

DISSERTATION

THE IMPACT OF A FRESHMAN SEMINAR ON THE SUCCESS OF FIRST TERM  
STUDENTS AT A FOR-PROFIT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION

Submitted by

Miguelita M. Beckwith

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Colorado State University

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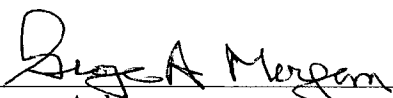
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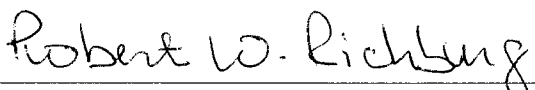
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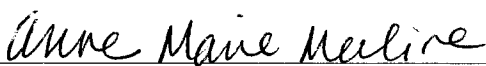
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY MIGUELITA M. BECK WITH ENTITLED THE IMPACT OF A FRESHMAN SEMINAR ON THE SUCCESS OF FIRST TERM STUDENTS AT A FOR-PROFIT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

Committee on Graduate Work

  
George A. Morgan

  
Robert Richburg

  
Anne Marie Merline

  
Advisor – William Timpson

  
Department Head/Director

## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### THE IMPACT OF A FRESHMAN SEMINAR ON THE SUCCESS OF FIRST TERM STUDENTS AT A FOR-PROFIT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION

The purpose of this study was to compare the differences between two freshman seminar courses at a for-profit postsecondary institution. One course was a standard freshman seminar course, and the second course included an advisement component. There were three independent variables for this study. The first independent variable was treatment group, the students who took the standard freshman seminar course and the students who took the course with the advisement component added to it. The second and third independent variables respectively were, ethnicity and gender. The dependent variables were first semester grade point averages and first-to-second semester retention. In addition, the researcher was interested in the students' perceived differences between the two seminar courses and also whether or not having the instructor as an advisor made a difference in their first semester. Therefore, this study included a qualitative analysis. Since the researcher conducted this study after the time period, this study is considered an ex post facto study.

Using a three-way ANOVA and chi-square statistical tests, the researcher found no statistically significant differences in the students' retention. Both groups of students had very similar retention, however, the findings on ethnicity and gender revealed that the African Americans and females were more likely to re-enroll for the second semester. Analysis on grade point averages found statistically significant differences between the

two groups of students. The students who took the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course had slightly higher grade point averages. In addition, the female students had better grade point averages than the males. The results on ethnicity found statistically significant differences between the three ethnic groups, with the African Americans having the lowest GPAs. However, it appeared that they benefited more from taking the freshman seminar course because they had higher retention.

The researcher collected feedback from students who took the standard freshman seminar course and the students who took the advisement enhanced course. Responses to mailed open-ended surveys and a focus group interview were mixed. The students felt that the professors were great, but often did not know their professors were their advisors.

Miguelita M. Beckwith  
School of Education  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, CO 80523  
Spring 2006

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (1999) reports, “The first year is the most crucial period in student retention; more than half the students who drop out of college do so in their first year” (p. 9). Of the nearly 2.4 million students who entered higher education for the first time in 1993, over 1.5 million will leave their first institution without receiving a degree (Tinto, 1993). The American College Testing Program reports that the most recent attrition rates for first-year college students are 26.7% for four-year institutions to 44.6% for two-year institutions (ACT, 2002). Very similar rates were reported nearly ten years earlier with attrition rates for first-year students being 26.8% at four-year institutions and 44% at two-year institutions. (ACT, 1992).

The Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (NCES, 2001) of the 1995-96 entering freshmen yields data that supports the claim of the first year being the most crucial in student retention. Fifty percent of the beginning students completed a degree or certificate within five years while thirty-seven percent of all beginning students had not completed any degree and were no longer enrolled after five years. Thirteen percent of all beginning students were enrolled after five years yet had not completed a degree. American colleges and universities have been experiencing such high attrition rates of first-year college students since the mid-1970s.

Student departure from higher education in their first year has consequences for both the individual and the institution (Tinto, 1993). The consequence for students dropping out of colleges may be largely economical. Statistics reveal that the salaries of students who complete college are much different from those of students who do not complete college. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2001) compares the difference between the salaries of college graduates and students who do not complete college. For those who complete college and graduate, the 1999 average salary range is \$52,985 for men and \$41,747 for women. This is much unlike the salary of \$39,221 for men who do complete college and \$27,757 for women non-completers. There is a dramatic, almost \$14,000 difference between the college graduates and non-graduates.

High attrition rates affect not only students. They can also have devastating effects on the survival of colleges and universities in the United States. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2001), the United States has 4,000 colleges and universities. This number represents 1,700 two-year public and private institutions and 2,300 four-year public and private institutions. Since the freshman class makes up approximately one-third to one-fourth of the total enrollment of a college, the retention of the first-term students can be crucial to the survival of the institution. In many cases, institutions have had to reduce some of their programs and/or activities due to the loss of revenue. For the institutions that experience high first-year student attrition, the loss of students equates to loss of revenue. Considering the statistic that approximately 1.5 million entering first-year students fail to return to school for the second year, the reality of the amount of lost revenue alone can be staggering (Tinto, 1993).

Many institutions, both public and private, have had to close as a result of either a lack of new student enrollment or the lack of students returning to the institutions. NCES (2002) figures show that from 1960 to 2001 approximately 540 institutions have closed due to the lack of enrollment. For colleges and universities to survive financially, they must strive to retain those students who enroll. Bean (1986) states that there is direct relationship between student enrollment and an institution's income. He states the obvious, "Without students, there is no institution" (p.47). In addition to economical reasons for institutions to retain students, Bean argues that it is unethical for an institution to admit students for the "benefit of the institution and not for the good of the student" (1986, p.47). A high attrition rate shows a failure on the part of the institution to select or to socialize students to the academic and social environments of the college or university.

### **DeVry Georgia's Attrition Problem**

DeVry Georgia has been battling the problem of high freshman attrition rates for the last ten or more years. Approximately 30 to 35% of DeVry Georgia's new students either fail to complete the first semester or fail to return for the second semester. Since DeVry Georgia is a for-profit institution, the impact of the first-year students attrition can be huge. Continued high rates of new student attrition result in a loss of revenue for both the branch campuses and the university as a whole. While DeVry Georgia systemically monitors the attrition rate of its entire student body, it is consistently with the first semester students that the highest attrition rate exists.

DeVry Georgia is one of the twenty-six campuses of DeVry University System. Originally DeVry Georgia consisted of one campus, and this was the Decatur campus. In

spring 1997, DeVry Georgia added the Alpharetta campus. While a large part of DeVry University's uniqueness is its for-profit status, it is part of approximately 2,500 other for-profit American postsecondary institutions. According to IPEDS (2003), the number of for-profit schools represents 47% of the postsecondary institutions in the United States. DeVry University shares the problem of high new student attrition with the majority of all colleges and universities of higher learning.

### **DeVry Georgia's Retention Efforts**

According to Tinto (1993), first-year students have the highest attrition rates in colleges and universities. The first year of college is extremely important in the academic achievement and retention process for students and institutions (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto and Goodsell, "For institutions, the freshman year is a period during which programs can have the greatest impact on subsequent student development and persistence" (1993, p.8). Levitz and Noel (1989) stated, "fostering student success in the freshman year is the most significant intervention an institution can make in the name of student persistence" (p.65). In an effort to reduce the high freshman dropout rate, many institutions have been expending a great deal of energy developing various retention programs. Similarly, DeVry Georgia has done the same.

Under the leadership of former presidents, as well as the current president, DeVry Georgia created and implemented several freshman year retention efforts. These efforts were put under the umbrella of one major program called the "First Year Initiative." DeVry Georgia's First Year Initiative program began in 1997. Using members of the

staff and a select group of faculty, a student advisement program, based in the Student Affairs Department was created. While this initiative was felt to be effective, DeVry Georgia's First Year Initiative program faded away around Fall 1999. This, however, was not the end of DeVry Georgia's retention efforts; in Fall 2001, the First Year Initiative was rejuvenated.

In Fall 2001, the First Year Initiative (FYI) program was revitalized and reintroduced on both the Decatur and Alpharetta campuses. Two major events helped to shape the new and improved program. One event was the implementation of Learning Communities for the first semester students. The second event was the emphasis placed on the importance of the freshman seminar class, Coll, with it serving as the hub for the learning communities. In addition, the advisement program that was once based in Student Affairs found its new base in Academics as part of the Coll class. Adding the advisement component to the Coll class was a new and dramatic phenomenon at DeVry Georgia. Now the faculty became major factors in the success of the first semester students.

Academic advising is another important component of a successful first-year retention program. Beal and Noel's (1980) research found that new students who utilize academic advising services persist at higher rates than students who do not use the services. Through academic advising, faculty can help new students to understand academic responsibilities and expectations in the college classroom and within the academic community from the very beginning of the college experience. Thomas (1990) found that the quality of academic advising is a primary and positive retention factor.

A brief overview of DeVry Georgia's Learning Community will place the Coll class, DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar course, in its proper context in the retention process before launching a more in-depth examination of the retention efforts at DeVry Georgia.

### ***DeVry Georgia's Learning Communities***

DeVry Georgia used an already existing block scheduling system to create learning communities. DeVry Georgia campuses had been using the block scheduling for years. Daytime first semester students were scheduled based on their programs. Each major had a set number of courses that would be taken together in the first semester. For students in the business programs, these courses included Coll, math, English, an introductory computer, and a fundamental business course. For students in the electronic programs, the courses were Coll, technical math, English, an introductory computer course, and a fundamental electronics course.

Block scheduling - in itself - created the foundation of learning communities among the students. The learning communities centered around a project that was part of one of the first semester courses. For the business students, the project was part of the fundamental business course. The electronics students project was part of their fundamental electronics course. These projects involved all the other first semester courses by linking the lessons and activities in all the courses. This linking of courses was to benefit the new students and the professors.

The students began to develop relationships both in and outside of the classes. Working on class assignments was carried beyond the walls of the building. Students

regularly worked outside of class on assignments and major projects. Personally, they looked after each other and formed strong bonds. If a student was having a problem, the group members would try to help their classmate.

The learning communities did not stop with the new students; the learning communities also impacted the professors. The first semester professors formed communities as well. Scheduling also blocked out a common time for the professors. This common time appeared to be most helpful for the first-semester professors. With the Coll class serving as the hub of the courses, participating professors met weekly to discuss ways to connect lessons and students. They developed lesson plans and schedules of weekly activities that connected to the final project. They served as evaluators for the project presentations at the end of the term. The professors also spent time discussing student concerns and issues. The major concern of the professors was the academic and personal progress of the students. The information derived from these discussions – both formal and informal – evolved into efforts to assist students who were encountering academic and related difficulties with school. The learning communities allowed professors to learn more about their students, each other, and their discipline as well.

The learning communities were felt to be successful at DeVry Georgia campuses. Students were beginning to build relationships that extended beyond the classrooms. They knew that their professors were working as a team. Instructors were working together and building relationships beyond their disciplines. However, beginning with the Spring 04 term, the learning communities were discontinued. Even though the

learning communities have been discontinued, DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar, Coll149, still remains since it is a graduation requirement for first-term students.

### ***DeVry Georgia's Freshman Seminar***

DeVry University Georgia's version of the freshman seminar is a three-credit course entitled Coll149, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving. Coll149 course was first offered at the DeVry Georgia campuses in Fall 2000. This course was not new to DeVry University and had been around for a couple of years; however, the Georgia campuses began offering it when the First Year Initiative Program was reactivated. A major change that DeVry Georgia made to Coll class in Fall 2001 was that the instructors would also serve as academic advisors for their students. As advisors, the Coll instructors would be responsible for helping students in both academic and personal matters. They would help students with understanding their programs, registering for the second semester, solving financial aid problems, housing, and any other problems the students were encountering in their first semester. Many of these advising activities occurred outside of the classroom. The desired outcomes for this course were to help the new students be successful in their first semester and re-enroll for the second semester.

The advisement enhanced Coll class seemed to be making a difference in better grade point averages and the retention of the DeVry Georgia's first term students. Data began to show DeVry Georgia's improvement in first-semester retention and grades. DeVry Georgia's overall first-semester attrition decreased from 35% attrition each semester to about 28 % attrition each semester. While the retention data for the new students showed improvement, the question was whether or not this improvement was a

result of modified Coll class. However, no official study was conducted at that time to answer the question.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar course, Coll149 with the advisement component. Specifically, the researcher's intent was to compare the effect of the advisement enhanced Coll class on the academic success and retention of first semester students at DeVry Georgia's campuses. Since studies have shown that the highest rate of attrition for the freshman student takes place during the first semester, DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar was designed to be a major factor in helping new students attain higher grade point averages and return to school after the first semester. This examination will lead to recommendations for the most effective means of maintaining a higher percentage of the student population from freshman year to graduation year. The purpose of this study lead to the research questions below:

### **Research Questions**

1. Are there interactions among treatment group, gender, and ethnicity in regard to grade point average?
2. Is there a difference between students who took the standard Coll class and the students who took the advisement enhanced Coll class in regard to their grade point average?

3. Is there a difference between African Americans, Caucasians, and “other ethnicities” in regard to their grade point average?
4. Is there a difference between male and female students in regard to their grade point average?
5. Is there a difference between students who took the standard Coll class and the students who took the advisement enhanced Coll class in regard to their retention?
6. Is there a difference between African Americans, Caucasians, and “other ethnicities” in regard to their retention?
7. Is there a difference between male and female students in regard to their retention?
8. What factors do students self-report that contribute to their academic success (GPAs) in the first semester?
9. What factors do students self-report that contribute to their retention in the first semester?

### **Methodology**

A mixed study was utilized to answer the research questions outlined in this chapter. Because the research questions in this study were designed to answer the question of *what were* the grade point averages of DeVry Georgia’s first semester students, *how many* first semester students re-enrolled for the second semester, and *what* factors did these students feel contribute to their academic success and re-enrollment for the semester, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used for this study.

Patton (1990) states “Quantitative and qualitative methods involve differing strengths and weakness and constitute alternative, but not mutually exclusive, strategies for the research. Both can therefore be used in the same study” (p. 14).

The quantitative methodology was a post-test only three-way ANOVA between groups with alternative treatment design. The three independent variables were the treatment group, ethnicity, and gender. The dependent variables were grade point averages and first-to-second semester retention. The qualitative methodology for this study was a phenomenological design and consisted of a mailed open-ended survey followed by a focus group interview.

### **Significance of the Study**

While many studies have been conducted on first year student retention and student advisement, the review of literature reveals a lack of research on student advising when it is incorporated into the freshman seminar course with the instructor serving as the advisor. First, this study will provide information to the body of knowledge in higher education regarding this missing element in the study of first year student retention. In its annual survey, the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience (2002) revealed that only 34% of the colleges combined advising with their freshman seminar course with the instructor serving as the students’ advisor. While there appears to be more colleges and universities combining the freshman seminar with advisement, there is a lack of studies to show the impact of such a combination.

The second benefit to be gained by conducting this study is providing first year student retention information on for-profit institutions. The review of literature also

reveals a lack of studies conducted on, for, and by for-profit institutions. By conducting this study at a for-profit institution, another piece of the student departure puzzle will be added to the body of knowledge on retention. Since DeVry Georgia is a for-profit organization, the third intent of this study is to provide its administrators, faculty and other interested parties information as to whether or not the advisement enhanced Coll149 is making a difference in the academic success and retention of its new students.

### **Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms will be used as follows:

Advisor: The Coll professor is also the advisor for new students.

Advisement enhanced Coll Class: The freshman seminar course with the added advisement component.

Coll149: DeVry's freshman seminar course. The title of the course is Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving. In this study, the names Coll149 and Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving class may be used interchangeably.

First-term Student: A student who enrolls at DeVry Georgia for the first time.

First Year Initiative (FYI): DeVry Georgia's student retention program designed specifically for the institution's freshman students.

First-Year Student: A student enrolled at DeVry for the first three semesters.

Freshman: Term is the same as a first-year student and is interchangeable with "first-term student."

Interrupt: A student who no longer attends DeVry University. The student may have

voluntarily stopped attending or may have been dismissed by the institution.

Learning Communities: The linking of the first-term core classes by scheduling of a block of courses and new students in common groups.

New Student: Another term used for a first-term student. It usually indicates that the student is attending DeVry for the first time. Term may be interchanged with the term “first-time student.”

Proprietary Institution: A for-profit institution.

Readmit/Resume Student: A student who stopped attending DeVry, but is returning after being out of school for at least a year.

Standard COLL Class: The traditional freshman seminar course without the advisement component. This class is the Critical Thinking and Problem Solving course. Instruction is the only focus of this course.

STOR110 : DeVry Georgia’s earlier freshman seminar course. STOR is an acronym for **S**tudent **O**rientation.

### **Delimitations**

The goal of this study is to generalize the results to other colleges and universities that combine advising with their freshman seminar since more colleges and universities have begun this practice. However, since DeVry Georgia is a for-profit institution and serves a somewhat different population, one problem may be the ability to generalize the results to public colleges and universities. In addition, due to DeVry Georgia’s demographics of approximately 55% African Americans, generalizations may be difficult to make for most colleges and universities.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the design itself since it was an ex post facto study. A weakness of ex post facto design is the lack of control that the researcher has in manipulating the independent variable or variables or to randomly assign subjects to treatment or control groups (Cohen & Mansion, 1989; Gay, 1996).

