, Given (2008) outlined that:

life events, therefore, may be considered “episodes” in an evolving narrative of the self, and just as the past is perpetually rewritten from the standpoint of the present, so too is the self, with the relationship between self and autobiographical narrative being a dialectical one through and through; even as the self is the source of autobiography, autobiography is the source of the self (p. 48)

The goal of autobiography is not only to recount the structure of past events, but to make meaning of it. Subjective by nature, autobiography goes beyond descriptions of past experiences to encompass present trends and implications (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). This multi-meaning approach is core to this study as it looks to not only describe critical events, but also to offer reflection on decisions made for the program and how they impacted the university and me. This constructive process highlights an interpretive approach, not only for me in retelling the

events, but also to the reader with their varying levels of knowledge and experience for this isolated case.

Autobiographical stories are more than personal testimonies from the narrator; they are attestations of rules, principles, and norms that govern learning and logic (Maynes et al., 2008, p.3). Autobiography provides a vehicle to derive understanding from lived experience and asserts a reflection of critical events is paramount in understanding the leadership and direction provided to initiatives. In an industry like higher education, there are shared goals, but there is autonomy to move forward in the execution of initiatives. Autobiography provides the best framework for this study to understand decisions that led to certain outcomes.

Critical Incident/Event Method

In reviewing the literature on critical junctures for narrative researchers, I find that the word incident and event are used most often. For the sake of this research, I believe the words to be interchangeable and will expand on the topic to articulate my process for critical event narrative and analysis.

Mertova and Webster (2020) emphasize the importance of events in narrative inquiry as they are pivotal in how we recall life experiences and use memories to influence the way in which we augment future strategies and work. Critical events are at the core of what researchers investigate as they are instrumental in influencing understanding. Mertova and Webster (2020) defines critical events as almost always “a change experience and can only ever be identified afterwards” (p. 60). Critical events reveal what is critical to the narrator and significant to the construction and reconstruction of narrative. What I identify as critical to me, may not even be remembered by someone else that was involved in that event years ago.

In this vein, Clamp et al.(2004) define a critical incident as:

an observable type of human activity which is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical it must be performed in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer, and its consequences are sufficiently definite so there is little doubt concerning its effects. (p.198)

Based on the importance of critical events, a critical incident method is helpful in making meaning of these events. Allen (2017) states that a critical incident method can be used as “a systematic, open-ended technique that involves analyzing specific situations to determine which communicative actions or behaviors would lead to the best possible outcome of a given situation system” (p. 300). Allen (2017) notes how this methodological tool can demonstrate how an instance of human behavior “emphasizes or decreases the goals, objectives, or outcome of a particular activity or communicative event in a significant way” (p. 301). While the critical incident method has a framework of five steps, it is most utilized when a researcher will be interviewing multiple subjects and analyzing the data presented through a thematic approach. In this autobiographical study, I have built an understanding of the intricacies of the critical incident method but have adapted an analytical framework that combines the Activity-Meaning System and analysis areas for discussion provided by Woods (1993).

Narrative Design

To provide structure and context around each narrative, I utilize an Activity-Meaning System (AMS) design as described by Daiute (2014). Daiute (2014) identifies that AMS is useful in organizing dynamic narrative inquiry as it “depicts an environment of everyday life – a cross-context slice of life-wherein relationships across different points of view by different actors

in the system interact in some way” (p.39). The table below is adapted from Daiute (2014, p. 40) to outline the dimensions of this model and how I utilize them for my study.

Table 4. Overview of Activity-Meaning System Research Design Dimensions

Dimensions of AMS	Relevance to my narrative inquiry design
Research questions: outline how this narrative episode aligns with research questions within this study.	Provides a reminder of the questions and a quick summary of why this episode is important to the study
Space-time activity: outline the relevant context at the given time of the event.	Identify key temporal facts surrounding the event such as place, time, context.
Interacting stakeholders: outline how individuals/units are involved.	Identify key stakeholders those that are directly and indirectly involved/relevant.
Narrative episodes	Provide the autobiographical narrative episode.
Narrative analyses	Utilizing Woods (1993) four areas of positive critical events

I utilize elements of the AMS framework within each narrative that compounds in chapter five to assist the reader in understanding and positioning micro and macro impacts. While the narrative episodes in chapter four provides my retelling of critical events, I believe that this framework will provide additional context to each episode, which helps facilitate understanding around the factors influencing my work at the time and provides for transferability.

Analysis Method

Woods (1993) identifies that critical events “lie between the flash-point incidents and the career-phase periods” (p. 357). I find this an interesting statement, as this study follows a chronological order of what I believe are critical events that have altered my viewpoint on education and influenced my career trajectory. As Woods (1993) continues to discuss the significance of critical events, he breaks down the four areas of positive events as:

1. promoting children’s education and development in uncommonly accelerated ways,

2. identifying they are critical for *teacher* change,
3. having an important preservation and confirmatory function for teachers, and
4. outlining they are critical for the profession as a whole. (p. 356-358)

I find this relevant for the ACE program and my role in all four areas. First, ACE by nature is an uncommon, accelerated program that takes what is the typical six week starting summer term for incoming freshmen and condenses it to four weeks. Within these four weeks, students not only take the same amount of credit hours that the typical summer freshmen enroll in, but ACE students are involved in multiple high impact practices that are absent from the typical summer student experience.

Secondly, my narratives and analysis will speak to the level of change that the program and these critical events have had on me personally and professionally.

Woods (1993) breaks down his third criterion of the important preservation and confirmatory function of teachers as helping to “maintain a particular definition of reality and identity against the pressure of contrary forces” (p. 358). This criterion resonates, as my work was aligned with the mission of the university, but at times in conflict with standard operating procedures and the culture of campus units. This conflict creates the intersections of new perspectives and change that can influence the larger work of the university. Piloting new initiatives brings proof of concept to the forefront for organizations with hopes of identifying new ways of doing things that could provide new efficiencies and success.

Woods’ (1993) fourth criterion is tied very closely with the third criterion and the reason for this dissertation; my hope that my reflection of these critical events will be critical for the overall profession (p.358). While work is primarily focused on benefiting the ACE students and USF, there was also information sharing with national organizations such as the North American

Association of Summer Sessions and the Association of International Educators. My hope was not to replicate the ACE program across higher education but provide information on the perceived benefits of the different layers of support and resources that were provided to students in this initiative: cohort model, linked courses, education abroad/domestic travel, mentors, and other features.

Overall, these four criteria speak to the purpose of this study and will provide a framework of analysis to identify relevance to described narratives. Mertova and Webster (2020) surmised that the above criteria could be aligned with a holistic approach for a meaningful methodology to provide validity to the study. In reviewing their work, my autobiographical approach allows me to reflect on my multiple identities within the narrative and reflect holistically on the impact to students, staff, individual units within the university, and the university as a whole. The multivoicedness that is inherit with the narrative approach and my positionality as both the researcher and subject allow for a deeper dive into the events and their impact.

Ethics and Trustworthiness

It is important for narrative researchers to outline a moral and/or ethical compass in conducting their work. Polkinghorne (2007) supported this when discerning that the true purpose of storied evidence is “not to determine if events actually happened but about the meaning experienced by the people” (p 479). With the subjectivity of memory and the evolution of my professional and personal foundations, notations of historical accuracy versus narrative truths are important to this study. How I supply meaning to my narratives is impacted by the timing of this narrative as a culmination of both past events and my current life situation.

Bishop and Shepherd (2011) postulates that a reflexive researcher can locate the “coherent and unified self” in the research to be examined (p. 1284). They further outline that while we may think of ourselves as resolute, our identities and worldviews are reconstructed over time and through new experiences along with our subjective base. As we experience changes in our personal and professional identities, reflections of past events can illuminate a deeper clarification of purpose and impact of critical events. What may seem like an easy decision at the time can truly be a foundational shift that impacts numerous events when looked back on. Temporal accounts are as much of a reflection of the past as they are “stories of our contemporary selves” (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011, p. 1290). With this positionality, reflexivity is a guide to understanding one’s subjectivity in the retelling and framing of narrative episodes. Reflexivity enhances a researcher’s transparency, which develops a more “nuanced and ethical account of qualitative research endeavors” (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011, p. 1290).

It is important to note that regardless of how this dissertation is written, I want it to be useful to those that read it. While I aspire for its utility, my subjectivity is not intended to derive causality amongst these events. Crites (1986) warned of this “illusion of causality” in that reflection of events either forward or backwards could be seemingly aligned linearly to appear to be causal in nature. As discussed earlier with the structure and importance of autobiography as a tool of narrative inquiry, I attest that these events are single episodes of many that impacted not only my work in isolation at the time but also my worldview and future work.

As narrator and researcher, I have the responsibility to not only create the narrative but to also interpret and construct meaning. Kramp (2004) discusses that the framing and structuring of relationships in narratives translates knowing to telling with the researcher providing meaning to a given experience. A related concern identified by Bruner (1991) is that of “background

knowledge” (p.10), giving way to the potential of stating claims or providing analysis that includes information outside of the bounds of the narrative. In telling, interpreting, and presenting analysis of these events and their impact it is understood that information can be skewed to reflect an agenda. My agenda with this dissertation is to identify some opportunities for transferability for the reader. Not that this dissertation is written for someone to create an ACE program on another campus, but that my lived experiences in navigating the principles of student success, limited resources, and an environment that changes at a slow pace will allow others to at a base level commiserate, but hopefully motivate others to persevere to affect change.

Loh’s (2013) work to identify issues of trustworthiness and quality in narrative studies articulates the lack of structure and rigor that is utilized in more positivist approaches. When we search for meaning within stories, much of it is found through diving deep into the analysis and balance of words used. By looking to identify criteria for validity or trustworthiness, it would seem that a checklist would dictate the structure and telling of a story that should flow naturally. From researching the narrative approach, I have found a connection when reading narrative episodes that are relevant and provide a glimpse into the thought process of individuals. Seemingly the feeling of connecting to why someone may have done something became a factor in me understanding and trusting the narrator.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide trustworthiness criteria, but many of the layers are structured in a way that the researcher is not the narrator. They outline how the researcher interprets the narratives provided by their subject. Loh (2013) identifies that the constructivist paradigm of this technique is implied and that it is understood that constructed knowledge is never “perfect” (p. 6). With this in mind, transferability becomes the criteria to reflect on for

trustworthiness for this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined this by stating “it is, in summary, not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers” (p.316).

Trustworthiness through transferability is provided by “thick description” that enables the reader to connect to the events of the narrative through connections or opportunities for generalizability (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; Maxwell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2001). In providing deep description through my narratives, I hope to also provide quality and value through verisimilitude and utility. Verisimilitude is defined by Creswell (2007) as “a criterion for good literary study, in which the writing seems ‘real’ and alive,’ transporting the reader directly into the world of the study” (p. 250). Loh (2013) outlines verisimilitude’s importance for achieving trustworthiness in that “it allows others to have a vicarious experience of being in the similar situation and thereby being able to understand the decisions made and the emotions felt by the participants in the study” (p. 10). Mertova and Webster (2020) connect these points in stating that for the reader, the story sounds true because of similar lived events or opens a new window to the reader that generates new understanding, or the reader gains a different understanding of a past experience (p.83).

Closely aligned with verisimilitude is the concept of utility. When aligning purpose with action, utility provides a cornerstone for this work. Loh (2013) posits that utility is an important criterion for trustworthiness whereas if there is no use for this study, why put it together? Using thick description and a peer validator, I believe this study will provide a glimpse into decision making aligned with meeting the dynamic goals of students and the university.

In aims to affirm my goals of providing trust within this research, my supervisor Dr. DeLuca is also a member of my dissertation committee. Her review of this material not only provides oversight of the dissertation process, but also the concreteness of the events outlined. While she cannot confirm nor deny my emotional connectedness to the work and critical events outlined, she can confirm the events that transpired.

I attest to taking these concepts to heart in the completion of my narratives and aim to highlight components of care for the needs of students and the university and demonstrate how it impacted my perceived decision making at the time. By providing my reflexivity and the above understanding of ethics, I aim to provide the utmost validity possible in this narrative study by staying true to myself and my experience through what is and is not included within the bounds of my narrative episodes. By thoroughly stating this, I want to be explicit in outlining that my moral decision making as described within my narrative episodes cannot be described as either right nor wrong, but as a part of my truth and evolving worldview.

Chapter Four: Narratives

Narrative 1: Other Duties as Assigned

I was leaving the world of summer transition programs behind-- or so I thought. After working for five years at NC State managing the Summer and Transfer START programs, I accepted a job as Assistant Director for Innovative Education at USF with responsibilities for Summer@USF and Intersession. This role was created to assist the university with updating the summer budget model to one that incentivized the colleges to be more efficient in increasing enrollment during the summer term. I would be working under Dr. DeLuca, who led the summer office at NC State and was now the Associate Vice President (AVP) of Innovative Education, starting at USF a year prior.

Being close with Dr. DeLuca and navigating a long hiring process, I felt like I had a good lay of the land, and I was ready to jump right in. For example, during my interview process I had a meeting with a department chair that was focused on gaining her support to offer a Maymester course the upcoming summer – which they did. Knowing that Undergraduate Studies ran the Freshman Summer Institute program, I believed I would work with them, but not have responsibility over their structure. While I knew I would miss working directly with the student population, over the month leading up to the job, I had made peace that this was a logical next step in my career trajectory. I was excited to settle into more leadership meetings, more data, and more strategy.

I had driven down to Tampa a couple of times trying to find a place to live but could not settle on any options. Wanting to be in the perfect area to get acclimated to Tampa seemed like a

great idea until indecision and timeline forced me to finalize an apartment on the Saturday before my Monday orientation. Now in an extended stay hotel for my next two weeks, I descended onto USF's campus on Monday, October 13, 2014, for orientation. Not a bad experience. I made some friends during orientation, including one that has been my closest friend in Tampa. The other became Associate Registrar, which within the world of summer sessions is extremely helpful!

As orientation wrapped up that afternoon, I was able to check out my new office and have a few meetings with co-workers to begin work on the most pressing project, which was the launch of Winter Session in December. As it was mid-October and Winter Session began in only a couple of months, there was a lot of work to do with the Registrar's Office, Financial Aid, and the advising community to ensure the launch went off with minimal issues. I knew I was jumping into the deep end but was excited to hit the ground running as I believe in the baptism by fire approach. Little did I know how hot that fire was about to burn.

Day two of orientation was only a half day, setting me up for what was only going to be the most labor-intensive meet-and-greet of my life. The Enrollment Planning and Management Committee (EPM) was led by the leader of Student Success (LoSS) who was focused on strategizing the student experience from admissions to graduation. The members of the committee included the leader of Student Success along with the leaders in Admissions, Financial Aid, Institutional Research, and Innovative Education. Dr. DeLuca brought me along to the meeting that afternoon to introduce me to the group as I would be partnering very closely with members of the committee to launch intersession and plan summer terms. After introducing myself and telling my story, the meeting continued with a presentation by Institutional Research

focused on performance metric findings from the 2013-14 academic year that had just been completed.

The Birth of ACE

During the presentation, there was excitement around metrics that had increased over the prior year, but it was clear that the group wasn't just trying to improve; the goal was being on par or better than The University of Florida and Florida State. I would come to learn the aspiration to be the top school in Florida and named to the AAU were the drivers of most, if not all, decisions. A familiar refrain over my entire time at USF was spoken first to me within this room, "while we should be proud of our accomplishments, we must not rest on our laurels." From the initial review of the data findings, we quickly shifted the meeting to discuss which populations we could influence for the upcoming cycle. It became clear why I was in the room.

The first discussion revolved around the incoming fall freshmen GPA and Test Score metrics and how USF was barely at the threshold for maximizing points in this category. Prior to this meeting, I knew that USF had a large summer freshman starting class of around 1,600 students, but I naively had believed that they opted in. A chance to leave home early and experience college life in the sun of Florida made sense to me, but that wasn't the case. With an emphasis on having the highest possible academic profile, the university had the competing priority of also ensuring enough freshmen were enrolling to generate the needed tuition, housing, and dining revenue. At this crossroads sat out of state (OOS) students.

As one can imagine, the OOS population at USF was skewed considerably towards states with colder climates. Being from North Carolina, I was used to K-12 getting out in late May or early June, depending on the year, like Florida. The northeast and mid-west, however, was prone to finishing school in mid to late June, making it difficult for students from those states to start at

USF during the summer. USF leadership had made a decision that was a standard policy that OOS students would be admitted directly to the fall. With OOS students paying almost three times the amount of tuition as an in-state student, maximizing the yield was of the upmost importance. Thus, the institution was at a crossroads; there was a population of OOS students that were well below the fall profile that were being admitted to the fall term because there was a legitimate concern that the students were less likely to enroll during the summer due to conflicting high school graduation dates and the stigma outside the state of Florida around summer school being remedial.

Just as Institutional Research finished discussing the potential increase in the metric if a subset of the fall OOS students could be moved to the summer, the LoSS looked at me and after buttering me up talking about my success in creating and running Summer START at NC State, said “Well, you’re the summer guy, can you figure something out?” Naturally, I said of course, as I’m one of those folks that believe they can fix anything, but then the real fun started. I had to pitch something on the spot. Knowing we were developing alternative calendar sessions for Winter Session and Maymester, I said we could create something that started mid-July and finished mid-August in time for the students to have a short break prior to the fall term. Everyone agreed that would be the only way it could maximize the number of students that could start in the summer, but Admissions leadership expressed concern as admissions decisions were rolling out in about a month. Their concerns parlayed into the mandate that they would have to have all details for the program in two weeks as they would have to update marketing and messaging for the students and that takes time to update. So, launching Winter Session and creating a new summer transition program with little to no time, no big deal.

Prior to leaving that space I told everyone that we needed to meet as soon as possible so I could understand their processes and procedures as we built out what was feasible within the next two weeks. The LoSS decided that the program leadership would be split as I did not know the Office of Admission's policies and procedures, so he named an upper-level administrator from Admissions in charge of working with students until they deposited. I would be in charge of the creation the program, the onboarding process after a student deposits, and program facilitation during the summer. With the meeting now over, I walked back to my office with Dr. DeLuca and while we laughed about how quickly my role escalated, I knew the next few weeks were going to be wild – and they did not disappoint.

