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## The Relationship between First Year Student Expectations and Persistence into the Second Year of College

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The Relationship between First Year Student Expectations and Persistence into the Second Year  
of College

by

Ashley Baltuch Dees

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career and Higher Education  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my two little boys; Greyson Robert and Bennett Matthew. I look forward to spending more time with you and watching you grow into strong, successful young men!

“Never, never, never give up.”- Winston Churchill

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## **ABSTRACT**

Incoming first year students have varying expectations for their college experience. As Florida public education budgets are more closely aligned with student persistence and graduation rates, it is vital institutions retain more first time in college students. The purpose of this study was to better understand how first year student college expectations on academic preparation, co-curricular involvement, socializing, and institutional commitment relate to persistence into the second year of college at one of Florida's large, preeminent public research universities.

This quantitative study utilized the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) in order to better understand incoming student expectations. The study sample consisted of 3,723 first time in college students and was collected during orientation for the summer and fall 2015 cohort. Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1975b), which served as the theoretical framework, states a student's individual characteristics he/she possess when starting college influence his/her persistence as well as initial commitment to the institution and ultimately a degree. Logistic regression was used to determine the strength of the relationship between students' expectations and persistence into the second year of college.

The overall findings of this study contribute to the increased understanding of first year student expectations and help administrators understand how to best support students. The findings illustrate a statistically significant relationship between high school GPA and

persistence into the second year. Expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities, self-perception of academic preparation, and a first year student's commitment to the institution were not found to be statistically significant to first year student persistence into the second year. Additional key findings and their implications for practice in higher education are presented along with recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

More students than ever before are enrolling in college today. Approximately 68% of high school graduates continue on to postsecondary education without taking time off (Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The retention and graduation rates of college students have historically been important benchmarks for higher education institutions but have recently become a major concern among colleges. Access has increased, but completion rates have not (Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2010; Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009).

Year-to-year student retention and degree completion serve as measures of overall college student success (Braxton et al., 2014). Student premature departure, defined as leaving the institution prior to degree completion, serves as a measure of the social and intellectual health of an institution (Tinto, 1993). ACT (2010) found only 39.6% of four-year college students complete a bachelor's degree in four years and 16% more complete the degree in six years. As of 2013, 41% of students who began their college careers at four-year colleges did not graduate within six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Retention and graduation rates have recently taken on additional meaning at Florida public institutions as budgets are now aligned with a new performance based funding model. The performance based funding model uses ten metrics to determine the amount of funding to be allocated to each public institution (FLBOG, 2016). The metrics include retention and graduation

rates of first time in college students which make this population of students a primary focus on college campuses.

Incoming first year students have varying expectations for their college experience. These expectations are formed from students' past experiences (Howard, 2005). Additionally, student expectations are also created based on admissions publications and information the institution provides to prospective students (Braxton et al., 2014). If students' expectations for college are unfulfilled, they may not persist to graduation at the institution.

As Florida public education budgets become more closely aligned with student persistence and graduation rates, it is vital that institutions retain more first time in college students. Incoming students and their families expect the institution to help them succeed and persist until they earn degrees. Leaving college without a degree may be economically detrimental to the student (DeBernard, Spielman, & Julka, 2004). The tasks of preparing students to succeed in higher education and increasing student success, persistence, and graduation rates are the shared ethical responsibilities of both student and institution (Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015). To support an effective transition from high school to college, higher education faculty and staff need to make first year students feel like they matter (Schlossberg, 1989). Findings from this current study will add to the body of knowledge related to theories of first year integration and persistence and will support higher education faculty and staff in their mission to educate students.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Every year, over 4,000 first time in college students start their academic collegiate journey at the University of South Florida, one of Florida's premier public research universities. First year persistence remains a concern for this institution. A review of the literature revealed a potential disconnect between a first year student's expectations and the reality of college. Though student expectations have been identified as a potential risk factor for persistence, few studies have discussed how administrators and faculty can better promote reasonable student expectations. Further research is necessary to determine whether or not current student expectations on academic preparation, co-curricular involvement, socializing, and institutional commitment relate to persistence into the second year of college.

The proposed study used Tinto's Model of Student Departure combined with existing literature as a guide for this quantitative study. Specifically, the study investigated if there is a correlation between academic preparation, co-curricular involvement, and social expectations of first time in college students along with their level of institutional commitment and whether or not a student persists into the second year of college. Research was needed to investigate if the University of South Florida can better establish reasonable student expectations of college, leading to an increase in first year student persistence.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to help administrators understand the relationship between first year student college expectations and their persistence into the second year of college.

Results of this study can inform student affairs professionals at the University of South Florida

of potential issues in the transition of first year students from high school to college and suggest how to better assist students to foster persistence into the second year.

Relevant literature suggests what students expect to do in college does not support the reality of the actual college experience. Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) found that about 38% of first year students never attended an organized co-curricular meeting. Although high school students recognize they will need to study more in college than they do in high school, many underestimate the faculty ratio expectations of about two hours of preparation outside the classroom to each hour spent in the classroom per week (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). The lack of alignment between student expectations and the reality of college cause many issues for first year students. This study focused on a few key areas of importance in a student's transition: co-curricular involvement, socializing, academic preparation, and institutional commitment. Understanding incoming first year students' expectations may allow family, administrators, and faculty to support more reasonable student expectations and diminish the disconnect between current student expectations and the first year college experience, which could lead to an increase in student persistence into the second year of college.

## **Research Questions**

Five research questions guided this study on first year student expectations and persistence:

1. What is the relationship between a first year student's expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the second year of college?

2. What is the relationship between expected socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games, or watching television) and first year student persistence into the second year?
3. What is the relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year?
4. What is the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year?
5. What is the relationship between a first year student's commitment to the institution and persistence into the second year?

## **Theoretical Framework**

Many theories such as psychological contract (Rosseau, 1995, 2001), student involvement (Astin, 1999), student expectations (Miller, 2005), and persistence inform the present study, but Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1975a, 1975b, 1988, 1993, 1997, 2004) served as the theoretical framework for this study. Student departure has been the focus of higher education research for over 75 years (Braxton, 2000). Tinto's (1993) theory of Student Departure has had the largest impact on retention research and has helped practitioners to better understand the needs of incoming and continuing students.

The researcher recognizes there are many characteristics that impact a student's decision to persist at an institution; however, this study focused on a few specific student characteristics - expected co-curricular involvement, perceived academic preparation, and



institutional commitment. These characteristics were analyzed to determine how they relate to a student's ability or decision to persist from the first year of college into the second year of college.

### **Significance of the Study**

Tinto's (1975a) model of student departure takes into account the student's pre-college characteristics, the social and academic integration at the institution, and the institutional commitment and how these all contribute to a student's decision to persist or dropout. Additionally, his model can be applicable to students who live on or off campus. Although a large body of research has been conducted on how to help students persist using Tinto's model of student departure, the existing literature does not specifically address incoming students' expectations for a large, public institution where about 40% of first time in college students attending live within a one hour drive of campus (J. Thomas, personal communication, April 13, 2016).

This research study can be beneficial to both faculty and administrators at the University of South Florida. Results are informative to college administrators' practices regarding the co-curricular opportunities offered and expectations for first year students. Faculty will find data that indicate how well the first year students feel they are academically prepared and how faculty can best prepare to teach the first year students. The persistence and graduation of each student indicates faculty and administrators are making a successful contribution to the institution. Results of the study can inform faculty, administrators, and parents of first year students of potential issues in the transition from high school to college regarding perceived academic

preparation and involvement in co-curricular activities on campus. Results will identify how to better assist students to succeed in college. Since a large proportion of student departure occurs during the first year of college, institutions must act quickly to intervene and increase student persistence.

### **Assumptions**

This study assumes all Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) participants voluntarily participated in filling out the paper survey at orientation and have previously reflected on his/her college expectations prior to attending orientation. The study also assumes each survey participant will define relaxing and socializing in their own way. For example, an extrovert and introvert will not necessarily relax and socialize in the same manner. The final assumption made is the respondents had ample time to fill out the survey, and to the best of their ability, as honestly as possible.

### **Limitations**

This study is subject to a few limitations. First, the researcher conducted the study at a large, Florida, four-year, public, research institution focusing on first time in college students who started in summer or fall 2015. By restricting the sample population to only one school and one cohort year, the findings may not apply to similar institutions or other cohorts. The second major limitation is students are strongly encouraged to complete the survey on the first day of a two-day orientation. Although the directions state the paper survey is optional (see Appendix A),

the students do not have an alternative activity or presentation to attend and, therefore, may feel pressure to complete the survey. If a student feels a burden to completing the survey, he/she may not read each question carefully and not respond to the best of their knowledge.

The third limitation is the difference between summer and fall 2015 cohorts. Many of the summer 2015 first time in college students are admitted to USF on conditional admission criteria. The conditional admission requires students to attend and attempt at least six credit hours in summer 2015 in order to continue enrollment at the institution in the fall 2015 semester. Failure to satisfy this condition when grades post for summer 2015 can result in their admission to USF being rescinded. Additionally, summer admits historically have a lower high school GPA and standardized test scores compared to students who start in fall 2015. For the purposes of this study, the summer and fall 2015 cohorts are grouped together, but it is important to note there are historically differences in their past academic abilities.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms have been defined for better understanding throughout the research study:

*Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)*. Paper survey that collects data from post high school/ pre-college students about high school academic and co-curricular experiences and their expectations for education and purposeful activities during the first year of college (BCSSE, 2016).

*First Time in College (FTIC).* Undergraduate, degree seeking students who have never previously been enrolled as degree seeking students at another institution. These students may have taken high school dual enrollment classes, but a majority are experiencing college level coursework for the first time.

*Full-time students.* Students who are enrolled in 12 or more credits at the beginning of each fall and spring semester. Students who withdraw from a course after drop/add week and then fall below 12 credit hours are still considered full-time in this study.

*College Grade Point Average (GPA).* Average of all grades a student receives for college courses completed at an accredited institution. For the purposes of this study, grades are measured on a 4.0 scale.

*Recalculated High School Grade Point Average (GPA).* Average of all grades a student receives for courses completed at the high school level with special consideration being given to advanced-level courses. USF Admissions includes weighted courses such as dual enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE), and Honors (see Figure 1). The recalculated high school GPA is measured on a 4.0 scale, but can exceed 4.0 based on weighted courses.

Course Type	Quality Point
Advanced Placement	1.0
International Baccalaureate	1.0
Dual Enrollment	1.0
AICE	1.0
Honors	0.5

**Figure 1.** USF Quality Points Awarded for Advanced-level Courses (University of South Florida, 2017).

*Persistence.* The ability of a student to remain enrolled in college from matriculation through graduation of a degree. For the purposes of this study, persistence will focus on students returning and enrolling in the fall semester of the second year of college.

*Retention.* The rate or percentage of students who return for enrollment from one semester to the next (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). This term is used more from an institutional perspective whereas persistence is used more from a student perspective. As Linda Hagedorn (2005) stated, “institutions retain students and students persist” (p. 92).

*Performance Based Funding Model.* Florida Board of Governors approved funding structure that includes ten metrics on which Florida State University System schools are measured. Each institution has some unique metrics that align with their strategic goals and mission (FLBOG, 2016).

*Progression.* The act of a student enrolling in college courses (part or full time), moving towards degree completion.

*Socializing.* The act of talking to or interacting with others in a friendly manner. For this study, socializing will include time with friends, playing video games, watching television, and/or keeping up with friends online. Socializing can take place on or off campus with peers or people outside of the USF community.

*Student Expectations.* Preconceived ideas created from a student's interests, background, media, and word of mouth about the college experience (Miller, 2005). Ideas can include expected benefits and outcomes of attending a particular institution, perceived characteristics of the student body discovered through information gathering, and perceived status of the institution in comparison to other institutions (Clark, Heist, McConnell, Trow, & Yonge, 1972).

## **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter One introduced the problem of freshmen not persisting into the second year of college. It also included the purpose of this study and introduced the theoretical framework to ground the research in Tinto's Model of Student Departure. The research questions, assumptions, limitations of the study, and key terms were defined. Most importantly, this chapter justified the significance of the study.

Chapter Two contains a review of the existing relevant literature related to first year persistence. Chapter Three explains the design of the research, population and sample, examination of the BCSSE instrument, procedures for data collection, and review of how the

data was analyzed. Chapter Four provides the results of the data analysis and interpretation of the data to determine the relationship between student expectations and persistence into the second year of college. Chapter Five contains a summary of the research findings, discusses implication for practice, and makes recommendations for future research.

