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AN EX POST FACTO STUDY OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ORIENTATION AS AN  
INDICATOR OF STUDENT SUCCESS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY


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May 2011

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## ABSTRACT

### AN EX POST FACTO STUDY OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ORIENTATION AS AN INDICATOR OF STUDENT SUCCESS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Amanda Ellis-O'Quinn  
Old Dominion University, 2011  
Director: Dr. Alan Schwitzer

The purpose of this ex post facto study is to determine if a relationship exists between certain student success indicators and students completing an orientation course their first semester at a small, rural community college in comparison to those students who do not complete an orientation course their first semester. The study will compare three instructional methods used in teaching orientation; a two-day, ten-week, and distance learning format. This emphasis will identify the impact of the delivery format on success measures. The measures representing student success are retention from the fall to concurrent spring semester and grade point average (GPA).

Data were derived from records of first-year students over a three year period. Fall and spring semester data represented the freshman enrolling for the first time in the fall semesters of 2006, 2007, and 2008. The research tracked students enrolled in the fall into the subsequent spring semester. The population of this study included 1,398 students that were first-time, full-time students.

Findings of this study are quite different from most of the previous research related to freshman orientation. Results of this study found that a significant relationship does not exist between community college students enrolling in a freshman orientation course, in the fall semester and retention for the subsequent spring semester. However, a significant relationship does exist between community college students enrolling in a

first-year orientation course in the fall semester and their GPA at the end of the semester. Findings also revealed that a significant relationship does not exist between the measures of GPA and retention and the instructional method of orientation. This unique study based on quantitative research investigates community college first-year student orientation at a rural community college. To determine if these results are unique to rural community colleges, future studies should replicate this one, but include campuses in other settings. In addition, qualitative studies of this topic could add to the body of literature.

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I cannot properly express my gratitude to my parents, Charlie and Sherrin Ellis, who taught me to know no limits and that with hard work and perseverance, anything is possible! To my brother Brent, the genius, I have to give you my “P”, for patiently quilting together all my data. To my beautiful daughter Brenley and Baby O’Quinn, this was done to prove to you that you can accomplish anything! Last, but certainly not least, to my amazing husband, Wade, thank you for willingly sacrificing our time, finances, and picking up my slack. Thank you for being my strength and support, I love you! I dedicate this to my loved ones, who believed in me when I did not believe in myself.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION.....	10
BACKGROUND.....	12
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	14
DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	15
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	19
HYPOTHESES.....	20
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....	20
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	21
OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY.....	23
LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS.....	24
CONCLUSION.....	25
CHAPTER TWO	
INTRODUCTION.....	26
MEASURES OF STUDENT SUCCESS.....	27
RETENTION.....	29
THE PURPOSE AND MISSION OF ORIENTATION COURSES.....	34
ORIENTATION STUDIES.....	37
ORIENTATION FORMATS.....	45
DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AFFECTING STUDENT SUCCESS.....	49
GENDER AND STUDENT SUCCESS.....	51
ETHNICITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS STUDIES.....	52
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORIENTATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.....	53
COMMUNITY COLLEGES.....	55
RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES.....	57
COMMUNITY COLLEGE ORIENTATION.....	59
THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM.....	61
SUMMARY.....	62
CHAPTER THREE	
INTRODUCTION.....	64
RESEARCH DESIGN.....	64
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES.....	65
SETTING AND SAMPLE.....	67
PLACEMENT TESTS.....	72
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.....	74
ETHICAL PROTECTION OF PARTICIPANTS.....	78

	Page
LIMITATIONS.....	78
CONCLUSION.....	78
CHAPTER FOUR	
RESULTS.....	80
DATA ANALYSIS.....	81
RESEARCH QUESTION 1.....	83
RESEARCH QUESTION 2.....	88
RESEARCH QUESTION 3.....	91
SUMMARY.....	94
CHAPTER FIVE	
DISCUSSION.....	96
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS.....	96
RESEARCH QUESTION 1.....	99
RESEARCH QUESTION 2.....	100
RESEARCH QUESTION 3.....	101
LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS.....	102
IMPLICATIONS AND FINDINGS.....	104
SUMMARY.....	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	109
APPENDIXES.....	129