Chicken or the Egg

Do I build the program and then go elicit campus support in hoping that offices will build around it, or do I meet with them and then take what I've learned to build something out? Build for buy-in. I have found through my career that if you build something that aligns with student needs, as well as the mission and goals of the university and partnering offices, it is very hard for them to say no. Also, considering the time I had and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, I needed to prioritize the mandatory logistics over student life elements. I wasn't going to have the opportunity to meet with the student affairs side of the house during the quick timeframe as I needed to focus on admissions, financial aid, the registrar, the colleges for courses, housing, dining, and the cashiers.

In looking at meetings I was able to schedule all the above within two weeks, so I felt confident that when I went back to EPM in two weeks, I would have the required program skeleton that would be feasible--not immaculate--but feasible. With my first meetings happening

towards the end of the week, I had a day and a half to put something together, so I leaned into past successes and explored USF’s current priorities.

START with the Bones

At NC State I had success with Summer START based on a concept of building student belonging through shared experiences and linked courses. I have always had the philosophy that all incoming college students are at risk of not persisting to graduation in one of three areas – academic proficiency, social integration, and/or campus acclimation. In building out programs, I have always tried to build models that support these three areas in helping students identify their strengths and build a community that supports their resilience.

There were some struggles in the beginning with building Summer START, as there tends to be with any new programs that do not take place in fall or spring. As universities are very cyclical and process driven, non-traditional programs require updates and reformatting to logistics across campus. When referencing Summer START to build what would become ACE, I started with the most recent version of START which was its fifth iteration. Going into this process, I knew there would be growing pains for ACE, but using a proven model supported benchmarking and consensus building at USF. I will use the table below to compare Summer START and ACE as I continue through narratives and in chapter five. Below you will find a quick structure of Summer START that I reflected on in hopes of building something similar at USF:

Table 5. Summer START Breakdown

Component	Summer START
Admissions	Students were invited to join the program as part of their Admissions Acceptance Packet. Students and their parents would receive two emails from our office inviting them to start in the summer. There was a subset of special admit student athletes that were mandated to begin during Summer START.

Table 5 (Continued)

Component	Summer START
Confirmation of Attendance	Students would complete an online Google form expressing interest. Our office would set up a meeting with the student/family to discuss the program expectations and any questions. To formally be updated from a fall to Summer START, students would send an email to our office and the Office of Admissions to be formally updated in the student information system.
Onboarding	Once officially updated in the system, students would be sent a next steps PDF that outlined all that was needed. This was based off the typical onboarding information with students discussing FAFSA, housing/dining, residency etc. Added to this was any changes to deadlines or additional items that needed to be completed for the summer. We also had a form for course preferences.
Financial Aid	Financial Aid was done by hand for students based on their FAFSA for the next academic year (fall/spring/summer). The Office of Financial Aid used university funds to award aid. With no federal money being used, students were not required to do the prior year's FAFSA.
Housing	Students lived in Central Campus in the buildings utilized for the First-Year College Living Learning Village. Students had the opportunity to keep the same rooms for the summer, fall, and spring. This location was hall style, and our office created the room assignments. Students had the opportunity to request roommates, but our office worked to spread special cohorts and students in the same courses across the building to promote a diversity of interactions.
Orientation	With over 220 students, the university held an orientation session specifically, for START students. This was the typical fall orientation, but I was present during some large group sessions to answer questions specific to START. Orientation was always held the day after move-in to ensure families that wanted to attend could in the same trip.
Peer Mentors	Peer mentors were pivotal to the success of the program. All Summer START mentors were previous participants and had varying academic and co-curricular involvement. The shared experience of starting during START that they had with the participants coupled with the diversity of campus integration, peer mentors helped push the mission of the program forward while supporting each participant's unique path to success.
Academics	START always operated in a linked course model. Students would be enrolled in two courses together that were only open to START students. We had faculty meetings every spring and throughout the summer so faculty could work with their partner to streamline the experience. During the summer, faculty would keep us abreast of any academic or personal issues students were experiencing. In partnership with academic advisors, we would utilize student preferences and register students in major appropriate pairs. During every fall we worked with associate deans and department

Table 5 (Continued)

Component	Summer START
Academics (cont.)	chairs to highlight the best courses and pairs for their students and some colleges and departments would market these experiences to their students outside of our office’s direct communications.
Co-Curricular Programming	Our office created the Summer Certificate in Leadership and Personal Wellness to give students a framework for purposeful programming and a motivating challenge. This certificate also allowed the campus to come together and identify where they could fit into the model and offer a program or two that aligned with our goals. The model was very robust when marketed together, but student affairs units were typically only offering one program. Programs were offered on campus as well as trips scheduled for local Raleigh museums and local spots to help students engage with their new home. Two community service trips were also planned on the weekends for students to engage with local non-profits and one another.
Fall Transition	Students had three options for the transition time between summer and fall terms. The first was to move out on the last day of summer term. The second was to pay to store their items in their fall/spring housing assignment in which they would have to turn in their keys once moved in and not return until the scheduled fall move-in date. Third was they would pay the daily room rate for the days over the break and could reside in the room. The last day of summer corresponded with Resident Advisor move-in for fall training, so buildings were staffed.
University Goals / Initiatives	Summer START began with four pilot groups that were deemed at risk, so the program was focused on retention and success of these populations. Over the years the increase in retention for these students opened the door for high achieving cohorts and any student being able to opt in. In year two, we created a Diversity course that satisfied the Diversity Gen Ed requirement. All students In START were mandated to take the course in which the National Coalition Building Institute Diversity training was infused. This gave the university a pilot cohort for the training and heightened the university’s profile with the increased enrollment. During my time with START, micro-credentialing became an important aspect for the university and Career Services. By creating the summer certificate program, we embraced a pilot opportunity for helping students bolster their resume.

In developing Summer START at NC State, we focused on successful elements of other summer programs from across the country. While there are a handful of programs called Summer START across the country, there is not a set criterion used or link between the programs. While many intricacies exist for each component and numerous tweaks occurred over

the years, the table identifies key tenants that informed the building and subsequent success of Summer START. Woven into those components were the opportunities for students to meaningfully engage with other students through course work, orientation groups, mentor groups, or housing assignment. My goal was to help students identify that while they may have different majors and reasons for choosing NC State, they were all united in their goal of graduating and taking their next steps into the world. This comradery helped students to identify that they were not competing against each other for success but had their own separate paths in which they could count on one another to challenge and support them. Being celebrated for being uniquely you and realizing that you belong to something larger helps students feel at home and confident in taking on the challenges of emerging adulthood. Summer START proved that to me and is why I hoped to infuse similar elements at USF.

You Can't Say No to Students' Success

With START being the framework, I wanted to carry these elements through in the most efficient way possible. What I found useful over my time at NC State was framing conversations around mission, vision, and budget. If I was presenting something that required, no cost or provided an office with revenue that also aligned with mission and vision – how could potential partners say no? If they did say no, they were saying no to students being successful or having a higher quality experience, with little strain placed on their office.

That conversation was much easier on the academic or student affairs side, not necessarily with enrollment management units. Getting enrollment management to buy-in is focused on investment; not the amount of time you invest with them, but more long term as they don't see the benefits of changing processes until the end of cycles: admissions, first-year retention, graduation rates, etc. Enrollment management is data driven. In piloting a new

program, you never have a true data point. It is always a “I think we should increase xxx rates by (blank) amount.” In which the response is typically, “that sounds nice and makes sense, but how can you prove that?”

From the initial EPM meeting there were a couple of nuggets I had jotted down in my notes. I knew that USF was up for their accreditation visit and, therefore, a new Quality Enhancement Plan. While it wasn't discussed at the meeting, looking further into it, I found that the university had chosen to create the Global Citizens Project (GCP). The GCP was established to increase the number of students that engaged in global experiences. Initially these experiences were to include enrolling in courses certified by the GCP, studying abroad, or working internships abroad. The initiative followed the USF mission and strategic plan to prepare students for the global workforce. I knew building a curricular and co-curricular partnership with the GCP would help get buy-in from the colleges as I could align this Provost initiative with an accreditation initiative. Using the initial structure of Summer START and infusing elements of GCP gave me the framework and lens to build out the program.

Let the Meetings Begin

With many of these meetings being my first interactions with partners, the tone was going to be important not only for this project, but in creating long standing partnerships. Without ACE, these meetings would have been meet and greet style. With ACE being on the agenda, it was now important to show I was a dedicated collaborator as we started working on a path forward. I will briefly discuss the deliverables and challenges that were presented through my first round of meetings with campus partners. In the table below I will highlight my requests to the offices and the unanticipated challenges and issues that they presented.

Table 6. ACE Initial Meeting Outcomes

USF Office	My Request	Partner Challenges	Office Deliverables
Admissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions letter containing information about program • Program Flier in Admissions package • Clear communication structure for admissions, yield, and onboarding phases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would not admit students until the calendar, cost, and courses were finalized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of students admitted in Fall 2014 that would have qualified for the summer program if it existed
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students being able to keep their room summer, fall, and spring • Students would keep the same RAs summer, fall, and spring • Mentor rooms provided for the summer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students would not be able to stay in the residence hall the two weeks in between the summer and fall semester • Students would not be able to keep the same room summer, fall, and spring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochure for establishing a living-learning community
Financial Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation that students would be eligible for summer aid during alternative calendar session • Additional scholarship to mitigate some of the impact of out of state tuition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All financial aid was processed automatically in the system, so we would have to develop attributes in Banner to process their award 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
College of Arts and Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify courses and faculty that align with the GCP and the student population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor concern: initial faculty member for one course was a non-starter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of courses and faculty
Education Abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What locations would it be feasible to plan a program for 100 students for the summer of 2015 and commitment to assist in planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical process is 18 months to initiate a new program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential partners that could be contacted for short turnaround programs if we guaranteed payment

Financial aid. With this being my first meeting, it actually went very well. I hadn't been thrown my curveballs yet, so this would have been a much different negotiation if Housing would have come first. With the federal guidelines for financial aid, there is a typical standardization and straightforwardness one can expect. The straightforward culture and unwillingness to change process was apparent from the onset. At NC State, all financial aid awarded to students was from university funds, which allowed for students to not have to fill out an additional Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application for the summer. This also allowed for the disbursement of aid based on need and merit to be smoothly student facing, while it was done manually per student behind the scenes.

Again, as a member of the EPM group, the reason for the program was well established, but the willingness to amend processes to support the alternative calendar was not. I was lectured to by the director on the number of students at USF and the fact that the ACE population in comparison was incredibly small – why would they put in the time to augment a standardized process for such a small group? The process at USF would require students to complete the FERPA for summer and there was no university money that would be given to these students to help offset out of state tuition.

Understandably, with such a large student population, much of financial aid awarding for incoming students was automated. This would not have been much of an issue if the cost for ACE was a flat rate for all students as initially hoped, but I quickly learned that wouldn't be the case. With the varying costs of the domestic and abroad programs and the need to account for in-state and out-of-state fees, I left the meeting needing develop multiple price points and determining what travel elements were eligible for financial aid support.

Admissions. During the EPM meeting, the leader of Admissions stressed the importance of a quick turnaround in the creation of a program so marketing and application processing could begin in the next couple of weeks. What was not discussed was the fact that he wanted every single detail imaginable about the program before marketing/admitting to the students. Dates, costs, curricular and co-curricular model make sense for a flier; what doesn't make sense is needing the exact faculty and courses, mentor to student ratios, what programs were being offered, etc.

This request put a lot of pressure on me and other campus partners. When piloting, it is important to come up with a foundational framework and principles to work from. It is understood that you are building as you're flying. Not only were we conceptualizing what the program could be at the point of this meeting, but the nuts and bolts included a handful of other offices – and offices that I had not even met with up to this point. There was a framework in my head and principles that I did and continue to believe in, but that did not mean others were going to quickly jump on board with articulated processes for this off-calendar program.

During the meeting and for the rest of the planning process we established that the Office of Admissions would handle students up to their deposit and then all program questions and onboarding would be handled by me. The hope was that they would require less details to move forward with the process, and I would be able to speak to the program components in depth and usher the students into a meaningful connection with the university. They provided me with a list of students that began in the Fall of 2014 that would have begun in the summer if a program was established. I planned to use this list to survey the students about elements of the summer program to see if they would have attended if available. This meeting set the tone for others to come: requests and needs with little flexibility.

Housing. Wow! The biggest curveball that established what ACE came to be. In the moment, I can tell you that if beads of sweat weren't rolling down my bright red face, I should be a professional poker player. Going into this meeting I wanted to ensure we could create a structure in which students would keep their same room summer, fall, and spring and be able to stay in their room between the summer and fall semesters. Well, I went 0 for 2. While they understood the ask, they would not oblige. At the time of the program, all summer students resided in the Juniper-Poplar complex, which were the newest buildings on campus with the most demand from incoming students. They believed allowing the ACE students to keep those rooms would be unfair for other incoming students based on demand.

They were unwilling to allow the students to stay in their rooms the week following the summer term due to limited staffing in the buildings. This is understandable – all buildings were set to be fully staffed as RA training was to commence that week. In the discussion I reiterated that we could have mentors continue in the hall that week if the true issue was supervision, plus the students would be in their classes during the day, but to no avail. With a last-ditch effort, I proposed that since the students were from out of state and if they are going to have to leave campus, can they at least put their items in their fall rooms and not stay there for that week – that was not an outright no, so there was the glimmer of hope. The question then became – what can we do with 100 students for a week, so they don't have to travel home or live in their cars?

Education abroad. If they are unable to stay on campus, where we can we go? The thought of making these students move out, go home for a week, and then return to campus to move back in was ridiculous. In the spirit of global citizenship, studying abroad seemed to be the best option and integrated another high impact practice to the program. If we were able to do it in a cost- effective way, the program would only be strengthened. As the years have gone on,

Education Abroad has been one of our strongest and most utilized partners. That said, our first meeting was a mixed bag. I went over the reasoning behind the development of the program, the issue with housing, and how studying abroad would be an amazing opportunity to get the students involved early with the core global citizenship aspect of our program.

Again, I didn't get an outright no that it couldn't be done, but I was lectured on the traditional process of creating an Education Abroad experience – it took 18 months. As we postured, I turned the discussion to relationships I was aware of at NC State, who owns a physical space and hosts an institute in Prague. Did USF have anything similar? The short answer was yes, but it was complicated. There was a USF Health center in Panama City, Panama, but it was managed by USF Health, which was a separate entity than USF Tampa. We had a few maybes as we also discussed long standing partners that could potentially create experiences quickly if we guaranteed payment upfront. That is all I needed to insert it into the ACE proposal, where if it garnered the support of the Provost Office, it could help supply pressure and the maybe could hopefully become reality.

College of arts and sciences. What a wonderful meeting. Straightforward and easy. In outlining what we wanted to do in utilizing courses that satisfied the Human and Historical Context and Process (HHCP) general education requirement, we quickly settled into exploring those options. The Dean's Office administration clearly understood what we were looking to do and liked the idea of incorporating elements of GCP as an opportunity for the college to show they are earlier adopters and partners. Being a faculty member herself, the Dean's Office administrator understood the intricacies of teaching a freshman only course and agreed to move forward in identifying not only faculty members that could teach aligned courses, but that would also relate well to the students. From these conversations, we decided to identify three courses

that met the HHCP as well as one that met the general Humanities requirement as incoming students were typically deficient of this requirement with transfer credit thus increasing the odds of having courses that aligned with all majors.

The main question here was of course funding, but I was able to ensure them that the college would get the credit hours generated by the course and that would help them cover the cost of faculty. I also ensured that whatever faculty we moved forward with would have their contract guaranteed centrally, meaning they would not be on the hook if the program didn't get enough enrollment to cover the faculty salaries. With shifting all financial liability to our office for their faculty, we eliminated their concerns and swiftly moved forward.

Undergraduate studies. When missions align, things should be easy right? One would hope. Undergraduate Studies offered the college introduction and life skills courses that we find standard across the country. At the time, they also operated their own freshmen transition program, so I was coming into their sandbox. Operating out of Innovative Education, being focused on summer and now summer transition programs put a question mark on their operations as there was a concern that I was going to assume their responsibilities – this conversation never happened, but when questions linger, there can be a cause for concern.

Undergraduate Studies had just developed a new course, Academic Foundations, that was the new staple for incoming students. I went into that meeting believing we would have a simple conversation about the course and how it could be updated to fit the four-week format. It turned out to not be an easy conversation. They offered to teach University Experience (UE) instead of Academic Foundations. They decided that UE would be a better fit for the program because the structure and learning objectives weren't as rigid as the Academic Foundations course. The colleges had been complaining about UE as the data showed that students enrolling in that course

were not fairing any better at the university with retention or GPA. The lack of rigidity in UE caused Academic Foundations to become ultra-rigid and they said it was unable to be taught in four weeks – let alone their belief that a student should not be subjected to a four-week course as they would be unsuccessful.

While we agreed on theory of the needs of the courses, there was a disconnect on what encouraged student success. I believed we should focus on purpose and belonging, they believed it was important to go over the laundry list of policies and procedures at the university along with study skills – I hoped to work with them to find the middle ground as this course needed to be the foundation for aligning the linked courses with the overall program’s goals. As they would not agree to teach Academic Foundations in the four-week format, we moved forward with UE as there was more (perceived) opportunity to mold the curriculum to fit the needs of the program and students. While this was not exactly what I went in for, we landed in a place that would be mutually beneficial and we could find compromises on what was best for students.

Kids Say the Darndest Things

And their parents. It was clear after the meeting with housing, that the program could not move forward in the initial format discussed. With the high propensity of students needing to live on campus for the summer and their inability to stay on campus between the summer and fall and the lack of opportunities to move off campus based on the leasing cycle, we were going to have to take the students somewhere. Prior to all initial meetings being complete, Dr. DeLuca gave me permission to create a quick survey for the students from the list I received from Admissions. Within the explanation of the survey, I outlined that there was potentially a new initiative that was being built around the Global Citizens Process that could result in the creation

of a summer program. I outlined the key components of linked courses, mentors, and the potential of studying abroad.

The survey required the need to be vague (as no final details were created), but also provide information needed to satisfy the direction forward. Both students and parents were sent surveys to see if they would have been admitted to the summer instead of the fall would they have still attended USF and if they had to travel as part of the program. From the students that responded 92% said they would have considered attending with 96% saying they found studying abroad appealing. From the parent side, the majority said they would have remained neutral in influencing a student's decision to attend, with only 8% saying they would have tried to keep them from attending. Those data points were enough for me to show broad student and family support for the ACE proposal.