### **Researcher's Perspective**

For the last eleven years I have worked with first-year students. As one of the Associate Deans of First Year Initiative, I worked directly with first year students at DeVry Georgia, specifically, Decatur. I have seen and personally assisted new students in handling the many challenges they face as newcomers to our institution. As a result, I feel very strongly that an institution needs to have some type of program or initiative in place to help its first semester students. It is my personal belief that DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar course with the added advisement component was a major factor in helping our new students have a good beginning at our institution.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

This literature review will focus on the following areas: 1) past freshman students and problems; 2) enrollment and attrition data; 3) theories on student departure; 4) past and present freshman seminars; 5) effectiveness of freshman seminars; and 6) DeVry Georgia's attrition problem and efforts.

### **Past Freshman Students and Problems**

It might appear that today's freshman students are the first to experience problems transitioning to college; however, an analysis of the past shows this to be untrue. From the very beginnings of formal post-secondary education, history reveals that past freshman students faced a wide range of problems. These problems included leaving their homes, finding a place to live, having little or no money, being treated as outsiders, enduring harsh treatment, and integrating into a new academic and social environment. Today's freshmen face many of the same problems of transition that past freshmen faced hundreds of years ago.

The first notion of freshmen occurred in the twelfth century in Bologna, Italy. During that time, young Italian men from surrounding cities entered the University of Bologna in the search of knowledge. It was here where the troubles and challenges began for first-year students. Even though they were part of the University, new students were

treated like outsiders by the upperclassmen and even, at times, by the faculty. New students had no rights whatsoever, and they had to do what they were told. They were at the mercy of the institution and the landlords of the dwellings where they stayed. However, at some point the new students managed to pull together as a collective group and were successful in gaining concessions from their landlords, the merchants, city officials, and the institution. Life began to change for the new students. They began to take charge of their lives by electing professors, setting the professors' contracts, and regulating the lectures and examinations (Morrison, 1936).

At the same time that young men were enrolling at the University of Bologna, some men were also enrolling at the University of Paris in France. These young Parisians faced some of the same problems. Between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, they would go to the nearest towns that had universities. Like the young Italians, the French students' first challenge was to find a place to stay. Typically they found places where other freshmen were staying. These places were often run by a member of the university, a recent graduate, a student, or maybe a master and his family. In most cases, these places were informal boarding houses referred to as "halls." With lodging settled, the freshmen were ready to select a curriculum for study and a Master of Arts for instruction. Rather than having different teachers, freshmen had one, a Master of Arts. The curriculum usually consisted of grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry, astronomy, arithmetic, music, metaphysics, ethics, and natural science (Dwyer, 1989).

Having both lodging settled and a curriculum and professor selected, the real problems of being a freshman began. These young men had to become members of a society of scholars. However, membership came at a cost. That cost was reflected in the

form of harsh treatment, even mistreatment at times, and was probably more detrimental to them than their lack of money. Older students tormented the freshmen before and after they gained membership into the institution's societies. During these times hazing was also a widespread practice. After being received into this society of scholars, new students still faced discrimination, humiliation, and even pain. Along with paying physically and emotionally, there was also a monetary price the new students had to pay in order to gain membership. They even had to pay for their own celebration feast once they were accepted. As a result of this requirement, the new students needed even more money and frequently wrote home to their parents requesting financial assistance (Dwyer, 1989).

When higher education began in America in the early 1600s, there were only nine colleges and universities. These schools were Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, William and Mary, Columbia, Pennsylvania, Dartmouth, and Rutgers. The first American class of freshmen began at Harvard University in 1638. There were many similarities between the experiences of the American freshmen and their earlier European counterparts. Lodging, lack of money, and harsh treatment were common to both the American students and the European students (Dwyer, 1989).

Like the European freshmen, the matter of lodging presented the first problem for American college students. These young men came from various locations throughout the United States. They, too, found lodging in the homes of members of the particular colleges' professors, graduate students, and even the headmasters. Lacking money to pay for other housing, the new students were often at the mercy of their landlords (Dwyer, 1989).

Since the nine colleges and universities were the first institutions of higher education in America, freshmen were the only students initially enrolled. At the beginning, there were no sophomores or upperclassmen to harass them. Accordingly, one would expect that the American freshmen would have had an easier time than their earlier European counterparts. Yet, these students faced harsh treatment. Even at the prestigious Harvard University the school's headmaster, Nathan Eaton, himself, was directly responsible for the mistreatment of many new students by often beating them severely when they lagged behind in their academics. His wife and servants were also guilty of making the domestic lives of new students difficult. Eventually in 1640, Harvard's headmaster and his wife were dismissed for the mistreatment of students. This firing led to the school getting its first "real" president, Henry Dunster, who came from England (Dwyer, 1989).

President Dunster became a leader in creating a better life for freshman students at Harvard. Recognizing the need to help the new students, he began finding ways of helping them make the transition to college. Under President Dunster's leadership, Harvard University took the lead in developing many practices to assist new students, some of which are being used today. For example, Harvard University is believed to be the first higher education institution to recognize that many students were academically under-prepared and often suffered from distraction. As a result, Dunster developed a system of faculty counselors who also tutored the new students. He also created the first work-study program that allowed students to work in exchange for reduced tuition (Dwyer, 1989).

Later in 1655, Harvard's second president continued the work Henry Dunster started by increasing the entrance requirements for new students. Under his leadership, prospective students had to pass an oral defense to gain admission into the school. In addition to Harvard, King's College (Columbia) recognized similar problems with their students. King's College's president also acknowledged that its students were not academically prepared for their studies and established a grammar school (Dwyer, 1989).

In 1735, with more students now attending colleges and universities in the United States, other institutions including upperclassmen were guilty of mistreating freshman students. Brown University was also guilty of conduct similar to Harvard University. New students at Brown University found themselves experiencing many hardships. For example, new students were not allowed to use the library. They had to run errands, clean the rooms, build fires, and be the brunt of various forms of hazing. Hazing during these times is very similar to the hazing that takes place on college campuses today and can be defined as "extracting humiliating performances from or playing rough practical jokes upon" (Webster's, 1990, p. 772).

Again with Harvard taking the lead, faculty began to get more involved with students. Faculty members started to spend time outside of class with students, often in informal gatherings. These gatherings helped to reduce some of the barriers that existed in the classroom. These informal gatherings were actually considered to be one of Harvard's greatest improvements (Morrison, 1936). Prior to this, the faculty's main contact with students was in the classroom, and it was a formal student-teacher relationship. Around 1770, Harvard's faculty also began to take a collective interest in the new students as a class. They were successful in helping the new students experience

a better college life. They were able to reduce the enforcement of “The College Customs” which was a document of freshman servitude (Dwyer, 1989). This document gave the school’s headmaster and faculty the power to control the freshman students. All freshmen had to abide by this document.

Faculty members were also successful in reducing the length of time new students had to endure harsh treatment by reducing the experience from the entire term to just the first week of the fall term. This period of time was known as “Freshman Week” or “Hell Week.” This was later reduced to a one-day event called “Bloody Monday.” Eventually, both events were abolished as a result of a group of Harvard sophomores taking the harassments a little too far. Another improvement made by Harvard’s faculty was the creation of the Board of Freshman Advisors in 1889. These advisors provided orientation, advisement, counseling, and coordination of social events for the new students (Dwyer, 1989).

The nineteenth century was a period of change in higher education in the United States. As a result of the growth and improvement of secondary education, there was an increase of the number of students enrolling in colleges, giving institutions the ability to be more selective in the students they admitted. Academic standards were raised. Along with the increase in student enrollment, the number of colleges and universities also increased. Up to this point, college had been strictly for men. However, women were beginning to enroll in college founded by and for women. The first colleges for women were founded and were known as “the Seven Sisters.” They were Mount Holyoke (1837), Vassar (1865), Wellesley (1875), Smith College (1875), Radcliffe (1879),

Barnard (1889), and Bryn Mawr (1885). The first co-educational institution, Oberlin, was founded in Ohio in 1837 (Dwyer, 1989).

The curriculum for American colleges and universities was originally designed to prepare men for the ministries. With women and a more diverse student population now attending colleges, the college curriculum needed to change to meet their needs. Another impetus for curriculum change was the need for a workforce to support the industrialization of the United States. Young men and women needed to be trained to become workers in businesses and industry (Dwyer, 1989).

In the twentieth century, first-year students began to experience better times in American colleges and universities. Institutional leaders and faculty both began to take more interest in the first-year students. Tutors were often provided to help those in academic need. Work-study programs provided some income for the new students. Books focusing on helping new students adjust to college were written. Institutions began creating orientation courses. Initially, in 1911-1912 only two institutions offered orientation courses. However, these courses experienced rapid growth after World War I. From 1925-1926, the number of institutions offering orientation courses grew to eighty-two. Different courses focused on different types of problems. Topics included adjustment to college, study skills, current events, women's issues, and career counseling (Fitts and Swift, 1928). Some orientation courses focused on general adjustment problems while others focused on study skills. Nevertheless, these orientation courses were the precursors to the current freshman seminar courses of today (Dwyer, 1989).

Other institutions began following Harvard's lead in finding ways to help first-year students. The University of Michigan's upperclassmen began taking interest in the

well being of the new students and even wrote a book of advice for them. They advised the new students on excessive familiarity, gambling and dating as well as not knowing the campus traditions. Freshmen students were urged to balance their time, read the newspaper, get to know their instructors, study hard, and attend church. These upperclassmen wrote, “Be a good Christian; be a hard worker; and for this first year, be, for the most part, a good listener. These are the cardinal virtues of a Michigan freshman” (Crocker, 1921, p1.).

Overall, new students appeared to be gaining acceptance at American colleges and universities. However, twentieth century freshmen began to face some of the same problems new students faced in earlier years, i.e., they were being treated like outsiders by upperclassmen. Returning students at colleges and universities began the practice of social exclusivity at places like Princeton, Yale, and even Harvard. Various exclusive clubs or societies were formed and only special groups of students were permitted to be members. The new students at American colleges and universities were again treated like outsiders (Dwyer, 1989). On the other hand, fraternity rushing created a “good” problem for freshman students. Many fraternities competed aggressively in attracting new students. They went to great lengths to recruit new students. Groups from Cornell University’s fraternities even went to meet new students at the train station to extend invitations for membership (Dwyer, 1989).

During the 1920s and 1930s greater emphasis was placed on first-year students. These years saw the beginning of extensive research conducted by educators on the many problems experienced by new students. These problems included curriculum adjustment, the influence of older students, time and money management, student activities, and the

difficulties of transitioning from home to college (Doormann, 1926). For example, the University of Chicago undertook a major study analyzing its 200 freshmen and identified 5,959 specific problems experienced by its freshman students (Emme, 1933). The results of this study suggested solutions in two major areas -- careful counseling and structured orientation courses (Dwyer, 1989). By the mid-1930s, another major university, Yale, began grouping the freshmen into smaller groups and assigning a faculty counselor to each group. This was not new to higher education inasmuch as Harvard had already begun this practice in 1889. A counselor's primary role was to advise students on curriculum. Counselors soon took in on other roles such as surrogate parents, mentors, taskmasters, or inspiring teachers (Duffus, 1936).

When comparing past first year students and their problems to today's first year students, both differences and similarities are found. One difference is that today's freshmen are a more diverse group of students. Currently, college and university enrollment has more women and minorities including African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. Another difference in today's college student is that the average age of students attending college has increased. The average age of today's college student is 25-26 years old. Another notable difference is the fact that there are more part-time students enrolled in colleges today than before (Levine, 1989).

Some of the similarities twentieth century freshmen share with their earlier counterparts are the challenges of needing money, strong academic skills, and the skills to adjust to college. The matter of money still remains a major concern for new students. The majority of college students can only attend schools with the assistance of financial

aid. Even with financial assistance, many students have to work part-or full-time in order to pay for necessities.

Like earlier first-year students, many of today's new students lack strong academic skills and therefore are not academically prepared for the demands of college. Their lack of preparedness is evidenced by the number of institutions that offer developmental studies programs. While a movement to eliminate developmental studies in American colleges and universities has been underway, many institutions are continuing to offer remedial courses. A report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2000) states that more than a third of students at two-year and four-year colleges spent an average of a year in remedial courses, and those who did spend more time in those courses in 2000 than they did in 1995. The report goes on to say that more than 40 percent of entering freshmen at two-year colleges, and about a quarter of entering freshmen at four-year institutions enrolled in at least one remedial course in fall 2000. To help freshman students meet the academic demands, many colleges and universities also offer tutorial services. Offering tutorial services to new students was one of the first things earlier colleges did to help their students.

Students who are not enrolled in intervention programs also face challenges in achieving high GPAs during their first semesters. Students typically find that earning grades in colleges is different than earning grades in high school (Levine, 1989). While students may have earned all As and Bs in high school, they find it difficult to make these same grades in college. Often times this can be disturbing to new students.

Today's first-year students still face the challenge of a successful adjustment to college. The college experience requires that new students make the transition to college

and adjust both academically and socially. With the first semester course load, new students must learn to adapt to each course and professor. They must also learn to handle the rigors of college by developing good study habits and time management skills. New students need to adjust to college and become members of the collegiate community. They need to separate themselves from what they are used to and become members of a new environment. This can be difficult for students just out of high school as well as those who have left home for the first time.

While earlier studies beginning in the 1940s focused on finding out what types of problems freshmen were experiencing, later studies in the mid-1970s focused on learning about why so many first-year students left college so soon. As a result of the studies on student attrition, many theories were developed as means of trying to explain causes of such early student departure from colleges and universities. However, before looking at theories on why students leave, this section of the literature review will focus on enrollment and attrition data for colleges and universities in the United States.

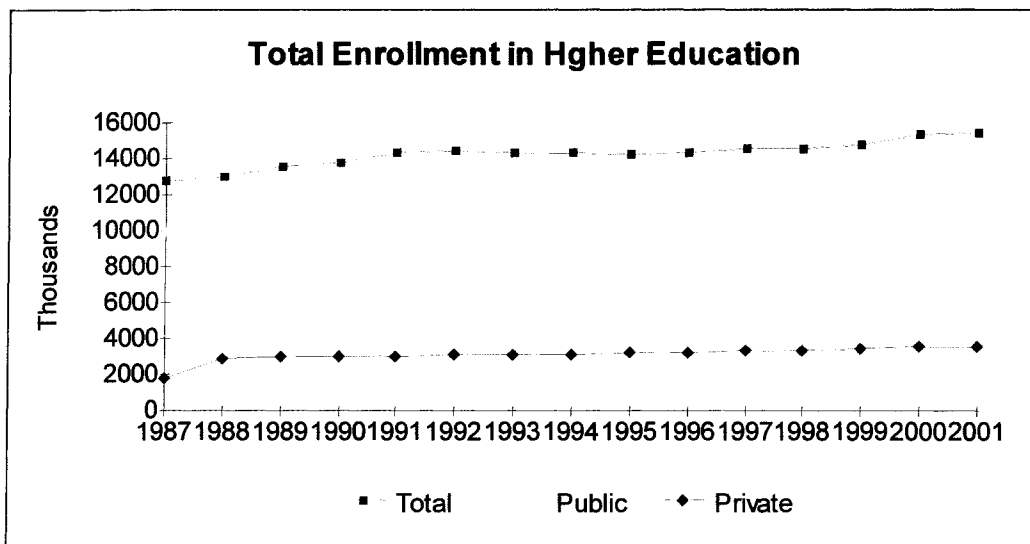
### **Enrollment and Attrition Rates**

This section of the literature review will examine data and trends in enrollment for colleges and universities on the national and state level. Next, national and state first-year student retention rates will be examined. Since DeVry University is located in the state of Georgia, looking at the state's first-year student data will help to see where DeVry Georgia stands in relation to the state. Last, DeVry Decatur's first-year student enrollment and retention data will be reviewed.

### ***National Enrollment Data in Higher Education***

Total enrollment in higher education in the early part of the 1980s began with a slight decrease. Total enrollment includes undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degree-granting institutions. In 1983, total college and university enrollment was 12.46 million. Enrollment decreased to 12.24 million students for the years 1984 and 1985. However, the later part of the 1980s experienced an increase to 13.01 million in 1988, and 13.54 million in 1989 (NCES, 2001).

Total enrollment in higher education in 1990 was 13.82 million. Again in 1991, enrollment increased even more to 14.49 million. While 1991 and 1992 experienced an increase in enrollment, the years 1993, 1994, and 1995 experienced a slight decrease in enrollments of 14.31 million, 14.28 million, and 14.26 million respectively (NCES, 2001) (see Figure 1). Similar to the 1980s, the largest decrease in enrollment occurred in 1995 as in 1985. Also, similar to the later 1980s, total higher education enrollment increased steadily in the 1990s and into the 2000s.



*Figure 1. Total enrollment in all institutions of higher education in the United States. From U. S. Department of Education. National Center for Educational Statistics. Projections of Education Statistics to 2011.*

Both public and private colleges and universities' total enrollment remained almost constant averaging around 11.13 million before peaking at 11.31 million in 1991. Private colleges and universities' enrollment reached 3 million in 1991 and remained constant until 1996 when enrollment reached 3.25 million. By 1997, private colleges and universities' enrollment was 3.31 million and reached 3.49 million in 1999.