### **Researcher Bias**

The researcher currently works in the Office of Academic Advocacy at the University of South Florida. The focus of an Academic Advocate position is to provide support to high-risk first time in college admits and help them persist to the second year of college. Freshmen who are at risk of not persisting due to academic or institutional barriers can be referred to the office, students may self-select to see an Academic Advocate, or the Advocate may reach out to students based on predictive analytic reports that monitor academics, financial concerns, and social integration. Advocates have intentional conversations with students about their college experience and assess if any risks exist that may impact academic persistence. Students can be referred to care partners and other resources on campus to intervene and ideally improve their chance of persisting. The researcher will use data from a cohort that had already started their second year of college prior to her joining the Office of Academic Advocacy. This helps to remove bias towards the data since the researcher did not help students to persist in the specific cohort being analyzed.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The pressure for increased student retention in higher education has grown due to larger numbers of students attending higher education (Crosling, Thomas, & Heagney, 2008). Astin (1993) found student persistence was positively linked to involvement in academic and social activities along with interaction with faculty and peers. Astin (1975) also found involvement to be both physical and psychological. There is great demand for a coherent institutional action agenda to reduce student departure (Tinto, 2012). The following literature review includes why student activities matter, the importance of student expectations, high school GPA, perceived academic preparation, and student commitment to an institution. The information presented provided the background for the foundation of this study. The review of literature demonstrated how this research study contributes to the current knowledge on student expectations and first year student persistence into the second year of college.

### **Exploration**

It is important to identify the original purpose of education - to discover one's likes and dislikes and identify careers and occupations that align with interests, skills, and abilities (Tinto, 1993). As a student attends college and learns more about himself or herself, it is inevitable he/she may feel the need to leave an institution to pursue a career different from his/her original aspiration. We recognize this may occur and could be in the best interest of the student, making 100% persistence impossible.



Student premature departure from an institution can happen for a variety of reasons, both academic and/or personal. Most importantly there are limits to what institutions can do to retain students, and it is important to note that not every single student who enrolls at a large public institution can be retained through degree completion. Keep this in mind as the relationship between first year student expectations and persistence is explored.

### **Why Activities Matter**

Research has found student involvement to be one of the most important factors to student success. According to Astin (1985), students learn by becoming involved. Institutional attachment emerges from involvement in co-curricular activities. How involved students choose to become in their college career can vary greatly and serve as the foundation for student persistence (Bergen-Cico & Viscomi, 2012). Students expect to participate in a wide range of activities in college (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). Research suggests that a student's co-curricular involvement plays an important role in determining how a student adjusts to campus. Huang and Chang (2004) found a positive relationship between academic and co-curricular involvement; when co-curricular activities increase, academic involvement increases too. Student engagement positively affects grades in the first year of college as well as positively contributes to persistence to the second year (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). It is the responsibility of the institution to offer a wide range of activities so every student can find his/her niche on campus.

Both single- and multi-institutional studies report that a student's level of social integration is significantly and positively related to eventual degree completion (Allen & Nelson, 1989; Astin, 1993; Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler 1995; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992). There

is evidence to support the view that student participation in extracurricular activities is positively associated with persistence. Research suggests degree completion has a strong positive correlation to whether an institution provides supportive student personnel services (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). In a later study, Astin (1993) found regardless of entering student characteristics, degree completion was positively affected by the percentage of resources invested in student services. Institutions can offer student services, but Astin's Theory of Involvement (1999) suggests it is the students who determine their own degree of involvement by participating in academic courses and joining co-curricular activities leading to social development. Activities on a college campus can vary widely, but this study focused on non-academic, co-curricular activities and socializing. Academically related first-year activities will not be evaluated in this study.

### **Co-curricular Activities**

A significant factor in social adjustment of first-year students is involvement in social activities (Dungy, Rissmeyer, & Roberts, 2005). Co-curricular activities promote socializing. Participation in co-curricular activities is associated with increased persistence and higher educational attainment (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997), because students have a sense of institutional attachment (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986; Tinto, 1997). Specifically, Tieu and Pancer (2009) found that students better adjust to a university when they participate in high quality out of class activities. Tieu and Pancer (2009) defined high quality as activities that brought out positive feelings, were perceived to be important by the student, and provided the student with a sense of connection to other individuals. Co-curricular activities such as student organizations, Greek life, and intramural sports have a positive association with student persistence and can be

deemed high quality, out of class activities because the student voluntarily chooses to participate based on their values and interests. In addition to supporting student persistence, co-curricular activities can significantly improve a student's psychological well-being, which can help the student through Van Gennep's Rites of Passage (Bowman, 2010).

**Greek life.** For the purposes of this study, Greek life is defined as a fraternity, sorority, or multicultural organization affiliated with an institution that has a cost associated with joining. The study recognized this co-curricular activity may not be accessible to all, but is still an important variable to include. Students involved in Greek life are more likely to have continued persistence in college as the membership has a significant positive relationship with degree completion (Astin, 1975). Walker, Martin, & Hussey (2015) found Greek membership leads to a higher level of on campus involvement and satisfaction of social life, leading to higher persistence and graduation rates for Greek members. Although some researchers have found Greek life may have a negative association with academic achievement (Tinto, 1975a), for this study we will review the positive effects it has on persistence from the first to second year of college.

**Intramural Sports.** Intramural sports is another co-curricular activity evaluated in this study. Intramural sports is defined as an optional, free, non-credit bearing, sports related activity outside the classroom that allows students to interact with peers. An intramural sport is one way a freshman can get involved on campus prior to having a sense of belonging, because the student brings a skill with them to the program that other students have as well. This skill can help create a bond between the students, leading to a sense of belonging in the community and creating the freshman's primary social network on campus (Phipps, Copper, Shores, Williams, & Mize, 2015).

Intramural sports are organized by Campus Recreation, and activities are offered at various levels of skill so any student can feel comfortable participating (Phipps et al., 2015). Intramural sports have been found to have a positive effect on student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Kilgo, Mollet, and Pascarella (2016) found student involvement in intramural sports positively influenced students' psychological well-being. Students who are psychologically healthy have a better chance of persisting in college (Locke, Wallace, & Brunner, 2016).

A previous study found students experience a greater overall sense of community on campus when they participate in intramural sports (Phipps et al., 2015). In addition to a greater sense of community, Artinger et al. (2006) found intramural sports can also lead to improved interpersonal relationships. Intramural sports help students to gain valuable competencies employers are looking for in recent graduates (NACE, 2017) while positively impacting student persistence.

**Student Organizations.** Student organizations offer students involvement opportunities with the campus community. For this study, student organizations were defined as organizations registered with the Center for Student Involvement. Organizations expose students to a social network of peers who have similar aspirations and goals helping to inspire each other. Students may be more willing to persist in college if they initially feel they are a member of something or have a purpose. Researchers have found that the expectation to participate in student organizations was a positive predictor of persistence (Herreid & Miller, 2009b).

In addition to assisting with social integration on campus and promoting student persistence, student organizations allow students to acquire life skills such as interpersonal skills and self-confidence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). These transferable skills not only help

students to persist in college, but are also valuable tools post-college. The self-reported growth in interpersonal communication due to involvement on campus (Astin, 1993) supports the case that all freshmen should be involved in at least one student organization on campus.

## **Socializing**

Social adjustment to the college community is one of the most critical activities that can predict success in college (McEwan, 2011). Hu's (2011) study on the relationship between engagement and persistence found levels of students' social activities appear to be positively correlated with student probability of persisting; students with higher levels of social engagement persisted at higher levels. Persistence rates of low socially engaged students were around a 71.2% whereas students who were considered to have high social engagement persisted at a rate of 95.6% (Hu, 2011). His study demonstrates socializing positively affects persistence in college.

Fellow students are one of the most powerful influences on student persistence in college. The degree of integration into campus social systems, specifically involvement in extracurricular activities and quality peer interactions, positively influences persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Tinto (1993) also found that involvement in social aspects of college positively influences undergraduate degree attainment. Student to student interaction produces a positive correlation to student persistence (Astin, 1993).

Socializing with friends on campus occurs in academic and non-academic settings. Students who feel as though they are members of a community are more likely to successfully develop close friendships with other students and spend more time with their peers, leading to a higher level of persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The greater the involvement, the more socially attached to the institution a student will feel, therefore increasing student

persistence (Lang, 2002). This study, focused on non-academic socializing, specifically how much time students spend with friends.

The more students are involved in the social life of a college, the more frequently they will interact with their faculty and other students in learning settings outside the classroom and the more likely they are to learn which can lead to improved persistence (Astin, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993, 1997) believed the decision to persist in college is an on-going process of becoming more or less committed to an institution based on academic and social experiences at the institution. The level of academic and social integration to the campus environment is weaker for commuter students than on-campus students (Chickering, 1974). This study does not focus on whether students live on or off campus, but it is important to note this finding.

### **Social Media's Impact**

Social media are powerful tools through which students can connect with their peers and the institution. This social connection can make the adjustment to college life better, reducing the uncertainty of the transition from high school to college, and can continue to keep the student engaged well after the transition period to college. Social media is the most efficient platform for institutions to market and communicate with students. The interaction an office on campus can have with students on social media can be a way to generate awareness, create interest, or serve as the first engagement the student has with the office (Newman, Peck, Harris, & Wilhide, 2013) on campus. Social media foster and support two-way dialogue (Thackeray, Neiger, & Keller, 2012) between students and the institution. This allows for engagement with students and fosters a connection to campus on the student's preferred platform.

Prior to arriving to campus, social media can prove beneficial in the transition process. Social media can help students establish friendships and social networks, which are key to a successful transition (Lowe & Cooke, 2003; Maunder, Mjali, & Cunliffe, 2010). The University of South Florida's New Student Connections office in the Division of Student Affairs and Student Success supports students in many ways, one being through a social online community (Miller & Tyree, 2009). This is one way students can connect before arriving to campus and engage themselves with the campus community.

Facebook, a free social networking site, has been the site most U.S. college students utilize to connect with others (Hargittai, 2007; Smith, Salaway, & Caruso, 2009). Research on social media use confirmed that in 2014, the largest group of Facebook users were between the ages of 18 and 29 years old (Duggan & Smith, 2014). Lately, new social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter have joined Facebook as a popular way to communicate with others. At the end of 2015, there were 1.59 billion people registered on Facebook, 400 million on Instagram, and 320 million on Twitter from all over the world (Guest, 2016). These numbers confirm the immense potential power each of the three social networks have for communication.

Heiberger and Harper (2008) applied Astin's theory of student involvement to students engaged with the campus community. Since Facebook has a positive impact on students' interaction and involvement on campus, it is critical that student affairs professionals utilize Facebook and other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram to engage students with the campus community.

Engagement on social media can be measured by traffic, frequency, reach, number of followers, messages, likes, posts, reads, page visits, comments, and sharing content (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray et al., 2012). If student affairs professionals start to use

social media platforms to communicate with students, they should measure student traffic. If they have an increase in students attending events, utilizing services, or getting involved then they have had a positive impact on student socialization on campus.

Students' interaction with an institutions social media accounts helps to distribute information among the student body. All college campuses should utilize the power of social media to engage students and help them persist.

## **Expectations**

Students' past experiences create expectations of what will happen in the future (Howard, 2005). They also enter college with expectations formed through various information-gathering activities such as campus visits, talking with admissions counselors, and speaking with college alumni. It is important for prospective students to experience an accurate picture of the academic and social life of students at an institution (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999) for prospective students to form manageable expectations.

Students who perform well in high school expect to achieve the same academic success in college. If academic success as defined by the student is not achieved, students may feel their expectations have not been met. Personal motivation to succeed in college is one of the most important factors in explaining persistence rates (Pittendrigh, Borkowski, Swinford, & Plumb, 2016). Students begin college due to an extrinsic motivation. For many students, this may be reaching a long-term goal such as gaining skills or knowledge to get a better job or make more money (Erickson & Strommer, 2005). Once students arrive on campus, it is important that staff and faculty understand the students' expectations and promote the students' intrinsic motivation



to help them achieve their goal of a degree. If a student continues to hold on to an alternate expectation the institution cannot meet, there is a chance persistence will be affected.

Expectations are an important factor for student success, but are a moving target (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). Expectations are what we predict will be the case in a future situation. Predictions of the future are guided and created by our past experiences (Howard, 2005). Expectations are constantly being revised and shaped as students have new experiences (Feldman, 1981). Unfortunately, when expectations fail, it can lead to anxiety since one's best guess about a situation proved wrong or inadequate (Howard, 2005).