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1	<i>Overall Study Design</i> .....56
Table 2	<i>Ethnicity of Student Body in Comparison to Study Participants</i> .....61
Table 3	<i>Participants by Gender</i> .....62
Table 4	<i>Participants by Age In Comparison to Student Body</i> .....63
Table 5	<i>Students by Fall Enrollment</i> .....64
Table 6	<i>Students by Orientation Enrollment</i> .....65
Table 7	<i>Placement Test Scores by Academic Year</i> .....67
Table 8	<i>Grade Point Average Scale</i> .....68
Table 9	<i>Comparison of SDV Course Formats</i> .....71
Table 10	<i>Description of Variables</i> .....73
Table 11	<i>Mean GPA of Participants in Concurrent Spring Semester Based on a 0-4.0 Scale</i> .....75
Table 12	<i>Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Based on the Dependent Variable GPA</i> .....77
Table 13	<i>Marginal Means GPA of Participants in Concurrent Spring Semester Based on a 0-4.0</i> .....77
Table 14	<i>Study Participants Based on Orientation Enrollment</i> .....78
Table 15	<i>Comparing Fall Orientation Enrollment Regressed on Spring Retention</i> .....79
Table 16	<i>Participants Enrollment by Format of Orientation for Fall Semesters</i> .....81
Table 17	<i>Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Based on the Dependent Variable GPA</i> .....82

Table 18	<i>Marginal Means GPA of Participants in Concurrent Spring Semester Based on a 0-4.0 .....</i>	82
Table 19	<i>Comparing Orientation Formats Regressed on Spring Retention.....</i>	83

## CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

In the United States, nearly two out of three high school students enroll in post-secondary education following high school graduation (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009). This number is encouraging considering that in the world's other developed nations, only one out of every two young people will attend college (Education at a Glance, 2004). When the same groups of students are compared, however, the American dropout rate far exceeds the average. One particular reason cannot explain the differences between these groups and, regardless of the reason, a remedy is needed. In the report, "Quality, Cost and Access Challenges Confronting Higher Education Today," Rendl (2007) points out that if current degree attainment rates in postsecondary education persist, the nation will face a significant degree gap that puts it at a disadvantage relative to other leading developed nations. The outcome of this is that the country will not be able to meet workforce needs, maintain international economic competitiveness, and improve the quality of life for all Americans. Based on a U.S. Census Bureau report that forecasts the economy, the *Benchmark for International Competitiveness*, by 2025, globally 55% percent of adults will have an associate's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). To compete the United States will have to drastically increase the current rate which is 37.4%. In February 2009, United States' President Barack Obama cited low college-completion rates a "prescription for economic decline" (Chronicle, 2009). Based on national statistics, the difference in the wage premium for high school graduate versus graduates receiving an Associates Degree is over \$7,000 in annual earnings (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Such statistics have

prompted recent economic stimulus legislation focusing on community colleges. Critics point out that community colleges students frequently fail to achieve a degree or certificate.

While community colleges do an excellent job of fulfilling their open door mission, research shows that the completion rate for community college students is dismal (Forde, 2002). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2003, 65% of community college students had not attained a degree, certificate, or transferred to a senior institution within three years of their initial enrollment. In the 2007-2008 academic year, 66% of first-year college students attending community and four-year colleges returned to the same institution for their second year of college, the lowest percentage since 1989 (ACT Inc, 2008). That figure is down from 68% in 2006-2007, according to ACT Inc., the nonprofit testing-and-research group that conducted the survey. As Cliff Adelman pointed out in the *2008 Educational Equity Brief*, many students drop out before completing their academic goals; therefore, our goal should be meaningful participation to help students succeed in classes and persist through graduation. The low college completion rate is a national problem, but for the individual, lower education attainment results in lower earnings.

Colleges strive to implement successful retention strategies to increase completion rates. One retention strategy often employed by community colleges is providing support through orientation programs. An orientation course, usually designed to provide students with tools needed for social and academic integration to the institution, is also one of the most common methods used by colleges and universities to address attrition and retention (Cueso, 1997). However, few orientation programs are

appraised objectively to determine whether or not they have achieved the intended outcome of student retention (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007). A lack of research focusing on orientation exists at the community college level. Furthermore, quantitative research examining orientation at a rural community college is not available.

### *Background*

As a nation, college completion rates are critical to prosperity. They serve as financial predictors for individuals, but they are also of importance to higher education institutions. During a time of financial shortcomings, it is important that institutions invest in retention efforts that, ultimately, are lucrative. Retention, and the student enrollments they represent, translate into revenue, whether from full-time enrollment (FTE) reimbursements or tuition and fees. Considering the limited opportunities colleges have to retain students, it is critical that retention efforts are intentional, validated, and directed.