Undergraduate enrollment experienced an increase during the 1970s. However, enrollment decreased slightly between 1983 and 1985. Afterwards, enrollment in undergraduate colleges and universities increased annually between 1985 and 1992, and then experienced another slight decrease followed by an increase and stabilization between 1993 and 1998.

From the 1970s to the 1990s much of the increase in college and university enrollment was the result of the increase of the number of minority students. In 1999, the number of minority students was 28 percent compared to 16 percent in 1976. The majority of this increase can be attributed to more Asian and Hispanic students enrolling in colleges and universities. Another reason for the increase in college enrollment in this time period is that more women entered college, especially between the years 1999 and 2000. The number of women during this time increased from 7.5 million to 8.6 million in 2000. The proportion of African American students fluctuated during this period before slightly increasing to 11 percent in 1999 (NCES, 2001).

### ***National Freshmen Enrollment***

Freshmen enrollment in the 1980s in American colleges and universities began with a slight decrease from 2.5 million freshmen in 1982 to 2.4 million in 1983. Freshmen enrollment on the national level continued to decrease in the years 1984, 1985,

and 1986. However, enrollment climbed to 2.2 million in 1987, 2.3 million in 1988, and 1989. In 1990, freshmen enrollment was similar to 1989s freshmen with an enrollment of 2.2 million students. In 1993, freshmen enrollment dipped to 2.1 million and continued at the same enrollment numbers throughout the remaining of the 1990s (NCES, 2000).

***National Freshmen Attrition Rates***

The national freshmen attrition rates throughout the 1980s ranged from 24.5 percent for four-year institutions and 43.2 percent for two-year institutions in 1983 ending with attrition rates of 25.3 percent for four-year institutions and 43.9 percent for two-year institutions in 1989.

According to the American College Testing program (1992), the 1990 fall freshman class attrition rate was 26.9 percent for four-year institutions and 44.0 percent for two-year institutions. Almost ten years later, the attrition rate is almost the same with attrition rates of 25.1 percent for four-year institutions and 45.4 percent for two-year institutions (ACT, 2002) (Table 1). The National Center for Educational Statistics (1999) reported that the current national dropout rate was approximately 33 percent.

**Table 1**

*Institutional Rates of First-Year Attrition for Full-Time and All Entering Students Over Time*

Institution Type	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Four-year Public	28.6	28.3	28.4	28.1	28.3	28.6	29.0	28.6	28.8	28.1	27.9	28.1
Four-year Private	23.8	24.0	23.8	24.0	24.8	25.1	25.9	25.9	25.3	24.9	24.9	25.1
Four-year Total	26.9	26.8	25.2	25.2	25.9	26.2	26.9	26.7	25.3	25.9	25.1	25.9
Two-year public	47.7	47.9	48.0	48.0	47.5	47.7	47.2	47.4	47.2	47.5	48.0	48.2
Two-year private	29.4	27.4	27.6	27.6	29.9	29.9	31.1	31.8	31.8	31.0	31.6	33.1
Two-year Total	44.0	44.0	44.1	44.1	43.9	44.4	44.3	44.6	45.0	44.9	45.4	45.9

*Source:* American College Testing Program, 2002.

### ***Georgia's Higher Education Enrollment***

Georgia's higher education enrollment increased steadily in the 1980s. In 1983, Georgia's total enrollment in higher education was 137,743 students. However, enrollment in 1984 dropped to 135,141 and to 135,794 in 1985. In 1986, Georgia's higher education enrolled bounced back and jumped up to 147,504. Each year thereafter enrollment has been increasing with an enrollment of 172,190 students in 1989.

The decade of the 1990s brought more increase in Georgia's higher education enrollment. The 1990 enrollment of 180,447 was a big increase from the 1980 enrollment of 137,743. From 1990 to 1992 enrollment was between 180,000 and 199,000 students. In 1993, enrollment reached 203,369. In 1994, Georgia's enrollment was 204,200. In 1995, Georgia colleges and universities experienced another increase in enrollment to 206,484. However, enrollment declined slightly in 1996 when it dropped to 204,332. The number of students attending college increased again in 1997 before dropping to 200,102 in 1998. Yet again enrollment bounced back up to 203,000 in 1999 and continued to climb in the year 2000 to an enrollment level of 205,878 students.

### ***Georgia's Freshmen Enrollment***

In the early 1980s, the State of Georgia's freshmen enrollment began with a freshman class of 20,996 new students in 1983. Freshmen enrollment increased to 21,735 in 1985 and 24,459 in 1986. In 1987, the enrollment was 26,663 followed by 1988's enrollment of 28,823. The 1980s ended with enrollment of 30,052 freshmen in the state of Georgia.

Georgia's freshmen enrollment in the 1990s followed the 1980s enrollment with new student enrollment representing 15% of Georgia's total fall enrollment. Fall 1991

enrollment was 30,375; however, 1992 freshmen enrollment decreased to 28,704. Fall 1993 found freshmen enrollment slowly increasing before regaining its enrollment level of 30,208 in 1995. From 1995 to 2000, freshmen enrollment remained almost constant before increasing to 33,447 in 2001 (University System of Georgia, 1995 and 2001) (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Georgia's Freshman Enrollment*

Year	Total Enrollment	Freshmen	%
1990	180,447	28,568	15.8
1991	191,831	30,375	15.0
1992	199,642	28,704	14.4
1993	203,369	29,022	14.3
1994	204,200	29,998	14.6
1995	206,484	30,208	14.6
1996	204,332	31,546	15.4
1997	205,389	30,062	14.6
1998	200,102	30,145	15.1
1999	203,806	31,708	15.6
2000	205,878	31,479	15.8
2001	217,546	33,447	15.4

*Source:* University System of Georgia, Information Digest 1995, 2001)

***Georgia's Freshmen Attrition Rates***

The attrition rate of Georgia's freshman students for the 1990s averaged 26 percent (University System of Georgia, 2003) (Table 3). The years 2000 and 2001, freshmen attrition dropped to 21.9 percent and 19.1 percent respectively. This is a big improvement for colleges and universities in the state of Georgia. In Fall 2002, one-year retention rates for the Fall 2001 cohort of freshmen were the highest in the last 16 years.

**Table 3**

*Georgia's Freshman Attrition*

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Year	Freshman Enrollment	Attrition Rate
1990	28,568	24.8%
1991	30,375	24.3%
1992	28,704	26.5%
1993	29,022	28.0%
1994	29,998	26.4%
1995	30,208	26.5%
1996	31,546	24.7%
1997	30,062	27.9%
1998	30,145	22.3%
1999	31,708	28.6%
2000	31,479	21.9%
2001	33,447	19.6%

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Source: University System of Georgia, Information Digest, January 2003)

While colleges and universities in Georgia have experienced growth in enrollment, retention of freshman students is also a big concern. Since the mid 1990s, Georgia's first year student retention has been steadily improving as seen in Figure 2.

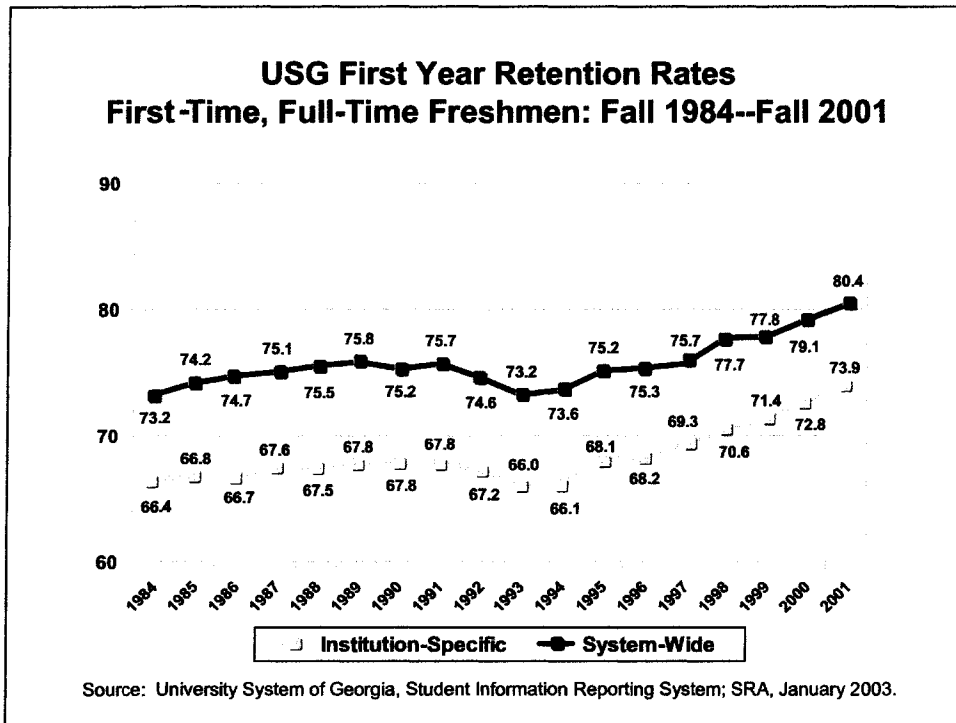


Figure 2. Georgia's first-year retention rates

### Student Departure Theories

Several theoretical models exist that attempt to explain why so many students do not stay in college their first year. Models developed by Lazarus (1966), Astin (1975, 1984), Bean (1980), Pascarella (1980), and Tinto (1975, 1987) have made major contributions to the study of retention in higher education. While these models may vary, the one common thread is how students fit and adjust academically and socially to their new environment and how this impacts whether they stay or leave. This section of the literature review will highlight some of the theories on student retention.

Lazarus (1966) developed a theory based on an individual's self-assessment and assessment of an environment and the adaptation to that environment as being important

to adjusting to a life situation. He describes coping as the behavioral process that can improve an existing situation or defuse a potentially dangerous one. "Adjustment can be viewed as the process by which an individual acquires "goodness to fit" in a new environment; whereas, adaptation can be defined as the process by which an individual chooses to cope with a particular situation" (Lazarus, Averill, and Opton, 1974, p.51).

Astin (1975, 1984) developed a theory of student involvement that describes how a student learns and develops in an institution's environment. Astin argues that a student will achieve higher levels of personal development and learning if he or she is actively integrated into the college experience. He defines student involvement as the "the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience." According to Astin (1984), a student's involvement can include many activities. These activities may be the amount of time he or she spends studying, participating in extracurricular or co-curricular activities, participating in sports, and interacting with peers, faculty, or other college personnel.

"Fit" has played a prominent role in Bean's retention model (1990) and has been defined more specifically as "institutional fit." Fit is considered to be an important part of a student's decision to stay or leave an institution. Institutional fit suggests that even though a student may fit in an institution's environment socially or academically, the student may still feel out of place in other areas. An example of such would be in the case of a student making good grades but not associating with any one or participating in other activities. The student is fitting into the academic environment; however, he or she is not fitting into the social environment. As a result, the student may leave that institution.

Pascarella (1980) developed a theory on the importance of student-faculty informal interactions. He theorizes that student-faculty interaction plays a major role in educational outcomes and can have an effect on retention or attrition. Pascarella theorizes that a student's background characteristics interact with institutional characteristics. The nature and quality of these interactions will determine how well the student becomes integrated into the college or university. He states,

“The term integration can be understood to refer to the extent in which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community or in the subgroups of which the individual is a part”. (Pascarella, 1991, p. 51)

Eaton and Bean (1995) found the approach/avoidance model of coping that is helpful in examining the ways students become integrated into a university's environment. Their studies produced evidence to support the connection between coping behaviors and academic and social integration of students. Approach behaviors are described as those “practices individuals use to focus attention on and respond aggressively to stressors in order to reduce stress. Avoidance behaviors are passive practices an individual may use to avert the stressor. Stress occurs when an individual feels that he/she is responding to a situation ineffectively. Appley and Trumbull (1986) defines stress as the emotional and psychological response perceived threats from the environment (Braxton, 2000).

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

Of all the vast amount of research conducted to understand student departure from higher education, Tinto's (1970) interactional theory of student departure is probably the most noted theory. “Tinto's interactionalist theory, enjoys near paradigmatic stature in

the study of college students departure. Such stature manifests itself in more than 400 citations and 170 dissertations pertinent to this theory “(Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson 1997). Using Van Gennep’s Rites of Passage Theory (1960), and subsequently, the work of Spady (1970), Tinto (1975, 1987) incorporated these ideas into a theoretical model on the process students go through when they decide to leave school. However, in order to understand Tinto’s theoretical model, it is important to briefly review the work of earlier pioneers Van Gennep and Spady.

Van Gennep’s Rites of Passage Theory (1960) was developed as a result of his observations of the stages individuals passed through in tribal communities. Van Gennep, a Dutch anthropologist, was concerned about individuals and society. More specifically, he was concerned about how individuals moved from society to another society and how they maintained stability. He saw the movement as three distinct stages. Each stage was significant and had a profound effect on the individuals. The first stage was separation and involved the separation of individuals from past associations. The second stage was transition, the period in which individuals began to interact with new members seeking to gain membership into the community. The third stage was incorporation and it had to do with the individual’s ability to connect to the new community after experiencing separation from the old community.

Building on the work of Van Gennep and other pioneers, Spady (1970) compared a student’s leaving college to that of an individual’s withdrawal from society. He suggested that a student’s withdrawal from an institution resulted from the lack of shared values with the institution or possibly a lack of support from significant others. Spady

emphasized that if a student did not fit in with the institution's environment, the student would be not be able to adapt to the academic and social systems of the institution.

Tinto (1975, 1987) applied Van Gennep's Rites of Passage theory and Spady's (1970) work to student departure from higher education. Tinto, as did his predecessor Spady, felt that the success of students was dependent upon their successful academic and social integration into an institution. He also felt that students went through a process before making the decision to leave an institution. His interactional student departure model is longitudinal and attempts to provide an explanation rather than a description of student departure.

Tinto first developed an interactional theory of student departure in 1975 and later, in 1987, created a longitudinal model to explain the stages and processes new students go through before they make the final decision to withdraw from an institution. He suggests that one of the major reasons for students dropping out of college is the lack of interaction between the students and other members of both the academic and social systems of the institution. If these interactions are positive, students will more than likely stay in school. If these interactions are negative, students will more than likely leave the institution. This explanation seemed to have been missing from prior research.

Tinto (1975, 1987) paralleled the stages identified by Van Gennep to the stages of student departure from college. The first stage of student departure, separation, occurs when new students leave their families, friends and familiar environments. This period of time may be very difficult for new students. This is especially true for students who come to college from distant locations. Not only are students leaving behind their school, they are leaving a nurturing family and a host of friends, familiar environments, and

routines to which they have become accustomed. This stage can be more difficult for students who come from other locations. For students who live within the same location as the school, the separation may not be as difficult. However, these students still experience some type of separation. They, too, are leaving some sort of familiarity, mainly friends, whom they saw on a daily basis during high school. In both cases, the new students have to begin making a transition to the new school and the people who are part of it.

The second stage, transition, takes place when the new students begin to interact with people at the new institution. They start developing relationships with other students, faculty and staff. These new students begin to learn what the norms are for the new environment, and they start to make connections. They are no longer isolating themselves from the institution's community.

The third and final stage, integration, occurs when the new students begin to adjust to their new institution. It involves taking on the new patterns of interaction with members of the new group and the establishing of competent membership in the new group as a participant (Tinto, 1993). These adjustments are both academic and social. The new students are now adjusting and beginning to fit into the new community. They are becoming integrated and taking on the culture, norms, and behaviors of their new environment. They are no longer outsiders; they are members (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's (1987) longitudinal model of student departure set out to accomplish three things. First, his model attempted to address the longitudinal process students went through as they decided to withdraw from an institution. He says that a series of events take place once a student has entered college or even before the student entered. These

events may play a major role in the student's success at the institution. The second goal of Tinto's model is to explain exactly what the processes are. The model's third goal is to show that an interaction must exist between the student and the individuals within the institution. Using Tinto's longitudinal model, a prediction may be possible regarding the students' likelihood of leaving an institution (Braxton, 2003).

Tinto's longitudinal theory of student departure is based on certain factors that play a role in the student's decision to withdraw from an institution over time. The factors that play a role in the student's decision to withdraw are: 1) background characteristics, 2) initial goal and institutional commitments, 3) academic and social integration, 4) subsequent goal and institutional commitments, 5) intention to persist, and 6) withdrawal decisions. Tinto's model shows that when students come to college, they bring with them certain characteristics. In addition, they come with certain levels of goal commitments. Both of these features play a role in how students will perform in college. These two features also influence how students will interact or become integrated into the institution.

Tinto's theory examines the academic and social systems of colleges. He states that colleges are made up of both academic and social systems with each system having its own characteristics, formal and informal structure, sets of students, faculty, and staff. He further states that all of the systems are also interwoven and interdependent. He goes on to say that colleges are made up of smaller communities that are similar to human communities. These communities are highly interdependent, and consist of interactive systems in which events in any one part may be felt in other parts of the system. As students move through the various systems (communities), they modify their intentions

and commitments accordingly. If these experiences are positive, integrative, students will be more likely to stay at the institution. On the other hand, if these experiences are negative, malintegrative, students will be more likely to leave the institution.