Piloting on Paper

By the time the last meeting finished, I had less than 24 hours to put together the program outline for the EPM discussion. The ups and downs over those nine business days was intense. Trying to navigate other meetings or combining the ACE meetings with needs for Winter Session had led to a bit of a split personality in trying to project manage. I'm an ideator by nature, so I had been jotting things down and making mental notes throughout the week on how things could work. With the limited time, I would lean on the mission and goals from Summer START to build out the ones for ACE – different university, similar goals, good to go.

Whenever I'm building pilots, it is important to understand the goals of the program, both for the administrative side and the population it serves, as well as the available resources and roadblocks. In reflecting on goals, that part was easy. The administration was focused on performance metrics – the goal is to have these students start during the summer instead of the

fall with an opportunity to increase the fall profile, the first-year retention rate, and the four- and six-year graduation rates. With limited constraints on the administration side (as far as goals), this gave the space to be creative as long as it aligned with a positive student experience. Knowing that the structure that I had in mind aligned with numerous High Impact Practices, there were limited opportunities for folks to disagree with the tactics being student-centered. Armed with this information and the curveballs from the meetings, now I just needed to put it together.

Appendix A shows the initial breakdown that was given at the EPM meeting on October 21, 2014. Long story short, there were no objections, and everyone was pleased with where it landed. All the boxes had been checked, most importantly, the structure was something that could be marketed, and the study abroad experience a value add. The work ahead was arduous in getting processes adapted and communicating with students, but the program got off the ground. Negotiation was key and a true focus on benefiting students as the direction made it hard for others to not come to the table, even though they may have not been willing to augment their procedures or plans.

Where we Finished

The first year of a pilot is typically the most difficult and limiting. So much time was put into getting the processes to work for students, not as much attention could be paid to developing the curricular and co-curricular models. The university did not provide any funding for mentors or programming. With all of these constraints, we still landed in a spot that was beneficial to students. In Appendix B you can find where the structure of the end product for 2015. Before the program started, we knew there was room for improvement, but overall, it went well and set the tone for years to come.

What I Learned

When it comes down to it, if you oversee an initiative, it is your baby. You are the one that has to nurture it, you are the one that has to advocate for resources and support, you are the one that is left to clean up the mess at the end of the day. In working with partners, it wasn't that they didn't care about these students, it was that they weren't tied directly to the success or failure of this initiative. This was the beginning of a trend that I would find was embedded in the culture of the university. I will get much more in depth within chapter five, but I was beginning to see that change fatigue was running rampant and accountability wasn't strong leading to an approach of minimal effort, not for the lack of care, but for not being able to be blamed if something went wrong.

Narrative 2: Bulls of a Feather Flock Together

In writing my first narrative, there is so much to the USF story that I'm having to leave out such as where things landed, what the next meetings looked like, the ups and downs of working with the students and families over the first year, a faculty member being busted in customs for trying to bring back over 30 mangos from Panama, you know, the usual. As all these moments have been important to my development, it is difficult to edit them down as I want the readers to know the ins and outs of what happened that may help support them in their creation or augmentation of student initiatives. While these narratives are chronological, this narrative from year two is one of the most worthwhile lessons I've learned during my career. Honestly, this narrative serves as the ACE book of proverbs, where we were constantly making lemonade out of lemons and trying to reduce mountains to molehills. What was most important, other than the lemonade being sustaining for the soul, was Bulls of a feather flock together.

If two wrongs don't make a right, how about three, four, or five? Year two of a program is still a pilot. We knew improvements needed to be made for ACE 2015 before students arrived and we just kept adding to the list once the students were on campus. Pilots are at least a three-year process from the time the first participant begins. With some experience under our belt, we set forth to encourage a more robust and streamlined experience for students. We continued our path of compromise that was similar to what you see in politics – public proclamations from offices of what they can do with rushed results at deadlines that don't measure up. While this is the norm in higher education, I always hold out hope for a smooth process.

We had some big wins over the planning process, Admissions wanted to grow the program, Housing agreed to allow students to keep the same room summer, fall, and spring, we added a new extended orientation program that was offered by New Student Connections called CampU, and we were able to reduce the cost of the program through a different tuition model approved by the Provost's Office. It was a great fall/early spring at the surface, but then we got into the weeds.

House of Cards

As one could expect, the moving that was required for students who were not able to keep the same room in year one didn't go over well with parents. With families out of the area and many of the out-of-state freshmen not having cars, hectic doesn't cover the experience. Moving items across campus in the August Florida coupled with multiple thunderstorms throughout the was the worst possible scenario. The feedback was helpful as it provided pressure to Housing to rethink their process and allow students to continue in the same room for the academic year. That win was veiled. With the proposed increased size of the freshman summer class, Housing would have to expand outside of the Juniper-Poplar complex – any guess

which group they wanted to move out? It was a very pleasant meeting, the Housing Assignments staff at USF has been one of my favorite teams to work with and they came with care and options.

ACE was an easy target to move out due to the cohort nature of the program, the mentors, and added programming. If Housing would have just separated out typical summer starting students, the students would have received a less favorable experience than those in Juniper-Poplar. That makes perfect sense from that standpoint, so the decision came down to campus apartments that were beside Juniper-Poplar or moving to the opposite side of campus to a hall-style building.

With concerns of the price point and the need to build a stronger community I chose the hall-style option, Beta. While I would have much rather have had the students in Juniper-Poplar, the biggest issue with ACE was the price point. Beta Hall gave the best opportunity to not only reduce the cost of the program by a few hundred dollars, but also the hall-style dorm provided a much stronger opportunity to build community versus the secluded apartments.

When the Thunder Rolls

The Tampa Bay Lightning –a perfect name for a professional sports team playing in the lightning capital of the world. One of my main hesitations in confirming housing in Beta Hall was that the dining facility for summer students was in Juniper-Poplar, which is a 15-minute walk away with limited summer bus routes. Additionally, knowing daily quick or sustained thunderstorms always pops up in the summer between 3 and 7 pm, I met with Dining to see what they could do before confirming housing. Champions Choice, a dining hall located beside the Campus Recreation Center, was used for summer conferences and orientation at specific mealtimes, which would have worked perfectly. With only a five-minute walk, as well as close

proximity to the gym and academic buildings, Champions Choice seemed like the perfect option. And it was – until Dining pulled back on allowing our students to eat in the dining hall, informing us weeks before the start of the program.

The Price is Right, the Process is Wrong

The Board Of Governors for Florida allows for universities to collect tuition in three different ways: typical state tuition, market-rate, and cost recovery. Due to the traveling component of the program, the standard state tuition route was overly costly to students as they had to pay full tuition and then study abroad costs. Market-rate is traditionally what you think of for MBA programs; the cost is higher than tuition because people will pay it, so the program is allowed to make a profit. Cost-recovery is a unique opportunity to have a program treated as an auxiliary like market-rate, but all proceeds must be invested in the program and students.

A non-profit within a non-profit, cost-recovery was truly the only way forward. Going into year two, we still had no university funds allocated from Student Success to facilitate the program. With negotiations going nowhere on securing programming or mentor hiring funds, a further vetting of the dynamics of cost-recovery gave the leverage needed for approval by the Provost's Office. When building the model, we set out to show the cost benefit of choosing to be a part of ACE than starting in traditional Summer B. The aim was to keep our costs for out-of-state students to no more than what they would pay for their study abroad air fare and traditional Summer B. This allowed us to build a marketing slogan of being able to study abroad for a week for the price of a plane ticket. When comparing the ACE domestic trip cost to the traditional summer starting students, out-of-state residents were actually paying less. While there was an increased cost in most cases, I strongly believed the value add was actually at a discount when you consider the price included studying away, mentors, programming, and CampU.

While there were not any issues in getting the Provost's Office approval, the cost-recovery process with the Cashiers Office was a headache (annually). With approval in early fall, I set out to understand the ins and outs of the funding method and see what would need to be done to move us forward. Much like year one, working with campus partners and resources proved to be challenging to align processes and procedures for this off-calendar term in a timely matter so we could provide a smooth process for the student population. This was a mountain, not a molehill.

Financial Aid

We compounded the issue from year one to two. For students to get a financial aid award from their completed FAFSA, they would have to be coded correctly in the system and Financial Aid would have to have the ACE cost built out in their system. When integrating the Education Abroad costs into the tuition model, there were additional caveats to what a student's financial aid award could or could not cover. This is where it got ugly. From year one to two, we increased the locations that we would be traveling from two to four. In having four locations, two international and two domestic, we ended up with four different price points— meaning four different codes, four different prices in the system, with four different allotments of what could and could not be covered by financial aid.

My hope in the conversation was that we could come up with a standard ACE rate so students would be able to be processed with traditional students for aid awards after they deposited. Like at NC State, if we came up with a standard ACE rate that included the costs that could traditionally be covered, university funds (considered like cash aid) could be used to fill in the gaps with a lower amount of state and federal scrutiny. Again, a manual process could not be

allowed – especially for “such a small portion of the student population.” This compounded issues through recruitment, onboarding, and throughout the fall semester for some students.

Cashiers Office

In making the shift to a cost recovery funding model, the Cashiers Office became more deeply involved with our process and students. In the opposite approach to Financial Aid, the Cashiers Office processed cost-recovery charges manually. This was and still is a terrible experience for anyone involved. Much like the world of politics, interpretation versus intent is key. In reflecting on the student accounts and billing statutes from the BOG, leadership within the Cashiers Office believed that all charges that a student incurs must be represented as line items on a student’s account. This in theory makes sense, but when a single course is charged to a student account, there are more than seven lines that populate on the bill as each fee and tuition stream is its own line. This is especially confusing for traditional new students and cost-recovery compounded the issues.

The basic premise with cost-recovery is that students are not charged typical tuition, but an agreed-upon amount that includes relevant fees and the charges for the course/program. To facilitate this process, the cost-recovery fee is added on to a traditional course. When a student is registered, they are charged full tuition and the cost-recovery rate. Our office would send a list to the Cashiers Office that included students that needed to have standard tuition removed from their account. The tuition and fees are removed, and the student’s bill is ready for payment. After the process is complete with all the tuition charges added to the student account and then removed, a typical ACE student bill would include over fifty lines. On average, it took two weeks for this process to be completed, all the while we are telling students to not pay their bill until we let them know it was correct.

During those 10 days, students were getting multiple emails about paying their bill as they had unpaid summer charges. These Cashiers Office emails were automated and could not be turned off. As the emails were coming from the Cashiers Office with warnings of courses being dropped for nonpayment, so many headaches were created for students and families as they would contact our office stating their bill was more than what we advertised so they needed to drop out of the program. It was a very difficult process to manage and communicate around and, when families would contact the Cashiers Office, they would just forward their calls to me.

Communication

During this Admissions cycle, communications for incoming students was a big issue. With all Admissions emails automated, every incoming student received the same basic emails and then additional communications if they were part of special groups/cohorts. This caused major headaches. All admitted and deposited ACE students would receive our ACE information, as well as information on starting in traditional summer B. So much confusion was coupled with the fact that students received reminder emails to register for orientation or sign up for housing (along with other onboarding steps) even if those steps had been completed. This caused everyone an increased level of uncertainty as if they had completed the process, they questioned if it had been processed or lost.

Education Abroad

Education Abroad (EA) has always been a strong and caring partner. With a mutually beneficial relationship with us infusing a HIP that strengthened student resiliency and sense of belonging and EA being able to increase the number of students traveling to help with their rankings and revenue, they always came to the table. In identifying partners for 2016, we knew we wanted to get away from Panama and align with high quality partners that had a positive

track record in working with USF. We settled on partners in Costa Rica and Quebec City and built course specific trips around them. With the emphasis on bringing cost down and being as transparent with students as possible, I kept going back to the drawing board to ensure that faculty were working closely with the locations to identify value add activities while balancing the overall costs.

EA is cyclical in nature and that led to issues with the final pricing. We were in a race to finalize cost and logistics as we needed to make sure everything was set for financial aid awards and cost-recovery. What I found out is there is a gamble that is wagered on trips abroad. The university requires contracting through travel agents as the contractual language for group rates doesn't align with USF's General Counsel's standards. In working with EA, we came up with final per student rates – which I thought were final. What actually happened was that the travel agent believed if we waited a little longer and got a new quote, the price of the airline tickets would go down. So... our flight schedule was changed for Quebec and both the Quebec and Costa Rica ticket cost went up by around \$100, which ate into our mentoring and programming funds.

While all these situations were challenging and caused duress for many of our students and families, we made it to the summer. The disjointed admissions and logistics process that prompted constant communication to students to pay attention to this, but ignore that, kept everyone on their toes and built a level of resilience within the student population.

We're All In This Together

The ACE call-center. From year one to year two, our office continued calling and setting appointments with students and families to talk through their questions and support their needs. Most calls were handled by myself and a student from ACE 2015 that I hired into a work-study

position. Her level of maturity and experience with the first year of ACE made her the perfect choice to talk with families. By connecting with almost every student multiple times before they arrived on campus, we built a level of trust. We were able to connect with them and let them know that we understood that at times the process truly didn't make sense. We showed that we had their back when there was a discrepancy, and we would help to breakdown the USF shuffle and get them in contact with who they needed to talk to and coach them on how to describe the issue to find a solution in USF vernacular.

Being able to meet students where they were and work with them to find solutions built a level of trust with the families. This doesn't mean they were happy, and I really could share some stories there, but it built a level of respect that persisted. Commitment to the families through clear, truthful, and consistent communication proved to be successful in building community and yielding what was needed for Admissions.

With my steadfast belief in shared purpose and experience being not only a personal motivator but an opportunity to break barriers and build relationships around shared pursuits, there were two moments for this cohort that solidified my beliefs. Both situations revolved around expectations, challenge, and support. These situations set the foundation for family that would only become more important in years to come.

An Introduction to Tampa Traffic

It had already been a whirlwind of a move-in week. In efforts to keep the cost down for students and avoid an exorbitant amount of downtime (which for the typical college student means late night festivities), our schedule was jam packed from move-in to the first day of class. Move-in Wednesday, university orientation Thursday and a half day Friday, then CampU Friday afternoon through mid-day on Sunday. In theory this was a great idea... in practice— not really,

even without the incoming curveball. Incoming students are going to stay up late, they are going to flirt with the line of personal responsibility and freedom – with many not yet grasping a positive balance. By the time we got to Friday that translated to a lot of tired and grumpy teenagers.

In stepping into their shoes, it's understandable. Wednesday was a long day of moving in, and like every dorm across the country on move-in day, the elevator went down. That's a lot of steps in the July Florida sun. After move-in, we had the typical mentor meetings but of course students stayed up late getting to know one another. That transitioned into Thursday's university orientation which ran from 8am to 10pm. Why would we think that they would come back and go to sleep, prior to 2am, and then be up again for 8am orientation? Once the advising portion of orientation finished for each student, they were to make their way back to the residence hall to prepare to leave for CampU. This gave them around 2-3 hours to pack and gather in the classroom we would be leaving from to catch the buses.

CampU was an extended orientation program that was offered by the New Student Connections office. Our office and mentors partnered with them throughout the spring to do training and offer an ACE only session for our students. With the success I had at NC State with the daylong diversity training and extended orientation activities, CampU gave ACE students the opportunity to get to know themselves as it related to goal setting for college, get to know their peers, and learn the history and traditions of USF. Overall, I believed this would be a cornerstone to the ACE program moving forward. CampU took place in cabins at a retreat center about an hour away from campus which helped create a positive immersive environment for students prior to the start of classes. While that may have been the result, it didn't start out that way.

Check-in started at five that afternoon as we were to load the buses at 5:30 and head to the camp. Once we arrived, we would quickly drop our bags in the cabins and head straight to dinner. So, to set the stage, by around 5:30 we had located all the stragglers in the residence hall and have gotten them checked in. Students are hot, grumpy, and hungry. One of the fraternities had informed a few of our students that they would be hosting a big party at their frat house that night. So, 5:30 happens – no buses.

First phone call to this private bus companies dispatch – “oh, they aren’t there yet, they should be there soon, they are close.”

Second phone call at 5:45 – “I just talked with the lead driver, they ran into some traffic on the Howard Franklin Bridge, but they have made it through and will be there shortly”

Third phone call at 6:00 – “We are sorry, but your pickup was scheduled during rush hour so potential delays should be expected. There was a wreck on the Howard Franklin Bridge, they will be there in 30-45 minutes.

So, many emotions and logistics scrambled. First off, if they were honest, we could have sent the students to dinner and told them to come back for the buses. If anyone has been around tired and hungry teenagers, you know that could have positively increased the resulting situation by 1000%. Now we don’t have enough time for them to walk over to the dining hall, eat, and get back to catch the buses, as we are pressed against the late check-in time with the campsite staff. The only fix we had was to bring out the snacks that were meant for Saturday and Sunday. Not a huge deal in having to make an early Saturday morning grocery store run for more snacks, but not ideal for time nor budget.

The big issue we had was moral. That was even before any of the transportation delays. Students and people in general hate mandatory. ACE was founded on the travel component, and

people still complained about having to travel. I will be generous and say only 50% of students and families complained during onboarding about having to attend CampU. We heard it all, from “I’m a college student, I shouldn’t have to do a high school camp” to “I’m in college now, I have the right to do what I want on the weekends.” While it is a college student camp, I could understand where they were coming from, but when you start in a program where all of these things are marketed and explicitly given to you up front, I’m sorry, but you’re along for the ride (pending extreme circumstances). Unfortunately, those voices that were against CampU only got louder.

Part of CampU was helping students to get to know one another, so as students had begun checking in, they were split up into small groups and started icebreakers with the CampU counselors and mentor staff. These rolling activities were only supposed to last a few minutes until the bus arrived for loading. Once we hit the first delay, even with the late student arrivals, the activities had wrapped up. This unstructured time started to drive a divide in the group.

A Mutiny was Upon Us

What brings people together – commonalities and shared interest and beliefs. The base for this doesn’t have to be positive, it can be a shared idea of how much they dislike something or how frustrated they are because of a stimulus. I have never seen a group bond so quickly, but they were bonded in their frustration of having to attend CampU and their hunger. As the activities ended, we started to see students move around the room. There was a minority of students that were still interested in going to CampU that felt comfortable discussing that. There were a group of students that were 50/50, but they were the rule followers so didn’t want to sit with the people that were being outwardly rude and challenging the student staff. Then there was the last group, the vengeful lobbyists that were openly discussing and challenging staff on

the point and purpose of CampU, that they wanted their money back, and they were going to return to the residence hall and not attend.

In running between the classroom and outside to call the bus company, every time I returned inside, I felt the heaviness of the room as more and more students were getting frustrated. We needed to clear the air.