Expectations and precollege characteristics influence students to seek out specific kinds of activities in college (Kuh, 1999; Kuh, Gonyea, Williams, 2005). Expectations also set the bar for how and if students get involved on campus. Kuh, Gonyea, and Williams (2005) found students who have low expectations for college are more likely to have corresponding expectations in reality, compared to students who have high expectations going into college. Students who have high expectations tend to get involved in a wide range of intellectual, social, and cultural activities during the first year (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). Helland, Stallings, and Braxton (2001-2002) found students who feel their expectations have been met also experience a positive degree of social integration. As discussed prior, excessive co-curricular involvement does not always positively impact college persistence.

### **Managing Expectations**

It is important for admissions material and tours to communicate consistent institutional mission, vision, and ideals to prospective students (Feldman, 2005). Students should be provided an accurate portrayal of campus characteristics and support and understand the type

of student that succeeds at the institution (Miller, 2005). Standards of educational and social behavior should be clear so students can set their expectations of the institution before deciding to attend. Once a student has decided to attend, institutions should consider using a contract that outlines "... as accurately and fully as possible the sorts of students, faculty, and staff and the types of social and intellectual communities which exist on campus and which are likely to be encountered by prospective students after entry" (Tinto, 1993, p. 156). The more accurate the contract, the more informed the incoming student will be upon arrival, unless the perceptions of the institution are incorrectly understood (Tinto, 1993).

### **Psychological Contract Theory**

Psychological contract theory (PCT) was considered as a possible framework for this study. PCT can be applied to students' expectations going into college. Rousseau (1995) defined the psychological contract as an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of an agreement with another party. Attending college is a contract because students agree to pay an institution in exchange for an education. The psychological contract occurs when students create expectations about their college experience. The expected experience is formed from mental schemas that are culturally and situationally determined; for example what the student experiences at the institution open house, what they hear from word of mouth, or what they see in the media (Rousseau, 2001). Although psychological contracts change throughout a student's time at an institution (Howard, 2005), this study will focus on a student's initial psychological contract (prior to starting college).

Undocumented psychological contracts play a crucial part in a student's experience at an institution (knowingly or unknowingly). In a psychological contract, a student believes the

agreement he/she has created is mutual and the institution understands his/her expectations making the agreement binding to a set of actions to take place upon arrival on campus (Rousseau, 2001). When a student perceives the contract to be breached, he/she loses trust in the institution which leads to further negative consequences for the student such as dropping out of school, transferring to a different institution, or becoming disengaged with the campus community leading to negative academic consequences (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005).

There are so many elements in a campus community it is impossible for an institution to meet the psychological contracts of every student in every department on campus. Upon arrival to an institution, a student's initial psychological contract is based on prior beliefs (as discussed above) and conditions of the institution on arrival. For example, if the dining hall serves 100 options on the buffet, a student is going to expect this many options every day, or if there are cleaning staff present in the residence hall upon arrival, a student may expect the staff to be present on a regular basis. Over time psychological contracts can evolve from basic beliefs to elaborate schemas. For the purposes of this study, we are only evaluating a student's initial psychological contract, however, as the first year of college commences the psychological contract can become more involved putting immense pressure on the institution to meet student expectations. Psychological characteristics that may contribute to student persistence are academic ability, motivational mind frame, personality traits, and student development theories (Braxton et al., 2014).

### **High School GPA**

Research suggests the most powerful predictor of persistence in college is prior academic achievement, specifically high school grades (Astin 1993; Herreid & Miller, 2009b;

Miller & Tyree, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Academic grades not only display a student's academic ability, but they also reveal personal traits such as motivation, perseverance, and study skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Prior studies have revealed high school curriculum and GPA are predictive of academic success in college (Adelman, 2006, Kuh et al., 2008, Sciarra, 2010, Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). High school grade point average (GPA) is the most useful and strongest predictor of how a student will perform in college (Astin, 1993, 1997; Kuh, et al., 2008; Sciarra, 2010).

High school GPA is often used in predictive equations to determine a student's possible success in college (Schwartz & Washington, 1999) and is considered a pre-college characteristic. High school GPA provides more than twice as much weight in predictive success formulas as SAT scores and other variables (Astin, 1993). Berbery and O'Brien (2017) found high school GPA was the most important predictor of both college going self-efficacy and educational goals predicting academic persistence and success. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) have found student's high school grades to be the single most predictive determinant of college success, but that does not also mean increased college persistence. Stewart, Lim, and Kim (2015) found high academic performance in high school may not predict persistence at the same institution beyond the first year.

Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993), Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995), Eaton and Bean (1995) and Mallette and Cabrera (1991) all found a positive relationship between a student's aspiration to finish college and the student's high school GPA. High school GPA is also a predictor of re-enrollment in college (Eaton & Bean, 1995). When college applicants apply to the institution, it is particularly helpful if the admissions office pays attention to the applicant's high school GPA. High school GPA should not be the sole characteristic evaluated,

but should be given additional weight in the admissions process since it has a positive relationship with persistence.

### **First Year College Grades**

First semester college GPA is the strongest variable in predicting persistence between the first and second year of college. First semester GPA is more accurate at predicting persistence than demographic, financial and social factors (McGrath & Braunstein, 1997). Kiser and Price (2007) found first year college GPA was significant to persistence for all first year students, regardless of race. First-year college grades are also a positive predictor of degree completion (Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015). Overall, satisfaction of a college experience is positively related to college GPA.

As discussed previously, joining Greek life can help freshmen socially integrate into the college community; however, joining Greek life can sometimes have the reverse effect on college GPA. According to Astin (1993), Greek life negatively affects undergraduate GPA. A study conducted by Kuh et al. (2008) found student engagement in educationally purposeful activities had a small, but statistically significant effect on first year grades in college and persistence from the first to second year of college. This study did not analyze a student's first year GPA when he/she persists, but recognized it may contribute to long-term persistence, and degree completion.

### **Commitment to Institution**

Institutional type (two or four year) and student commitment to graduating with a degree directly affect persistence rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to Mallette and

Cabrera (1991), the greater a student's commitment, the greater chance of institutional persistence. Tinto (1975a) also found a student's personal reason for attending a specific institution can be an important factor influencing persistence or can contribute to a student transferring to a different institution. Reasons a student's commitment to an institution may be strong can be if a student's family member previously attended the institution, if the institution is an integral part of a student's long-term career plan, or financial- a student receives a scholarship to attend.

Above all these factors, student satisfaction at the institution is the most important. Research shows first year students who are satisfied with their college experience are more likely to persist than those who are dissatisfied (Sanders & Burton, 1996). The BCSSE (2016) measures institutional commitment prior to enrollment by asking the student to rank what choice the institution was for them and if the student expects to graduate from the institution.

Student confirmation they matriculated to the right institution is critical in first year transition period and affects persistence to second year (Ishitani, 2016). A student attending his or her first-choice institution helps towards student confirmation, but it is also critical that the student feels accepted into the campus community upon arrival. It is important to note Tinto (1975a) found minimal academic and social integration paired with minimal institutional commitment does not always lead to student departure. Tinto recognizes a student's goal of educational attainment can push the student to graduate.

### **Alternative Intentions**

Rossmann and Kirk (1970) found some students can indicate at the start of their college career that they do not plan to complete their degree at the current institution. Some students

enter college to gain additional skills or specific knowledge needed for their careers or take courses for enjoyment of learning (Tinto, 1993). Some students enroll with a specific educational objective in mind that does not require earning a degree (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). Other students who are unable to gain entry to their first-choice institution may start their college career at one institution with the intention to transfer to another institution (Habley, Bloom, Robbins, 2012; Williamson & Creamer, 1988). All of these are examples of student situations that may contribute to a student not completing a degree at an institution.

Students who enter college with a career identified tend to be more certain about their future and are more likely to earn a degree (Tinto, 1993). However, not all students have clear intentions upon college matriculation. As higher education becomes more accessible, more students are starting their college careers as an undecided major with unknown career goals. There is a perception in higher education that undecided students are less likely to persist (Spight, 2008). Education experts differ on whether starting college without a major or career goal is a good idea. Some researchers believe undecided students may receive a lack of guidance and drift from program to program extending their time to graduation if they do not receive special attention. Other experts feel an undecided student may be more marketable upon graduation as their coursework will be more diversified (College Rank, 2016).

Some students begin college wanting a four-year degree but cannot identify their long-term goals because they have had little opportunity to explore their options (Tinto, 1993). Primary education has shifted to covering the content of the curriculum instead of focusing on the children's own learning (Selley, 2012). This may contribute to why students have had little opportunity to explore their values, interests, and skills. Uncertainty of major may not always lead to student departure. Raimst (1981) found no correlation between first-year major

indecisiveness and lack of persistence in college. More recently, Cuseo (2005) argued students in declared majors may be at greater risk of leaving college than undecided students due to inappropriate major choices. Graunke, Woosley, and Helms (2006) also found “individuals who reported relatively high levels of commitment toward a specific career path were less likely to complete a degree in six years than were individuals who reported lower levels of commitment” (p. 17). Student intentions and institutional commitment should be considered when evaluating college persistence.

### **Performance Based Funding Model**

The Performance Based Funding Model was approved in the state of Florida by the Board of Governors in January 2014. The model includes ten metrics that evaluate Florida public four-year institutions on a range of issues. According to the FLBOG (2016) the metrics for the University of South Florida are:

1. Percent of Bachelor’s graduates employed and/or continuing their education further 1 year after graduation
2. Median average wages of undergraduates employed in Florida 1 year after graduation
3. Average cost per Undergraduate degree to the institution
4. Six-year graduation rates (full-time and part-time FTIC)
5. Academic progress rate (2<sup>nd</sup> year retention with GPA above 2.0)
6. Bachelor’s degrees awarded in areas of strategic emphasis (includes STEM)
7. University access rate (percent of undergraduates with a Pell Grant)

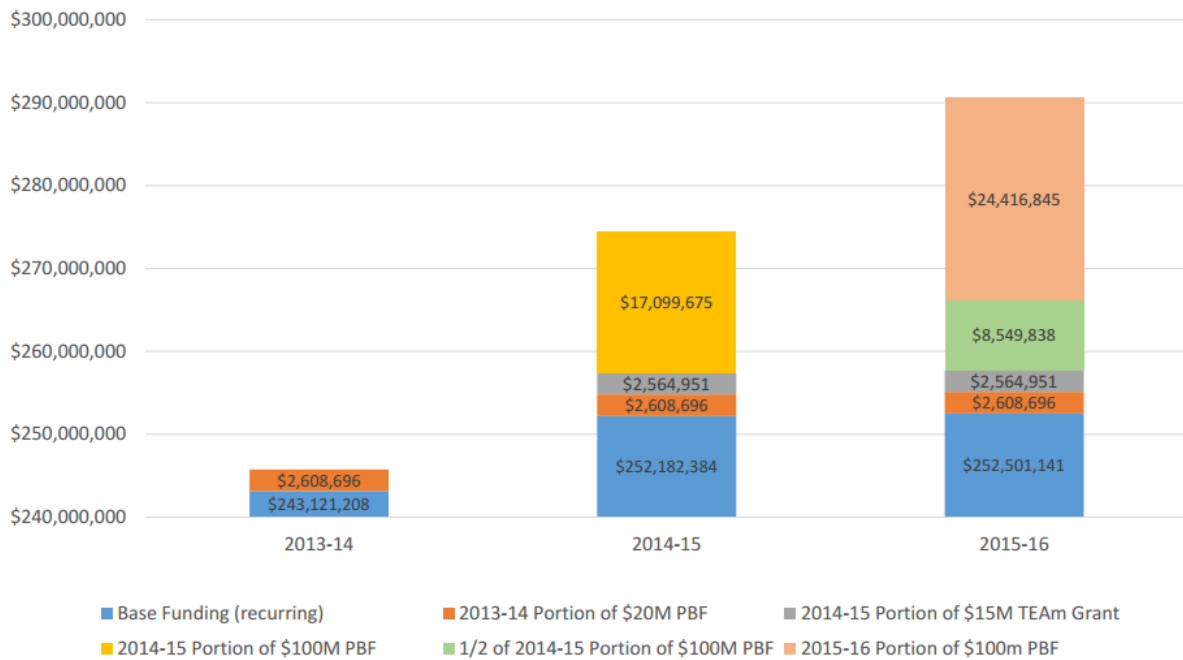


8. Graduate degrees awarded in areas of strategic emphasis (includes STEM)
9. Board of Governors choice- Percentage of Bachelor's degrees awarded without excess hours
10. Board of Trustees choice – Number of postdoctoral appointees

The amount of new state funding appropriated by the Legislature for performance funding will be matched by an equal amount reallocated from each institution's base funding (FLBOG, 2016). It is vital the University of South Florida meet the metrics and benchmarks set for the institution to receive additional funding support in addition to the base funding (recurring) financial support. In the 2015-16 academic year, the USF system received over 38 million dollars from Performance Based Funding (see Figure 2). Performance Based Funding provides a strong reason for ensuring the institution retains and graduates as many first time in college students as possible.