Tinto views academics as a major factor in determining if students are integrated into an institution. According to him, within academics are formal and informal systems. However, academics mostly provide the formal education of students and involves faculty and staff whose primary function is to educate students. Formal is what takes place in the classroom. Classrooms are smaller communities of colleges. These communities consist of a faculty member and students. If students are to get involved with the institution, it typically begins in the classroom. For new students, engagement in the classroom becomes a gateway for subsequent involvement in the larger academic and social communities of the institution (Tinto, Goodsell, and Russo, 1993). Informal system of academics is what takes place outside of the classroom. This, too, is greatly impacted the faculty member. In both cases, the key to the success of students lies in their involvement. Tinto theorizes that the more students are actively involved, both academically and socially, the more they are to become integrated into the college.

The theories discussed in this section of the literature review are just a few of the many theories on student departure. These theories attempt to give reasons why students leave college and also solutions as to what can be done to keep them in college. Even though there are a host of theories and solutions, a common factor is the concern for students in higher education. While earlier pioneers Van Gennep and Spady have made great contributions to retention research, Tinto's retention research continues to be the most widely cited student departure theory (Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson 1997). The

next section of this literature review will discuss one of the solutions, the freshman seminar.

## **Freshman Seminars**

### ***Early Freshman Seminars***

Freshman seminars had their beginnings during the period when higher education institutions were being developed in the United States. Some of the earlier institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and other Ivy League schools were finding ways to help reduce some of the hardships their freshman students were facing. With the problem of mistreatment under control, schools had more opportunity to focus on the academic success of their new students. With a large number of students coming to college under-prepared and without the necessary skills to make the transition to college, the freshman orientation was created (Dwyer, 1989).

Both non-credit and credit-bearing freshman seminar courses grew prior to World War I. Different types of courses were developed and taught based on the need of the university. The one feature that seemed to be common among all the courses was the component on helping students become familiar with the university and life in general (Gordon, 1989).

The first known freshman seminar courses were offered at Lee College in Kentucky in 1882. A similar seminar was taught at Boston University in 1888 (Dwyer, 1989). In addition, in 1900, the Mechanical Engineering Department of the University of Michigan began requiring all of its freshmen to attend a series of lectures that included

what are now the basic elements of present-day freshman seminar courses. About the same time, Oberlin began offering a non-credit orientation course (Drake, 1966).

The first credit orientation course was established at Reed College in 1911 (Fitts and Swift, 1928). “The College Life Course” was required of all freshmen. Its purpose was to help the new students adjust to college life and develop good study habits. Topics included the purpose of college, the college curriculum, the individual plan of study, student honesty, student government, intercollegiate athletics, and college religion (Fitts and Swift, 1928). In 1912, after the Carnegie Foundation recommended that colleges and universities do something to help the freshmen, the University of Michigan, Amherst College, and Brown University began offering freshman seminar courses in 1912, 1913, and 1915, respectively. These courses incorporated presentations by academic departments and the library. They also included methods on how to study (Gordon, 1989). By 1916, only six American colleges offered orientation courses for credit. Within the next ten years, 82 colleges and universities established credit-bearing orientation courses. These courses were created because a freshman’s first year was recognized as the most important to a student’s future experience in college (Gardner, 1986).

After World War I, the number of freshman orientation courses grew rapidly throughout the United States. The types of freshman orientation courses varied according to the particular college or university. Some courses focused on helping the new students adjust to college life. Like today’s freshman students, students during earlier times had to learn how to adjust to college and fit into a new culture and environment. Other courses focused on helping new students develop good study skills. Not only were these students

unprepared academically, they also did not know how to study effectively (Gordon, 1989).

During the period of 1918-1922, many colleges and universities were still offering non-credit orientation courses. However, Princeton, Stanford, John Hopkins, and a few other larger universities began offering credit orientation courses. Whether for credit or non-credit, the earlier freshman orientation courses fell into three major categories (Fitts and Swift, 1928). The first type of orientation courses dealt with the organization and administration of the college, the students, intellectual habits, and the freshman curriculum. These courses were characterized as “adjustment” courses. The second type of courses focused on thinking and studying methods. Instruction was on teaching thinking processes using lessons from philosophy, psychology, and education. The third type of orientation courses focused on orientating students socially and intellectually. These courses centered on citizenship, social problems, and the study of the nature of the world and humanity.

The third type of orientation course played a significant role in freshman orientation history. This theory resulted in “the new orientation movement” that was initiated because of the students’ need to “find themselves.” Some of the colleges changed direction with their orientation courses. Instruction began focusing on introducing the freshmen to social, economic, philosophical, political, and scientific issues. Dartmouth introduced their course, “Evolution” in the 1920s. Columbia began to offer “Introduction to Contemporary Civilization” in 1924. Antioch College, Brown University, and the University of Michigan offered courses that included broad social, economic, philosophical, political, and scientific issues and began to provide assistance

with study techniques, how to use the library, personal etiquette, and vocational choice (Drake, 1966).

By the 1930s, an estimated one-third of the colleges and universities were offering orientation courses. By 1938, nine out of ten freshmen were required to take an orientation course (Mueller, 1961). A study conducted in 1941 revealed that freshmen who took an orientation course knew more about college life than those who did not take such a course (Nelson, 1941, 1942). A survey in 1948 showed that 43 percent of the American institutions offered required orientation courses. This survey revealed that the majority of the freshman orientation courses taught were adjustment type courses. In addition, these courses emphasized adjustment to the social and intellectual world of today (Bookman, 1948).

During the 1950s, colleges and universities were offering two main types of orientation course (Strang, 1951). These two types focused on making personal adjustments and planning in the new college environment, and they attempted to open up to the student to various folds of knowledge and their interrelationships.

In the 1960s, freshman seminars experienced a decline throughout the United States. This was largely due to faculty discontentment with freshman seminars not being academically adequate. Faculty felt that freshman seminar courses needed to do more to help the diverse student population that was now entering higher education in America (Drake, 1966).

Even though three major types of freshman seminar courses existed during the early periods of higher education and the twentieth century, all courses included some type of advising for the freshmen students.

### ***Present Freshman Seminars***

Freshman seminars made a comeback in the early 1970s as the result of The Freshman Year Experience Program that was developed at the University of South Carolina. The school's president, Thomas Jones, sought the help of a General Education professor, John Gardner, to help students deal with the many problems they were facing at that time. During the 1960s and early 1970s, three major events were taking place in the country. First, the United States was in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. Second, the Vietnam War had begun, and many Americans resented the United States' involvement in the war. Third, there was a big change in the demographics of the student body at colleges throughout the United States as well as the University of South Carolina. Not only were the traditional eighteen-year-olds enrolling in college, veterans and non-traditional students were also enrolling in colleges and universities throughout the United States. The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War caused a great deal of unrest in the country generally, and this was evident in the student body of the University of South Carolina. The enrolling of veterans and non-traditional students simply added to the problems the institution faced.

Gardner took the school's existing University 101 course and added an academic component to enhance it to better serve the needs of the students. This was the piece that many higher education faculty felt was missing in the 1960s. University 101 was actually created as a way of calming an unruly and turbulent student body. As part of the revamping of University 101, Gardner also developed a faculty-training program. Any professor who was going to teach the course had to participate in the training program. The Freshman Seminar became the major component of the Freshman Year Experience.

The Freshman Year Seminar and Freshman Year Experience Program proved to be very successful at the University of South Carolina and have since been adapted by many American colleges and universities. As indicated at the beginning of this literature review, the number of freshman seminars has grown from the first two offerings in 1911 to approximately 800 today according to the National Center for The First-Year Experience Program (2001). The courses are offered at both four-year institutions and two-year institutions in the United States and abroad. Since the Freshman Seminar is so popular and has been adopted by so many institutions, it is worthwhile to look at the University of South Carolina's freshman seminar, University 101.

### ***Description of University 101***

As stated, University 101 grew out of the need to help freshmen at the University of South Carolina adjust to college life during the turbulent times of the 1960s and 1970s. This course was designed to give the students a more positive start on their educational journey. The earlier course was a three-credit hour, pass/fail, course that focused on teaching new students the skills necessary to help them survive college (Jewler, 1989).

The present University 101 course at the University of South Carolina is similar to the earlier course. Students receive either a passing or failing grade. The content of the course includes learning study skills, understanding professors, getting along with other students, coping with stress and anxiety, examining health and nutrition concerns, understanding values, and other important topics. Also included in the course are library research methods, career and academic major planning, writing experiences, and the effective use of textbooks and other appropriate materials. One unique feature of the

course is that the students also help to generate a list of topics they feel are important to their success. Instruction of the course is not limited to the General Education faculty; however, professors who teach the course must possess a certain profile. They must have a desire to work with new students; must be stimulating, motivating, challenging yet reasonable, kind, considerate and approachable; and be willing to go through the training required to teach the course. Training for University 101 faculty is a five-day workshop held in January and May (Jewler, 1989).

### **Effectiveness of Freshman Seminars**

Long before the current studies were conducted on the effectiveness of the freshman seminar, studies on the freshman seminar were conducted as early as the 1940s. As previously stated, the 1941 study revealed that the orientation courses were really helping the freshman students (Mueller, 1961). A survey that was conducted in 1948 showed that 43 percent of the colleges and universities offered an orientation course (Bookman, 1948).

Since John Gardner modified the University of South Carolina's University 101 in 1970, Paul Fidler, then professor at the University of South Carolina, conducted a series of annual studies on the seminar. These studies (1973, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1983) were conducted to determine whether or not the new revised freshman seminar course was making a difference in retaining its first-year students. Variables other than persistence were investigated including: academic ability, race, gender, course load, and motivation. Students who participated in the freshman seminar were compared to students who not participate.

Fidler (1991) reported positive results from these studies. The results showed a significant difference between the students who participated in the course and the students who did not. Participating students had a higher return rate than the non-participants. The findings were as follows:

- (1) The return rate for the participating students was higher than the non-participants.
- (2) Both participating males and females achieved higher sophomore return rates.
- (3) In spite of the course load, the course participants achieved a higher sophomore return rate than the non-participants.
- (4) The comparisons of the motivation between course participants and non-participants showed no difference.
- (5) Both participating African Americans and Whites showed a higher sophomore return rate than their non-participating counterparts.

In addition to the main campus, the University of South Carolina also had eight other campuses that offered the freshman seminar as well. The Lancaster campus, a two-year institution, showed the most impressive improvement in retention. The return rates for its 1980-84 periods were 5.1% to 17.7% higher than the other seven campuses. These rates were higher for the participating at-risk students who primarily attended the main campus. Also, when Fidler compared the at-risk and non-participating standard students, the at-risk students' results yielded a higher return rate (Rice, 1984). This difference was also significant because according to the SAT scores and the high schools rankings, the participating students had been deemed less likely to succeed in their first year.

Shanley (1987) found that students who took the freshman seminar course had a significantly higher graduation rate than the non-participating students. This, too, is significant in that the participating students had lower GPAs than the non-participating students, yet the participating students had a higher graduation rate of 56.2% compared to 50.7% for the non-participants.

Davis (1992) conducted a longitudinal study on the first-time students at Kennesaw State University who enrolled in the university's freshman seminar course. He investigated the impact of the freshman seminar on at-risk students as well as those who were identified as standard. He was hoping to show that the at-risk participating students benefited more from taking the seminar. However, his results showed that the standard students, based on their higher SAT scores, benefited more from the seminar than the at-risk students. This result was different than what Davis had anticipated.

Hyers' (1998) study conducted at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, formerly North Adams State College, examined the impact of the freshman seminar on its first-year students. The study revealed that the grades made in the course were a better predictor of students' success than other measures. His study showed that a positive correlation existed between grades earned in the freshman seminar course and students' later success in college.

Barefoot (1998) undertook a study of 50 colleges and universities to investigate the impact of the freshman seminar at these institutions. Of the 50 colleges, seven were two-year institutions and 43 were four-year institutions. Enrollment at these institutions ranged from 500 students to 24,500 students. The findings revealed that the majority of the freshman seminar courses resulted in higher first-to-second semester retention, higher

freshman to sophomore year retention, higher first year GPAs, and higher graduation rates for the participants.

Starke, Harth and Sirianni (2001) studied eight groups of first-term Ramapo College students who participated in the freshman seminar between the years of 1986 and 1993. The seminar course was very similar in structure and content to other freshman seminar courses. A comparison was done on the retention of the students who participated in the course and the students who did not. The results showed the retention rates for the participating students were better by 6% to 28% over a period of four years. The graduation rates for the participating students were 14 to 32 percentage points better than the non-participating students. The data also showed significantly higher GPAs for the participating students. She also reported that the students who took the course were more actively involved and comfortable at the institution.

A more recent study conducted by Schnell, Louis, and Doetkott (2003) added to the research supporting the effectiveness of the freshman seminar. The study was conducted at North Dakota State University, a mid-size mid-west university, from 1991 to 1994. Approximately 1,700 students participated in the study. The results revealed a higher graduation rate for those who took the freshman seminar than those who did not.

In addition to the above studies, for the last six years the National Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in conjunction with the University of South Carolina has conducted an annual survey specifically designed to ascertain the number of colleges and universities that offer freshman seminars. The fifth annual survey (2000) was sent to all regionally accredited colleges and universities with enrollments of 150 or more students. Out of 1,013 colleges and universities that were

mailed surveys, 74% of the institutions responded with descriptions of their first year seminars. The outcomes were as follows:

1. Fifty-seven percent of the institutions reported student satisfaction with the course and the instructor.
2. Thirty-three reported increased student persistence to sophomore year.
3. Nineteen percent reported improved grade point average

The survey also asked questions about the type of freshman seminar colleges are offering and also if academic advising was a component of their freshman seminars. The responses from the most recent survey revealed that one-third of the institutions courses are more adjustment type courses, one-third of institutions course were Nineteen percent of the institutions indicated that the instructors for the freshman seminar courses also served as the academic advisors.

### **DeVry Georgia's Attrition Problem and Efforts**

#### ***DeVry Georgia's Freshmen Enrollment and Attrition Data***

Each semester DeVry Georgia's new student enrollment ranges from 100 to 400 students between the two campuses. DeVry Decatur's campus enrolls approximately 300 to 400 daytime freshman students with Alpharetta's enrollment ranging from 100 to 200 students. However, 30 to 40 percent of these students fail to return for the second semester. In the 1990s, DeVry Georgia's first-term attrition was averaging 31 percent. In 1995, the attrition for new students was 38 percent. Attrition for new students dropped to 29.2 percent in 1996. Then in 1997, Decatur's first-term attrition climbed up to 32 percent and increased to 35 percent in the year 2000. For the years 2001 and 2002

Decatur's attrition rate ranged between the 35 and 31 percent respectively. Alpharetta's attrition rates have been averaging 30.0% since its opening in spring 1997 (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*DeVry Georgia's Freshman Attrition Rates*

Year	Decatur	Alpharetta
1993	31.3%	---
1994	30.0%	---
1995	38.2%	---
1996	29.2%	---
1997	35.4%	29%
1998	30.7%	23%
1999	31.7%	28%
2000	35.3%	34%
2001	31.3%	36%

Source: DeVry University, 2003

***DeVry Georgia's Freshman Seminar***

Prior to Coll149, DeVry Georgia offered another freshman orientation course. This course was entitled, STOR110, **Student Orientation** and was only offered at the Decatur campus since the Alpharetta campus did not exist at this time. This was a one-hour credit course that was frontloaded, i.e. scheduled to meet the first half of the semester. STOR110 was taught in the first half of the first term with the thought that after the first half of the term, the students would be able to function adequately. STOR110's goal was to help first-year students make a smooth transition from high school to college. The content of the course included time management, money management and budgeting, note taking, listening, and test taking skills. The course primarily focused on adjustment to the rigors of college work and was taught by the General Education faculty.

STOR110 was designed for the 17 or 18-year old students who were attending college for the first time. It was required of all daytime students with the exception of three groups of students: students who had to take developmental reading, students who had a minimum of twelve credit hours from another institution, and students who had served in the military. The developmental reading students were exempt from STOR because many of the same topics that were covered in STOR were covered in the reading course; therefore, they did not have to take STOR. As it related to students with twelve credit hours, DeVry felt that students with prior college credit possessed an understanding of what it takes to be successful in college. DeVry also felt that military students possessed the maturity and discipline to be successful in college. The last group of students to be exempt from taking STOR was the evening students. Students in the evening school were exempt from STOR110 because they were adults who were perceived to be mature and sufficiently focused not to need lessons in time and money management and adjustment to college life. In addition, it was realized by the National General Education Curriculum manager that DeVry University's freshman seminar course needed to have more academic rigor thereby making the course worthy of bearing a credit-bearing course. As a result, a new freshman seminar course was created with a new set of terminal course objectives.

Coll106, College Success Strategies, replaced STOR110 as the new freshman seminar course in Fall 1999. While this course was similar in content to STOR110, it was the beginning of the movement away from an adjustment type orientation course to that of a more academically based course. Coll106 carried two credit hours and was still designed for daytime students. It, too, was also frontloaded as was its predecessor

course, STOR110. As with STOR110, the General Education faculty taught the new course. Interestingly, COLL106 was short-lived before a new freshman seminar was created.

Fall 2000 brought about another change for DeVry's Systems freshman seminar course. The freshman seminar course was revised once again and, this time with some major changes. The first change a name change; the new course had three versions called Coll145, Coll147, or Coll149. The content and terminal course objectives were identical; the only difference was the credit hours. Coll145 carried one credit hour, Coll147 carried two credit hours, and Coll149 carried three credit hours. Each DeVry campus was at liberty to choose the version that best met its need. The second change involved the objectives of the courses. The course objectives were designed to enable students to learn problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills. The focus moved away from the college adjustment type of topics such as time and money management note-taking skills, and study strategies. Further, instead of frontloading the class, it was designed to run the entire 15 weeks of the semester. Initially, DeVry Georgia chose to implement Coll147. However, when the First Year Initiative was revamped in Summer 2001, Coll149 was selected as the official freshman seminar course.