Soapbox

For the good and bad, I speak with emotion. That day for five minutes I wandered around the classroom telling a story about the staff members in the room working hard this spring to create this experience for them that would be both fun and challenging. I discussed that we all didn't see the challenge of a late bus arrival and that we were just as frustrated and hungry as they were. I went on to discuss that if waiting on a bus was going to be something that derailed their mood and brought overpowering negativity into their lives that college may not be the right place for them.

This is not directly quoted, but the gist of what I said. College and emerging adulthood is one of if not the most challenging stage of your young lives. You are going to have battles with yourself, pushing to get out of bed in the morning, when to go to sleep, and how many hours of work you do to get by and should you work more than that? What does work make you sacrifice from your personal experience, should you join that club, or should you go to that program? What professor should you take and, when it is not going well, should you drop the class, stick it out, or change your major? What should you do if you don't get the amount of financial aid you think you should get? How do you get in-state residency because being out-of-state is so expensive? Who can you trust when you need to talk to a friend? When you are stressed, how

can you make sure you are making healthy decisions to manage it? Who will support you through your ups and downs now that you are away from home? Who has your back?

Take a second and look around the room and see everyone that is wearing the green CampU shirt. They have worked countless hours in training and developing this weekend to help ensure you have the best transition to USF, that you are supported, and that you know you belong here. The ACE mentors all went through ACE last year, they understand what the transition was like. They came together and said that CampU would have made their ACE experience better. Hey, I'm pissed too about these buses and I'm an old man that needs his nutrients to keep moving. What I can promise you is that we are doing everything we can now to augment the experience tonight to make sure you are well fed and still have a wonderful time at camp. We are here for you right now, we are here for you this summer, and we are going to be here for you for the rest of your life. Please bear with us as the buses are still battling traffic to get here and I promise it will be worth it by the time we return Sunday.

My speech was targeted on two things, helping the students understand that their frustrations were valid, but the leaders in the room weren't to blame for the current situation. I wasn't necessarily trying to minimize what they were frustrated about, but I wanted them to understand that in the grand scheme, a late bus was not even going to be a blip on the radar of distractions and hardship that awaited them over the next four-ish years of college.

Funny Thing About Expectations

The speech worked for the most part. Pitchforks and torches were put away as we handed out snacks and the counselors transitioned into another icebreaker in which we had a good number of students to participate. There was still a small group of students that sat off to the side, but the positive thing was they kept bonding over how much they were bothered. Over

this last thirty minutes, I floated around the room talking to students and trying to get a smile on their face. The buses finally showed, and we went to CampU.

Discussing CampU could fill up twenty pages on its own, but it couldn't have gone any better. It was the right balance of challenge and support and helped students see that they were not alone. They learned about opportunities for involvement and strategies for success but were celebrated for the goals they were setting and found peers that were invested in seeing them through.

Expectations are a funny thing. In the Netflix culture that we currently live in, do you ever notice yourself discussing movies or shows by saying it was better than you thought it was going to be or it was just ok, and you don't understand why people are making such a big deal out of it? I believe expectations have a large part to do with how we process experiences and allow for vulnerability. While waiting on the buses was stressful for everyone, I think it lowered expectations for enjoyment for CampU for both students and staff. Within those low expectations we not only rose to the occasion, but we were able to catch students off guard and they became immersed and connected. We left for CampU disjointed, we came back a collective as they built bonds with one another and pledged to support each other as they moved forward.

Weekend Festivities

The week after CampU was difficult. The students were worn out just in time for the first day of class. ACE courses are intense. The courses are four weeks long, three weeks on campus and then one for the travel away. That means that those three weeks on campus are slammed with content and assessments to ensure students are moving forward to complete learning objectives. With two, two and a half hour classes four days a week with homework, there was no rest for the weary. Knowing what statistically awaited us at the end of the week, we had

programming infused in the University Experience course that focused on personal wellness, safety with substances, and sexual health. As ACE classes ended on Thursday and didn't pick up until Monday with no mandatory weekend programming – we were entering the first college party zone.

In working with transitioning freshmen over the years, the first weekend is always the toughest. The first real taste of freedom. Again, there is an interesting thought around expectations here. We talk a lot about peer pressure when discussing underage substance and alcohol use, but in many of my conversations with students after the fact, they reveal that it is something they believe they should be doing. They embody the “best four years of your life” mantra and make reckless decisions not necessarily because they want to, but they think they should. Regardless, of reasoning, there tends to always be an event around alcohol consumption during the first weekend, either a party that gets busted in the residence hall or a student gets alcohol poisoning on or off campus that requires medical transport. 2016 was no different.

No Silence in the Summers

During the summers, I don't mute notifications on my phone at night. It is my wife's favorite part of my job. Being on call in the case of an emergency is something that is very important to me, not only to be in the know, but I feel a sense of responsibility. With the ACE students all being from out of the area, it was increasingly important for me to be a part of the reporting process so I could support the student's situation.

The call that first weekend was a student that had gotten alcohol poisoning and had to be medically transported from the residence hall. This was a student that was front and center at CampU. The student was vocal and well liked amongst the group and had become an outright leader for the incoming students. The mentors and staff did what was needed to ensure the safety

of the student, but there was a level of trauma that comes with first responders showing up in an ambulance with a blaring siren in the early morning hours to remove a student from their room on a stretcher. It was the first challenge for the mentor staff and the first shock to the system of the “immortal” college student attitude.

In working with the mentors over the phone, we discussed the plan for ensuring that everyone was ok in the moment, that this type of situation happens, the student being transported to the hospital would receive the best care possible, and the students were not in trouble as they were seeking help. At USF there is a medical amnesty policy where the student who was in distress and the student that reached out for help will not be subject to disciplinary procedures as it was more important for students to get help. I reported to the mentors that I would be checking on the student at the hospital in a few hours and for them to get some sleep.

So... I didn't fall back to sleep. I sent an email to my supervisor to keep her in the loop as a medical transport had taken place and I knew that the Dean of Students office would be notified. I arrived at the hospital around 8am that morning to find out that the student had just been discharged and taken back to the residence hall by a fellow student. I decided to head over to check in on the student and staff and be there if anyone needed anything or had questions. Upon arriving at the building, I ran into the Residential Building Manager (RBM) who oversaw the RAs in the building. The RBM questioned me on why I would be showing up on the weekend and that this situation wasn't that big of a deal as it happens throughout the year. I left that conversation feeling frustrated that my students were going to be treated like a statistic and the staff was just going through the motions.

In texting with the mentors, one was in the process of talking with the student that just returned from the hospital and the student wanted to talk to me. I met them in the lobby, and

they were so scared they were going to get kicked out of the university; that their family was going to be so upset with them and they started crying as they felt like they had let everyone down. I hugged them (asking for permission first) and told them it was going to be ok. I told them that this was a rough situation, they were supported, and that they weren't going to get kicked out. After the sobbing, we discussed what moving forward looked like. There of course would be meetings, but the focus of those meetings was to make sure that they were good to go moving forward. I told them that I was sorry I didn't catch them at the hospital as I thought they would have been there longer, but I consider my students like family, and I am always here for support in the best and worst of times.

The ten-minute conversation ended well. The student knew they had support and we set up a meeting for a few days later to catch up and make sure that everything personally and with their classes started off well that week. I gave them my cell phone number if they needed anything and then they went to bed for the rest of the day and did some homework. I hung out with a few of the mentors as we discussed how reactions went that night and potential things to expect throughout the day and the week to come. All in all, we landed in a good space. The students and staff were doing well and understood resources, so I left in good spirits and excited for the week to come.

The Meeting

Early in the week I was contacted by Dr. DeLuca in response to leaders in the Student Affairs and Housing requesting to discuss my actions from over the weekend. A meeting was convened with Dr. DeLuca, a leader from Student Affairs (LoSA) and Housing (LoH), and me for the upcoming Friday. As you can expect, I was floored by the meeting request as I'm running through the chain of events trying to figure out if there could possibly be a breach of

protocol. FERPA? No. HIPPA? No. USF Housing or Student Conduct Policies? Not that I was aware of, but I knew it wasn't my responsibility to enforce. The RBM would conduct Housing protocols and the Dean of Students Office would conduct any follow up from Student Conduct. Weird.

Friday came along as did the meeting, and it was infuriating. It started with Dr. DeLuca asking for an explanation on the need to meet in which the LoSA and LoH jumped in to discuss the university policies that I violated. There were not questions, there was a lecture. In meetings like this, I have learned to let individuals air their grievances and get it all out on the table. I find it better for them to stack everything up to make it easier to topple over. The complaints discussed:

- it is against university policy to visit a student in the hospital – such a policy couldn't be located,
- I violated FERPA by calling the students family – I never called the students family,
- I violated university policy by transporting the student from the hospital to the residence hall – the student was already back at the residence hall when I went to the hospital,
- I should not have been contacted the night of the incident and it is not my place to intervene in housing and student conduct processes and procedures as I shouldn't be meeting with students prior to them meeting with their respective offices.

I wanted to laugh. I can only imagine how red my face was as I wanted to erupt on them. Not only were they wasting Dr. DeLuca's and my time with the false allegations, but clearly were more worried about themselves than supporting the students. I quickly began to speak to

share that their allegations were untrue and questioned where they heard that information. I discussed the importance of my role with the program in supporting these students, the reason the program exists, and the fact that the students are on an island with limited intentional support from their offices. I reminded them that the student had yet to have been contacted by either Housing or Student Affairs so the student still had concerns of being kicked out of housing and/or the university. So, if they expected their typical processes to support the student, it wasn't working in the student's favor.

That was about the time that Dr. DeLuca cut me off. She stated that the fact we were having this meeting was ridiculous. The cohort program was created to provide additional support to this student population for metrics and the students unique needs and that I was empowered by the Provost's Office to support the students as we see fit. She reminded them I had gone through all trainings, and this was my seventh year running transition programs, so she was flabbergasted at why I was being treated as a novice.

It was clear that neither the LoSA nor LoH believed they were going to be challenged in the space. It seemed to me that the meeting was more of a territorial discussion. The conversation retreated to the LoSA saying that she was not made aware of the intricacies of the program, and she now better understands the level of support and care that the program brings to students. But with that said, the "conciierge" level of support that I provided students set them up to be unsuccessful. My work with the students created unrealistic expectations on how the university worked and those expectations were unattainable at such a large university.

And then it happened for the first time in my career, Dr. DeLuca stood up, looked down on them and said something to the tune of it was clear that I hadn't violated any policies and my responsibility was to support the cohort and that I was respected across the country for the work I

do with transition programs in making sure students felt supported as they navigated the realities of university life from being admitted to graduation. She then walked out.

There I was still sitting, mind racing. Do I leave, do I say something, was she coming back? I stood up, told them that I hoped that they had a nice weekend, and I walked out.

Word Travels Fast

Word got back to the mentors and students about that meeting in two different ways. First, a few student staff members were in the library for their office hours when the meeting went down. They asked what was discussed as it may impact the students and I told them that there was a disagreement on policies and procedures, and we were clearing the air. I confirmed with them that nothing was changing on our side. In the residence hall, the RBM was discussing with their staff that the meeting was happening and alluded to the fact that I was getting reprimanded for sticking my nose into their business. From that point forward, the RAs should not be discussing Housing business with the mentors.

What you have to understand about this situation is, students were already on an island. They had a difficult onboarding process. We had our CampU experience and now they were wrapping up their second week of classes, which for ACE meant stressful mid-terms. They saw me in the residence hall daily. They knew I went to the hospital and came to the residence hall that Sunday to talk with the student and anyone else that needed support. They knew that my conversation with the student was positive, and I had met with him again that week to make sure they were doing ok personally and with their coursework. They also were stressed that their friend still hadn't had a meeting with Housing or Student Conduct and were worried he still may be kicked out of the residence hall with nowhere to stay as he was from another state.

In hearing that the administrative meeting happened, the overwhelming sense from the students was they felt further segmented from the university. Students seemed to become unified with an us-versus-them mentality, crystalizing their ACE identity. They became solid in the fact they were in it together, despite the odds and whatever the university threw at them, they knew that together they would make it. This sentiment is the fear I had going into the summer, that students would feel like the cards were stacked against them and they wouldn't feel as if they belonged at USF. While not positive for the students and the university overall as negative sentiments prevailed, it did unify the cohort in moving forward together with a high level of commitment to one another the program, and their studies in years to come. These events of ACE 2016 started the materialization of the #ACEfam.

Narrative 3: #ACEfam

ACE 2017 got us closer to our vision created at the inception of ACE. The third year of a pilot seems to be the sweet spot with campus partners and clients. In the university setting where so many new initiatives and priorities are always popping up, it is expected that some will fall to the wayside and be forgotten. The three-year mark is when you start to flirt with becoming institutionalized. I'm not saying the stress of getting to that point gets you committed to an in-patient facility, but you become woven into the fabric of the university. The waning commitment of partner offices that previously hadn't gone all in began to understand that the pilot has become a university expectation and it isn't going anywhere.

Quick Outline of 2017

The third year brought welcomed logistical updates. With the building of new residence halls, the demand for Juniper-Poplar went down enough for Housing to allow our students to stay there for the entire academic year. This greatly increased the satisfaction of the students through

the onboarding process and gave us more students that continued with their summer housing into the full academic year. Additionally, with the cluster of headaches caused by cost-recovery processing with a separate price per trip, we updated the price structure to have an international and a domestic travel rate. This improved processing time, which eased some of the stress students experienced during onboarding.

In January of 2017, we were able to add an assistant director to our office. The excitement of a new full-time position was also coupled with the fact that our office's work more than doubled, as we also officially assumed leadership over USF Pre-College programs for high school students. Luckily, we were also able to add multiple student positions to provide programming, mentor training, and support the onboarding process. Running ACE 2016 fully cost recovery not only provided the funds for our student positions, but also the ability to offer programming during the fall and spring. This level of staffing allowed us a more direct opportunity to continue to aid students in their transition and better support them during their first year (positively impacting retention). At this point, our office had moved into the library, and we were able to provide a student study area that was utilized by mentors and participants. These opportunities provided students more access to our office during a time we saw an increase in students reaching out to us for help and guidance as they navigated campus life.

The Roots of the #ACEfam

While we had not yet reached a state of nirvana, the quality of the program and experience for our students continued to improve. Reflection and student feedback was always important to our process for increasing our success year after year. Through our new year-round student positions comprised of mentors from the previous summer, we were able to glean important nuggets from their experience. Their personal experiences, plus the continued contact

and support of the new cohort, helped us to keep a pulse on the needs and desires of our students. As we got into mid-September, we received the go ahead to begin planning for the 2017 cycle. By this point, we had started hearing some interesting things from our mentors and the students that were coming to use our study space. Even though around 60% of our students from the summer had moved out of Beta Hall to other places across campus, almost all of them were going back there to hang out. They remarked that Beta felt like home, and they missed the family they had created during ACE.

The word family kept coming up in conversations. We had hired a student that participated in ACE Panama in 2015 and was one of our strongest mentors in 2016 to lead our marketing efforts for the cycle. As elevating the voice of students was important, I believed that hiring a student specifically to work on marketing provided a level of authenticity as well as propelled the student on a path of career goal achievement. The student was a marketing major and excelled in the world of social media – especially in comparison to me, now in my thirties and completely unhip. With this role the student helped manage our social media across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter while also assisting in the development of the Admissions marketing campaign. Branding was incredibly important to the student. We needed a logo and a hashtag. In discussions we focused in on what made ACE and how we could embody that.

About this time in pop culture, it was cool to call friends “fam.” Relating to our students’ experience and the fact that “fam” was now frequently used in the teenage world, the student pitched #ACEfam to be our brand and online persona. The student moved forward in creating the logo and it was utilized in our print and digital marketing along with the hashtag in our social media.

I thought that was that. It was going to be something cool that we did. Something we would be able to point to during training and in discussions with families when talking about our students build their home away from home. What I didn't foresee was that we were inspiring a movement that carried through ACE 2017. In creating our support structures and programs in 2017, we would always highlight family. The fact that the students were in this together. Family was a central theme at CampU. We wove family into our meetings with our faculty and partners abroad. We always hear that it takes a village. As the concept of family manifested into our mission, vision, and partners, the #ACEfam became a village.

Family Values

The hiring process for summer mentors always begins towards the end of fall and hiring for 2018 was no different. Our goal was to have students hired by the time they were registering for spring courses so they can build their course schedule around our training time. It has always been my policy to interview any student that applies to our mentor positions, as most of the time the new applicants were freshmen, and this was typically their first professional interview.

During the individual and group interview process, we always discussed the students experience in the program and how we could make things better. Most students in this cycle discussed how they were initially frustrated with the thoughts of living in Beta and CampU, but they did it because they wanted to be at USF. They discussed being so thankful for starting during ACE and that they wanted to be a part of the experience in 2018 to help others and to give back. The secret's out. If a student during their interview states that they are applying because they want to give back to others and to improve on the experience that they had, they're basically hired on the spot.

When we discussed our preliminary planning for what 2018 would look like, students were excited about the #ACEfam. They followed us on social media, but so many of them lived into the space of becoming big brother or big sister for future ACE students. This concept got me called the Godfather or Grandfather as years went on, but most importantly, students wanted to take on a natural leadership role for the family.

As we were brainstorming for spring trainings, our staff decided that we needed to define the #ACEfam mission and values. We allocated our second and third training of the semester to discuss the importance of mission, vision, and values and how they translated into goals. These discussions became cornerstones for our trainings for the entire semester, especially as mentors apply these concepts to help students set goals for the summer and their first year.

The mentors took the idea and ran with it. As we were an “official” family, they wanted to create a crest and a creed for the program. In having so many students on staff from the northeast, this was the logical next step. A couple of students from New Jersey and New York discussed their extended families and how the family crest is prominent within their homes – with some even having family crest tattoos. They wanted to create something that was representative of the mission, something that they would be proud of building, and something that would stand the test of time that future generations of ACE could reflect on.

The level of importance that these student leaders put into the concept of an ACE family floored me. Yes, I believe in the importance of following through with promises, but did I believe that the level of belongingness I was trying to instill would translate to such an extreme... no. The sense of purpose that these students felt and discussed was a labor of love as they developed a framework to support future students that they deemed the future generations. It was here that I realized that they truly didn't look at their mentor positions as a job, but as a

responsibility. The comments they made during the interview about giving back and how their lives were shaped by the ACE experience wasn't fluff, it was a personal commitment.