# USF Performance Funding



Note: Figures shown are funding for USF System

**Figure 2.** USF Performance Funding. This figure illustrates the impact Performance Funding had on USF budgets over a three year period. (FLBOG, 2016)

## The Rites of Passage

It is important to understand Van Gennepe’s theory because Tinto used this as a base to create his model of student departure. Arnold Van Gennepe, a Dutch anthropologist, conducted a study entitled The Rites of Passage. Van Gennepe (1960) maintained the process of transmission of relationships between succeeding groups was marked by three distinct phases or stages, each with its own specialized ceremonies and rituals. These three stages- separation, transition, and incorporation- made up the rites of passage. For most high school graduates, the passage to

college is movement to a more mature association (Tinto, 1993). The first stage of the college career requires students to disassociate or separate from high school, local residence/what is familiar, and possibly family. Separation from the past can be isolating and stressful, causing difficulty with persistence in college. The separation stage varies for all students. Some students must physically and socially disassociate themselves from a community whereas others may attend a local, nonresidential college and can maintain past affiliations (Tinto, 1993).

The second stage of passage is transition. This period of passage occurs between the old and the new, before full adoption of new norms in the college community. The student can be in the separation and transition stage at the same time and can begin the transition stage prior to arriving at the institution. Students in the transition stage may not have acquired the social and intellectual skills to be successful in their new community making the community feel unfamiliar (Tinto, 1993).

There is extensive research on student involvement in college which found quality involvement leads to higher levels of student development (Astin, 1993; Gellin, 2003; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Co-curricular learning helps students develop societal and cognitive skills by pushing students outside their comfort zones into contact zones with their peers (Musil, 2003). Co-curricular activities lead students to higher levels of personal development which aid the student in the transition period. This study recognizes nearly all students will experience some difficulty making the transition from high school to college, but there are strategies to work through the transition phase.

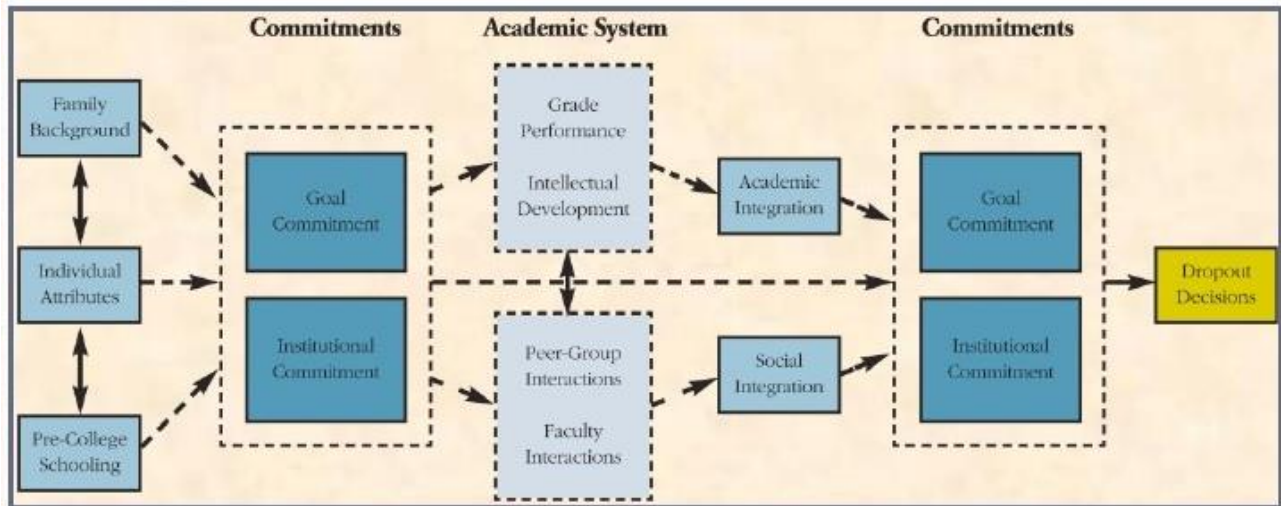
The final stage in the rites of passage is incorporation into the college community. This stage can only be achieved once a student has completed separation and transition. To reach

this stage, students must successfully integrate themselves into the college community and have accepted the new norms. Many institutions do not have a ceremony or ritual that confirms a student has integrated into the community, leaving many students to feel a lack of intellectual and social membership at the college. Unfortunately, these students are the ones that will eventually leave the institution. Tinto (1993) suggested students should become involved on campus in Greek life, student unions, extracurricular programs, intramural sports, and first year programs to help reach the incorporation stage. As we have discussed previously, these campus activities lead to improved first year persistence.

### **Tinto's Model of Student Departure**

Vincent Tinto is a researcher whose work focuses on college student retention. In 1975, Tinto published his concept of retention that theorizes students who socially and academically integrate into the campus community increase their commitment to the institution and are more likely to graduate. By 1993, Tinto believed institutional factors were fundamental to student departure. A student's individual characteristics he/she possess when starting college influences his/her persistence as well as initial commitment to the institution and earning a degree (Tinto, 1975b). Tinto has since expanded upon his initial theory of student departure as more student characteristics were evaluated. Many researchers in the education field use Tinto's integration theory as a framework to evaluate student persistence in college (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartley, 2008; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Chapman & Pascarella, 1983; Jones, 2010; Pascarella, 1982; Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983).

Tinto viewed persistence in college as the outcome of a longitudinal process of interactions between the student and the institution in addition to a student's characteristics, prior experiences, and prior commitments (Tinto, 1975a). Tinto's original theory focused on two dimensions of integration: academic and social (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Tinto's Model of Student Departure (Tinto, 1975a).

Academic integration is defined by Tinto using multiple variables. Academic performance, specifically grades, reflects the student's ability and the institution's choice for academic behavior. Intellectual development of the student and the intellectual climate of the institution should also be of similar quality (Tinto, 1975a). Higher grades are represented when the academic environment matches the student's intellectual ability, leading to successful academic integration and persistence.

Social integration is the interaction between a student and peers, staff, and faculty at the institution. In his theory, Tinto (1975a) viewed social integration as occurring "...primarily through informal peer group associations, semi-formal extracurricular activities, and interaction

with faculty and administrative personnel within the college” (p. 107). Socializing is important, but can put a strain on academics if a student does not create friendships with peers who have strong academic goals (Tinto, 1975a).

Tinto believes students must separate from the group in which they were formerly associated, undergo a transition, and incorporate and adopt the normative behaviors of the new group (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). This concept is like Van Gennep’s three stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. The higher the degree of academic and social integration of the student into the college community, the greater the student’s commitment to the institution and degree attainment (Tinto, 1975a). Tinto emphasized the stages of persistence can occur in a different order for each student or can overlap. It is the institution’s responsibility to assist students during their “rites of passage” to achieve successful integration into the college community (Tinto, 1988).

Over the next 30 years, Tinto’s model was supported, criticized, and eventually revised. In addition to social and academic factors, Tinto added a third factor- external or environmental. The third factor encompasses finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunity to transfer. Tinto (1993) recognized that psychological, environmental, and economic approaches to retention demand a greater focus from the university and its efforts to reduce student departure. Tinto now identifies three major sources of student departure in his framework: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution (Kuh et al., 2006).

Tinto (1993) recommended colleges and universities integrate students academically, socially, and intellectually within the culture of the institution. All three should take place deliberately. Some suggestions for institutions are to create opportunities for extracurricular activities, informal student interactions, and faculty/student interactions (Long, 2012).

### **Two Types of Departure**

Tinto (1993) identified two types of departure or reasons a student leaves the institution- forced and voluntary. Students may be forced to leave an institution due to academic, financial, judicial, or family issue. Students may not earn the grades needed to remain enrolled at an institution and be academically dismissed. Others may not receive enough financial aid to pay for courses. Some students violate the student code of conduct and are dismissed from the institution. For some students, family can request them to return home. These are some of the reasons for a forced departure.

In addition to forcefully leaving the institution, students may voluntarily want to leave. Students may feel isolated, experience homesickness, want to transfer to a different institution, or not see a cost-benefit in staying enrolled in the institution. Some students may wish to continue their college education, but are not able to due to financial consequences. Students who do not integrate into the college community and successfully navigate the transition from high school to college can feel isolated. Students who attend college away from home may feel homesickness and want to be closer to family. As discussed previously, not all students start college with the intention to graduate from the institution. Some students may have the intention to begin at one institution and transfer to another before degree completion. Some

students may perceive an alternate form of investment such as time, energy, and resources will yield a greater benefit and choose to leave the institution (Tinto, 1975a). This alternative form can be transferring to an institution closer to home to live with family and save on housing and dining fees or it can be to pursue a different type of education such as technical school. Another important factor to be considered in voluntary departure is external forces affecting a student's decision such as the job market (supply and demand) and economy (Tinto, 1975a). Overall, there are many factors that affect student departure.

## **Retention**

Student retention has become a popular subject in higher education. Institutions have some influence but very little control over student retention and degree completion (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). The higher education system must recognize each student's departure from an institution is highly personal and may not be able to be avoided. However, retaining first time in college students now directly affects funding for the institution, making retention a primary goal. This change in priorities has forced higher education to become proactive to retention instead of reactive (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001).

Retention can be affected by many different characteristics and offices on campus. Academic and social integration are strongly associated with student's commitment to the institution, which has a direct impact on retention (Ishitani, 2016). Tinto also found academic and social integration positively influence a student's commitment to the institution and contribute to degree attainment. The more academic integration, the greater the level of commitment to the goal of graduation (Tinto, 1975b). Initial and continued institutional



commitment from the student also directly affects retention. As the student's level of institutional commitment increases, the probability of their persistence in college also increases (Braxton et al., 2014).

One student retention approach that works best is when institutional representatives and campus community members come together to support the student in an individualized manner creating a support system. Retention requires institutions to reduce the barriers the student experiences on and off campus and provide support that enables the student to master the role of student (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). Astin (1993) and Oseguera (2006) found students who attend an institution with a large percentage of student commuters negatively affects degree completion. In the 2015-2016 academic year the University of South Florida had roughly 78.6% or about 3,225 first time in college students live in on-campus housing (C. Herreid, personal communication, October 21, 2016).

Many institutions have found a positive link between participating in a discussion based first year course and higher student persistence (Permzadian & Crede, 2016; Pittendrigh, Borkowski, Swinford, & Plumb, 2016). According to Miller, Janz, and Chen (2007) first year programs benefit all students equally; students were retained at a higher rate if they participated. A discussion based first year course allows students to experience a student-centered approach to learning where the educational agenda reacts to the needs of the students. The student-centered first year seminar helps students obtain the tools they need, fulfill their needs and resolve any issues they face on campus so they can persist and ultimately achieve their degree (Astin, 1993; Hunter & Linder, 2005; Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). First year seminars also provide students the opportunity to build a relationship with a staff member on campus providing a connection to the campus community. A University of South Florida freshman student felt the

support she received from her professor in the first year seminar course was the main reason she stayed on campus after the first semester (C. Damm, personal communication, January 30, 2017).

Successful academic integration during the first year showed a positive and significant effect on first-year persistence (Ishitani, 2016). This study does not focus on first year seminars, but does recognize the importance of offering a discussion based course to increase retention of first year students.