In Fall 2001, with the revitalization of the First Year Initiative Program came additional modification of the Coll class. First, all daytime freshmen were required to enroll in the new freshman seminar course, Coll149. All students, regardless of prior college or military experience, would now have to take Coll149. Further, the course was to be taken in the students' first semester. Second, with the new retention program, the Coll149 instructors would also serve as advisors to the students enrolled in their classes.

Professors took on the role of not only teaching but also advising their students on both academic and personal matters. With the new course structure, the students would be in contact with their professors at least once or twice a week depending on class meeting times. As advisors, the Coll149 professors took on full ownership of the new students. Listed below are some of the activities performed by the advisors:

- Participated as session leaders at New Student Orientations each semester
- Assisted new students with their schedules if they had problems and assisted them with any other enrollment issues.
- Implemented early intervention activities by monitoring mid-term progress.
- Worked with other first term professors on student matters.
- Worked with other members on student matters.
- Helped students register for the second semester by teaching them how to read their program checklist, create a schedule and use the new student online registration program.
- Follow-up on the students' completion of registration for the second semester before the student leaves.

Another major change for the Coll149 course was that the class became an integral part of the DeVry Georgia's Learning Communities. The course now served as the hub for the learning communities. Using the already existing block scheduling system, DeVry Georgia created learning communities for the first semester students. Students were scheduled into cohorts based on their program. Each cohort became a

learning community. On an average, DeVry Decatur had nine or ten learning communities each semester, and Alpharetta had four to six. The learning communities centered around a project that was part of the program fundamental course.

The Coll149 professors pulled together the faculty in their learning community to discuss how they would work together as a team on the project and the overall welfare of their students. The faculty members met weekly to work on lessons and activities for the projects. They also discussed student issues and concerns. More importantly, they discussed how to help the students solve their issues and concerns.

### **Conclusion**

While many people may think that the problems freshman students experience today are new, that is not the case. Some of the problems new students face today are some of the very same problems experienced by the new students hundreds of years ago. The impact of both earlier and present-day problems seems to be similar, that is, the early departure of freshman students from colleges and universities.

This problem of early new student departure has caused much interest and has lead to a vast amount of research. While many studies have been conducted to determine causes for high freshman attrition, a few findings have become quite apparent. First, many students leave college in their first year. Second, the first year of college is a crucial one for new students. Third, something useful can be done to help new students in their first year of college. Hopefully, the freshman seminar is one approach that can help new students during this crucial time. Fourth, continued research is necessary to increase efforts to reduce first-year student attrition.

Evidence seems to support the success of freshman seminars in helping new students stay in school during their first year of college. Even though there are a variety of freshman seminar courses taught at different colleges and universities, there appears to be one common factor among these courses and that is the courses' ability to connect new students to the schools.

The study focused on DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar course, COLL149, to determine whether or not the addition of the advisement component of this course is positively impacting the success of its first-year students.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the research methods conducted to answer the nine research questions that are outlined below. Quantitative analysis was conducted to compare two freshman seminar courses. Statistical tests were utilized to address questions about the grade point averages (GPAs) of the first semester students and the number of first semester students who returned the second semester. Qualitative analysis was conducted to solicit feedback about first semester students' experiences in the Coll classes.

### **Research Questions**

1. Are there interactions among treatment group, gender, and ethnicity in regard to grade point average?
2. Is there a difference between students who took the standard Coll class and the students who took the advisement enhanced Coll class in regard to their grade point average?
3. Is there a difference between African Americans, Caucasians, and "other ethnicities" in regard to their grade point averages?
4. Is there a difference between male and female students in regard to their grade point average?
5. Is there a difference between students who took the standard Coll class and the students who took the advisement enhanced Coll class in regard to their retention?

6. Is there a difference between African Americans, Caucasians, and “other ethnicities” in regard to their retention?
7. Is there a difference between male and female students in regard to their retention?
8. What factors do students self-report that contribute to their academic success (GPAs) in the first semester?
9. What factors do students self-report that contribute to their retention in the first semester?

### **Rationale for Conducting Mixed Study**

Based on the questions to be answered in this study, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used for this study. By adding a qualitative component to this study, the researcher was able to gain somewhat richer information about the effectiveness of the advisement enhanced Coll class.

Some researchers argue that is not advisable to conduct a mixed study; however, Patton (1990) argues, “Quantitative and qualitative methods involve differing strengths and weaknesses and constitute alternative, but not mutually exclusive, strategies for research. Both can therefore be used in the same study” (p.14). Datta (1994) has also given five practical reasons for using both methodologies:

1. Both methodologies have been used for years.
2. Many evaluators and researchers have urged using both paradigms.
3. Funding agencies have supported both paradigms.
4. Both paradigms have influenced policy.

5. Much has been taught by both paradigms.

### **Quantitative Design**

The quantitative research method for this study was a three-way ANOVA post-test only between groups alternative treatment design. The first independent variable is treatment group, the group who took the standard Coll class and the group who took the advisement enhanced course. The second independent variable is gender, male and female. The third independent variable is ethnicity with three levels, African American, White and other ethnicities. The dependent variables are grade point averages and first semester student retention. Student grade point average was measured on a 4-point scale for the first semester, and student retention was measured by the number of first semester students who re-enrolled for the second semester.

Since both the standard and advisement enhanced Coll classes have already occurred, this study was classified as ex post facto. Even though the advisement enhanced class is still being offered at DeVry Georgia, this study's intent was to investigate the effects of advisement in the Coll classes two years prior to the academic year 2003. According to Wilkinson and McNeil (1995), the term ex post facto means "after the fact and denotes that subjects already possess the independent variable of interest before the research study begins" (p. 232.). Kerlinger (1970) (as cited in Cohen & Mansion, 1989) defines ex post facto research as "that in which the independent variable or variables have already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the observation of a dependent variable or variables. He then studies the independent variable or variables in retrospect for their possible relationship to, and effects on, the

dependent variable or variables” (p. 177). When the new Coll class was first offered in Fall 2000, the focus of the course was primarily on instruction. Professors were to make sure students received instruction according to the terminal course objectives (TCOs). Then in Fall 2001, when the advisement component was added to the Coll class, both the course and professors took on a much different direction. Student advisement became a major part of the course. In addition to being instructors, the Coll professors became advisors to their students.

### ***Population and Sample***

The population for this study was the undergraduate students attending DeVry Georgia’s Alpharetta and Decatur campuses. DeVry Georgia’s undergraduate enrollment is made up of two major schools, the School of Business and the School of Technology. The business programs include Computer Information Systems (CIS), Business Administration, (BSBA), and Telecommunications (TCM). The electronics programs consist of the Electronic Engineering Technology (EET) degree program, Computer Engineering Technology (CET), Biomedical Engineering Technology (BMET), and the Electronic Computer Technology (ECT) associate’s degree program. In terms of program enrollment, 62% of DeVry Georgia’s students are enrolled in one of the business programs with 38% in electronics (DeVry, 2003). Alpharetta’s enrollment consists of 80% of its students enrollment in one of the School of Business programs and 20% in the one of the electronics programs.

DeVry Georgia’s overall enrollment is approximately 3,400 students. Decatur’s enrollment is 2,400 students with Alpharetta having an enrollment of approximately

1,000 students. The overall daytime population for DeVry Georgia is 52.1% African American, 28.7% Caucasian, 3% Asian, and 30.2% other. When looking at the two campuses individually, they are different. The Decatur campus daytime population consists of 80% African American, 15% Caucasian, and 5% Asian and other.

Alpharetta's daytime population is slightly different from Decatur with a population of approximately 24.2% African American, 42.4% Caucasian, 3.0% Asian, 9.0% Hispanic and 21.2% classified as others.

Of these 2,400 Decatur's students, approximately 60% are daytime students and 40% are evening students. Alpharetta's enrollment consists of approximately 40% daytime students and 60% evening students. Approximately 35% of Decatur's students come from the Atlanta area, and 65% come from outside areas such as North Carolina, South Carolina, and other areas in the state of Georgia (DeVry, 2003)

The sample for this study was the daytime full-time first semester students enrolled at both campuses during the terms indicated earlier. For the last several years, Decatur's daytime first semester enrollment has been averaging between 300 to 500 students per semester. Alpharetta's daytime first semester enrollment has been averaging between 100 to 200 students per semester.

Two groups of students were not included in this study. Even though DeVry Georgia's electronics department offers both an associate degree in electronic technology and a bachelor's degree in electronics engineering technology, this study was only interested in students seeking bachelor degrees. Therefore, students enrolled in the associate degree program were not a part of this study.

The other group of students who were not included in this study were the evening students. While DeVry Georgia does have an evening program, these students were eliminated from the study because of the nature of the evening program. The evening program is accelerated with all the courses being taught in an eight-week delivery format. In addition, the evening students consist mainly of adults.

### ***Data Collection***

The first step in this study was to get approval from the Human Research Committee (HRC) at Colorado State University. Application was submitted once approval had been gained from my dissertation committee to continue to this next step. Approval from the Human Research Committee was granted, and permission from DeVry University was also granted. An approval letter was received from DeVry Georgia's Dean of Academic Affairs to conduct the study (Appendix A). The third step was to contact the Registrar's Office in Decatur and request the needed information. Several sets of information were needed.

The first set of information collected was a list of Decatur and Alpharetta students who took the standard Coll course in Fall 2000, Spring 2001, and Summer 2001 and a list of students who took the advisement enhanced Coll course in Fall 2001, Spring 2002, and Summer 2002. Along with this list, the researcher requested pre-college information on the students. This information included the computerized placement test (CPT) scores (reading, writing arithmetic, and algebra), gender, and ethnicity. The second set of information requested was the students' Coll grades, their first semester grade point averages (GPAs) and their first-to-second semester retention data. This information was

actually gathered through the assistance of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs' SPSS database.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

**First dependent variable** - The first dependent variable for this study was the students' grade point average. Using SPSS, a three-way ANOVA statistical analysis was used to analyze the data for this study. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level. Effect sizes were calculated to determine strength of the relationship between the variables.

**Second Dependent Variable** - To determine if there was any statistical significance in the percentage of first semester students who re-enrolled for the second semester, a chi-square was used. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level.

### **Generalizations**

The results from this study should be generalized to 4-year colleges and universities. More specifically, the results from this study could be generalized to colleges and universities that combine advisement with their freshman seminar course and the instructors serve as advisors. Since all DeVry campuses offer Coll149, this study could also yield generalizations to the twenty-six campuses that make up DeVry University. However, since African American students make up 56% of the Georgia institutions' student body, generalizations to all campuses may not be possible.

## Qualitative Research

Since this researcher also wanted to get feedback from students who took the enhanced Coll149 class, a qualitative analysis was part of this study. Based on questions eight and nine, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not the first semester students felt that the advising component of the course made a difference in their first term academic success (GPA) and their consequent re-enrollment in the second semester. Getting feedback from the students offered insight about what contributed to the students' having good grade point averages and coming back to DeVry for the second semester.

Qualitative research can give researchers in-depth information about a subject that cannot be obtained through quantitative research. Qualitative research typically takes place in a natural setting where the researcher collects data in the form of words or pictures. The researcher analyzes these words or pictures inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language. Qualitative research asks “how” and “what” with these questions leading into descriptions of what is going on. Quantitative research questions ask “why” while the researcher looks for comparisons (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research as defined by Creswell (1998) is:

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p.15).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials –case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts- that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives (p. 2).

Of the five qualitative research traditions, the qualitative research in this study employed the phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study “describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). In addition, phenomenology argues that people's perceptions of their experiences are their reality. According to Patton (1990), “There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means” (p. 69). Maxwell (1996) states, “qualitative researchers need to ask questions about the meaning of events and activities to the people involved” (p. 59).

In order for this researcher to find out what factors contributed to new students being successful and returning their second semester, approximately 2,100 students were mailed surveys, and with a subset of these students interviewed in a focus-group setting. Focus group interviews allow the researchers to understand the meanings that people give to their own experiences. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) note an important benefit in using focus groups:

Participants can ‘feed off each other’ as they respond; a response that may not occur to a person in an individual interview may be stimulated by something someone else said in the focus group. Focus group members can support or disagree with one another, creating more energy and thus more data (p.74).

Berg (1998) also writes about the power of using focus groups:

Focus groups are extremely dynamic. Interactions among and between group members stimulate discussions in which one group member reacts to comments made by another. This dynamic has been called “synergistic group effect”. It allows one participant to draw from another or to brainstorm collectively with

other members of the group. A far larger numbers of ideas, issues, topics, and even solutions to a problem can be generated through group discussions than through individual conversations. It is this group energy that distinguishes focus group interviews from individual interviews (p.101).

Interviewing is one of the best ways to conduct phenomenological research. The researcher used open-ended interviewing questions. Bogdan and Biklin (1990) state “open-ended interviewing questions allow the subjects to answer from their own frame of reference than from one structured by pre-arranged questions” (p. 3). Patton (1990) states “open-ended interviews allows the participants to identify the factors most relevant to their response, rather than choosing between research-determined options.”

### ***Data Collection***

Data, in the form of feedback, was collected from two sources. A mailed open-ended survey and focus group interviews was used for the qualitative part of this study. The first form of data collection was mailed surveys. Surveys were sent to the Decatur and Alpharetta students who were enrolled in Coll in Fall 2000, Spring 2001, Summer 2001, Fall 2001, Spring 2002, and Summer 2002 (N=2,000). Using the database maintained by the Registrar’s Office, the researcher generated addresses to mail the surveys (Appendix C). A list of six open-ended questions was used to get responses from students about their experiences in DeVry Georgia’s freshman seminars and what, if any, they feel helped their academic success and return for their second semester. From the 2,000 surveys that were mailed, only 30 completed surveys were returned to the researcher.

The second source of data collection was the focus group interview. The researcher had planned to conduct four to five focus group interviews. Three to five

focus group interviews were to be conducted at each campus, Decatur and Alpharetta. These groups were to consist of eight to ten students. However, since there was a low rate of response from the participants, only one focus group interview was conducted. Only six students indicated their interest in participating in the interview. The interview was conducted at the Decatur campus on a Saturday morning. On the day of the interview, only three of the five interested participants arrived to the interview.

The focus group interview process began with the researcher explaining the study, its purposes and methods. Once this was done, the researcher obtained signed consent forms from all participants prior to the start of the interview (Appendix B).

Confidentiality was discussed, and permission to tape the interview was obtained from all participants. Before asking questions, the researcher took time to set the students at ease and build a rapport with the students. Two of the three students knew the researcher since the researcher was one of the associate deans who worked with new students during registration and at orientation. Also, the researcher was one of the manager's of the Coll149 classes. Once the students were comfortable, the interview process began. The focus group session was audiotaped for later transcription and analysis.

Using Patton's (1990) guidelines, the researcher used an open-ended interview protocol (Table 3). All interview questions were designed to reduce researcher bias.

### **Table 3**

#### **Focus Group Protocol**

##### **The Protocol Objective:**

To identify what factors made an impact on first-term students' academic success and retention, the following protocol was designed to ascertain this information.

##### **Introduction/Icebreaker**

1. What experiences in your first semester do you believe impacted your academic success and desire to return to DeVry?

##### **Coll Class**

2. What did you like about the class?
3. Was there anything in this class that you believe impacted your academic success during your first semester?
4. What recommendations do you have for improving this class?
5. Was there anything about your Coll149 professor that you believe impacted your academic success during your first semester?
6. Was there anything about your Coll149 professor that you believe impacted your desire to return to DeVry University for the next semester?
7. What could your Coll149 professor have done differently to encourage you to return to DeVry University for the next semester?

##### **Advisement Enhanced Students Only**

##### **Coll Class with Advising Component**

8. What do you think about the advisement you received from your Coll149 professor/advisor your first semester?
9. What specific aspects of advisement were helpful to you?
10. What recommendations do you have for improvement in advising?
11. Is there anything else you would like to say that has not been discussed today?

### ***Data Analysis***

Once the surveys were returned and the student focus group interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed the tapes and notes. Coding was used to analyze the data. The goal of coding is to “rearrange the data into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Strauss, 1987, p. 29).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the validity and reliability of any qualitative study rests on the researcher’s ability and integrity. They also state that a researcher must answer this question when analyzing the data: What techniques and methods were used to ensure the integrity, validity and accuracy of the finding? Patton (1990) suggests “searching for rival explanations, explaining negative cases, triangulation, and keeping data in context” (p. 472).

### ***Generalizations***

Just as generalization is part of quantitative research, it is also part of qualitative research. According to Maxwell (1996), qualitative researchers rarely make claims about the generalizability of their findings. However, he defines two types of generalizability: internal and external. Internal generalizability “refers to the generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied, whereas external generalizability refers to its generalizability beyond and that setting or group” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 97). Internal generalizability can be related to Cook and Campbell (1979) statistical conclusion validity in quantitative research. Maxwell (1996) explains the concept by stating, “The descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity of the conclusions all depend on their

internal generalizability to the case as a whole” (p.97). Patton (1990) rendered another opinion on generalizability:

Unlike the usual meaning of the term generalization, an extrapolation clearly connotes that one has gone beyond the narrow confines of the data to think about other applications of the findings. Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful, and problem oriented rather than statistical and probabilistic. (p. 489).