As we worked through training, it was my decision to allow the student year-long staff to lead the activities and help shape the final programming model. The students deserved ownership of this process as it was so important to them. I hoped that this project would build the team at the core. Not only were they building the mission and values of what future students could expect, they were building a structure for accountability and direction for themselves. By working on the crest and creed, they were uniting in common purpose to design a framework of expectations that would be used to govern their decision making and push them forward throughout the cycle.

Over all my years of training, from teaching credit bearing courses, to retreats, and other structured group activities, I have never seen this level of commitment to any project or topic. The students worked hard over the next few weeks and created drafts that were revisited throughout the semester and finalized as spring training wrapped up. They wanted to make sure that they agreed on the final product as they planned to post these within their rooms in the residence hall so they could proudly reference it during their mentee meetings. As we headed into the summer, I was just as proud of their creation as they were, if not more.

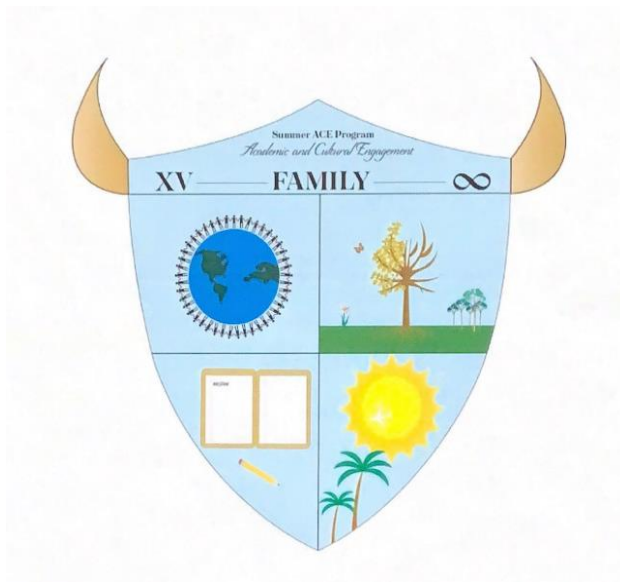
The Creed

We Approach problems from a global perspective.
We Create an environment in which students can express their individuality.
We Encourage student leadership, involvement, and success.
We Forge the foundation that allow students to choose their own journey
We Accept diversity and embrace the many differences of the world and each other.
We Model inclusivity that creates a supportive and loving family.

We are #ACEfam.

There is something about college students that makes them create acronyms. I believe it has to do with memorization exercises they have done through school to help study for tests. It was no surprise the creed was presented an acronym of ACE fam. In reviewing the creed, I was humbled in the themes that they presented. Diversity and inclusion were highlighted through the creation of an environment that supported students' individuality, but also promoted the importance of embracing different cultures. Being student led and created, I was grateful that the students put creating an inclusive environment that supported students on their own personal path to success was celebrated.

The Crest



Much like the creed, the crest was focused on symbolizing the support of differences and success through the transition. The crest has bull horns to symbolize not only the ACE family, but the larger USF Bulls family. The XV roman numerals symbolized the program's first class in 2015, with the infinity sign symbolizing that the ACE family doesn't end at graduation but is sustained for life. In developing the four areas of the crest, the Earth symbolized diversity and mutual respect. The tree symbolized transformation with the seasons. The students decided to

use the tree for the fall, knowing that the transition from high school to ACE was big, but it wasn't until the fall semester that they felt themselves transforming into their adult selves. This was important to them as they wanted to be clear that ACE supports students year-round, not only in the summer.

Academics made it into the crest as they felt it was an important area for the ACE fam and was left out of the creed. They also said this area symbolized a to-do list showing that the ACE family supported everyone's goals. The last area included the palm trees on the sun to symbolize Florida as the home for many out-of-state students in ACE. This also represented that through the support of the ACE fam, members would find love and respect in their success and a brighter future awaits.

The Impact

While I believed that the crest and the creed were great ideas that came out of training, I didn't know the impact that they would have. The unity that was created by mentors as they discussed the importance of the program and what it meant to them crystalized their purpose and drive for the year to come. The conversations about diversity of backgrounds and interest were elevated throughout that year as students looked to support students the best way possible, which meant getting them in the right rooms with the right people. In working with staff prior to that year, mentors felt ownership for their mentor group – which typically translated to becoming territorial or checking the box of meeting with those 15-25 students.

This year and moving forward was different. The staff began to work collectively on projects, programs, and finding more efficient ways to work with students. Experience became the teacher and driver. They understood lived experience was important. This began to knock down the barriers of working with campus resources. The mentors felt more confident in

meeting with and talking to full-time staff members. They allowed the purpose of their position to transcend their student status. They came to the table to push the envelope and fully understand how they could better support students. I believe that this level of leadership experience is unparalleled in preparing students for the workforce. Competence and experience matters. I want students and professionals to understand that knowledge is power, and we should lift up the voices that have the most relevant experience and competence around whatever table decisions are being made around.

Through this high praise, it is important for me to also temper this down a bit in reminding myself that they were still student employees. They of course were late for trainings or would go rogue at times as they navigated their own personal and academic ebbs and flows. However, the level of accountability that these students placed on themselves propelled them forward like no other staff. They set the bar for years to come. From that point on, the mentor applicant pool more than doubled along with attendance to programs throughout that academic year. They set a tone for the understanding of family. While the foundation was built in previous years, this group of mentors finished the construction of the ACE family's home away from home.

Narrative 4: A Pandemic of Support

We were humming along. ACE 2018 and 2019 were incredibly successful and we built up momentum heading into 2020. After 2018, our processes were basically set. We continued in Juniper-Poplar; cost-recovery processing was still a bear but was marginally getting better every cycle. Leading into the 2018 program, we had added a full-time coordinator with an additional administrator starting in December of 2019. ACE was a well-oiled machine at this point.

The university had been in the process of consolidating all three university campuses into one unified entity under the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). This was a labor-intensive process that required updating policies and procedures, aligning campus-specific degree programs into a single course of study, and creating system offices that strengthened overall performance while allowing for each campus's unique culture. Being the only summer office in the system, there was not a need to consolidate any staff, but there was great debate on how our programs would manifest on other campuses. It was decided that I would serve as a consultant across the system for their summer programs, but ACE and USF Pre-College for the 2020 cycle would remain Tampa only with expectations for expansion starting in 2021.

With marching orders in hand, we moved forward to build the largest ACE yet, in terms of students and travel locations. In 2018 and 2019 we had shifted our biology for a non-majors course from Costa Rica to Ecuador. The various microclimates in Ecuador made for the perfect backdrop to discuss the evolution and importance of flora and fauna. In 2019, the addition of traveling to the Galapagos Islands made for a remarkable experience, but some mishaps with the partner abroad created a need to shift away from Ecuador in 2020. While all other locations and partners remained the same for 2020, we were able to incorporate a new partner we had been wanting to collaborate with since meeting them at a conference in 2018. The Study Abroad Association (SAA) was founded by two individuals who built the company to provide students access to cost-conscious trips that were focused on not only academic enrichment and personal growth but, just as importantly, supporting the community to which they were traveling. We were excited to begin building an experience with them where students would travel to Peru.

While we believed the partnership at the time would only benefit the 25 students that would travel to Peru in 2020, SAA became a cornerstone for all of ACE 2020.

Covid-19

Uncertainty, fear, and a challenge to the natural order was not just an inconvenience but put life on pause. As the world ran into a brick wall in March of 2020 after outbreak after outbreak popped up across the globe, we hit a standstill. Looking to USF leadership for answers, we continued to have the goal posts for decisions on the summer pushed back week after week. Campus leadership believed that if they decided to move all courses online for the summer, less students would enroll, and the university would be in the red financially for the academic year.

In running summer for the university, I was able to be a part of the early conversations with campus leadership. However, as a voice to make the shift to 100% online early in the process, I was taken off the meetings. I believed that the university needed to be decisive early on so there was ample time to build a support structure around that decision. That wasn't the case. As the summer and fall registration period was supposed to open at the end of March, it was pushed back a few times to the end of April, with Maymester right around the corner. The university did finally make the decision to go 100% online after many other universities had gone public with their decision. During this time, staff from across the university were getting burnt out coming up with plans for multiple contingencies and trying to support their communities with limited direction. The decision was late. The impact was felt. They didn't learn from their mistake.

Campus leadership was meeting daily but not providing any substance and, as one would expect, our students and families were freaking out. With no official announcement from the university of what modality classes would be in or if Education Abroad would move forward

with their summer programs, all we could do was keep the lines of communication open and provide updates as they came in. After almost two months of asking for guidance and trying to provide pressure upward, I came to an agreement with Dr. DeLuca. We needed to shift ACE100% online as our students needed to be able to plan for not moving to Florida until the fall semester if they were staying on campus. Our faculty needed to be able to have ample time to flip their courses online for the shortened format and our office had to shift our student training for them to be ready to support students across the globe online. We couldn't move forward with the decision without the Provost Office's blessing as the campus community had to be made aware and with media and all stakeholders pressing for a decision on what USF was going to do as a whole for the summer, we didn't want to cause any upheaval. As this was over the fifth time we had requested a decision from the Provost Office, I told her I would give it a week, and, with no objection, I would move forward in notifying campus partners and the students.

It was the threat of moving forward without a response that garnered a discussion with the Provost Office. I understood completely where ACE fell as they were navigating accreditation, consolidation, and a pandemic. Our conversation was frank and caring and they did believe the shift online may cause a reduction in ACE numbers, but by making the decision in April, we could support students through the Admissions yield process with them knowing what they were committing to. Up to that point, if you would have asked me if I ever believed I would be running a transition program online, I would have said never – but there we were. We had to change everything. Being pressed up against the admissions deposit deadline still scheduled for a little less than a month away, we needed to get the message out within the week.

Pivoting on Needs

Whenever I've been posed with creating something, the focus is always on mission, goals, and needs. In taking a quick assessment of the landscape during cycle, there were a lot of stakeholders that were going to be impacted and their needs had to be considered in our decisions of how to move forward.

Our incoming students needed a clear understanding of what the summer had in store for them. Travel would be canceled, their courses shifted online, and the mentor support structure would need to be present across multiple platforms. At this time, we were also pressed against the uncertainty of the pandemic. Are we only going to be online for the summer and return to our housing community in the fall? Out-of-state tuition was the same price online as it was in person, did it make sense for students to pay a premium if they couldn't be on campus? It was clear that our model would need to be solidified quickly and clearly highlight the value add.

The non-negotiables. To make the program work, we needed to identify the must-haves to move forward. Students, faculty, staff, curriculum. Our prospective students didn't change, we just needed them to understand what was in front of them. Our faculty hadn't developed online ACE courses for a shortened session, so a big question was if they were still interested and how we can turn around a course development quickly in the current environment. Staff wise, we were just wrapping up mentor training as we were reaching spring semester finals, so we basically had to throw most of that out of the window as it was focused on an on-campus environment. Our curriculum was also out the window. We wouldn't be able to travel. Not having the students on campus meant our #ACEfam Reunion BBQ and other large on campus programs were cancelled. The question became, how can we stay true to our mission and support these students with a purposeful experience?

The meetings began almost immediately. When you're not having to manage everyone getting into the same meeting room with various schedules and locations around campus, it is much easier to get larger groups together online. Within a week, we had met with all major groups at least once. Our faculty had always been the backbone of our program and every single one of them agreed to make the shift online. We talked with all of our partners abroad and they all agreed to partner with us on some type of synchronous or asynchronous programming to aid in continuing our mission of global citizenship. Considering our budget for larger scale programs that traveled around Tampa Bay and the BBQ, we were able to allocate those funds to our mentor staff so they could start earlier in the summer for additional training for supporting students in an online environment, resulting in community programs prior to the students completing orientation and starting their courses.

The value was there from an experiential level, but we knew cost was going to be key during these unpredictable times. As our cost recovery amounts had already been approved, we needed to build a new budget model that incentivized and supported our students. In hopes that we would be back on campus in the fall, much of the programming budget was shifted there, as well as a plan to hire more yearlong mentors to support the students for the full academic year. Although we were going to embed programs from our abroad partners into coursework and our social curriculum, we still wanted students to have an opportunity to travel in the future. At that point we created an ACE study abroad scholarship that all students that completed the program would be eligible for if they studied abroad before they graduated. In paying this \$1,000 scholarship out of our ACE budget, we are able to provide ownership and oversight to ensure ample marketing and utilization will continue to go to any ACE student studying abroad, regardless of the length of their program.

Armed with our faculty, commitment of our staff, and a solid support structure for our incoming students in their first academic year, we were ready to market the updates and get to work on making them reality.

Connecting in the Virtual World

Starting in 2018, we began utilizing USF's Learning Management System, Canvas, to help facilitate next steps. Prior to this point we were emailing PDF lists to families that outlined onboarding steps with links on where to go to complete processes. We made the shift to Canvas for a few reasons, but most importantly we were trying to give our students a head start on orientating to the platform they would use for their ACE courses and beyond as well as aid in building community. In 2019 our office instituted ACE Canvas Connects (ACC) as a mandatory part of the ACE onboarding process.

The ACCs formalized the process of meetings and calls from previous years as they shifted to virtual meetups. Being able to virtually see the students and have staff members begin to build relationships in that modality worked wonders for community building. This process was paramount for our continued success after once the pandemic hit. We needed more virtual meetups; we needed to get students adapted to using Microsoft Teams that would be the university's new live video conferencing platform. Our staff was learning how to operate Teams as were orienting students on the functionality. Canvas provided us a place to keep students up to date on process and procedural shifts and became our platform for updates for University and ACE logistical announcements.

We quickly realized we needed to draw a firm line on Canvas only being utilized for announcements and not mixing in student social content. In using Canvas for both initially,

students were getting multiple notifications, with many not being pertinent to them. This led to apathy in checking updates, which impacted their engagement.

That December we had just hired a new full-time admin who was a participant in ACE 2015 and served in various roles within the office until graduation. Hiring a past student full-time was a huge benefit in helping build community through the trust and shared experience they had with all participants. In searching for a meaningful way to create a social infrastructure for participants, they created the ACE Discord server. In taking lead on this project, the admin aimed to create a space that would be like hanging out in a pod or lounge in the residence hall. Students had the opportunity to engage on social interests, connect with their mentors, have virtual study group meet-ups, and engage in our programming curriculum. While this was all new to the office and most of the students, it worked. It wasn't perfect when implemented, but it became their space and served its purpose.

Mentoring Mentors

The switch to online was devastating to many of our mentors. Having experienced living on campus with ACE and traveling, they believed that there was no way to match the experience for the incoming class. They were most excited about giving back to the community in the ways that were impactful for them, which meant hanging out late in the pod, making food runs, going to the gym together, and all kinds of other informal activities. The experience that they had, like other students across the nation when having their spring semester uprooted with a sudden shift to online courses, led to not feeling supported in the modality. They were worried academically, socially, and for their family and friends. This rise in anxiety drove us closer together as we needed each other for support, but also proved to be the catalyst for dedicating efforts for creating a strong ACE 2020.

With the funding model, we were able to extend training and start compensation earlier in the summer to get the mentors interacting with the incoming students. This allowed us to start our mentor group and individual meetings in late May. Typically, mentors don't begin engaging with students until the week the program begins in July. This earlier engagement helped build the relationships in this new environment, but also aided in limiting melt (students that deposit but don't take courses). Without this shift, I believe we would have seen a higher level of melt for our students and mentor staff along with concern for students being overwhelmed if we would have hit them with everything in July. While this was only one piece of the puzzle, we were on the right track.

Supporting Faculty

Our faculty have always been drivers for the success of the program. While we build a structure for students to have a successful transition, it is of paramount importance to me that student coursework helps them see the purpose of general education and the need to solve problems with an interdisciplinary lens. Having ACE faculty that understand the intricacies of teaching first year students and challenging them academically while supporting their transition is a fine balance. One of the main benefits we had during ACE that contributing to faculty success was that many of our faculty have stayed with us from years one and two. They were able to mentor new faculty and support them as they updated their curriculum to fit the ACE format.

This comradery and trust amongst faculty and our office allowed for us to quickly gather around the proverbial table and agree on the best path forward. Our decision to go 100% online for the summer beat the decision for the rest of the campus by about a week. With the vast majority of faculty being bogged down by having to shift on campus sections to online to finish

the spring semester, bandwidth for planning ACE was limited. To support faculty with this transition for spring and summer courses, Innovative Education's Digital Learning team developed the DYOC – Design Your Own Course modules. When partnering with the colleges prior to Covid, Digital Learning had a specific number of courses per college they would help the faculty convert with a more hands-on process. With Covid and the high demand, they needed to develop a support structure that could support more faculty and provide opportunity to approve courses using the university's quality online course rubric.

Due to ACE being such a special population and being organizationally structured within Innovative Education, we created a special instance of the DYOC online modules in which our faculty could collaborate and have access to the resources we were providing for ACE. Two course developers with Digital Learning were assigned to the ACE group and helped support each of them with best practices for developing an online course for the ACE time period. I believe this dramatically improved the quality of the online course and decreased the development time. By providing an all-hands-on deck approach our faculty were bought in and had ample resources to lean on for support and motivation.

It was agreed upon by the group that we still wanted to move forward with ACE courses spanning four weeks. The removal of the travel week gave instructors the full four weeks for instruction, which mimicked the typical four-week structure of Maymester or Winter Session. This standardization gave Digital Learning and the faculty an accessible framework to space content while scaffolding in the needs of ACE.

The Global Mission

Much like our faculty, our partners abroad have been committed members of the #ACEfam. Prior to Covid, we were planning our trips abroad to Quebec City, Costa Rica, Peru,

and Colombia. Knowing that our trips provided these partners with revenue, and that we had been working with them since the fall semester, I wanted to ensure that we could compensate them and integrate their content as much as possible online. In meeting with each location separately we were able to create unique experiences with each that further solidified our strategic partnerships.

With Costa Rica, our faculty members were able to embed some guest lectures and community interviews into their curriculum. These community interviews were utilized for the students' final projects. The partner also was able to coordinate separate synchronous culture classes that all participants could attend.

With Quebec City, we were able to integrate guest lectures and asynchronous tour content on the founding of Quebec City through modern day. We were also able to partner for a live cooking class.

With Colombia, we were able to setup a culture exchange with a partner university in Barranquilla and have live culture classes.