## **Conclusion**

First year student expectations can be a strong factor in a student's decision to persist in college. Research suggests academic and social integration play an important role in contributing to student persistence. This study looked at the relationship between incoming student's expectations for co-curricular activities, socializing, academic preparation, high school GPA, and institutional commitment and their persistence into the second year of college at the University of South Florida. Tinto's model of Student Departure was used as the framework. This study also evaluated the relationship between student expectations and persistence at the institution. The findings will provide guidance on how faculty and staff can prepare themselves to meet the expectations of incoming first year students, subsequently helping them persist into the second year of college.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

This study focused on the individual relationship between expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities, socializing, high school GPA, and a student's initial commitment to the institution and the student's persistence into the second year of college. The study also analyzed the student's self-perception of academic preparation and persistence into the second year of college. College student surveys are vital to evaluating the effectiveness of college and university programs, policies, and procedures (Porter, 2011). By evaluating the BCSSE feedback in combination with first year college persistence, this study will help inform the University of South Florida's programs and policies. This chapter outlines the methods used in the study. Included in Chapter Three is the research design, population and sample, examination of the instrument used, procedures for data collection, and a description of how the data was analyzed.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between first year student college expectations and their persistence into the second year of college. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between a first year student's expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the second year of college?

2. What is the relationship between expected socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games, or watching television) and first year student persistence into the second year?
3. What is the relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year?
4. What is the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year?
5. What is the relationship between a first year student's commitment to the institution and persistence into the second year?

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was first time in college undergraduate students, who were degree seeking, at the University of South Florida Tampa campus. The University of South Florida was founded in 1956 and consists of three separately accredited campuses: USF (Tampa), USF St. Petersburg, and USF Sarasota-Manatee. All together the three campuses serve over 36,000 undergraduate students. USF is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (USF, 2017).

The sample for this research were students who enrolled at the main Tampa campus at the University of South Florida in summer 2015 or fall 2015. As mentioned before, all students attending first year orientation are encouraged to complete the BCSSE survey. A total of

4,127 or 99% of first year students attending orientation participated in the administration of the BCSSE on the first day of a two-day orientation.

## **Variables**

This study focused on summer 2015 and fall 2015 first time in college admits. Many predictor or independent variables were included. The first research question focused on expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities. Co-curricular activities to be analyzed were participation in student organizations, Greek life, and intramural sports as outlined in question 13c on the BCSSE (see Appendix B). Socializing was defined as time spent with friends in person or online, playing video games, or watching television in question 13d on the BCSSE (see Appendix B). Recalculated high school GPAs were provided by the Office of Decision Support at the University of South Florida. Students' perceived academic preparation, questions 20a-20g on the BCSSE, were included as a predictor variable as is a student's commitment to the institution prior to starting college, question 29 on the BCSSE (see Appendix B).

The outcome variable for this study was persistence into the second year of college. This variable was measured by enrollment in courses for the fall semester of the second year of college. A student would be considered persisting if he/she enrolled in at least one credit hour in fall 2016, which is the start of a student's second year in college. The Office of Decision Support at USF provided the persistence information.

## **Instrument**

The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, also known as the BCSSE, is a paper or web based survey that collects data from first time in college students. The survey covers two overarching topics - high school experiences and student expectations for the first year of college (BCSSE, 2016). The BCSSE instrument is subscribed to by The University of South Florida, which started administering the BCSSE in 2014 (M. Bombaugh, personal communication, January 17, 2017). The institution self-selected to participate in the BCSSE to better understand their incoming first-year students' previous high school experiences and preconceived expectations for their first year in college. The BCSSE serves as an important resource for faculty, advisors, and student affairs professionals to help inform decision-making on campus (BCSSE, 2016).

Since BCSSE was launched in 2007 by Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research, 464 institutions in the United States and Canada have utilized the instrument. More than 741,000 first year students have completed the survey. The survey utilized in summer 2015 was previously updated in 2013 to better align with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (BCSSE, 2016).

The 2015 survey is constructed of 36 questions that include fill in the blank responses, multiple choice, and rating scales (see Appendix B). The survey is formally recognized to have nine scales known as BCSSE scales (see Table 1). These nine scales include two that cover students' academic engagement in high school quantitative reasoning and learning strategies. Three scales address a student's expectations to engage in collaborative learning with other

students, interactions with faculty, and interactions with a diverse student body. Four scales focus on students' expectations for college (BCSSE, 2016).

**Table 1.** BCSSE scales (BCSSE, 2016).

High School Quantitative Reasoning
High School Learning Strategies
Expected Collaborative Learning
Expected Student- Faculty Interaction
Expected Interactions with Diverse Others
Expected Academic Perseverance
Expected Academic Difficulty
Perceived Academic Preparation
Importance of Campus Environment

The BCSSE was chosen for the proposed study because it is supported by years of research and student development theory (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

This study does recognize the BCSSE instrument has received controversial feedback on parts of the survey. Some researchers in the field believe the BCSSE instrument should allow a student to indicate their intentions on the survey. This information would provide the institution a chance to assess student's educational investment prior to starting at the institution (Tinto, 1993) and more accurately measure retention. This feedback should be taken into consideration by Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research in the next instrument update.

Additionally, some researchers found the validity may be affected if participants have trouble accurately reporting on behavior or performance. Participants may rely on estimation strategies that can result in systematic reporting errors (Porter, 2011). For the purposes of this study, it was presumed that students are being honest, to the best of their recollection, in the feedback they provide on the survey at orientation.

## Validity and Reliability

The BCSSE is one of the most widely used surveys measuring incoming first year students' past and expected engagement behaviors, developed by academic professional and leading researchers in the higher education field. In 2013, the BCSSE was updated to align with the NSSE. This update provided improved clarity of survey language and measures. The improved BCSSE and NSSE have stronger psychometric properties (validity and instrument reliability) than past versions of the surveys (BCSSE, 2016).

Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) identify six indicators of the validity and reliability of student self-reports:

1. The information requested is known to the respondents
2. The questions are phrased clearly and unambiguously
3. The questions refer to recent activities
4. The respondents think the questions merit a thoughtful response
5. The information requested is potentially verifiable
6. The question asks for information that is known to those answering the questions and does not threaten, embarrass, or violate their privacy or encourage the respondents to respond in socially desirable ways. (p.2)

The BCSSE asks participants to recall recent information through asking conscious questions. Since the participants indicate their student ID number, first initial, middle initial, and full last name, the results of the BCSSE survey can be easily matched with their future academic results or verified. Kuh (2004) found that NSSE survey questions can be easily understood and



answered by college students. Since the BCSSE is derived from the NSSE, the questions should also be easily understood by college students.

Cronbach’s alpha, a conventional measure of internal reliability consistency was performed for each BCSSE scale. Researchers prefer a .70 or above as an acceptable level when applied to studies (Gordon, Ludlum, and Hoey, 2008). The results from the 2013 updated version of the survey had Cronbach’s alpha of each of the nine scales range from .63 to .92. (See Table 2).

**Table 2.** BCSSE Scales Cronbach’s Alpha (BCSSE, 2016)

BCSSE Scales	Cronbach's Alpha
High School Quantitative Reasoning	0.78
High School Learning Strategies	0.68
Expected Collaborative Learning	0.78
Expected Student- Faculty Interaction	0.84
Expected Interactions with Diverse Others	0.92
Expected Academic Perseverance	0.80
Expected Academic Difficulty	0.63
Perceived Academic Preparation	0.83
Importance of Campus Environment	0.84

These results indicate that seven of the nine BCSSE scales had a suggested high degree of reliability: High School Quantitative Reasoning, .78; Expected Collaborative Learning, .78; Expected Student–Faculty Interaction, .84; Expected Interactions with Diverse Others, .92; Expected Academic Perseverance, .80; Perceived Academic Preparation, .83; and Importance of Campus Environment, .84. The scores that fell below the preferred Cronbach’s alpha level of .70 were for High School Learning Strategies, .68 and Expected Academic Difficulty, .63, (BCSSE, 2016) indicating these scales should be used with caution when applying statistical analysis. For

this study, the survey questions examined from the BCSSE were all from scales that had a reliable Cronbach alpha.

Once the data for the study was received, the researcher evaluated Cronbach's alpha to test reliability. This reliability analysis included each of the BCSSE questions used in the study. The BCSSE was found to be highly reliable (10 items;  $\alpha = .70$ ).

### **Data Collection**

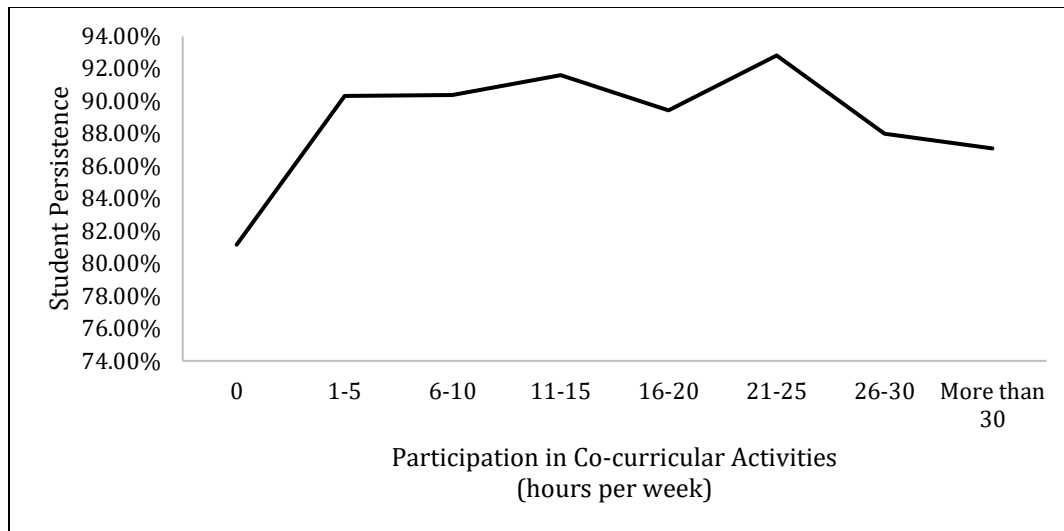
In summer 2015, the Division of Student Affairs in partnership with the Office of Orientation collected the BCSSE data from first time in college students. The Office of Academic Advocacy administered and collected the BCSSE survey with the assistance of orientation team leaders at orientation sessions occurring between June 2015 and August 2015. In order to ensure the confidentiality of the students who participate in the survey, the Director of Special Projects in the Office of Decision Support scored and coded the collected data so individual students cannot be identified. The Office of Decision Support provided additional institutional data such as high school GPA, enrollment in fall 2016 courses, and USF GPA at the end of summer 2016. This additional data along with the BCSSE was utilized to evaluate persistence into the second year of college.

### **Data Analysis**

Statistical analysis of the data was completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. Any p-value reported by SPSS as .000 was reported as  $<.001$  in the results discussion. Descriptive statistics were analyzed for each variable. The dependent variable for all five research questions was determined by whether a student enrolled in fall

semester the second year of college. The dependent variable was considered binary because a student can persist or not persist.

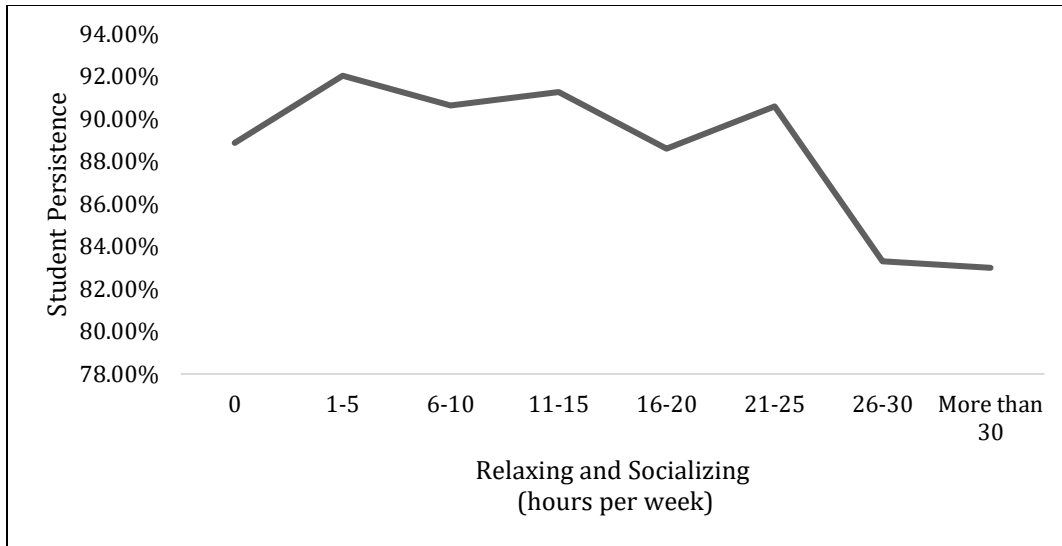
The first research question focused on the relationship between first year student expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the second year of college. The expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities was the independent variable. The independent variable could be measured as categorical because participants select a range of hours per week they expect to be involved in organized campus co-curricular activities (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Campus co-curricular involvement could have also been considered a continuous predictor because there are more than five options to choose from in the response. The researcher analyzed the predictor variable relationship with the outcome to determine if the relationship was continuous or categorical based on whether the relationship was linear or non-linear (J. Ferron, personal communication, March 9, 2017). The relationship was determined to be linear, therefore the variable was treated as continuous in the study (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Percent of students who persisted into the second year of college based on response to Question 13C on the BCSSE. Information provided by Administrators of BCSSE at the University of South Florida, 2015.