Generalizations from the qualitative portion of this study were difficult to make because of the extremely low response rate of the mailed surveys and extremely small number of participants for the focus group interview. However, since qualitative research possesses faces validity, it was believed that the statements made by the students on the mailed survey and during the focus group interviews were true.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

Since the questions in this study address both the academic success of the first semester students and their perceptions about their experience in the freshman seminar course, chapter four is designed to answer both sets of questions. The first part of this chapter is a quantitative analysis and addresses the seven questions about the students' first semester grade point average and the re-enrollment in their second semester. This part begins with the examination of the pre-characteristics of the students in both groups. The next section of the first part is the analysis of grade point averages, research questions 1 – 4. The last section will report the analysis of the first-to-second semester enrollment of the students, research questions 5 - 7.

The second part of this chapter is a qualitative analysis and reports the feedback from the students about their experiences in their class and with their professor. First, the responses from the mailed survey are analyzed. Second and last, the findings from the focus group interview are reported.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Before the analysis of the grade point averages and retention rates is reported, this section of chapter four begins with a comparison of the freshman seminar Coll groups on the pre-college characteristics identified in chapter three.

### ***Pre-college Characteristics***

First, because DeVry Georgia was using cohort scheduling based on programs, the majority of the students in this study were assigned to a section of the freshman seminar course based on their specific programs. Second, in cases where the time of course presented a time constraint for the students, students were assigned to a section that was offered at a more convenient time for them. Furthermore, some students were exempted from taking the standard Coll course because they had previous college credits or military experience. Finally, students who dropped the Coll course during the first two weeks of the term and students who did not take Coll during first term at DeVry were not included in the following data analysis for the research questions.

Analysis was conducted to determine if the pre-college characteristics of the group who took the standard freshman seminar course ( $N=847$ ) and the group who took the advisement enhanced course ( $N=916$ ) differed. Chi-square was used to examine ethnicity and gender. Table 4.1 shows the results for ethnicity and indicates that the students who received a grade for the standard freshman seminar course and the students who had a grade in the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course were statistically significantly different on ethnicity ( $\chi^2 = 13.73, df = 4, N = 1763, p < .008$ ). It appears that the enhanced course had a higher percentage of African Americans and a lower percentage of Caucasians and the other ethnicities.

**Table 4.1*****Chi-square Analysis of Ethnicity of Freshman Seminar Course Takers***

Variable	Course				$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	Standard		Enhanced			
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Ethnicity					13.73	.008
African American	584	69%	689	75%		
Caucasian	212	25%	185	20%		
Asian	37	4.4%	22	2.4 %		
Hispanic	13	1.5%	18	2.0%		
Native American	1	.1%	2	.2%		
Totals	847	100%	916	100%		

For the gender comparison, Table 4.2 shows the results and indicates that the two groups also differed on gender ( $\chi^2 = 3.99$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $N = 1892$ ,  $p < .046$ ). The enhanced course had a slightly lower percentage (62%) of males than the standard (66%). Those students who did not take the Coll class had an even lower percentage (56%) of males.

**Table 4.2*****Chi-square Analysis of Gender of Freshman Seminar Course Takers***

Variable	Course				$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	Standard		Enhanced			
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Gender					3.99	<.046
Female	296	34%	378	37%		
Male	<u>580</u>	<u>66%</u>	<u>638</u>	<u>62%</u>		
Totals	876	100%	1016	100%		

For the other pre-college characteristics, t tests were conducted to analyze the age of the students at the start of their first semester, the placement scores (reading, writing, math, and algebra), and the number of credit hours taken in their first semester. Table 4.3 shows the results and indicates that the two groups also differed on the reading, writing, math, and algebra placement tests, with the students who took the standard course having the higher scores. However, the effect sizes are small. Also, the students who took the enhanced course were older and took somewhat fewer credits.

**Table 4.3**

***Comparison of Pre-College Characteristics for the Standard Freshman Seminar Group and Advisement enhanced Freshman Seminar Group***

Pre-College Characteristics	Mean Scores		t-value	Probability	<i>d</i>
	Standard Course ( <i>N</i> =847)	Enhanced Course ( <i>N</i> =916)			
Age at start	21.0	22.0	-4.373	<.001	.20
Reading Scores	85.5	83.7	2.509	<.012	.13
Writing Scores	94.5	92.1	3.480	<.001	.17
Math Scores	81.5	78.4	3.088	<.002	.16
Algebra Scores	70.5	66.0	3.938	<.001	.21
Atmpt Hrs 1 <sup>st</sup> Term	15.3	15.0	2.282	<.023	.10

## Grade Point Average and Freshman Seminar Course

### *Interactions of Course, Ethnicity, and Gender*

The means and standard deviations for first term cumulative GPAs are shown in Table 4.4. These descriptive data are necessary to understand the results of research questions 1 – 4, which are presented below.

**Table 4.4**

### *Means, Standard Deviations, and Ns for First Term Grade Point Averages*

	Standard Course			Enhanced Course		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>African American</b>						
Females	187	2.87	.86	248	2.99	.89
Males	299	2.61	.97	358	2.70	1.01
Total	486	2.71	.93	606	2.82	.97
<b>Caucasian</b>						
Females	35	3.21	.99	35	3.18	.96
Males	152	2.67	1.17	125	3.04	.99
Total	187	2.78	1.15	160	3.07	.98
<b>Other</b>						
Females	42	3.23	.95	50	3.27	.80
Males	78	2.72	1.18	89	3.11	.86
Total	120	2.90	1.13	139	3.17	.84
<b>All</b>						
Females	264	2.98	.90	333	3.05	.89
Males	529	2.64	1.06	572	2.81	.90
Total	793	2.75	1.02	903	2.92	.96

Research question 1 examined the four interactions shown in Table 4.5: A(course) x B(ethnicity), A x C(gender), B x C, and A x B x C. None of these interactions were statistically significant, indicating that it is reasonable to interpret the main effects of course type, ethnicity, and gender separately, (research questions 2 – 4), without needing to consider whether or not one of these variables depends on another.

**Table 4.5**

***Three-Way ANOVA Comparing Course Types, Ethnicities, and Genders on First Term Grade Point Average***

Source	Type # SS	df	MS	F	p
Course (A)	6.23	1	6.23	6.52	.011
Ethnicity (B)	22.05	2	11.02	11.53	<.001
Gender (C)	23.92	1	23.92	25.01	<.001
A x B	.647	2	.32	.34	.713
A x C	3.61	1	3.61	3.4	.052
B x C	.316	2	.158	.17	.848
A x B x C	3.25	2	1.63	1.70	.183
Error	1612.03	1686	.956		

Research question 2 examined the apparent impact of the freshman seminar course on the students' grade point average. To determine this, the main effect ANOVA (*F*) for course in Table 4.5 was utilized. Table 4.6 shows that the grade point average of the students who took the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course was significantly different from the students who took the standard freshman seminar course, ( $p=.011$ ). Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average grade point average for the advisement enhanced students (2.92) was significantly higher than the

average grade point average (2.75) for the standard students, but the effect size,  $d$ , was approximately .17, so small.

**Table 4.6a**

***Comparison of the Grade Point Averages for the Standard Freshman Seminar Course and the Advisement enhanced Freshman Seminar Course***

Variable	$M$	$SD$	$F$	$df$	$p$	$d$
Grade Point Averages			6.52	1,1686	.011	.17
Standard	2.75	1.02				
Enhanced	2.92	.96				

Supplemental analysis (Table 4.6b) showed that both groups had about the same percentage of As and Bs. However, the enhanced Coll group had more Cs and slightly more Ws while the standard group had a higher percentage of Fs.

**Table 4.6b**

***Freshman Seminar Groups' Grade***

Course	A	B	C	D	F	W
Standard Coll Course	43%	27%	8%	3%	7%	12%
Advisement Enhanced Coll Course	43%	26%	11%	4%	4%	13%

### ***Ethnicity and Course on GPA***

Research question 3 investigated whether or not students differed in ethnicity on grade point averages. The ANOVA for ethnicity shown in Table 4.5 was used. Table 4.7 shows that there was a significant difference between the three ethnic groups. Pairwise comparisons revealed that, of the three ethnic groups of students, the African American students had significantly lower GPAs than either the Caucasians or other ethnicity

students, who were not different from each other. As expected from the non significant interaction of course and ethnicity as shown in Table 4.4, all three ethnic groups (African Americans, Caucasians, and Others) had higher cumulative GPAs after taking the advisement enhanced freshman seminar. The effect size,  $d$ , for the pairwise comparison of African Americans and Caucasians was approximately .14 (small); for African Americans and Others,  $d$  was .20 (small).

**Table 4.7**

***Analysis of Variance Comparing Ethnicities on Grade Point Average***

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade Point Average			11.53	2,1686	<.001
Ethnicity					
African Americans	2.77	.96			
Caucasians	2.91	1.09			
Other Ethnicities	3.04	.99			

***Gender and Grade Point Average***

Research question 4 compared male and female students on grade point average. Again, the difference was statistically significant; female students had higher GPAs (3.02 vs. 2.74). Females did better in both the standard Coll course and the advisement enhanced Coll course. The effect size,  $d$ , was approximately .3, which is in the small to medium range.

**Table 4.8*****Analysis of Variance Comparing Genders on Grade Point Average***

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade Point Average			25.01	1,1686	<.001
Ethnicity					
Females	3.02	.90			
Males	2.74	1.03			

**Retention and Freshman Seminar Course**

Research question 5 determined the apparent impact of the freshman seminar course on the short-term retention of the students. To investigate whether the percentage of students re-enrolling for their second semester differed between the students who took the standard freshman seminar course and the students who took the advisement enhanced course, Pearson chi-square was used. Table 4.9 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that the students who took the standard freshman seminar course and the students who took the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course are not statistically significantly different on re-enrollment for the second semester ( $\chi^2 = 2.229$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $N = 2,000$ ,  $p < .32$ ). Although there was not a difference in retention between the two freshmen seminar groups, both groups had much better retention (69%) than those who did not take either freshman seminar. Furthermore, it is very likely that students who dropped out of the Coll course in the first two weeks had much lower retention. Unfortunately, data for these students is not available so it is not known whether their probably low retention differed between standard and enhanced Coll groups.

**Table 4.9*****Chi-square Analysis of Retention for Freshman Seminar Course Takers***

Second Semester Courses	Standard		Enhanced		$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Grade Posted	717	76%	795	75%	2.229	.32
Not Posted	<u>229</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>259</u>	<u>25%</u>		
Total	946	100%	1054	100%		

***Ethnicity and Retention***

Research question 6 investigated whether African Americans, Caucasians and “other ethnicities” differed on retention, Pearson chi-square statistic was used. Table 4.10 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that African Americans, Caucasians, and “other ethnicities” differed significantly on their enrollment for the second semester ( $\chi^2 = 13.32$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $N = 2,010$ ,  $p < .01$ ). African Americans were more likely to re-enroll than either of the other groups.

**Table 4.10*****Chi-square Analysis of Retention for Freshman Seminar Course Takers by Ethnicity***

Second Semester Grades	African American		Caucasian		Other		$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Grades Posted	992	78%	285	72%	235	70%	13.32	<.01
Not Posted	<u>278</u>	<u>22%</u>	<u>111</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>99</u>	<u>30%</u>		
Totals	1270	100%	406	100%	334	100%		

### ***Gender and Retention***

Research question 7 investigated whether or not males and females differed on retention. Pearson chi-square statistic was used. Table 4.11 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that males and females differed significantly on their re-enrollment for the semester ( $\chi^2 = 6.54, df = 1, N = 1,873, p < .035$ ). Females had a slightly higher retention than the males.

**Table 4.11**

#### **Chi-square Analysis of Retention for Freshman Seminar Course Takers by Gender**

Second Semester Enrollment	Females		Males		$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Grades Post	534	79%	911	75%	6.54	.035
Not Posted	<u>139</u>	<u>21%</u>	<u>309</u>	<u>25%</u>		
Totals	673	100%	1220	100%		

### **Qualitative Analysis**

To answer research questions seven and eight, qualitative research was designed to give the researcher indepth insight into first-term students perceptions of their experiences in DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar course. Because this qualitative research was conducted to gain an understanding of these experiences, a phenomenological approach was used. A mailed survey followed by a focus group interview was utilized to supplement the quantitative research data in this study.

The analyses from each of the two qualitative data collection methods will be presented in the following order. First, the response rate will be discussed with a brief

assessment. Second, themes developed from the students' responses based on the questions will be presented.

### ***Mailed Survey***

Approximately 2,000 surveys were mailed to students who enrolled from Fall 2000 to Summer 2002. Approximately 500 surveys were returned due to incorrect addresses. Of the approximate 1,500 outstanding surveys, only 30 completed surveys (2%) were returned to the researcher. Students who completed the survey represented a mixture of programs. Students who were enrolled in the standard freshman seminar course represented the following major/programs: two accounting (ACC), one business (BSBA), four computer information (CIS), one computer engineering technology (CET), one electronic engineering technology (EET), and one networking communication management (formerly TCM). The programs represented by the students who were enrolled in the advisement freshman seminar course were as follows: three accounting, four business (BSBA), two computer information systems (CIS), one computer engineering technology (CET), five electronic engineering technology (EET), and five network communication management (NCM also known as TCM).

Because the response rate for the surveys was extremely low, the researcher attempted to understand some possible reasons for such a low response rate. One possible reason was that the addresses were incorrect. Since this study was conducted almost three years after the students enrolled, many of them have probably relocated. It is also known that the students often did not give correct addresses at the beginning of their enrollment and failed to update their addresses in subsequent semesters. This may account for the initial 500 surveys that were returned to the researcher due to wrong

addresses. Another possible reason for the low response rate was that students simply might have ignored the surveys. One other possibility was that the survey was open-ended and required students to write their responses. While the survey only asked six questions and probably only required about thirty minutes to complete, it still may have required too much from the students. However, given the 30 surveys that were returned, three themes seemed to emerge from the students about their experiences.

The survey (Appendix C) consisted of six open-ended questions. The first question asked about DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar course. Questions two and three asked the students about their freshman seminar professor. Questions four and five were about the advisement they did or did not receive. The last question was specifically addressed to the standard freshman students where their freshman seminar professor was not their advisor. Specific themes did emerge from the standard freshman seminar course and then the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course. Students gave both positive and negative responses to the questions. In many cases, they did not give a response at all. However, based on the responses from the students, three themes emerged: intellectual excitement/ teacher-student rapport, faculty selection, and professional development. These themes will be discussed for the mailed survey responses and the focus group interview responses.

### **Standard Freshman Seminar Course**

The first central theme emerged from the positive responses by the students about their experiences in the freshman seminar course. Many students felt that the course and the professor offered them intellectual excitement and interpersonal rapport. These

qualities are the two central components of Lowman's (1995) two-dimensional model of effective college teaching.

These components emerged from students' responses to questions one, two, and three:

*The class helped/taught me to analyze and rationalize situations and to be able to recognize the possible from the impossible.*

*The intense learning environment.*

Since this group of students did not have their freshman seminar professor as their advisor, the two questions (four and five) about advisement did not apply to them. However, question five did ask the students to answer the question if their professor was not their official advisor. This question was designed to see if the students felt that having their freshman seminar professor as their advisor would have made a difference in their academic success and desire to reenroll for the second semester. Their responses were largely negative –most students felt that having their freshman seminar professor as their advisor would not have made a difference.

Overall, the fifty statements from this group of students, seventeen were positive and thirty-three were negative. Some of the negative comments were:

*To be honest, I really did not learn anything from my Coll class.*

*None, I did not receive any helpful information at all.*

*I do not believe any of the class helped with my coursework or my desire to return. At the time I felt the course was a filler course.*

*...the professor spoke in a monotone voice, showed no feeling when speaking, and put several students to sleep with her endless babble.*

*Not much advice.*

*I honestly can't answer that. I only saw my advisor at orientation, then got a new one, but never met him.*

### **Advisement Enhanced Course**

The findings from the students who took the advisement enhanced seminar yielded a mixture of responses with the majority of the responses being positive.

For question number one, students reported a variety of positive aspects of the course. One salient point drawn from this question was that the students felt that the course helped them academically, but not necessarily helped them want to return to DeVry.