The game changer was our partnership with the Study Abroad Association (SAA), our partner for Peru. Immersive experiences are one of the best educators and a main benefit for ACE. In our meeting, we found out that they were in the early stages of building out virtual reality experiences. The company started with a mission to provide cost effective ways to give students the benefits of study abroad and cultural immersion without required travel. They wanted to bring VR experiences to life so everyone could experience the world. This was a perfect opportunity for us during the pandemic. In working with them about what was feasible for Peru, the covid restrictions didn't allow them to travel in country. With SAA headquartered in Italy, we leapt at the opportunity to utilize a virtual north to south tour.

We provided funds to SAA to film the content with the agreement of co-owned content for Italy and a free year subscription to the VR content service they planned to begin in 2021. This agreement was mutually beneficial as we became a test case and proof of concept moving forward. We were able to utilize the content with our students across multiple classes as well as incorporate into our co-curricular programming.

To help our students connect to this content, as well as building community online, we partnered with a vendor that creates and ships themed boxes. Through this partnership, we were able to create a #ACEfam themed box that included everything needed to be successful over the summer. Tech wise, this included ear buds with microphone capability, VR cardboard headsets, a USB port, and a large charging cable. We also included a journal, colored pencils, a watercolor paint set, and a stress ball that would be utilized for our summer programming. We wanted to make sure students felt excited and supported in beginning their classes this summer. This was a small token to show that while they were spread across the US and the world, we wanted to stay connected and help them perform at their best.

Impact

From the onset of Covid to the current environment, it seems that the needs of students and the university are constantly in flux. While I feel like this is an environment in which I thrive in, the level of trauma coupled with the necessities of work was enormous. During the pandemic, we had mentors and students losing friends and family members. We had students whose parents were losing jobs and college was no longer financially viable. What I learned from spring 2020 through the summer was that resilience is a group activity. Peer pressure is not always a negative concept. By working together and supporting a common goal, our team found that the necessity of a constant focus on reshaping the summer during such stressful times helped

us find a purpose every day. We reflected on how important it was for us to continue reaching out, continue adapting policies and procedures to help students navigate their changing landscape, but most importantly be there for one another in a common purpose. While the past year has been the most stressful and difficult, I can happily reflect on many positive aspects and accomplishments for our team and students.

CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTION

Narrowing down the most influential moments in my almost seven years at USF was difficult, but the narratives chosen have been critical in my continued development as a professional. As I reflect on the narratives and identify themes, it is important that I go back to the initial research questions to provide a framework and direct discussion. As stated in chapter one, my research questions are:

1. How did I come to understand the ways that USF influenced the creation and implementation of the ACE program?
2. What did I perceive as opportunities for the program given perceived university and student needs, and how were they implemented to align with the goals of the program?
3. How did I come to define success for the ACE program?

In closing out this study, I will provide my understanding of these three questions and elaborate on influential dynamics that impact these areas.

Question 1

1. How did I come to understand the ways that USF influenced the creation and implementation of the ACE program?

USF, like most large universities/conglomerates, is like a machine. USF is so large that it is difficult for things to be standardized with clear expectations. Then, when you add in competing priorities and a lack of accountability and authority across units, everything seems to live in the gray.

From the onset, the reasons ACE was created were never veiled: performance metrics. At the time of the program's inception, the administration's concern was that the ACE population needed to begin in the summer, as the administration was primarily focused on increasing the incoming academic profile metric. While the program had immense supports built in to assist students beyond their summer transition, neither retention nor graduation were mentioned in the initial charge. Each year I sought to increase the program's success through individual student success as well as through university metrics. During initial implementation of the program as well as subsequent iterations, the overall culture of USF and departmental dynamics weighed on what and how change could be brought about.

Reflecting on my experience and my written narratives, I believe that USF's influence can be summed up in 3 A's: accountability, authority, and autonomy. Accountability to the university, our team, and our students. Authority was not clearly defined due to shared governance and wide-ranging partnerships that lacked upper administration mandates. Autonomy because of lack of institutional oversight. Despite the challenges with accountability, authority, and lack of oversight, my personal drive persisted, and I sought—with the ACE Team—to strengthen the program for students year after year.

Accountability

I find accountability to be an interesting beast within higher education. Stakeholders take many forms for universities, from the students to administration to community partners and leaders, amongst numerous others. While accountability to various stakeholders exist, it is often ill defined leading to a lack of transparency and clarity around actions and assessment at the micro level. With limited cross-organizational oversight, generalizations of the message from university administration of “increasing university metrics by any means necessary” provides

units with a broad freedom to (or not to) move forward with initiatives or partnerships. With limited proactive leadership from the top, I find that it is an individual's personal drive and accountability to self that pushes the needle for work within units and creating meaningful campus partnerships. Based on my experience working at two different institutions of higher learning and engaging with hundreds of administrators from across the nation in the North American Association of Summer Sessions over the last 12 years, I believe individuals fall on a spectrum when it comes to attitudes around workplace accountability. While individuals are fluid and not fixed on this spectrum, I do believe they have an innate positionality.

At the upper pole I find that entrepreneurs are individuals that are constantly staying abreast of the needs of the institution and looking for ways to make changes to current programs or be a part of partnerships to try and move forward. Entrepreneurs are in the public eye with their thoughts and perspective being known. Entrepreneurs are typically known across campus and are part of numerous task forces or campus committees. They seem to be called upon often to find ways to make things work and are typically assigned a high level of work as "other duties as assigned."

I define the lower end of the spectrum as appeasers. Appeasers stay out of the limelight and keep up the status quo. They believe that if they stay under the radar and do not rock the boat, they have the best chance for not coming under question from upper administration, which may result in job insecurity. I have individuals say heard numerous times over the years that they hope the provost or president did not know their name and/or they are scared to ask a question about resources or needs as they do not want to be scrutinized. The interesting thing about appeasers is they tend to put in an ample amount of work to stay unnoticed and articulate ways in

which something is not their problem or fault. That extra work that is put in for self-preservation is diverted from attention that could be paid to improving conditions for their stakeholders.

It is important for me to identify these concepts to the reader as I believe it impacts the daily comings and goings of higher education as a whole, and ultimately the creation and development of ACE. I wrote earlier in this dissertation about the time it takes programs to become institutionalized and how that impacts the degree to which people come to the table to support initiatives. Prior to institutionalization, it is easy for individuals and units to hide behind their process and conceived scope to the degree they deem appropriate. If they were to go out of their way and augment a process and it fails, they will potentially get negative feedback from students and families and thus be placed on administration's radar. This paradox creates what I refer to as a minimal viable partnership.

Macro: minimal viable partnership. For years higher education has been labeled as resistant to change. There seems to be a feeling of safety in keeping with the status quo with minor augmentations. Personally, being involved with numerous strategic planning committees and university task forces, more often than not, I will say they were a waste of time. The months to year-long process would end with recommendations that never materialized or the agreement to move forward in a certain direction with funding pulled before it could be fully realized. At the end of the day though, the university leadership would say that through this process we discovered many helpful contributions that will be implemented in the coming years to further the success of our students and the university community.

Being a part of these initiatives and leading a few taskforces that were not granted funding to move forward was frustrating and created a culture of limited expectations for new initiatives and meaningful change. With the feeling that change takes too much time with what

were antiquated processes, this culture did not incentivize individuals to put additional effort into new initiatives. Double whammy. You have individuals and units that inherently want to stay under the radar and not champion new initiatives or processes for the sake of staying out of the limelight and then you have a culture where additional effort is exerted on committees to bring about change that never comes to fruition. This repetitive cycle disincentivizes individuals to step outside of their bubble and maximize opportunities.

Micro: ace. Varying levels of accountability and commitment to the ACE program existed from campus partners over the years. What I experienced out of the gate was tremendous push back to augment processes to support ACE's alternative calendar framework. With partners not being held accountable from the top, there was a lack of attention to how the decisions of critical support units would impact the onboarding and experiences of ACE students. There were consistent reminders of how small the ACE population was in comparison to the number of students being served over the summer. This refrain was used with upper administration whenever there was an issue or complaint. They would say things like, "if we diverted effort to focus on processes for 100 students, we would be neglecting the needs of thousands of others." While this statement is understandable, it was often used at the beginning of initial meetings before we fully vetted the needs and the impact of the ACE population. This clearly showed that having a presence at the meeting table did not signify support or meaningful engagement of partners.

Because ACE was housed within Innovative Education, I saw Student Success and the colleges as partners but not as accountable agents to the program. Without a high level of accountability being placed on these units to provide ample support to the program and students, it felt at times that ACE was on an island fending for ourselves. This was evident in narrative

two, as the students were on a proverbial island, being the only students on the east side of campus in 2016. During the meeting referenced in narrative two, a leader in Student Affairs told me that by attempting to visit a student in the hospital I went above and beyond the scope of my position. By exceeding my scope, I was creating an environment that was not conducive to student success as the unit could not offer the same level of support to ACE students continuing into the fall and spring terms. My translation: “do less, so we don’t look bad and get complaints or reprimanded down the road.”

Where I had difficulty is that I felt accountability to and for ACE students. Reverting to the Promise element of the 4 Ps, I promised students and their families that we would support them and be there for them during their transition. This was also a goal of the university, but of course at scale it must manifest in different ways. It is true that the university could not and cannot offer the same level of support due to the size of the university. My issue with the sentiments from this meeting was that supporting students was being pushed from the side of equality and not equity. Much like support programs to special populations like first generation students we see across the country, my view was that out-of-state students need additional support based on their lived experiences and what was viewed by student affairs leadership as above and beyond, was an equitable support practice.

As I moved through the years, I was able to get people on board with feeling accountable to ACE students and their families, along with upholding the culture of ACE. I knew that I was never going to be in a place where these units felt accountable to me, but if we proved ACE to be worthwhile for students, partners would hopefully feel accountable to the success of students. While it took time, during the third and fourth year, we finally cleared the hurdle of proving longevity, which got more units focused and committed.

Authority

So much work at universities is done through committees. So much wasted time at universities comes from serving on committees. In serving on multiple university committees and chairing a handful, I became completely disenfranchised at USF. I want to be clear that on many occasions, committees had tough conversations and came up with meaningful reports and recommendations for various leadership groups, but for various reasons, often those recommendations would not come to fruition. While there are understandable reasons for a lack of follow through by leadership--such as a lack of funding--the frustrating cases were when these recommendations were ignored. As the charge was put together for committees and new initiatives, it often seemed as if upper leadership had already made up their mind on what they were going to do. The committee became procedural and was more of a ruse than impactful. I describe this phenomenon as “looking good vs. doing good.” In my estimation, the upper administration was able to have a committee to show they acknowledged that a change needed to be made and they created a democratic committee of influential stakeholders to come up with the best idea and path forward for overall success. They then try to steer the group to their desired outcome during the committee process or use the information after the fact to support their decision on how to move forward-- regardless of whether it aligned with the committee’s recommendation. As I saw things, if the direction that leadership went worked out, they got a pat on the back. If the direction did not work out, they had the opportunity to place the blame on the committee. With committees made up of multiple people, there was no one person to place the blame on, so the status quo was upheld, and no one was disciplined for misappropriation of funds or negatively impacting student success.

From work on committees and meetings through the years with colleagues, numerous times middle managers would share their apathy towards change as they felt that regardless of the work that was put in, the administration was going to do what they wanted at the end of the day. I was not the only one that discussed becoming disenfranchised. This reduced the motivation for many units to step out of the box and, I do believe, influence individuals to slide down to the appeaser side of the spectrum. Shared accountability with lack of authority seldom works but is woven into the fabric of USF.

Macro: provost proclamation. ACE is a Provost initiative. That should have been all I needed right? I will not speak for the Provost, but if I was a Provost that is probably what I would think. The issue that arose was that the Provost's Office placed the accountability on me to make things work but did not grant the authority to make people come to the table and make appropriate augmentations that supported the units mission and student success.

When reflecting on the culture of top-down management and appeasers at USF early on, scare tactics seemed to be what got folks around the table. In other words, fear that the Provost's Office would hear that someone was not partnering well, got them to agree to meet with me. This is one of the contributing factors to minimal viable partnerships and looking good versus doing good. I believe the partners felt an obligation to do something so the Provost's Office knew they were "doing their part," but also were stopping at the point of minimal viability.

At the end of the day, I believe initiative fatigue played a key role in the action phase of new changes that the university leadership promoted and how authority was loosely defined. Communication from the Provost's Office and the Leader of Student Success (LoSS) would often proclaim to the campus community that student success was everyone's responsibility. I presume this resulted in campus leadership believing that this statement in itself was the rallying

cry for everyone to get in line and constantly build a better environment for students. I also believe that this constant and universal pressure for everyone to do better provided a baseline of “added work” and stress to individuals.

Ultimately, with multiple competing initiatives being discussed at any given time including many of the same stakeholders, decision making authority and the path forward was typically muddy. There always seemed to be a hesitation from campus leadership to give explicit authority to individuals outside of his cabinet, presumably as there would be a loss of control. There was clearly a need to be proactive in prioritization of initiatives and funding, but this was not the environment internal to USF. This was continually compounded with the ever-changing legislature and resulting needs for USF.

Micro: authority of self. Not having direct authority, but full accountability from your supervisory chain, provides the need to get creative. To help move things forward, one must find ways to mitigate a lack of authority but still create an environment where it is hard for partners to say no. What I have found to be incredibly successful is to do research and align unit asks to their missions, their personal passion projects, and asking questions in a way that if they say no, they are saying no to students’ collective success. When working at NC State, people jokingly labeled this as Jedi Mind Tricks after the fact, but I believe this is exactly what should be done in any partnership. Goals should align. The added work should have a purpose and not be a chore. Those involved should feel a sense of satisfaction in supporting others. But, most importantly, they should always get credit and praise for their work.

While I discussed minimal viable partnerships early on, the benefit of starting there is that there is always room for improvement. If you are creating partnerships aligned with mission and the goals of that unit are being championed, it is very difficult for partners to back out. Once

you have completed a program cycle, you then have feedback from assessments and student testimonials that help guide improvements. Negative feedback from students and families is a wonderful motivator for improvement as internal conversations can get muted by discussing “we did the best we had with our available resources to partner.” However, if you have negative family feedback that can be shared or directly with to the president’s office, you best believe that changes are coming for the next cycle.

By just getting in the door, I find that building trust is key. I understand the hardships that partners have in trying to ensure the best outcomes for all students. I understand that my population of students should not take precedence over the masses, but that is not a reason to be dismissive. Pilots are a multiple year process. I have lived them across multiple spaces and getting frustrated early on or throwing someone under the bus is counterproductive and only hurts students. By building trust and scaling programs, you provide partners with digestible changes year after year that gets desirable outcomes. It is important to show this level of partnership and trust as units become accountable to their own authority. While they must check the box of participation with upper leadership, they truly are not accountable to me. By shifting to a framework of “you are accountable to your mission, and you have the authority to make changes to do right by your students,” I found a way to make a meaningful impact for students and partners without having direct authority from leadership.

Autonomy

I find myself incredibly lucky to have worked in a fairly autonomous environment during my career. I find that autonomy comes from the trust and respect of supervisors and a proven track record of meeting deadlines and exceeding targets. Often seen as an authority for successfully piloting programs and initiatives, the short time frames I have been given have

translated to more autonomy. The short time frame requires things to be set in place quickly, limiting the opportunities for naysayers to drag their feet and put off work. With the framework of understanding that the pilot will have holes and not be “perfect,” the pilot allows us to have something tangible to move forward with and improve upon.

Early on in my career at NC State, I grew frustrated as many initiatives would take at least two to three years to come to fruition. The typical process consisted of identifying a population that was struggling and articulating the need for an intervention. Next a committee would be put together that would spend the next year doing internal and external research on the needs of the population and the potential solutions. They would then spend the next six months getting support for the plan from upper administration and trying to identify funding opportunities. They would then roll out a small pilot and, if it worked on a miniscule piece of the impacted population, they would roll out to scale. After the two to three years of getting to scale, the population in need was more than halfway done with their degree, graduated, or dropped out. Additionally, there was the worry that more salient university needs would be highlighted over those few years, thus tabling or dissolving the work of the initial committee. So much time and effort wasted with minimal tangible progress to show for it, which negatively impacted students.

It is clear that I do not subscribe to the traditional higher education route of creating new programs and initiatives. Honestly my experiences working in summer and intersession coupled with the performance metric culture of Florida has never lent itself to a lengthy implementation process. When I look at how autonomy has impacted me professionally and the work that I have done, I see the macro level from the supervisor up and the micro as the culture of the team you lead including how you promote autonomy amongst your staff.

Macro: radio silence. Autonomous environments most certainly start with your supervisor and their leadership. If you find yourself working for a micro-manager or if they themselves are micro-managed, autonomy is difficult to attain, but not impossible. I discuss radio silence in reference to autonomy for a few reasons. The most obvious is the fact that in highly autonomous environments, you do not feel a constant pressure of the higher ups scrutinizing your daily tasks and putting unrealistic expectations on your work. have a monkey on your back. Even if you are initially confronted with a micro manager or a specific project that is under more scrutiny, I find that trust, respect, and a proven track record is one of the only ways to attain more autonomy. The success I have had with launching new initiatives provides me with the proven track record needed, even when working with new partners. The need for the creation of the ACE program was identified late in cycle with the framework needing to be developed over a few weeks. When the LoSS looked at me and said “well, you are the summer guy” and put it under my leadership, he provided what I needed to get the job done. The short turn-around did not allow for a large committee to be created and options discussed. The process of committee creation would have taken longer than I had to launch the program. I was given the autonomy based on temporal circumstances and a proven track record in relation to Summer START at NC State. Having no one else that was around the table at the Enrollment Planning and Management Directors meeting that had worked with summer transition programs resulted in limited input or expectations given. Autonomy out of the gate.

Another element of radio silence is making sure there are no blips on the radar screen. In this case, that is ensuring that there are no alarming situations during the creation of an initiative or within assessment. Playing nice with others is an important step in staying off the radar with leadership. Finding ways to work together and collaborate is key to the success of any initiative.

I have rarely seen a time in which complaining about another office to my supervisor or up the chain resulted in any positive sustainable relationship. For example, if I was frustrated with housing and vocalized as such in 2015, would they have been a better partner in years to come? No. Autonomy and successful collaboration are about swallowing ego and finding common ground in order to build a foundation of trust.

With USF's primary focus on performance metrics, staying off the radar meant ensuring your population did not underperform. This was an interesting predicament for ACE. The initial focus of moving out-of-state and international students out of the fall and into the summer starting class was complete from the onset. With a sole focus on ensuring that took place, it was not until years later that we were discussing retention and graduation. I provided reports over the years based on the progression of the population, but I continually asked for comparison cohorts or targets we should be looking to hit. None were ever provided. Internally I aimed our goals around the retention and graduation rates of the traditional summer starting students.