A logistic regression was computed because the outcome variable is binary; persists or does not persist (UCLA, 2017). This statistical analysis was appropriate to determine the strength of the relationship between students' expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the second year of college.

The second research question examines the relationship between students expected socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games or watching television) and first year student persistence into the second year of college. The independent variable, socializing, was treated as continuous based on the outcome of the analysis conducted in Chapter Four (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Percent of students who persisted into the second year of college based on response to Question 13D on the BCSSE. Information provided by Administrators of BCSSE at the University of South Florida, 2015.

Socializing was measured by the participant selecting a range of hours per week they expect to socialize in college. A logistic regression was computed because the outcome variable is binary; persists or does not persist (UCLA, 2017). This analysis was appropriate to determine the strength of the relationship between students' expected socializing in college and persistence into the second year of college.

The third research question investigates the relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year of college. The independent variable, high school GPA, can be any value between 0.0 and 4.0 and can include decimals. This variable is continuous. A logistic regression analysis was computed since the dependent variable is dichotomous and the independent variable is continuous (Herreid & Miller, 2009a). A logistic

regression analysis was appropriate to determine the strength of the relationship between high school GPA and persistence into the second year of college.

The fourth research question considers the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year of college. The independent variable, self-perception of academic preparation, was measured by asking participants to answer each of the seven statements on a rating scale. The seven statements included: “Write clearly and effectively”, “Speak clearly and effectively”, “Think critically and analytically”, “Analyze numerical and statistical information”, “Work effectively with others”, “Use computing and information technology”, and “Learn effectively on your own”. The Academic Preparation rating scale has six response options: Very prepared (6) to Not at all prepared (1). The participant could express how much they agree or disagree with each of the seven statements based on the rating scale (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The independent variable is continuous. A logistic regression analysis was appropriate to determine the strength of the relationship between perceived academic preparation and persistence into the second year of college (Herreid & Miller, 2009a). Perceived academic preparation had one of the smallest standard deviations for a BCSSE scale (BCSSE, 2016).

The fifth and final question examines the relationship between a first year student’s commitment to the institution and persistence into the second year of college. The independent variable, institution commitment, was measured by asking students to select if the institution is their “1st choice”, “2nd choice”, “3rd choice”, “4th choice”, or “5th choice or lower”. This independent variable was considered categorical. A logistic regression was computed to see if there is a relationship between two categorical variables- a student’s commitment to the

institution and if they persist into the second year of college (UCLA, 2017). Table 3 illustrates the research questions and the data analysis conducted for each question.

In addition to analyzing each independent variable with the dependent variable, this study was interested in determining how much each independent variable uniquely predicts persistence into the second year of college. A logistic regression was used to evaluate all five independent variables in relationship to the binary outcome - persist or not persist into the second year of college. Multiple logistic regression analysis determines the correlation between a dependent variable and two or more independent variables (UCLA, 2017). Based on data patterns found in the logistic regression for Question 4, the researcher conducted additional analysis to evaluate each item within the independent variable in relation to persistence.

### **Summary**

This study included secondary data provided by the University of South Florida's Office of Decision Support. First time in college students' expectations and institutional information such as GPA and second year enrollment confirmation was analyzed to answer the research questions. Chapter Four will present the findings of the statistical analysis and answer each of the research questions.

**Table 3.** Research Questions, Variables, and Data inquiry

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
1. What is the relationship between first year students expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the second year?	Expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities (hours per week)	Persistence (Yes or No)	Independent-BCSSE question 13c  Dependent-USF Office of Decision Support (ODS) data	Logistic Regression
2. What is the relationship between socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games or watching television) and first year student persistence into the second year?	Expected socializing (hours per week)	Persistence (Yes or No)	Independent-BCSSE question 13d  Dependent-USF ODS data	Logistic Regression
3. What is the relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year?	High School GPA	Persistence (Yes or No)	Independent-USF ODS data  Dependent-USF ODS data	Logistic Regression
4. What is the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year of college?	Self-Perception of academic preparation	Persistence (Yes or No)	Independent-BCSSE question 20a-20g  Dependent-USF ODS data	Logistic Regression
5. What is the relationship between a first year student's commitment to the institution and persistence into the second year of college?	Student's commitment to the institution	Persistence (Yes or No)	Independent-BCSSE question 29  Dependent-USF ODS data	Logistic Regression



## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between select first year student college expectations and their persistence into the second year of college. This study specifically focused on students expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities, expected socializing, high school GPA, self-perception of academic preparation for college, and student's commitment to the institution in relation to persistence into the second year of college. Further, the study determined persistence based on whether a student was enrolled in at least one credit of coursework in their second fall semester at the institution. Chapter Four will begin with explaining the survey sample, followed by an analysis of the results for each of the five research questions, and an overall summary of the results.

### **Survey Responses**

The sample included a total of 4,127 respondents out of a possible 4,159 first year students in the cohort. About 99% of first time in college students who's admission term was summer and fall 2015 voluntarily completed the BCSSE on the first day of a two-day freshman orientation. The Office of Decision Support at USF shared responses for 3,924 students. Although 4,127 students participated in the survey, only 3,924 survey instruments were usable. A survey could be considered non-usable if a student does not include his or her university identification number or full name, preventing the university from making a connection of BCSSE data with institutional data. The sample size was further reduced to 3,723 after the

removal of incomplete survey responses for the ten specific questions analyzed on the BCSSE for this study.

All of the BCSSE data were connected to university identification numbers allowing the researcher to request additional institutional data such as if the student was retained for the second fall semester, the student's high school GPA, and the student's USF GPA at the end of summer 2016. The data set was de-identified by the USF System Office of Decision Support and assigned a participant ID. The assigned participant ID allowed the researcher to connect BCSSE results with institutional data to gain a better understanding of student expectations and persistence into the second year of college.

## **Results of the Analysis**

The findings of this study will be reviewed and discussed for each research question. For each of the research questions, the findings were only considered significant at the alpha level of .05. Additionally, any p-value reported by SPSS as .000 was reported as <.001 in the results discussion.

### **Research Question One**

The first research question examined the relationship between expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the second year. The independent variable, organized campus co-curricular activities, was treated as a continuous variable because the relationship was found to be linear (Figure 4).

A logistic regression was used to evaluate the relationship in question one. The results of the logistic regression are presented in Table 4. The results of the regression indicate the

relationship is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = .03, p = .55$ . This finding indicates the expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities does not have a significant relationship to first year student persistence into the second year of college.

**Table 4.** Logistic Regression Question 1 Variables in the Equation

		Variables in the Equation					
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	fycocurr	.026	.043	.360	1	.549	1.026
	Constant	2.156	.165	170.211	1	.000	8.638

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: fycocurr.

### Research Question Two

The second research question examined the relationship between expected socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games or watching television) and first year student persistence into the second year. The independent variable, expected socializing, was treated as a continuous variable because the relationship was found to be linear (Figure 5). A pattern was observed among the relationship of the independent variable, expected socializing, and persistence into the second year. Students who expected to socialize 6-10 or 11-15 hours per week had a similar outcome in relation to persistence into the second year of college (average persistence of 90.97%). Students who expected to socialize 26-30 or more than 30 hours per week had a very similar negative outcome in relation to persistence into the second year of college (average persistence of 83%).

A logistic regression was used to evaluate the relationship in question two. The results of the logistic regression are presented in Table 5. The results of the regression indicate the relationship is statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = -.11, p = .01$ .

Specifically, for every one unit change in expected socializing, the log odds of persistence into the second year (versus non-persistence) decreases by 0.11. Both statistics indicate there is a significant negative relationship between expected socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games or watching television) and the odds of persistence into the second year.

**Table 5.** Logistic Regression Question 2 Variables in the Equation

		Variables in the Equation					
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	fysocial13	-.108	.042	6.722	1	.010	.898
	Constant	2.659	.170	243.812	1	.000	14.282

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: fysocial13.

Expected socializing was found to have a statistically negative effect on persisting into the second year of college. Upon closer analysis of the independent variable, there was a point where expected socializing considerably affected persistence into the second year of college. For example, students who expect to socialize 0-25 hours per week persisted in college at a rate of 88.6% to 92.05%. The findings indicated student persistence into the second year of college becomes significantly impacted when students expect to socialize 26 -30 or more than 30 hours per week reducing student persistence to 83%.

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question examined the relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year. A logistic regression was used to evaluate the relationship in Question Three. The results of the logistic regression are presented in Table 6.

The results of the regression indicate the relationship is statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = .89, p = <.001$ . Specifically, for every one unit change in high school GPA, the log odds of persistence into the second year (versus non-persistence) increases by .89. Both statistics indicate there is a significant positive relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year.

**Table 6.** Logistic Regression Question 3 Variables in the Equation

		Variables in the Equation					
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	High_School_GPA	.892	.126	49.849	1	.000	2.441
	Constant	-1.182	.479	6.076	1	.014	.307

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: High\_School\_GPA.

#### Research Question Four

The fourth research question examined the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year. The independent variable, self-perception of academic preparation, was measured by asking participants to answer seven statements on a rating scale. The seven statements included: “Write clearly and effectively”, “Speak clearly and effectively”, “Think critically and analytically”, “Analyze numerical and statistical information”, “work effectively with others”, “Use computing and information technology”, and “Learn effectively on your own”. First, the mean of the student’s responses to all seven statements was calculated. A logistic regression was then used to evaluate the relationship between the mean of the seven items constituting the independent variable and the dependent variable in question four (see Table 7). The results of the regression

indicate the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2 (1) = -.12, p = .12$ .

**Table 7.** Logistic Regression Question 4 Variables in the Equation

		Variables in the Equation					
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Ac-prep	-.120	.076	2.460	1	.117	.887
	Constant	2.831	.377	56.451	1	.000	16.968

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Ac-prep.

Based on the output of the logistic regression for question four, the researcher was interested in further evaluating each of the seven items in the independent variable. The researcher conducted a logistic regression that simultaneously entered as predictors each of the seven items in self-perception of academic preparation. Out of the seven items in the self-perception of academic preparation independent variable, one item was statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2 (1) = -.17, p = .01$ ;" Speak clearly and effectively" (see Table 8). Specifically, for every one unit change in "Speak clearly and effectively", the log odds of persistence into the second year (versus non-persistence) decreases by 0.13. Both statistics indicate there is a significant negative relationship between the item "Speak clearly and effectively" and the odds of persistence into the second year.

A logistic regression determined the other six items that constitute self-perception of academic preparation were not statistically significant. The statement "Write clearly and effectively" is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2 (1) = .03, p = .69$ .

The statement “Think critically and analytically” is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = .00$ ,  $p = .96$ . The statement “Analyze numerical and statistical information” is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = -.04$ ,  $p = .51$ . The statement “Work effectively with others” is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = .12$ ,  $p = .06$ . The statement “Use computing and information technology” is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = -.02$ ,  $p = .71$ . The statement “Learn effectively on your own” is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = -.01$ ,  $p = .87$ . (See Table 8). This finding indicates the six statements: “Write clearly and effectively”, “Think critically and analytically”, “Analyze numerical and statistical information”, “Work effectively with others”, “Use computing and information technology”, and “Learn effectively on your own” do not have a significant relationship to first year student persistence into the second year of college.

**Table 8.** Logistic Regression Question 4 for each of the seven items Variables in the Equation

		Variables in the Equation					
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	fySGwrite	.025	.063	.157	1	.692	1.025
	fySGspeak	-.169	.064	6.918	1	.009	.844
	fySGthink	.004	.084	.003	1	.957	1.005
	fySGanalyze	-.042	.064	.426	1	.514	.959
	fySGothers	.124	.065	3.655	1	.056	1.131
	cgncompt13	-.022	.059	.138	1	.710	.978
	cgninq	-.011	.063	.028	1	.867	.990
	Constant	2.641	.382	47.868	1	.000	14.030

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: fySGwrite, fySGspeak, fySGthink, fySGanalyze, fySGothers, cgncompt13, cgninq.