*The experience I had in Coll helped me with my academic coursework in my level of thinking. It made me think more in depth of a problem, analyze a problem, and solve the problem.*

*I believe the psychological profile (Myers/Briggs) helped me identify my personality type. Good study habits were discussed reminding me how to be a successful student.*

*It helped me think about major responsibility. It showed me how to reach out to others and build long lasting relationships from a networking stand point of view.*

*Well, the Coll course helped me to develop the skills I needed to think outside the box. It helped me focus on thinking more open-minded than close-minded.*

*The experience I got from Coll was the group work, critical thinking, and the excitement of learning.*

Responses from questions two and three were mixed. The positive responses corresponded to the two key components, intellectual excitement and interpersonal rapport, of Lowman's (1995) two-dimensional model. Comments from the students included the following:

*Yes, I believe my professor was a nice lady and she positively influenced me*

*with her method of conducting the class, that is, placing students in groups and making us brainstorm.*

*Just her openness to questions and willingness to assist.*

*The professor pushed us to think clearly and to use more brain power.*

*Yes, Professor A was an outstanding professor in every way....*

*I believe that the teachers were very knowledgeable, and that they were organized with what they are going to teach.*

*Her kind nature, and helpful spirit.*

*...It challenges me to think.*

*Her energy and how she had the other professors involved in class.”*

Typical negative responses included:

*Hated the class.*

*Honestly, I don't think the class helped me as much.*

*Honestly, I can't remember what I learned in Coll. So nothing benefited me thus far.*

Questions four and five asked students who were enrolled in the advisement enhanced course, if they felt that the advisement they received impacted their success at DeVry. Out of the seventeen responses to the two questions, eleven responses were negative. Among the six positive responses, students offered the following:

*Yes, she said only those who persevere will survive. It was about us making sacrifices.*

*My professor showed me that the professors at the school pay attention to the student as an individual not as a whole class.*

*Her kind nature, and helpful spirit.*

*Coll was the best general class I ever took.*

*Motivating, concernment, strict, empowering are all these things that I received from my advisor.*

*My professor took the time go over the class I would need to eventually graduate.*

*This is where Professor A was outstanding. She helped me register for classes when DSOS wasn't working, She helped me plan my schedule and select classes. She was also kind enough to help me when other administrators wouldn't in other areas. She is one of the best people at DeVry.*

From a total of 137 comments from the 30 students who completed the mailed survey, 53% of the responses were positive with 47% negative statements. The students who were enrolled in the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course responded more favorably about their experiences in this course. Three of the questions about the course and professor were favorable having an average positive percentage of 57%. The same three questions yielded an average percentage of 46% positive comments from the students who took the advisement enhanced course.

### ***Focus Group Interview***

From the 30 students who completed and returned the surveys, only eleven students indicated that they were willing to participate in the focus group interview. The researcher called the students to notify them of the date, time, and location of the interview. After making the phone calls, six students agreed to participate. The researcher informed the students that she would call and remind them of the session.

On the day of the focus group interview, only three students showed up for the session. Two of the students took the advisement enhanced course, and the other student took the standard course. After waiting a little longer with the hopes that some more students would come, the interviewer began the session. The session began with the

interviewer discussing the purpose of the session and having the students sign the informed consent form. Since the interviewer knew two of the students, establishing rapport was not an issue. However, for the one student the interviewer did not know, time was taken to make her feel comfortable. Since the interviewer did know two of the students, the interviewer made it clear to all of the participants that she was not looking for answers that the students thought she might want to hear. To eliminate or reduce bias, the interviewer stated that she wanted the students to give their honest answers. From this point, the interview began.

The protocol (Figure 1.1) consisted of ten questions with question number eleven asking the students if they wished to discuss anything else. The first six questions were about the course and professor's impact on the students' academic success and desire to return to DeVry. Question number one asked about the students' experiences in their first semester. Questions two, three, and four were focused on the course itself. Questions four, five, and six asked about the professor's impact on the students' academic success and desire to return for the second semester. The remaining questions, eight through ten, were directed specifically to the students who enrolled beginning with the year, Fall 2001. These were the students whose freshman seminar course was the advisement enhanced course. Question eight asked the students to share their thoughts about the advisement they received. Question ten asked the students for recommendations for improving advisement. The last question was a standard question asking the students if there was anything else they wished to discuss. The following are some of the themes generated from the participants' responses to the interviewer questions.

Based on the responses from the participants, no theme emerged for question number one. One participant commented that as a student in the course, he began to think differently:

*... When I started at DeVry, I would say the class started to develop my thinking patterns on world views or maybe a little bit of outside of what I already knew....So, I started to look at different avenues of thinking and thought patterns and how people think and I could see other people's mindsets around the world."*

Questions two and three were about the class with the following comments;

*What I liked about the class was that it gave me the opportunity to learn a little bit about how I felt.*

*What I liked about the class I guess with my being so concrete and sequential as I am was getting more input from other students a lot younger than me and seeing how their patterns were and how we are all so different in our views and how we process information we get.*

*I remember when I came out of the class. When you first enter college, you don't really have too much. You're afraid and you're a little bit scared. Am I going to be able to live up to this whole college experience? Am I going to be able to do this? And I just don't know if I can do it. And so it (the class) starts helping you say if I just think hard, if I just work hard, and focus, I can possibly make it through this.*

*"I would have to say the instructor was important for me. First, I am already self-motivated and I will complete anything that I have set my mind to doing. But if the instructor should have the same desire to present the information, that motivates me to at least made a great grade, I think that the instructors play a vital role in the education at DeVry.*

Questions five, six and seven were specifically about the freshman seminar professor.

The majority of the questions were positive with the following comments:

*She had a passion for that class. She was very into the class. She wanted to try to connect to the students to help them understand things. She just loved teaching the class. And so watching her made you want to get more into it also.*

*Wow, I think when you have a teacher where you see that he or she is passionate about what they do, that maybe rubs off you some. And it's her energy, it's like, WOW! And you kind of start to connect to it more. You start to enjoy that.*

*Professor B was my professor for critical thinking. I also have to give him some kudos because he really had a mainstream way of teaching. He wasn't too far left. He wasn't too far right. And I think that gave me and the other students the chance to say that we could relate to him. Because if a professor is too hard or takes one side or the other, then more likely you build up barriers. So, I have to give the professor his props on that because he really made the class more rewarding.*

The remaining questions, numbers eight, nine, and ten, were designed to gain the students' perceptions of the advisement component of the class. In some cases, it was difficult for students to distinguish the instructor's role as professor from the advisor. In many cases, these roles were merged into one. Of the three participants, two had their freshman seminar professor as their advisor while the other student took the standard class. However, the students revealed that they did not know that their freshman seminar professor was their advisor. The participants shared the following comments:

*I really felt left out in this portion because I don't recall either receiving any advisement.*

*No, I don't remember getting advised.*

*I think that when most college students get to college, they enter college, and they really don't have any sense of putting together schedules for themselves to structure their lives. I would say that the advisement that college students need is when they come in.*

*When the professor takes the time to call a student, and she is taking the chance to reach out to the student, she is letting them see it's okay. If you need to call, then let her know. I think that opens up a lot of students to say okay it's alright if they need to call her. They can call and build a relationship with her. The teachers sometimes have to be a little more aggressive, I guess, to draw students in. That way they (the students) can see that that's a good thing.*

## *Summary*

While both mailed survey and focus interview group had a low participation. Feedback from both echoed the same sentiment of the students. Their experiences in the standard freshman seminar course and the advisement enhanced freshman seminar were both positive and negative with the overall experiences being mostly positive.

The positive experiences were derived from their freshman seminar professors. The majority of the students perceived their professors to be caring, enthusiastic, passionate about the subject, and their students learning.

The negative experiences were based on many of the students not knowing that their freshman seminar professor was their official advisor. This applied to the students in the advisement enhanced course. It seemed that the students in the standard course had some type of advisor, but had little or no contact with them. The students seemed to be confused in both cases. In addition, some students indicated that their freshman seminar professor lacked the skills to teach the course. This was actually based on comments their professors made. It was from these responses that the three themes of intellectual excitement and interactive rapport, faculty selection, and professional development emerged. Responses from both groups of participants revealed a need for better faculty selection and more professional development for the faculty selected to teach the freshman seminar course. Overall, it seems that the students tended to feel good about the freshman seminar class.

A word of caution about both the mailed survey and focus group interview is needed here; approximately two years had elapsed for the participants since they were

enrolled in this seminar. Accordingly, the participants' lack of recall should be taken into consideration. This was mentioned in the returned surveys and at the time of the focus group interview.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter addressed the seven research questions regarding the grade point average and retention of the students who took the standard freshman seminar course and the students who took the advisement enhanced freshman seminar courses. This chapter also addressed the students' feedback about their perceptions of their experiences in the course.

The quantitative analyses revealed that students in the two types of freshman courses differed significantly on grade point average with the advisement enhanced group being higher. Further analysis revealed that students also differed significantly in ethnicity and grade point average. In addition, analysis showed a statistical significant difference between male and female students on their grade point average.

The quantitative analyses also revealed that the two groups of students differed significantly on retention. Again, further analysis investigated whether or not students differed in terms of ethnicity and gender on re-enrollment for their second semester. The analyses found that in both cases, there was a significant statistical difference between ethnicity and retention and between gender and retention.

The implications from these findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The first semester of college is viewed as probably the most crucial time for a new student (Tinto, 1993). College administrators, faculty, and others in higher education face the same challenges today that have existed since the beginning of higher education – retaining new college students (Gordon, 1989).

A great deal of research has been conducted in an attempt to examine the factors that impact the overall success of college students, especially new students. Many studies have been conducted to determine what practices play a major role in helping new students achieve good grades and retention in their first semester. Many theorists have different views on ways to help freshman students be successful in their first semester.

This study was conducted to compare a standard freshman seminar course and an advisement enhanced freshman seminar course on the academic success and retention of first semester students at a for-profit postsecondary institution. Analyses were conducted on the student's grade point average at the end of the first semester and their re-enrollment in the second semester. First, pre-college characteristic similarities and differences between the two groups of students were examined. Second, quantitative analysis utilizing a three-way ANOVA and chi-square statistics to examine the grade point averages and retention of the two groups was conducted. In addition, effect sizes were used to determine the strength of the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

The qualitative analysis utilized a mailed open-ended survey followed by a focus group interview to get feedback from some of the students in the two groups. As indicated in chapter four, the researcher faced several challenges in collecting sufficient responses from the students for both the survey and the focus group interview. However, the feedback solicited provided a glimpse of insight about the students' perception of their experiences in the courses.

First, this chapter will discuss the quantitative and qualitative findings from the study. Second, the implications for policy and practices will be discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research will be enumerated. However, before discussing the findings and implications of this study, a few things need to be remembered. First, this study only investigated the daytime bachelor's degree-seeking students. The associate degree seeking students and the evening students were not included in this study. The evening students were excluded because they were not required to take the freshman seminar course. Therefore, the findings from this study only apply to daytime students who are matriculating toward bachelor degrees. Before discussing the findings from this study, a brief reminder of the background of the students is needed. The placement scores showed that the students who enrolled in the standard Coll course were higher in reading, writing, math, and algebra. Both groups of students had more females than males. Also, both groups had more African American students.

### **Quantitative Findings**

Before discussing the quantitative findings of this study, the pre-college characteristics will be revisited. The analysis on the pre-college characteristics in chapter

four indicated that there were differences between the standard and advisement enhanced groups. The standard group scored higher in all four of the placement test areas of reading, writing, math, and algebra. The analysis also revealed that DeVry Georgia had more females and more African American students in the advisement enhanced group than in the standard Coll group.

The quantitative analyses on grade point average in this study indicated there was a statistically significant difference between the standard freshman seminar group of students and the advisement enhanced seminar group. On the other hand, the analysis on retention did not yield a statistically significant difference between the two freshmen seminar groups.

### ***Freshman Seminar and Grade Point Average***

The findings from this study showed that a difference exists between the students who took the standard freshman seminar course and the students who took the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course in regards to their grade point average. This difference only applies to the students who did not drop out of the course and/or drop out of college in the first two weeks. Because the DeVry database did not provide any indicator of whether a student registered for a course if they dropped it in the first two weeks, it was not possible to know the GPAs or retention of students who started the Coll courses and then dropped before week three. It is possible that the enhanced Coll course teachers were able to encourage students to stay in the course and school longer, but we cannot tell.

To account for the differences between the two groups of students, one might first think that the advisement enhanced Coll class was easier than the standard Coll class. However, inspection of Table 4.6b shows that both groups had basically the same percentage of As and Bs. However, further inspection of the table shows that the enhanced Coll class had fewer Fs, but did have a slightly higher withdrawal rate. In addition, the enhanced Coll class also had a higher percentage of Cs. One possible reason for the higher withdrawal percentage could be due to the students being advised to withdraw from the class or finish the assignments and get a C rather than receive an F. DeVry Georgia students are allowed to withdraw from a class up to week eleven of the semester without penalty. If they withdraw after the eleventh week, the grade would be an F and will be factored in their grade point average. Therefore, it is their best interest to withdraw from a class rather than have an F, which would negatively impact their grade point average.

While there is not much literature on the combination of advisement and the freshman seminar, the findings on the grade point average are consistent with the literature on academic achievement of college students (Astin, 1993 and Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). The results are also in alignment with Upcraft and Gardner's (1989) literature on freshman seminars. They cite several beliefs that are necessary for freshman success, one of which is about the freshman seminar:

The freshman seminar is a proven and effective way of enhancing freshmen success. It can be the glue that holds together and solidifies all to enhance freshman academic and personal success. It can provide students with vital information, promote their involvement in campus life, enhance their academic skills, stimulate their intellectual interests, and facilitate relations with peers (p.132).

The above statements are supported by several studies. Results from a variety of studies revealed student improvement in grade point averages among those enrolled in freshman seminars. Stupka (1986) found Sacramento City College's freshman students who took the freshman seminar achieved higher grade point averages than the non-participants. In Hopkins and Hahn's (1986) study of State University of New York College at Cortland the results indicated that students achieved higher GPAs in 1983, 1984, and 1985. Additionally, freshman seminar course takers at the University of North Carolina had higher grade point averages than the non-participants (1987). The same is true for Wilkie & Kuckick's (1987) study on grade point average and the freshman seminar at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Students who participated in the freshman seminar course had consistently higher grade point averages even three years after taking the course. However, Fidler's (1991) studies did not show any significant differences in grade point averages. Freshmen who took the freshman seminar course had similar grade point averages as the students who did not take the course. Therefore, the results can still be viewed as positive. However, these same studies conducted by Fidler (1991) at the University of South Carolina showed significant differences in retention and will be discussed in the section on freshman seminar and retention.

### ***Ethnicity and Grade Point Average***

The findings on ethnicity and grade point average showed significant differences between the three ethnic groups (African Americans, Caucasians, and Other Ethnicities). Of the three groups, African American students had a significantly lower grade point average compared to the Caucasians and individuals from other ethnicities attending the

institution. It is interesting to note that the pre-college characteristics comparison revealed that both the standard and enhanced Coll courses, but especially the enhanced group, had a higher percentage of African American students as compared to Caucasians and Other ethnicities. Although the African Americans had the lowest average GPAs in both the standard and enhanced Coll class, the African Americans showed an increase in GPA after taking the enhanced Coll course, indicating that the enhanced course was effective in helping African Americans as well as the Caucasians and the students of other ethnicities. The students who were classified as Other Ethnicities had the highest grade point average. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the GPAs of those with other ethnicities and the Caucasians. The Caucasian students having the second highest enrollment and grade point averages is more consistent with the literature on academic achievement (Astin, 1993). Astin states that Caucasians are more likely to succeed in higher education than minorities.

### ***Gender and Grade Point Average***

The findings on gender and grade point average revealed that the females had better grade point averages. This, too, is consistent with Astin's (1993) findings on academic achievement. While the analyses on grade point average and gender between the two groups of students indicated that the females tended to do better than the males, males and females also differed significantly statistically on the pre-college characteristics. The pre-college characteristics on gender also showed the enhanced Coll class had a higher percentage of females than the standard Coll class, which could be part of the reason that students in the enhanced course had higher grade point averages.

### ***Freshman Seminar and Retention***

The findings in chapter four indicated that there was no difference between the standard Coll class and the enhanced Coll class in regards to retention. Approximately three-fourths of the students in each group re-enrolled for the second semester. However, when reviewing the students who did not take either the standard or enhanced course, their retention was lower than either of the groups who took the Coll class. It must be remembered that from Fall 2000 to Summer 2001, students who entered DeVry Georgia from another college with at least 12 credit hours and a minimum grade of B in the courses or students with military experience could exempt the Coll class. This practice changed beginning with the Fall 2001 semester when the advisement enhanced Coll class was first offered. From this point forward, all daytime students were required to take the new Coll class, which was the advisement enhanced Coll class. But this was not necessarily what occurred since some students did not take the course during their first semester for various reasons. As a result, a number of students did not enroll in the new Coll class in their first semester at DeVry but took it later during their tenure at DeVry Georgia.

The results on DeVry Georgia's freshman seminar and retention are not consistent with the literature on freshman seminars. The majority of findings from studies conducted to determine whether or not freshman seminars improved student retention found improvement. Beginning with Nelson's (1941) study and Mueller's (1961) study on earlier freshman seminars, the results have been positive. Students who enrolled in freshman seminars had better retention than students who did not. Going back to the

series of studies conducted by Fidler (1991) on the University of South Carolina's University 101, the results showed that the students who took the freshman seminar had significantly higher retention than the non-participants. In addition to the study that was conducted on the main campus, similar results were reported from the studies conducted at the University of South Carolina's other eight campuses. The students who took the freshman seminar course had higher retention rates. Even the students in the developmental studies program had higher retention rates. Studies by Shanley (1987), Hyers (1998), Barefoot (1998), and Starke, Harth, and Sirianni (2001) all have shown higher retention rates for students who enrolled in the freshman seminars.

### ***Ethnicity and Retention***

Analysis on retention and ethnicity also revealed that of DeVry Georgia's three ethnic groups, the African American students were the most likely to re-enroll for the second semester. The re-enrollment rate for African Americans was 78%. The re-enrollment rate for Caucasian students was 72% followed by a re-enrollment rate of 70% for Other ethnicities. However, one must keep in mind that over 50% of DeVry Georgia's population is African American. For the African Americans to have the highest retention of the three ethnic groups examined is not consistent with the literature on retention and ethnicity. The literature indicates that Caucasians have better retention (Astin, 1993 and Tinto, 1993).