Due to ACE students being from outside of Florida and having an academic profile, on average, lower than the traditional summer starting students, I made the case that ACE students were more at-risk for first-year retention and graduation. If we were able to increase the size of the cohort and keep retention and graduation close to the university average, we were successful. By staying off the university's radar by supporting strengthened metrics, autonomy from the macro level for the team was achieved.

Micro: treat others as you want to be treated. Simple enough right? Being team oriented and goal focused, I worked to create an environment that valued everyone's input and collective growth. As I have discussed previously, the family culture that we instilled with our ACE students transcended beyond students to include our staff and partners. To promote

autonomy within the team, I could not be a micro-manager, but just as importantly, I had to leave my ego at the door. With a goal mindset and shared vision of improvement, it is important to champion the best ideas among your team and collaborators. Being a leader or supervisor does not mean what you think and do is always right. Creating an environment that allows for transparency and feedback, in a supportive manner, helps move everyone forward for personal and professional growth.

Creating this type of autonomy is achieved through dynamic assessment of stakeholders. While gleaned pre and post assessment data from surveys is helpful, to get a full 360-degree view of initiatives requires qualitative feedback from not only students, but partners. Many of the improvements that were made to ACE over the years started at the grassroots level with mentors and past participants. I have a saying that as my bald spot gets bigger, my relevance with students gets smaller. This level of humility is important as I have no clue what it is really like to be a teenager in the world today. The best perspective on the student experience comes from the students that are having the experiences. While they do not understand nuances around budget and strategic priorities, they do know if something worked for them and if they had pain points within the process.

An important part of our mentor hiring cycle was that every student received a first-round interview. I have done this throughout my career as many of the students that apply are freshmen and for many this is their first professional interview. The students have opportunities to meet with us after the interview for feedback and support in building their professional skills. While we are always student focused, our interviews provide the opportunity for students to talk about what worked for them and how they believe our programs can become better. These unique perspectives from students allow us to look for trends and leverage the feedback with

campus partners and leadership as it comes directly from the students. As we begin working with student hiring in September, this data is helpful as we are finalizing the launch of the next summer's program. By having actionable input provided by students, I was always able to speak to the reasons for updates as being presented and vetted by past participants.

While I like to say the best suggestions always get implemented, transparency is key to keep the trust and respect of the group. At times, the best ideas cannot move forward due to budget or university policies or politics. It is important for the professional team to understand the competing dynamics at the university, as well as students to understand that there are always bounds within the work that we do. Regardless of autonomy from the macro or micro levels, once trust and respect are earned and early successes are realized, autonomy seems to follow.

Overall, I found that performance metrics and the three A's not only contributed to the university's need to create ACE, but also to its continued influence. From the Provost level to the bottom of the org chart, these components clearly impacted the day-to-day work that was done over the years to continually improve the ACE program. With a focus on building respect and a value-add partnership for ACE, we were able to consistently move forward and improve year after year.

Question 2

2. What did I perceive as opportunities for the program given perceived university and student needs, and how were they implemented to align with the goals of the program?

Perception is always in the eye of the beholder. In working with students and student staff for so many years, I adopted a phrase that I would use during student orientation and mentor training: "interpretation vs. intent." As we entered the virtual world after Covid, these two words took on different meanings since the world shifted communication to a more text heavy and

online modality. Perception lies at the crux of interpretation and intent. When working with administration at USF, their intent was mainly focused on increasing performance metrics. With the goals driving their decision making, it became easy to interpret their written and verbal messaging as increase performance metrics in ways that can be viewed as supporting students. Metrics driven intent, meaning, do this to improve metrics and hopefully it will benefit the student experience. When looking at opportunities that were presented for the ACE program, I focused on past experiences and feedback from students to improve the student experience. Student-centered intent, meaning, if I improved the experience of the student, metrics would improve as a result. While both directions have goals in improving performance metrics, they were vastly different in how they prioritized the direct needs and support of students.

Macro: Institutional Opportunity

Improving performance metrics. This section is now complete. All joking aside, truly the opportunity that the university looked at with ACE was the instant gratification of metric 1, in being able to positively influence the fall FTIC academic profile. Reactive and short-sighted. From the start, I could list four main university-centric opportunities for this population. First of course is the profile metric, second is the first-year retention metric, third the graduation metric, and fourth, and extremely important is the increased revenue of out-of-state tuition.

What should not have been ignored from the start is the increase in out-of-state tuition from this population. With out-of-state rates for credit hours being just less than three times that of in-state students, the initial 94 students in ACE calculates to the same tuition rate of over 275 in-state students. That alone is a huge financial benefit for the university. That financial windfall was realized in the short-term with just the revenue generated in the summer, but then you add revenue generated from their continued enrollment in the fall and hopefully spring

semester, as without ACE those students do not attend USF, you are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now, multiply that through graduation; millions in tuition revenue, not to mention housing, dining, and other university auxiliaries.

While the sole focus of starting the program was the singular metric of the fall profile as we got into fall 2017, the Provost's Office did shift attention to first year retention and graduation metrics. This shift in focus came as Dr. DeLuca and I met with the Provost to discuss the success we had seen with ACE and his request for USF Pre-College to be shifted under my leadership. With the increased workload of USF Pre-College and the success of increased year-over-year retention rates for the 2015 and 2016 cohorts, the Provost approved a new coordinator position. By the end of 2020, the size of the recruiting pool had increased four-fold and the ACE team grew to four full-time staff (including myself). This staff size successfully managed the increased number of new and continuing students and provided substantial contributions to help students realize their personal goals for success while unilaterally improving performance metrics for the university.

Micro: Student-First Does Not Mean University-Last

I believe a student-first approach is the most proactive in higher education. If the focus is on bettering the student experience with tangible things that students see as supporting them, the university then builds resilience for those students. If the university is looked upon as making self-serving decisions, the students feel ostracized as if they do not belong and are more likely to not persist. That is my theory on success in higher education. This dissertation would not exist in this format if the university would have rolled out the red carpet for the creation of ACE. ACE from the onset has been making lemonade out of lemons, which prompted my constant reflection on personal values of how-to best support students.

In my opinion, a strong sense of belonging to the university is paramount for student retention and graduation. As explored in works of Baumeister and Leary and discussed in chapter two, a sense of belonging drives success. It does not matter how academically or socially talented a student is, if they do not feel at home on campus, they will leave. When you look at the bare bones needs of ACE with OOS students coming to campus, it was clear they did not have a support system. Baring full family relocation or distant relatives being local, most ACE students relied on campus resources and connections for personal, academic, and professional support. Campus truly became home. Using that lens, every decision I made was focused on ensuring that students had an opportunity to build connections with students, staff, and faculty. The concepts of the #ACEfam were established from the beginning, it just took time to fully realize and call out the intent. While I have discussed in the narratives that the university presented challenges for ACE, those challenges are what created opportunities for success.

First and foremost, study abroad was an opportunity that was born from a challenging situation with housing. With students not being able to stay on campus between summer and fall, ACE was almost dead in the water. With the new Quality Enhancement Plan for accreditation including the Global Citizens Project, study abroad seemed like the best opportunity to create buy-in. I have spoken ad nauseum on how embedding HIPs, especially hands-on learning, into first year student experiences helps achieve an increased level of belongingness for students. While I had never personally studied abroad, the opportunity to embed it with ACE perfectly aligned with research on HIPs and university initiatives. Aligning with the QEP meant there was less of an opportunity for campus to push back on its inclusion of ACE. It also meant that partners who adopted early, especially faculty members, were seen favorably as supporting campus initiatives. Additionally, the opportunity for ACE to be a leader

in adopting principles of the Global Citizens Project showed students that USF wanted to give them the best kickoff to a successful career at USF.

I believe that the study-away experience in ACE set the correct tone for students to understand the purpose of higher education and their degree path. As I have discussed passion and purpose repeatedly, I believe the study-away amplified the purpose of general education and problem-solving. Too many times over the past couple of decades, I have heard the general education curriculum referred to as “those courses we have to take before we can take what matters.” I must admit when I was in undergrad, I looked at general education courses the same way. I looked at fulfilling those requirements with whatever course was deemed the easiest and had the best grade distributions. I, like many students I have worked with, believed that only their major courses were relevant.

The curricular model of ACE amplified the purpose of general education in two major ways. First, the four-week linked course format provided a seemingly immersive experience into the course work and helped enhance faculty and peer relationships. The ACE orientation course focused on interdisciplinary problem solving and campus resources where students were introduced to critical thinking and success techniques. By working with faculty to use project-based learning focused on knowledge building that was supported by experiential examples during travel, students saw general education and interdisciplinary problem-solving as a strong foundation to their studies. My hope was that this purpose-driven approach to ACE coursework would help students understand the purpose of higher education and how they could use their general education curriculum to learn and make a difference. While this was not embraced by all students, many of the ACE participants were impacted holistically by the experience.

While making it through year one with a skeleton budget was difficult, the opportunity for ACE to be run as cost-recovery truly set the stage for its growth and amplified success. Cost-recovery made ACE self-sufficient, which provided insulation from upper administration and provided us with the resources to compensate campus for their partnerships. The opportunities created by cost-recovery drove many successes, especially with the inclusion of CampU in 2016-2018, mentor hiring, and year-round programming.

CampU was a perfect opportunity to help students build confidence in themselves as individuals and students before courses began. Just as important, CampU amplified opportunities for students to form social groups and support systems for their time at USF. With the typical cost of CampU being over \$200 per student, we were able to include it in the cost of ACE tuition. Creating this partnership with New Student Connections magnified opportunities for further student involvement during their time at USF as well as future student employment. CampU would have continued to be a cornerstone for ACE if the university did not decide to shut down the program due to a belief it did not benefit a large enough volume of students. Instead of providing funding to magnify its scope, they ended it.

With the cut to CampU, we were able to channel those funds into hiring more mentors and extending some of the positions to year-round. In losing the CampU kickoff to the program, I believed that students would need more direct facilitation to build a sustainable community. For incoming students, the ability to have a mentor that had been through the experience normalized the transition shock and provided a tangible example of how to be successful at USF. For our students who became mentors, student employment gave them an even deeper connection to the university while also providing much-needed financial resources. Students from out of the area have more expenses across the board, not only with tuition and fees, but also

with transportation, as the distances they travel during holidays are great since they are out-of-state, and travel is often at a premium during those peak times.

When hiring mentors that have experienced the program, the students are hired with an engrained commitment to the program's success, as well as an expansive knowledge of the program that reduces training needs. One of the most difficult aspects of a mentoring position is building trust and credibility with mentees. Having mentors that have experienced the program helps give instant credibility as they can self-disclose their experiences and discuss how they, or their peers, navigated similar challenges to be successful. This benefit transcends beyond their initial summer through the population's entire university career. We lean into our family culture approach with our view of students in cohorts and provide them "generational" support to succeed. Many mentors and students view this as an older/younger sibling relationship with the built-in responsibilities of challenging and supporting one another.

As mentors can work with individual and small groups of students in articulating and continually shaping a path to goal attainment, a strong mentor ecosystem helps students integrate in the larger campus community. With close working relationships with campus offices and resources, there are natural paths for students to find meaningful involvement that aligns with their goals. The ability to promote our program as focused on an individual student's success versus a one size fits all approach provides so many collective opportunities, but more importantly a tailored and potentially meaningful process for all.

Overall, the cost-recovery nature of the program allowed us to be nimble to the needs of the students and the shifting realities and resources at USF. By capitalizing on assessment data and direct student input to adapt year after year, we were able to maximize opportunities that

were presented. By satisfying the university's desire for increasing performance metrics and managing our own budget, I believe ACE was able to thrive.

Question 3

3. How did I come to define success for the ACE program?

Micro: Success for ACE is Personal

For this answer, I believe it is important to start with discussing my own feelings about success of the program as the micro was the driver for the macro. Student success is overall success. Metrics are important to the university but were also a way to track the success of ACE. Retaining and graduating students at higher rates year after year proved success personally, at the university, and for state and national rankings. I believed success for ACE was continual improvement. I've talked a lot about pilots and building student success infrastructure in many forums. In addition to my past institutions, many of these conversations happen at the North American Association of Summer Sessions conferences and forums. While higher education may be resistant to change, this is honestly where success lies. While the concept is not shocking, many professionals are resistant to change. The status quo provides a safety net for professionals, but it has the potential to leave students behind. What was important for me as an undergrad in 2003 is not what is important to students now.

Overcoming resistance to change was building success. Breaking down university barriers in the form of committee work delays or modernizing curriculum for seasoned faculty is always an uphill battle. When building working relationships and a consensus for change, my mind always drifts to Venn diagrams. I feel (hope) that anyone working in higher education basically has the same two circles – public good and personal aspirations. My hope is that everyone that works in education went into the field because they see it as beneficial to the

public and want to help students personally improve, thus improving the world around them. The other circle represents their personal aspirations. For faculty that may be their research agenda and for administrative professionals it may be delivering on the principles of business, salary/benefits, or stability. I find that you can motivate individuals for change if you can appeal to their inclinations for both the public good and personal growth.

Success for an ACE student was on an individual spectrum. It is my firm belief that while all students have a shared goal of graduating when they begin university, they have their own unique path that must be cultivated. With that frame, the ACE program overall was successful if it provided an environment in which students could find a sense of meaning and belonging at USF during their transition. Overall, the success of ACE was based on the collective successes of the participants. Educationally we moved the needle forward. Student belonging: we moved the needle forward. Campus involvement: we moved the needle forward. We were constantly adapting to the needs of students while supplying the campus with additional resources and opportunities to succeed with their goals.

Consistent financial viability is success. I wrote about the benefits of cost-recovery in relation to program participants in the last question, but success was also experienced for the university community. The ability to control our own fate financially was liberating. We were self-sufficient and were never put under scrutiny for financial allocations. As our program grew, we were able to offer campus partners additional funding to ensure our students had adequate support, signaling to our partners that we were a viable program that was here to stay.

ACE provided new revenue streams for Housing and Dining that have totaled well over one million dollars since the program's inception. Running an ACE-only version of CampU provided a new revenue stream for the New Student Connections Office that allowed them to

support more student staff and increased programmatic outreach. ACE faculty were able to supplement their income during the summer in teaching for ACE. Financial viability and stability allowed ACE to be successful as resources were available to support the needs of the program and support units.

At the end of the day, I personally felt the program was a success based on their feedback on post-assessments, their desire to keep in touch and vocalization of the impact of the ACE program. While the university goal was to have these students be retained and graduate, I ensured that our office supported students that wanted or needed to transfer or stop out. The success of ACE was in the level of care and individualized support we were able to offer to our cohorts. While we were direct support for students in the summer and in optional programming throughout their academic career, I believed our true success bore witness when students felt they could come to us in their time of need. Students would come with needs from ranging from involvement on campus to mental health to Title IX reporting, and we would triage them to the appropriate resource.

Overall, the purpose of ACE was to help students find their unique path of success. We were able to meet each individual student where they were and offer support along their path. With a culture of non-judgement and wanting students to be at their best, our team was able to support students at USF and beyond. By creating a program that celebrated and supported each individual student while increasing the metrics of the university, ACE was holistically successful in my view.

Macro: Defining Institutional Success Through the 4 P's

The success of any program, regardless of impact, can quickly lose favor of the administration if they do not understand or see the results. While I did not outline discussions or

reports using the 4 P's (Kalsbeek, 2013) with administration, they were always a guiding factor. Profile, progress, process, and promise were woven into the framework of ACE from the start of the pilot to institutionalization.

Profile. Profile is why ACE exists. What started as identifying OOS students that needed to be admitted into the summer term for metric reasons was expanded over the years to allow Florida students to opt-in. With the university increasing the overall size of the incoming freshmen class, over the years ACE more than doubled its numbers. Coincidentally, for the first few years I was instructed by EPM to keep ACE under the radar from fall admitted OOS students as to not jeopardize the fall profile.

Progress. The question is why did it take three full cycles before ACE was allowed to invite in-state students? The answer is simple. We had to prove that the program was successful at the university level as it related to student progress. In the beginning, profile success was the simple ability to move fall starting OOS students to the summer to strengthen metrics. While I created the framework for ACE that was approved at the highest level, there was still a concern that the program would not support retention and negatively impact student progress. In showing that our retention rate strengthened over the years, ACE became a recruiting tool and known student success initiative for the university. In highlighting the success of the program, we were able to institutionalize the program and our processes.

Process. After the rocky start that has been discussed throughout this dissertation, efficiencies were realized as ad hoc work became institutionalized process. Through consistently addressing student needs with offices such as Housing and Financial Aid, as we reached year four, processes were established with a wide range of understanding amongst university support staff. When working with ad hoc situations, we would find ourselves in situations where

students and their families would be supplied incorrect information from front line workers in support units. The administrators that we worked with were in the know of how we were operating, but their seemed to be internal communication issues within their teams. Once our processes were institutionalized, students had a much easier transition as the information they received was uniform across campus. At this point, the promise that we promoted to our students that they were just not a number and the university cared about their success was more apparent.

Promise. Once we got into year three and began using the #ACEfam as part of our marketing, we wanted to ensure that was true. Having our program institutionalized helped as expectations amongst cross-campus partners was more established and understood. By establishing that the #ACEfam our on-campus partners, in which we included in events, I believe they became more bought in. It was important to discuss these elements with the Provost and the higher administration, because of their consistent use of “Student Success is Everyone’s Responsibility,” in many university communications. By establishing a family culture for the program, we were promising students, along with campus, that we were united in ensuring they were given the best opportunity for success while at USF.

Overall, I believe the 4 P’s allows for an easier discussion with administration about student success. As there are many university initiatives and programs operating across campus, you must be concise with your messaging about resources, needs, and success. Using the 4 P’s as a framework for quick discussions or requests helps outline how the initiative is moving forward and where and how the program/university is doing and where improvements can be made.

Future Implications

Doing things for the right reasons – meaning for the students – translates into positive outcomes. What was seen with ACE was a university need to create a new start term for a small population of students was shifted into a transformational experience. In building off the research and experience of Lytle and Gallucci (2015) and other summer transition programs across the nation, I find that helping students translate what success is for them and how that can be experienced at the university is paramount to both short- and long-term student success.