### Research Question Five

The fifth research question examined the relationship between a first year student’s commitment to the institution and persistence into the second year. A logistic regression was used to evaluate the relationship in question five (see Table 9). The results of the regression indicate the relationship is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2 (1) = .05, p = .49$ . The findings indicate first year student’s commitment to the institution does not have a significant relationship to first year student persistence into the second year of college.

**Table 9.** Logistic Regression Question 5 Variables in the Equation

		Variables in the Equation					
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	fychoice	.046	.066	.483	1	.487	1.047
	Constant	2.178	.117	346.844	1	.000	8.828

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: fychoice.

### Summary

Chapter Four provided an analysis of the results for each of the five research questions in the study. Using select questions from the self-reported BCSSE along with institutional data on high school GPA and enrollment in fall 2016 courses this study concluded four main findings. First, high school GPA is statistically significant to first year student persistence into the second year. Expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities, self-perception of academic preparation, and a first year student’s commitment to the institution were not found to be statistically significant to first year student persistence into the second year. Although overall self-perception of academic preparation for college was not found



to be statistically significant to persistence, one of the items within academic preparation, the ability to speak clearly and effectively, does have a statistically significant relationship to first year persistence into the second year when analyzed individually. Chapter Five reviews the findings of the study and discusses limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

Chapter Five contains a summary of the research study, findings, limitations, a discussion of implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study sought to investigate whether there is a correlation between academic preparation, co-curricular involvement, level of institutional commitment, and social expectations of first time in college students and whether or not they persist into the second year of college at the University of South Florida. The purpose of this study was to better understand reasonable student expectations of college, leading to an increase in first year student persistence. Results of this study can inform student affairs professionals at the University of South Florida of potential issues in the transition of first year students from high school to college and suggest how to better assist students to increase persistence into the second year of college. Five research questions guided this study on first year student expectations and persistence:

1. What is the relationship between a first year student's expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the second year of college?
2. What is the relationship between expected socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games, or watching television) and first year student persistence into the second year?

3. What is the relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year?
4. What is the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year?
5. What is the relationship between a first year student's commitment to the institution and persistence into the second year?

This quantitative research study used a logistic regression analysis for each of the five questions. A logistic regression was computed because the outcome variable is binary; persists or does not persist (UCLA, 2017). This statistical analysis was appropriate to determine the strength of the relationship between the independent variable in each question and persistence into the second year of college. Additionally, the researcher conducted another logistic regression for question four that simultaneously entered as predictors each of the seven items in self-perception of academic preparation. A summary of the findings will be presented in the next section.

## **Summary of the Findings**

### **Question One**

The first research question focused on the relationship between a first year student's expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the second year of college. A logistic regression was used to explore the relationship between expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence into the

second year of college. The results of the logistic regression indicated the relationship is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = .03, p = .55$ . This finding indicates the expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities does not have a significant relationship to first year student persistence into the second year of college.

Although the results were not statistically significant, there was a pattern found between the hours per week spent participating in organized co-curricular activities and student persistence. Students who expected to spend anywhere between 1 and 20 hours per week participating in organized co-curricular activities persisted into the second year of college at an average rate of 90% (see Figure 4). Students who expected to participate in organized co-curricular activities 21-25 hours per week persisted into the second year at the highest rate of 92.82%. Although the results were not statistically significant, it is important to recognize expected participation in organized co-curricular activities can help to support persistence into the second year of college. The University of South Florida should continue to encourage participation in organized co-curricular activities at both orientation and across the campus culture once the semester is underway.

### **Question Two**

The second research question examined the relationship between expected socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games or watching television) and first year student persistence into the second year. A logistic regression was used to evaluate the relationship in question two. The results of the regression indicated the relationship is statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = -.11, p = .01$ . Specifically, for every one unit change in expected socializing, the log odds of persistence into the second

year (versus non-persistence) decreases by 0.11. Both statistics indicate there is a significant negative relationship between expected socializing (time spent with friends, keeping up with friends online, playing video games or watching television) and the odds of persistence into the second year.

The findings revealed a distinct relationship between expected socializing and persistence into the second year. A significant decrease in student persistence occurred when students expected to socialize 26 or more hours per week; persisting at a rate of only 83%. Students who expected to spend anywhere between 1 and 25 hours per week socializing persisted into the second year of college at an average rate of 90% (see Figure 5). It would be beneficial to further analyze why a sudden drop in student persistence occurs if a student expects to socialize 26 or more hours per week.

### **Question Three**

The third research question examined the relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year. A logistic regression was used to evaluate this relationship. The results of the regression indicated the relationship is statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2 (1) = .89, p = <.001$ . Specifically, for every one unit change in high school GPA, the log odds of persistence into the second year (versus non-persistence) increases by .89. Both statistics indicate there is a positive significant relationship between high school GPA and first year student persistence into the second year. The findings indicate high school GPA is a clear indicator for student persistence into the second year of college.

#### Question Four

The fourth research question examined the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year. A logistic regression was used to evaluate this relationship. The results of the logistic regression indicated the relationship between self-perception of academic preparation for college and first year student persistence into the second year is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = .12, p = .12$ .

An additional logistic regression was conducted to further evaluate each of the seven items in the independent variable. The researcher conducted a logistic regression that simultaneously entered as predictors each of the seven items in self-perception of academic preparation. Out of the seven items in the self-perception of academic preparation independent variable, one item was statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = .17, p = .01$ ; "Speak clearly and effectively". Specifically, for every one unit change in "Speak clearly and effectively", the log odds of persistence into the second year decreased by 0.13. Both statistics indicate there is a significant negative relationship between the item "Speak clearly and effectively" and the odds of persistence into the second year. The other six items were not statistically significant in relation to persistence into the second year at an alpha level of .05.

The results infer if the study independently evaluated a student's perception of preparation in speaking clearly and effectively in academic work, for every one unit change in perceived preparation of speaking clearly and effectively, the log odds of persistence into the second year (versus non-persistence) would decrease by 0.17. The statistics indicate there is a significant negative relationship between perceived preparation to speak clearly and effectively in one's academic work and the odds of persistence into the second year. Many students who

report lower academic confidence tend to report lower intention to graduate, while first year students with self-perceived high academic confidence indicate they intend to graduate (BCSSE, 2018). While the other six factors were not statistically significant for persistence into the second year of college, further research is needed to determine if these perceptions of academic preparation affect four and six year graduation rates.

It is important for the University of South Florida to further examine students' perceived academic preparation for each of the seven statements. In particular, why may students feel overconfident when responding to the statement "Speak clearly and effectively"? Evaluating students' self-efficacy could provide some additional key information. Furthermore, are students interpreting the statement to mean speak clearly and effectively in a large classroom setting or in a one on one conversation with a faculty member? The BCSSE question states in relation to academic work at the institution, but this may have been interpreted differently by each student taking the survey.

### **Question Five**

The fifth research question examined the relationship between a first year student's commitment to the institution and persistence into the second year. A logistic regression was used to evaluate the relationship. The results of the regression indicate the relationship is not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05,  $\chi^2(1) = .05, p = .49$ . Even though the findings were not significant for persistence into the second year of college, it is important this information is collected and evaluated again in relation to four year and six year graduation rates.

This study focused specifically on persistence into the second year of college, but further research should be conducted to determine if commitment to the institution impacts

persistence into later years of college and eventually graduation rates. Students may be seeking an associate's degree, prerequisite requirements, or need to satisfy requirements for programs offered at other institutions and not intend to graduate with a Bachelor's degree from this institution. For students seeking to fulfill these types of requirements, the students may continue at the institution into the second year, but then leave the university once their goal is met.

Although the variable was not statistically significant, it is important for the University of South Florida to monitor student's initial commitment to the institution and the ultimate outcome (earn a degree or not). Since funding is closely tied to persistence and graduation rates, it is helpful for the institution to be aware of students who may not be fully committed to earning a degree from the institution in order to provide additional support and resources in helping them persist and ultimately graduate.

### **Limitations**

As discussed in Chapter One, this study was subject to limitations prior to its beginning. The researcher initially identified three limitations to the study. First, the sample population was restricted to only one school and one cohort year, meaning the findings may not apply to similar institutions or other cohort types. The second major limitation was the potential peer pressure a student may feel to complete the BCSSE during their orientation session. The third limitation was that the study did not differentiate between the summer and fall 2015 cohorts. If the study had focused on one or the other cohort of students, the findings may have been different due to the historical differences in the students' academic abilities.

As the study progressed, an unanticipated limitation was revealed. Students in the original data set, provided from the Office of Decision Support at the University of South Florida, had



not responded to every question this study evaluated in the BCSSE survey. Although 99% of the summer and fall 2015 first time in college cohort participated in the BCSSE, only 89% of the students were included in this study. This unexpected limitation did not hinder the study, but should be mentioned.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study suggest incoming first time in college students' expectations prior to starting college may impact a student's ability to persist into the second year of college. The study found as students increase their expectations of socializing, their persistence into the second year of college actually decreases. This finding differs from Astin's (1993) view that student persistence is positively linked to involvement in academic and social activities. College staff and administrators should be aware that over-socializing can negatively impact student persistence. Providing a suggested kind of socializing for first time in college students in the first year may help guide students in making successful choices with their free time outside the classroom.

Another finding from this study found high school GPA has a positive relationship with persistence into the second year of college. This finding coincides with prior research suggesting high school curriculum and GPA are predictive of academic success in college (Adelman, 2006, Kuh et al., 2008, Sciarra, 2010, Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). High school GPA is also a predictor of re-enrollment in college (Eaton & Bean, 1995). Therefore, admission practitioners should continue giving high school GPA a heavier weight in the college admissions process.

Although expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities was found to have a lack of significant impact on persistence, practitioners should still provide planned activities for incoming freshman to assist with their engagement and integration into the college community. Self-perception of academic preparation and commitment to the institution also did not have a significant impact on persistence. Both of these opinions and feelings are determined prior to arriving at an institution so it may be difficult for a practitioner to affect these thoughts. It is still important for practitioners to understand a student's background in order to determine the best environment, support, and resources needed for the student to thrive in the college community.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Higher education is constantly evolving along with the students who enter into a university organization. Expectation is also an evolving belief that cannot be set by one definition. These moving pieces lead to a constant need for research on student expectations in higher education in relation to persistence and ultimately graduation.

Tinto (1993) recommended colleges and universities integrate students academically, socially, and intellectually within the culture of the institution. Tinto's Model of Student Departure eventually included three factors: social, academic, and external or environmental. This study focuses on student academics and expected socializing and involvement, but does not evaluate external or environmental factors. This is an area requiring future research as Tinto (1993) believes external or environmental factors which encompasses finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunity to transfer are also vital to student persistence.

Additionally, the research included in this study focuses on student expectations prior to attending college, but does not evaluate student's thoughts or feelings once they are actively taking classes and engaged on campus. Since expectations do not necessarily align with reality, it would be helpful to conduct a qualitative study focused on students after they have completed at least one semester on campus.

Tinto identified three major sources of student departure in his framework: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). This study defined successful persistence if a student enrolled in the second fall semester at the institution. Narrowing persistence to enrollment in the second year of college may include students who eventually leave the institution due to the inability to resolve an educational and/or occupational goal. Further evaluation of the fall 2015 cohort, possibly as far out as four years, could prove to be beneficial (this study specifically focused on first year persistence, but the researcher feels long-term persistence is important as well).

Based on the outcome found in Question Two, it is essential more time be spent understanding how expected socializing negatively impacts persistence into the second year of college. Astin (1993) found student persistence was positively linked to involvement in academic and social activities along with interaction with faculty and peers. Further research might help the institution identify at what point socializing may alter from a positive to a negative impact on student persistence. Future research could also focus on specific aspects of socializing in an attempt to identify healthy versus detrimental socialization activities affecting student

persistence. It would also be helpful to evaluate more first year student cohorts expected socializing to determine if there is a consistent pattern amongst various cohorts at USF.