### ***Gender and Retention***

The findings on gender and retention showed that a statistically significant difference existed between males and females. Females were more likely to re-enroll for the second semester. According to Tinto (1993), more females attend colleges and universities than males. Also, females have higher completion rates than males. Therefore, DeVry Georgia's higher female population and higher female retention are consistent with the literature on females in higher education.

### ***Summary of Quantitative Findings***

One of the anticipated outcomes of the new advisement enhanced course was to increase the retention of DeVry Georgia's first semester students. However, the findings revealed no statistically significant difference. *What could be some possible reasons for there not being a difference in retention between the students in the standard Coll course and the students in the advisement enhanced Coll course?* One of the additional responsibilities of the advisement-enhanced Coll freshman seminar professors was to help their students register for the next semester. The Coll professors worked with their students in getting them registered for the next semester. They went over the students' programs of study, course schedules, and took the students to a computer laboratory to show them how to register using the new computerized scheduling program. For students who were having trouble, the professors actually registered these students. Some professors went even further by keeping records of who had registered for the next semester.

Based on the above, it would appear that students in the enhanced course would have had a higher return rate than 75%. The year before with the standard Coll course, the return rate was 76%. There must have been other reasons for students not to re-enroll. One potential explanation would be financial aid. Over 85% of DeVry Georgia's students receive some type of financial aid. So, if there was a problem with financial aid, it could have impacted the students' ability to re-enroll for the next semester. Of course, there could have been a variety of reasons students did not return to DeVry Georgia the next semester.

The second question actually was not a part of the study, but emerged from the quantitative results. *Why did so many new students fail to take Coll149 in their first semester at DeVry Georgia? Since the new course was a requirement of all daytime students and there were no more exemptions, how was this possible?* Taking the Coll class is a graduation requirement. However, there was not a written policy indicating that the course must be taken in the student's first semester. On one hand, the institution says that the students must take the course because it is a graduation requirement. This is evident by the course being part of the students' programs of study and is listed as part of the first semester cohort. However, when the students registered, many of them did not take the course during their first term at DeVry Georgia. So, on the other hand, it appears that an inconsistency existed. If the course was as important as it was said to be, this message should have been clear to everyone who worked with the new students. Another question that may need to be addressed what was the scheduling process for the new students during the period covered by this study. How was it done? At this point and time, it would be difficult to determine this. However, it does bring up the matter now

and for future scheduling of new students. If there was a policy requiring new students should take the freshman seminar course in their first semester, then this policy should have been enforced by everyone at the institution.

Even though this study found no statistically significant difference between the two freshman seminar groups, the retention rate for both groups seem to be an improvement over the institution's prior overall daytime retention rate as indicated in chapter two. However, whether or not this improvement in retention can be contributed to the freshman seminar course cannot be determined by this study.

### **Qualitative Findings**

As stated in chapter four, the students' participation in the qualitative analysis was very low. However, based on the comments from the mailed survey and the feedback given at the focus group interview, the participants did offer some insight about the perception of their experiences in the freshman seminar course and with their professors.

Data from both sources indicated that the students in the two freshman seminar groups had mixed feelings about their experiences. Approximately 50% of the 137 comments from the 30 students indicated that they had a positive experience. Both groups had positive and not so positive feelings about their experiences in the freshman seminar course.

The majority of positive comments were about the professors. This is for both the professors who taught the standard class and the professors who taught the advisement enhanced class. Both groups of students felt positively toward their professors. The students felt that their professors were generally caring and enjoyed what they did. They

felt that their professors made them think in different ways. They also felt that their professors were open minded and made them feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and ideas in class. All of these comments made it very clear how important the classroom is to students. This is especially true for new students. This is consistent with Tinto's (1993) theory of the classroom being important to new students. Tinto states,

Nowhere is the importance of student involvement more evident than in and around the classrooms of the college...student engagement is, for the most part, centered in and around the classroom. ...This view of the central role of classrooms leads us in turn to reiterate the importance of faculty to student development and persistence (p. 132-133).

Astin (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) share Tinto's view of the importance of the classroom. The role of the classroom professor is also the basis of Lowman's (1988) theory of effective college teachers. Lowman discusses how intellectual excitement and interpersonal rapport make for an exemplary professor. He says when asked what words come to mind to describe such a professor, they are "enthusiastic", "interesting", "dedicated", or "concerned about me and my learning." The above two key factors and some of the same words were reported in both the mailed survey and focus group interview.

As stated, not all of the comments were positive. Some of the students felt they did not need to take the course or that the course did not make a difference. These students felt that they were already motivated to succeed and did not need a course to help them academically. Not all the feelings about the professors were positive. Some students indicated that the professors were not prepared to teach the course and given the assignment at the last minute. Another comment was that their professor was not knowledgeable of the subject and said so to the class. Comments such as these really

made it clear as to how important it is having the right professor in the classroom and also how important is it for professional development for professors who are selected to teach freshman seminars.

### *Summary of Qualitative Findings*

The question that comes as a result of the qualitative findings relates to the student's confusion about their advisors. Why were the students in the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course confused about having an advisor? More specifically, how was it that many students did not know that their Coll professors were their advisors? Based on the feedback solicited from the students who completed the mailed survey and the focus group interview, it was very obvious that a problem existed in the communication to the students about the advisement role of their professor. As one of the key people involved with the freshman seminar, I had been hearing some of the same comments from the new students about not knowing they had an advisor or if they did have one who that person was. This confusion seemed to be created by the institution itself. Information about the new advisement program should have been shared at the recruitment stage, during registration, and at orientation.

Overall, the findings from the qualitative analyses may or may not be viewed to support the quantitative findings on grade point average, but not necessarily support the quantitative findings on retention. However, if an institution is seeking to help its first semester students, the quantitative and qualitative findings from this study may lead campus leaders to at least consider exploring the combining of new student advisement with their freshman seminar course or at least make sure that the advising role of the

professors is clear. In addition, the findings from this study may also lead them to take a hard look at several other matters that relate to freshmen students attending their institution.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As stated in chapter one, an ex post facto design was a limitation of this study. In addition to this, a few more limitations were revealed. One limitation had to do with the quantitative part of this study. While collecting the data on the student's GPAs and retention, it was revealed that there were a large number of students who did not take Coll in their first semester or students may have dropped the class during the first two weeks of the semester. Therefore it was not possible to determine the GPAs and retention of these students. The second limitation was discovered in the qualitative part of this study. As stated previously, there was a low response rate of the mailed surveys. This could have been due to the amount of time that had passed since the students were enrolled in the course or that they felt answering the six open-ended questions required too much writing. As a result of the low response rate, only one focus group interview was conducted rather than the anticipated eight to ten interviews.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

While this study was conducted at a for-profit institution, some of the implications can be applied to for-profit and non-profit colleges and universities. Any institution that is concerned about retaining its students, especially, its first year students, can benefit from the findings of this study. Many institutions have some type of policy

that requires them to assist new students in their first year of college. As a result, these institutions put into practice a host of programs or initiatives for such. One of these programs is offering a freshman seminar course. Many colleges and universities do offer freshman seminar, whether credit-bearing or non-credit bearing. While, the course format and credit hours may vary, however, the goal is the same – helping new students be successful in their first year of college.

In addition to offering freshman seminar courses, many institutions offer some type of advisement program. However, the literature does not show that many institutions combine the advisement and course together. Also, the literature shows limited research conducted to examine the impact of the combination of the advisement with the freshman seminar course. Therefore, this study could offer a few guidelines for an institution.

First and foremost, institutions should have a policy on supporting and assisting its first year students. With the multitude of literature on how important and crucial the first year of college is for new students (Tinto, 1993), colleges and universities should develop a philosophy for their first year students as well a plan of action to help new students succeed, especially in their first semester. Given the literature on attrition in colleges and universities and the importance of new students having a successful beginning, great emphasis must be placed on helping new students succeed in their first semester. Offering freshman seminar is one way to help.

Second, for institutions that offer freshman seminar courses, great care should be given when selecting the faculty who will teach these courses. Not every instructor is trained and equipped to work with new students. Therefore, institutions should develop a

set of criteria for the selection of freshman seminar professors. Selected professors should be very knowledgeable of the subject matter, possess excellent teaching skills, and have a desire to work with new college students.

Third, institutions should have the selected faculty participate in some type of professional development designed especially for them. Even though the faculty may possess excellent teaching skills and a strong desire to work with new students, they need to be made fully aware of what is required of them as instructors. Participation in training should be required and completed before the faculty begins teaching the course. Faculty need to be given the proper tools and information in order to be successful as instructors of new college students. Participation in some type of training activity will do this. If the faculty and the students are to be successful, faculty attendance must be a condition of taking on the task of teaching the course. They will need training on how to teach new students and on how to advise new students, if they are the advisors. They will need to know how to work with new students as opposed to working with students who have been attending the institution for a while. Faculty need to understand the concerns, the fears, and the challenges new students face when they first arrive at a campus.

Fourth, since the findings from this study do suggest that the advisement enhanced freshman seminar course takers have better grade point averages and at least as good retention, institutions might want to consider combining advisement with their freshman seminar courses. However, to do so might present a few challenges to institutions and freshman seminar professors. In addition to institutions needing to take great care in selecting the appropriate faculty to teach new students, they may have to spend yet more time and effort in finding faculty who are willing to take on the extra role

as advisor. It might be one thing to find someone to teach new students, but it could be another to find someone willing to become the official advisor.

For the faculty who are willing to take on the dual role of instructor and advisor, they will need to be willing to do far more than teach. They will need to extend their knowledge beyond the course objectives and learn such things as the institution's programs of study, how to help their students/advisees register for the next semester, understand financial aid, etc. In some cases, faculty/advisor may need to know some of the key people in the various departments and at times serve as liaison between the student and the department personnel. The faculty/advisor must be willing to be accessible to students outside of the classroom. This would be more than the normal faculty-student conferences that are normally held. Since being an advisor will require more from faculty, they may feel that they should receive extra compensation for the extra responsibility.

Fifth, if institutions are considering combining advisement with the freshman seminar course, faculty need to fully understand their dual roles. Also, the students need to understand the dual roles of their faculty, which the qualitative data suggests was not always true in this study. The students in this study who completed the mailed survey and participated in the focus group interview were not sure who their advisor was or if they had one. If an institution has an advisement program, whether under another program or as part of a freshman seminar course, it should make sure that the students, especially the new students, know who their advisor is. They should know this before arriving at the class. Information as valuable as a school offering an advisement program

should even be a part of the recruitment process and then reinforced during registration and at orientation.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study was conducted to offer more insight into the puzzle on student retention in colleges and universities. The findings gained from this study are just a small piece of information that can be added to the puzzle. If nothing else, one outcome of this study would be to spur others at this university to conduct further research. In addition, hopefully this study will spur others who are interested in the success of first year college students to conduct other studies to unravel the mystery of student attrition in colleges and universities throughout the United States, both non-profit and for-profit. The following are some suggestions for future research:

1. Conduct a longitudinal study of the two groups examined in this study. Since this study only examined the first semester grade point averages and first-to-second semester retention, the institution should follow these cohorts beyond their first semester to determine the graduation rate of these students.
2. Conduct this same study on the associate degree-seeking students. This study only examined the students in the bachelor degree programs. It would be advantageous to conduct this same study on the associate degree-seeking above students since they, too, take the freshman seminar course. This will give the institution a better picture of student retention.

3. When conducting a qualitative study, conduct it closer to the time period being examined. While collecting quantitative data was not a major problem, collecting adequate qualitative data was a limitation in this study. Since a lot of time had elapsed, the participants in the focus group study found it a little difficult to remember their experiences in the freshman seminar course. Also, the mailing addresses for the students were incorrect which was a big part of the reason for the low response rate.
4. Replicate this study at other colleges and universities that combine advisement with their freshman seminar course.
5. Conduct a study of the professional development issues in addressing the intellectual, emotional and advising needs of first year students with a special emphasis on the needs of underrepresented minority students.

### ***Conclusion***

This study was conducted at a for-profit postsecondary university. Like not-for-profit colleges and universities, this institution was experiencing the problem of high attrition of its first term students (Tinto, 1993). Over the last decade many efforts had been put into solving the high attrition problem. One of the solutions was taking their newly revised freshman seminar course and combining it with advisement. This was done in Fall 2001. By adding the advisement component to the new Coll course, the school attempted to help its new students increase their chances of academic achievement and to help more of them return for the second semester. The findings from this study showed that the students in the new advisement enhanced freshman seminar course

tended to have better GPAs, but no difference was found in retention. However, when any institution puts forth an effort to help new students get off to a better start when they enter college, offering a freshman seminar certainly could be a step in the right direction. Then to add an advisement component to the class, can only benefit all interested parties.

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## APPENDIX A

October 26, 2004

Mr. Ray Perren  
Dean of Academic Affairs  
DeVry University South  
250 North Arcadia Avenue  
Decatur, GA 30030

Dear Dean Perren:

As you know, I am in the process of completing my doctoral work at Colorado State University. I am writing to request permission to conduct my research project on DeVry Georgia's Decatur and Alpharetta campuses. The goal of my dissertation is to determine if there is a difference in grade point averages and retention rates of the students who took the COLL149 class after it was modified to include the advisement component. The period of time I am interested is from Fall 2000 to Summer 2002. I will be comparing the Fall00, Spring01, and Summer01 against Fall01, Spring02, and Summer 02. The intent of my study is to show that the addition of the advising component to COLL149 beginning in Fall 2001 did positively impact DeVry Georgia's new daytime students' grade point averages and first-to-second semester retention.

My study is both a quantitative and qualitative design. I will need to look at various institutional data. I also mail surveys and conduct focus group interviews with both students who took COLL149 before and after the advisement component was added. Attached is a copy of the interview protocol and consent form to be used for the interviews. Upon your approval, I would like to begin collecting data as soon as I have received approval from the Human Research Committee at Colorado State University. I would like to conduct the student interviews sometime during the fall 2004 semester.

The information collected for this study will be confidential, as my dissertation will not identify any student by name. In addition, I will not use the name of the institution if so desired.

Thank you.

Miguelita Beckwith  
Doctoral Candidate  
Colorado State University

Attachments:

**APPENDIX B**

**FIRST YEAR STUDENT SURVEY  
DEVRY UNIVERSITY  
DECATUR/ALPHARETTA, GEORGIA**

**Basic Information:**

When was your first semester at DeVry? \_\_\_\_\_

What campus did you attend in your first semester?

Circle one: Decatur                      Alpharetta

Did you return the following (second) semester?                      Yes                      No  
If no, please list the reasons why you did not return.

Are you currently enrolled?    Yes                      No

If not, when was the last semester you attended DeVry? \_\_\_\_\_

Program you are (were) enrolled in: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle one: Are (were) you a day or evening student?

Circle one: Male                      Female

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. What experiences in your Coll149 class do (did) you believe helped you with your academic coursework and your desire to return to DeVry?

2. Was there anything in particular about your Coll149 professor that you believe helped you with your academic success during your first semester?

3. Was there anything about your Coll149 professor that you believe helped you to return to DeVry for your second semester? Please explain.

**Please answer the following questions if your Coll149 professor was your advisor.**

4. Please describe any positive aspects about the advisement you received from your Coll149 professor/advisor during your first semester?

5. What specific aspects of advisement from your Coll149 professor were helpful to you?

**Please answer the following question if your Coll149 professor was not your official advisor during your first semester.**

6. How do you think having your Coll149 professor as your advisor would have made a difference in your first semester at DeVry?

7. **Would you be interested in participating in a focus group interview?  
If so, please write your phone below.**

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** The Impact of a Freshman Seminar on the Success of First Term Students at a For-Profit Postsecondary Institution

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. William Timpson, Professor of Education, Colorado State University

**NAME OF CO-INVESTIGATOR:** Miguelita Beckwith, Associate Dean, General Education Department – Decatur Campus and Doctoral Student, Colorado State University

**CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS:**  
Miguelita Beckwith, Decatur Campus, (404) 292-7900, ext. 2256

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:**

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not the Coll149 class with the advisement component made a difference in your GPA and your re-enrolling for the second semester at DeVry Georgia.

**PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED:**

If you choose to participate in the project, you will be asked some questions in a group setting. The group may consist of eight to ten participants and the interviewer. The researcher will ask the participants to respond to ten questions about your experience in the class and with the professor. The interview may last up to an hour at a location on either the Decatur or Alpharetta campus. This focus group interview will be recorded using a tape-recorder and supplemented with the researcher taking notes. These tapes will be destroyed after three years.

**RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES:**

There are no known risks involved in this project. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher (s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

**BENEFITS:**

There is not likely to be any direct benefit to you, but the knowledge gained from this study may contribute to a better understanding of what helps students stay in school in their first semester and then return to DeVry for their second semester.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

The information received during this interview will not be reported to anyone outside of this research project in any manner that personally identifies you. Only the participant's first name will be used when transcribing the tapes. Should there be more than one person with the same name, the participant's first name and last name initial will be used. However, when the comments are written and reported in the study, participants' names will not be used.

Page 1 of 2 Participant's Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**LIABILITY:**

The Colorado Government Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if any injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

Questions about participants' rights may be directed to Celia Walker at (970) 491-1563.

**PARTICIPATION:**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of the document containing  2  pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness to signature (project staff)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Page  2  of  2  Participant's Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_**