Building a sense of belonging for the incoming students, along with campus partners, is pivotal to student success. In operating transition programs students need to feel like they made the right choice in university selection. For that to translate to each student, the university must assume a vested interest in the student and ensure they align resources and support to help students realize their goals. It is important for transition programs to identify and celebrate the uniqueness of each student and help them translate a plan that optimizes their academic success and involvement.

For transition programs to be successful, they must have the buy-in and support across campus. In starting any new program or initiative, by aligning to the university mission and the mission of support units, it is easier to build a culture of support around the program. In other words, it is harder for campus partners to say know if you can show how the program aligns with their mission and will help with the metrics they are judged on. To assist in this process, I recommend having a small working group that includes campus partners in academics, student resources, and auxiliary units to help promote the best outcomes. I've found over the years that when units understand the balancing and coordination across campus, they are more inclined to do their part and support the larger whole.

Sustainability is one of the most important aspects of a pilot. While not explicitly discussed with the 4 P's (Kalsbeek, 2013a), I see sustainability as the culmination of a strong 4 P's framework and strategy. It is important to highlight improvements throughout the process and how the program continues to align with new campus initiatives. Whenever possible it is important to continue to find ways to align and partner with new initiatives. This helps with the relevance of the program to the administration but highlights to students how the university is partnered for their success. With universities chasing performance metrics I have witnessed too many times funds get allocated to one-time scholarships or other one time uses that are not sustainable. I view these opportunities as plugging a hole with bubblegum. While it may work briefly, it will not hold up over time. By spreading resources thin chasing metrics in unsustainable ways, I believe false narratives are created as there is no foundational support. Short-term gains that are not sustainable are not real gains in my opinion. I see these situations as wasting resources and delaying true progress.

In discussing earlier that I never believed that I would be running transition programs in an online environment, this is an important area to explore. Not only for the sake of credit bearing programs, but also to support the transition of all students. New student orientation has typically been a couple of days on campus in the summer with little interaction afterwards in my experience. This new frontier of online student engagement is a critical space for building community and set expectations prior to students starting their first semester. Be it Canvas modules or using social media avenues like Discord, engaging students online can help students start building their personalized success paths and sense of belonging early.

Overall, when building a new program, it is important to understand its purpose and the values you want to instill in its foundation. By aligning student needs with the university

mission, it is difficult to go in the wrong direction. Transition programs are a labor of love as you are managing a diverse range of expectations from students, their families, and the universities. By staying true to purpose, you will always have something to lean into as you build an influential and impactful program.

Conclusion

While this dissertation is grounded in my personal experiences, I hope others can find utility and hope within this document as they reflect on similar experiences. Being at NC State and working with hundreds of colleagues within the North American Association of Summer Sessions has proven that similar situations exist across academia. Where I've seen success from idea to practice has come not through rigidity, but with the humility and ability to pivot and comprise on process, but not on the commitment to students.

In academia, as well as in life, we run in to resistance. Be that budgetary, academic catalog policy, or the fear of change, embracing constraints help move us all forward together, much like embracing differences. I find it important to keep a clear head and try not to take things personally. With the amount of work on each units' shoulders, sometimes empathy is hard to come by. With competing initiatives and limited resources, many times partners believe in the work, but cannot expend what is fully needed upon initial request. Commitment to mission through the pilot process allows for sustainability and moving the needle over time. We all cannot change the world in a day, but collectively we can do a little something that adds up in a big way.

In closing, I could not be prouder of my time at USF and the many students that came through the ACE program. In working with students in transition for so many years, I've found that in doing right by students ultimately improves metrics. Helping students to clearly identify

their goals and build a plan to attain them typically yields a path towards graduation – positive of course for the student, but also for the university as a whole. Take time and focus on the needs of students and how they can clearly articulate and navigate their path to a successful outcome. I am thankful for my time at USF, but more importantly in being a member of the #ACEfam. Hopefully, I was able to positively impact them as much as they impacted me.

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APPENDIX A:

PRELIMINARY SUMMER ACE HANDOUT FOR EPM MEETING 10/21/14

ASAP Notes 10/21/14

This Accelerated Academic Program experience will be run in an alternative summer calendar in which students will be on campus 3 weeks, followed by spending one abroad. The program is only beneficial and successful through a strong partnership between Enrollment Management, Summer, Student Success, Education Abroad, and numerous others.

Below is just a sandbox of information that relates to the program. By no means is this set or even need to be used. Just getting the ball rolling.

Mission:

To support, challenge, acclimate and prepare out of state students beginning their college experience at the University of South Florida. ASAP provides a coordinated academic and community structure that reflects higher education values and institutes high impact practices developing participants' skills and awareness fundamental for academic and personal success at USF.

Objectives:

1. To provide a supportive environment within which each student can be recognized as a unique and capable learner, confident in their own potential for academic, personal success, and general wellness at the college level.
2. To provide realistic academic and personal challenges that stimulate intellectual and interpersonal growth, including the acceptance of responsibility for one's own decisions, behaviors, and successes.
3. To provide access and awareness of Education Abroad and community service/service learning opportunities to foster engagement globally and at USF.
4. To incorporate working relationships with student resource staff and individual student's college faculty and staff to foster early support and guidance for academic direction and success.
5. To simulate the realities of a full academic semester within a 4 week summer experience such that transition shock is minimized, awareness and access of university resources (programmatic and personnel) are in place, and that curricular and co-curricular habits that lead to success are familiar and practiced.

6. To expose students to the Global Citizens Award by celebrating diversity and its components focused on bringing students from differing backgrounds closer together through providing opportunities for global and cultural engagement.

Calendar:

July 16-17, 2015	Orientation
July 20	First Day of Class
August 7	Last Day of on campus class
August 8-August 15	Study Away (Saturday to Saturday)
August 15, 2015	Students Move into permanent Residence Hall

Locations:

- Panama – Flagship
- Keys Marine Lab – 20 student cap (1 track)
- Possibly Quebec – Education Abroad partner that wants business students
- Possibly Belize – College of Education had a wonderful experience.

Main action item is talking with Education Abroad to nail down opportunities at each of these sites (we will facilitate arrangements with KML).

Marketing:

- First touch will come in the Admissions Packet (**Early November Info Needed**), need clear path for students to market.
- Special follow up marketing will be done to students in specific majors promoting experiences within their field.
- Marketing materials will need to be created for students around the Global Citizens Award to cross promote and show opportunity for students.

Data (Preliminary Qualtrics):

The group that was surveyed is comprised of students that would have been targeted for this program in the summer of 2014.

92% - Would have considered attending

Very Appealing and Appealing:

96% - Traveling/ studying abroad

88% - Taking class towards major

80% - Earning credit towards the Global Citizens Award

Parents:

28% - Would have pushed student to attend

64% - Would have remained neutral

8% - Would have tried to keep from attending

After the Program:

36% - Would have liked to continue to stay on campus

64% - Would have liked to travel home

To Do:

- Create marketing materials. Emphasis on what is in Admissions packet.
- Create process for students from showing interest through the end of the summer.
- Solidify housing.
- Continue to meet with Education Abroad and partners from abroad sites to determine course pairings for students.
- Identify faculty.
- Partner to shape Academic Foundations into a 4 week model.
- What are students going to do July 18-19? Where and when does campus resource programming fit in? Anything additional to what will be offered during 50 Days of Summer? Who provides?
- Create program name.
- Many others....

APPENDIX B

SUMMER ACE HANDOUT FOR EPM MEETING PRIOR TO LAUNCH JUNE 2015

Summer Academic and Cultural Engagement (ACE)

This Summer Academic and Cultural Engagement (ACE) experience will be an alternative summer calendar in which students will be on campus three weeks, followed by spending one week abroad. The program is only beneficial and successful through a strong partnership between the Provost Office, Enrollment Planning and Management, Innovative Education, Student Success, Education Abroad, Undergraduate Studies, Student Affairs and numerous others.

Mission:

To support, challenge, acclimate and prepare out of state students beginning their college experience at the University of South Florida. Summer ACE provides a coordinated academic and community structure that reflects higher education values and institutes high impact practices developing participants' skills and awareness fundamentals for academic and personal success at USF.

Objectives:

7. To provide a supportive environment within which each student can be recognized as a unique and capable learner, confident in their own potential for academic, personal success, and general wellness at the college level.
8. To provide realistic academic and personal challenges that stimulate intellectual and interpersonal growth, including the acceptance of responsibility for one's own decisions, behaviors, and successes.
9. To provide access and awareness of Education Abroad and community service/service learning opportunities to foster engagement globally and at USF.
10. To incorporate working relationships with student resource staff and individual student's college faculty and staff to foster early support and guidance for academic direction and success.
11. To simulate the realities of a full academic semester within a 4 week summer experience such that transition shock is minimized, awareness and access of university resources (programmatic and personnel) are in place, and that curricular and co-curricular habits that lead to success are familiar and practiced.
12. To expose students to the Global Citizens Award by celebrating diversity and its components focused on bringing students from differing backgrounds closer together through providing opportunities for global and cultural engagement.

Admissions Process

With competing university priorities of increasing the out-of-state (OOS) first time in college (FTIC) population while increasing the incoming student fall academic profile, ACE was created as a conditional admission entry term akin to the Summer B session. With many states outside of the south graduating their high school seniors at the end of June, OOS FTIC students were positioned with the inability to attend Summer B. OOS FTIC students that were below fall profile were admitted into the ACE cohort. Rolling admission for the ACE program began in January. Students not wanting to attend ACE were given the option of changing their term of entry to Summer B or spring semester.

564 – Students Admitted to ACE
115 – Deposits at Peak
105 – Current Deposited Students
3-5 – Changed Admit Term to Summer B

As students were admitted directly into the ACE program, their official letter of admission detailed the program and included the ACE flier. Within Banner students were coded ACE. Students were followed up with according to the standard Admissions process, with additional contact from the ACE Graduate Assistant (GA).

Student Communication

An ACE specific email account and toll-free number was created to help facilitate communication. The phone number originates at the GA's desk and then rings Owen Hooper where the voicemail is stored. The email box is shared between Admissions, Innovative Education, and the GA. As students deposited they were sent a guide that helped walk them through the ACE checklist. The checklist was modeled after the current incoming student checklist, but added processes specific to ACE such as course selection and passport information. The GA consistently contacts students via email and phone to follow up with students and track their process in completing tasks.

Cost

When looking at the cost of the program there are interesting comparisons that can be drawn. With one of the main factors of ACE being instituted as the inability of OOS students to attend summer B, it is important to look at summer B costs during comparison.

Out of State Students

Student Costs	Summer B	Panama Group	KML Group
Tuition and Fees	\$3,450.06	\$3,450.06	\$1,725.03
Housing*	\$1,038.45	\$579.60	\$579.60
Dining	\$955.00	\$512.00	\$512.00
Study Abroad	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,725.03**
Total	\$5,443.51	\$6,541.66	\$4,541.66

* Based on Double Occupancy

** Delivered as Cost Recovery Course

In State Students

Student Costs	Summer B	Panama Group	KML Group
Tuition and Fees	\$1,267.14	\$1,267.14	\$633.57
Housing	\$1,038.45	\$579.60	\$579.60
Dining	\$955.00	\$512.00	\$512.00
Study Abroad	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,725.03
Total	\$3,260.59	\$4,358.74	\$3,450.20

Financial Aid

To be eligible for financial aid during the summer term students were required to complete the 2014-2015 FASFA application. As students cost of attendance is determined by the location of their Education Abroad Experience, processing could not take place until students identified their preferred course and were assigned by ACE staff. Once assigned, students were coded in banner as either ACE1 or ACE2 which references the location of their course and total cost of attendance.

Course Creation and Pairings

As part of the program students are required to take six credit hours. Six credits is the minimum amount of credits a student can take over the summer to be eligible for financial aid. An early partnership was developed with the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office to discuss possible courses and identify instructors.

Keys Marine Lab Layton, FL

MMC 3602: Mass Communication & Society

A survey of the history, theory, processes, and philosophy of mass communications and the mass media in the United States, and their relationship to the other major institutions of American society.

FKL: Social and Behavioral Sciences & Human Historical Context and Process

SLS 1101: The University Experience

Discussion based elective course designed to facilitate a successful transition from high school to university expectations and campus life.

City of Knowledge Panama City, Panama

LAH 2020: Latin American Civilization

An introduction to selected issues, events, and people in Latin American history from 1492 to the present. Focus on Panama.

FKL: Human and Cultural Diversity in a Global Context & Human Historical Context and Process

SLS 1101: The University Experience

ANT 2410: Cultural Anthropology

Discussion of major methods of and orientations to the cross-cultural study of the world's peoples. Representative case studies are used to demonstrate variations in human adaptations and to encourage an appreciation of diverse values and lifestyles.

FKL: Human and Cultural Diversity in a Global Context

SLS 1101: The University Experience

HUM 1020: Introduction to Humanities

Analysis of selected works of literature, music, film, and visual art, representing artists of diverse periods, cultures, genders, and races.

FKL: Fine Arts

SLS 1101: The University Experience

QEP Incorporation

With the Global Citizens Project being the new Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), the study abroad component of ACE is perfectly aligned. University Experience (UE) faculty and QEP staff are collaborating to engrain elements of the Global Citizens Award into the course. The UE course will include assignments that are based around the Global Citizenship Journal and Global Citizenship Capstone/Global Perspectives Statement that are mandatory components to achieve the award. During ACE, QEP staff will be providing programming and information sessions to get students engaged and involved in a high impact practice that will carry over to the fall.

Housing and Residential Education

In the fall, ACE staff worked with Housing and Residential Education to reserve one floor of Popular Hall which is where summer B students are housed. The last day of on campus class for ACE and summer B is August 7th. On August 8th students will have one of two options:

1. Students will move into their fall/spring housing assignment. Students will be responsible for paying additional fees for break days (independent of ACE). Students will sign up for break days after they have arrived on campus for ACE.
2. Students will move off campus. While a few students will live off campus during the fall/spring, others will have the opportunity to move off campus and store their belongings until fall move-in on August 20th.

Dining

In working with Dining staff, a special plan was created for ACE students. The any 15 option, which is the most popular during summer B, was tailored around the dates that ACE students would need meals. A special application was created for ACE online that aligned both housing and dining. Once students completed the application process they were sent a contract to sign and send back to the ACE office via email or fax.

Orientation

A weekly report was sent to the Office of Orientation to code students that were part of ACE in their registration system. Orientation's registration system recognized ACE students and only allowed them the opportunity to apply for the July 16-17 session. ACE staff worked alongside Orientation in efforts to diffuse issues in which students could not attend these prescribed dates, but would still be able to attend the program. ACE students are taking part in the traditional orientation sessions as the current numbers are not large enough to warrant a special session. Parents will attend the standard orientation session with their student.

Registrar's Office

Once a student had their course selection approved and had their immunization and medical history holds removed, they were passed to the Registrar's Office to get enrolled in for ACE.

Support Staff

A graduate assistant was hired to help coordinate communication with admitted and deposited ACE students to help facilitate process completion. The GA will serve as the mentor to one of the course pairings and aid in supervising the mentor staff. While the GA will not be living in ACE housing, they will be responsible for helping coordinate evening programs. The GA sits in the Office of Admissions and is trained on the admissions process and use of the Banner system.

Three student peer mentors (PM) were hired to help ease the transition and acclimation of students once they arrive. Mentors are split by course pairings and are part of their groups UE course. To be eligible to become an ACE mentor students had to have completed an Academic Foundations (AF) or UE course and attended peer mentor trainings offered by the AF office. Additional training will be facilitated for three weeks before ACE participants move in. Mentors will work with their students one-on-one to help them articulate the reason why they attended USF and what they want to accomplish over the next 4 years. Mentors will work with their students to articulate their accomplishments into trackable goals and help hold their students accountable.

Daily Life

Most ACE courses will take place Monday through Thursday with the exception of Intro to Humanities that meets Monday-Friday and Cultural Anthropology that meets Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. During these days students will have one course in the morning and one in the afternoon. All classes will be over by 4:15 to allow them ample time to study and attend evening programming.

With the assortment of 50 First Days programming that takes place during summer B, there are many opportunities for students to get involved. ACE students will be made aware of these opportunities and it will be a function of the mentors to help align individual student goals with

opportunities. ACE staff has worked with Housing to identify the needs of ACE students to fill in what programming was missed before they arrived.

Education Abroad

Education Abroad has worked alongside ACE staff and USF Health in planning the Panama experience. While USF Health has managed the on the ground logistic planning, Education Abroad followed the standard procedures for creating a new program. ACE students are responsible for filling out the ACE Panama application through the Education Abroad system and attend an ACE inclusive pre-departure orientation.

Cost Recovery

Innovative Education worked to create the Mass Communication and Society course as a cost recovery option. The cost recovery format allows for funds to be created for transportation and programming that are part of the course.

Study Away Experience

Students that will be traveling to Panama will be flying Copa Airlines and staying in the residence hall on the City of Knowledge Campus. The experience in Panama is meticulously planned to incorporate meaningful experiences that align with the learning objectives of all three Foundation of Knowledge and Learning courses. During their time in Panama students will visit the Biodiversity Museum, Panama Viejo, Casco Viejo, the Panama Canal, and the indigenous Embera tribe. Students will take part in tours, service activities, and cultural exchange throughout the trip along with class time and reflection.

Students traveling to the Keys via vans and will be staying at the Keys Marine Lab which is located in Layton, Florida. As part of their course they will be traveling to the Zimmerman headquarters in Miami, the Ernest Hemingway museum, and various other activities that are located in southern Florida.

Assessment Plan

As part of assessment, it will be important to create a comparison group of students that would have been admitted to ACE over the past three years (if it had existed) broken down by entry term (summer/fall/spring). Once the comparison group has been established, after every semester a report will be created that compares Progress Towards Degree, Total GPA, Major GPA, Credit Hours Taken, Credit Hours Passed, and Graduation Rates.

A pre and post test will be created to help quantify the students' transition and acclimation to the university. Special attention will be paid towards student's perceived comfort on campus, creation of a support system, confidence in academic skills, confidence in interpersonal skills, trust in faculty/staff, confidence in academic advising, knowledge of student resources, utilization of support services, and open ended questions discussing the success of the program, and recommendations for the program moving forward.

2015 ACE Calendar:

July 16-17, 2015	Orientation
July 20	First Day of Class
August 7	Last Day of on campus class
August 8	Move into fall housing assignment
August 9-15	Study Away Keys Marine Lab
August 10-16	Study Away Panama
August 16	Students return to campus by 11:30PM
August 17-19	Social programming and focus groups
August 20	Official fall move-in and beginning of Week of Welcome