## **Conclusion**

This quantitative study was conducted to better understand the correlation between academic preparation, co-curricular involvement, and social expectations of first time in college students along with their level of institutional commitment and whether or not a student persists into the second year of college at the University of South Florida. Previous research in the field has focused on student expectations and persistence, but no other research has focused on University of South Florida's unique first year student population. Tinto's Model of Student Departure served as the theoretical framework and combined with existing literature to guide this quantitative study.

This study found no significant relationship between expected involvement in organized campus co-curricular activities and persistence, self-perception of academic preparation and persistence, as well as a student's level of institutional commitment and persistence into the second year of college. The study did find a significant relationship between expected socializing and persistence and high school GPA and persistence into the second year of college.

The overall findings of this study contribute to the increased understanding of student expectations prior to arriving at college in relation to their persistence into the second year of college. As with many factors in the field of higher education, student expectations are ever changing. The findings from this study should be used to inform practice along with other relevant literature; however, it may be beneficial for this study to be re-evaluated in five years. As financial funding in higher education becomes more closely aligned with persistence and

graduation rates, it is crucial that institutions work to better understand and meet the expectations of their incoming first time in college students. Strategic planning, focused allocation of resources, and dedicated faculty and staff can positively increase student persistence leading to a positive impact on the campus community.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement Student Directions

Summer 2015

Study #0406000001R005

Dear new USF student:

As the Vice President for Student Affairs, it's important to me that you get the most out of your time at the University of South Florida. I know what USF has to offer you, but I really want to know what you think about your upcoming experiences here. Completing the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) will provide me and other administrators with information directly from our new students to help us improve our curriculum and general campus life.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This survey is conducted on behalf of your institution by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research; we will send your identified responses to your university for institutional assessment. No information associated with your name will ever be released publicly, but personally identifiable survey responses may be inspected by the University and government organizations when required by law. The survey asks for your USF student ID number and the first initial of your first and middle name, as well as your complete last name, which accompanies your survey responses. Your ID and name are requested so that your responses can be matched with USF records for three reasons: (1) assessing new student programs, (2) providing individualized information to your academic advisor, and (3) to invite you to complete a possible follow-up survey this next spring. By completing the survey you give USF permission to link your responses to your academic records, as well as to your responses to a possible follow-up survey.

For more information about the survey, email the Center for Postsecondary Research at [bcsse@indiana.edu](mailto:bcsse@indiana.edu) or call 812-856-5824. For information about the project on this campus or our interest in using the results, please contact Undergraduate Studies, SVC 2002, 813-974-2407, or [bombaugh@usf.edu](mailto:bombaugh@usf.edu). With questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research project, contact the Indiana University Office of Human Subjects Committee at 812-856-4242 or [iub\\_hsc@indiana.edu](mailto:iub_hsc@indiana.edu).

Sincerely,



Thomas Miller, Ed.D.  
Vice President, Student Affairs

IRB Study #: 0406000001R005 Study Approval Date: December 23, 2014 Study Expiration Date: December 22, 2016
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# Appendix B: Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement 2015 Instrument



## Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement

We are interested in your high school experiences and how often you expect to participate in certain activities during your first year of college. The information that you provide will help your institution improve teaching, learning and the quality of the student experience. Thanks for your help. Write or mark your answers in the boxes. Examples:  or

Please print your student ID number in the box below. Do **not** print your Social Security number.

Please write in the 5-digit ZIP code of your home during your last year of high school.

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 (U.S. residents only.)

When are you completing this survey? (Select only one.)

- Prior to the start of fall term classes  
 During the first week of fall term classes  
 After the first week of fall term classes

### HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

**1** Please write in the year you graduated from high school (for example, 2014):

--	--	--	--

**2** From which type of high school did you graduate? (Select only one.)

- Public  Home school  
 Private, religiously-affiliated  Other (e.g., G.E.D.)  
 Private, not religiously-affiliated

**3** What were most of your high school grades? (Select only one.)

- A  B  C  
 A-  B-  C- or lower  
 B+  C+  Grades not used

**4** To date, in which of the following math classes have you earned a grade of "C" or better? (Select all that apply.)

- Algebra II  
 Pre-Calculus/Trigonometry  
 Calculus  
 Probability or Statistics

**5** Did you take the SAT and/or ACT?

- Yes  No

If yes, please write your scores below (as best you remember):

SAT (possible range=200-800)	ACT (possible range=1-36)					
Critical Reading	Composite					
<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> </tr> </table>				<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> </tr> </table>		
Mathematical Reasoning						
<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td> </tr> </table>						
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**6** During high school, how many of the following types of classes did you complete?

Classes:	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11 or more
a. Advanced Placement (AP) classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. College or university courses for credit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**7** During your last year of high school, about how many papers, reports, or other writing tasks of the following length did you complete?

a. Up to 5 pages	None	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	More than 20 papers, etc.
b. Between 6 and 10 pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. 11 pages or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**8** During your last year of high school, about how many hours did you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, doing homework, etc.)	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
b. Working for pay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, school publications, student government, sports, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or videos, keeping up with friends online, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**9** During your last year of high school, of the time you spent preparing for class in a typical 7-day week, about how much was on assigned reading?

- Very little  Some  About half  Most  Almost all



**10** During your *last year* of high school, about how often did you do the following?

	Very often ▼	Often ▼	Some- times ▼	Never ▼
a. Came to class without completing readings or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Identified key information from reading assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Reviewed your notes after class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Summarized what you learned in class or from course materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**11** During your high school years, how involved were you in the following activities at your school or elsewhere?

	Very much ▼	Quite a bit ▼	Some ▼	Very little ▼	Not at all ▼
a. Performing or visual arts programs (band, chorus, theater, art, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Athletic teams (varsity, JV, club sport, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Student government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Publications (student newspaper, yearbook, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Academic clubs or honor societies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Vocational clubs (business, health, technology, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Religious youth groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Community service or volunteer work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**12** During your *last year* of high school, to what extent did your courses challenge you to do your best work?

Not at all ▼							Very much ▼
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**EXPECTED FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES**

**13** During the coming school year, about how many hours do you expect to spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
	Hours per week							
b. Working for pay on- or off-campus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
	Hours per week							
c. Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
	Hours per week							
d. Relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or videos, keeping up with friends online, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
	Hours per week							

**14** During the coming school year, of the time you expect to spend preparing for class in a typical 7-day week, about how many hours will be on assigned reading?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30	
Hours per week								

**15** During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following?

	Very often ▼	Often ▼	Some- times ▼	Never ▼
a. Ask another student to help you understand course material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Explain course material to one or more students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Prepare for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Work with other students on course projects or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Talk about career plans with a faculty member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Work with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**15 During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following? (Continued)**

	Very often	Often	Some-times	Never
	1	2	3	4
g. Discuss your academic performance with a faculty member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Discuss course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Come to class without completing readings or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**16 During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to have discussions with people from the following groups?**

	Very often	Often	Some-times	Never
	1	2	3	4
a. People of a race or ethnicity other than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. People from an economic background other than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. People with religious beliefs other than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. People with political views other than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**17 During the coming school year, how certain are you that you will do the following?**

	Not at all certain	1	2	3	4	5	6	Very certain
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
a. Study when there are other interesting things to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Find additional information for course assignments when you don't understand the material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Participate regularly in course discussions, even when you don't feel like it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Ask instructors for help when you struggle with course assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Finish something you have started when you encounter challenges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Stay positive, even when you do poorly on a test or assignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**18 During the coming school year, how difficult do you expect the following to be?**

	Not at all difficult	1	2	3	4	5	6	Very difficult
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
a. Learning course material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Managing your time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**18 During the coming school year, how difficult do you expect the following to be? (Continued)**

	Not at all difficult	1	2	3	4	5	6	Very difficult
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
c. Paying college expenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Getting help with school work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Making new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Interacting with faculty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**19 During the coming school year, about how many papers, reports, or other writing tasks of the following length do you expect to complete?**

a. Up to 5 pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	None	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	More than 20 papers, etc.	
b. Between 6 and 10 pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	None	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	More than 20 papers, etc.	
c. 11 pages or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	None	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	More than 20 papers, etc.	

**20 How prepared are you to do the following in your academic work at this institution?**

	Not at all prepared	1	2	3	4	5	6	Very prepared
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
a. Write clearly and effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Speak clearly and effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Think critically and analytically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Analyze numerical and statistical information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Work effectively with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Use computing and information technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Learn effectively on your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**21 How many courses are you taking for credit this fall term?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 or more	Uncertain	

**Of these courses, how many are entirely online?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 or more	Uncertain

**22 How important is it to you that your institution provide each of the following?**

	Not important					Very important
	1	2	3	4	5	
a. A challenging academic experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Support to help students succeed academically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Opportunities to interact with students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Help managing your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Opportunities to be involved socially	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Opportunities to attend campus activities and events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**23 Which of the following sources are you using to pay your education expenses (tuition, fees, books, room & board, etc.)?**

	Using	Not using	Not sure
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a. Support from parents or relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Loans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Grants or scholarships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Job or personal savings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**24 What do you expect most of your grades will be during the coming year? (Select only one.)**

- A       B       C  
 A-       B-       C- or lower  
 B+       C+       Grades not used

**25 Do you expect to graduate from this institution?**

Yes       No       Uncertain

**26 Do you know what your major will be?**

No  
 Yes, specify:

**27 Are you (or will you be) a full-time student this fall term?**

Yes       No

**28 How many of your close friends will attend this institution during the coming year?**

None     1     2     3     4 or more

**29 This institution was your:**

1st choice     2nd choice     3rd choice  
 4th choice     5th choice or lower

**30 What is your gender identity?**

- Man       Woman       I prefer not to respond  
 Another gender identity, please specify:

**31 Are you an international student or foreign national?**

Yes       No

**32 What is your racial or ethnic identification? (Select all that apply.)**

American Indian or Alaska Native  
 Asian  
 Black or African American  
 Hispanic or Latino  
 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  
 White  
 Other  
 I prefer not to respond

**33 What is the highest level of education completed by either of your parents (or those who raised you)?**

- Did not finish high school  
 High school diploma or G.E.D.  
 Attended college but did not complete degree  
 Associate's degree (A.A., A.S., etc.)  
 Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)  
 Master's degree (M.A., M.S., etc.)  
 Doctoral or professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)

**34 In driving time, about how far is this institution from the home where you lived during your last year of high school?**

- Less than 1 hour       At least 4, less than 6 hours  
 At least 1, less than 2 hours       At least 6, less than 8 hours  
 At least 2, less than 4 hours       8 hours or more

**35 Which of the following best describes where you will be (or are) living during the coming school year?**

- Dormitory or other campus housing  
 Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance to campus  
 Residence (house, apartment, etc.) farther than walking distance to campus  
 None of the above

**36 Enter your first two initials and last name:**

F. I.    M. I.    Last Name

**THANKS FOR SHARING YOUR RESPONSES!**

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## Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Exemption Letter



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

6/27/2017

Ashley Dees,  
Undergraduate Studies  
2801 W Wallace Ave  
Tampa, FL 33611

RE: **Not Human Subjects Research Determination**

IRB#: Pro00030839

Title: The Relationship of First Year Student Expectations and Persistence into the Second Year of College

Dear Ms. Dees:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application. The activities presented in the application involve methods of program evaluation, quality improvement, and/or needs analysis. While potentially informative to others outside of the university community, study results would not appear to contribute to generalizable knowledge. As such, the activities do not meet the definition of research under USF IRB policy, and USF IRB approval and oversight are therefore not required.

While not requiring USF IRB approval and oversight, your study activities should be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of your profession. If the scope of your project changes in the future, please contact the IRB for further guidance.

If you will be obtaining consent to conduct your study activities, please remove any references to "research" and do not include the assigned Protocol Number or USF IRB contact information.

If your study activities involve collection or use of health information, please note that there may be requirements under the HIPAA Privacy Rule that apply. For further information, please contact a HIPAA Program administrator at (813) 974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristen Salomon", written over a horizontal line.

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ashley Dees received a Bachelor of Science in Marketing and Multinational Business and a Bachelor of Science in Finance from Florida State University in 2008. After briefly working in a corporate position, Ashley returned to Florida State University and went on to earn a Master of Science in Higher Education in 2011.

Ashley has nine years of administrative, faculty, and student affairs experience including working in Career Services at Florida State University and LIM College as well as academic advising at the University of South Florida. Presently, Ashley is an Academic Advocate serving first year students in Undergraduate Studies at the University of South Florida. In the fall semesters, Ashley instructs a first year Academic Foundations Udecide course specifically for students who are undecided on their major and need more time to declare one.