Community colleges are a close second to four-year colleges in terms of higher education enrollment. In fall 2007, Title IV institutions in the United States enrolled a total of 18.7 million graduate and undergraduate students; 62 percent were enrolled in four-year institutions while 36 percent enrolled in two-year institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). For the students seeking postsecondary education, the public two-year sector is the least expensive option (College Board, 2004). Although two-year colleges are becoming a dominant force in the world of higher education, very little research exists focusing on retention efforts at the two-year level.

Theorists such as Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) and Astin (1972, 1973, 1984, 1993), have conducted and published studies and constructed theories in an attempt to define, explain, or even predict student retention and college success factors. Building on these earlier theories, more recently Marcotte, Bailey, Borkoski, and Kienzl (2005) concluded that student support services can increase student success and retention by providing students with additional resources and opportunities that help them become integrated into the college environment. Such services include orientation programs.

First-year student orientation is not a new element of higher education and can be seen in some form at virtually every higher education institution. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) describe the objectives of the typical orientation program.

Common objectives of such [orientation] programs are to acquaint students with the administrative regulations and expected behaviors of the institution, to introduce them to student services, to provide opportunities for students to meet informally with faculty, to guide students in designing an academic program and/or choosing a major, to assist them in career planning, and to help them develop academic skills essential to their survival as college students (p. 403).

Gardner (1986) and Perigo and Upcraft (1989) identify the primary goal of orientation as increasing student retention and improving academic achievement. Much research has focused on first-year student orientation at four-year institutions. As Cueso (1997) reported, the “first-year student orientation course has been the most frequently researched and empirically well-documented course in the history of American higher education” (p. 3).

*Statement of the Problem*

A lack of current research, especially at the community college level, exists to indicate whether orientation programs are achieving desired results. Research is not available assessing orientation at rural community colleges. Similar to other community college systems, the system in this study requires the Student Development (SDV) orientation course as a curriculum requirement for all Associates in Applied Science (A.S.) and Associates in Arts and Science Degrees (A.A.S). Little research is available, however, to evaluate the effectiveness of this course.

The rural community college in this study has offered an orientation course since 1968 (College Catalog, 1968-69). Currently, college instructors teach orientation in several formats. The original format meets once a week for 10 consecutive weeks. More recently, an added distance education format allows students to work at their own pace throughout the entire semester. A seminar format allows the student to meet in person two days prior to the beginning of the semester. Although advantages of the various formats have been speculated, the benefits are unknown.

The purpose of this ex post facto study is to determine if a relationship exists between certain student success indicators such as GPA and retention for students completing an orientation course their first semester at a community college. In addition, the study will attempt to identify the impact of delivery format on success measures. Astin's and Tinto's prominent retention theories will test a specific population of community college students. Tinto (1975) suggested that if a student is unable to integrate and gain acceptance in higher education, the result will be departure from the academic environment. Tinto points to the level of integration done by a student prior to and

during enrollment as a predictor of retention. Simply, the less integrated and committed that students are, the higher probability of their withdrawing. Astin's Student Involvement theory states that as students increase their physical and emotional investment on their college campus, their rate of retention increases (Astin, 1984). Students who feel connected to other students and the campus community are more likely to persist to graduation (Astin, 1993).

The independent variables tested included the students' participation or non-participation in orientation. In addition, the delivery format (two-day, ten-week, or distance education) served as an independent variable for students who participated in SDV. The dependent variables representing student success are retention from the fall to spring semesters and grade point average (GPA). Covariates included the students' gender, age, ethnicity, and placement test scores. Statistically controlling the covariates allowed for the possible emergence of relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables. The researcher analyzed historical data from the past three years from the study's population, students enrolled at a rural community college.

### *Definition of Terms*

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used:

1. *Academic Year*- In this study, academic year will be defined as the fall and subsequent spring semesters.
2. *Attrition*- The loss in student population from higher education in the normal course of events.
3. *Distance Learning*-“Learning in which either distance or time separates the instructor and the student” (Deal, 2002, p. 25). Although instruction can deliver

via television, computer, or correspondence, in this study instruction is delivered through correspondence.

4. *Dual Credit/Enrollment*- High school students that are simultaneously enrolled in college and high school courses
5. *Effectiveness*- In this study, effectiveness will compare the three instructional formats of orientation and all formats of orientation to the control group who did not take orientation. Grade point averages and retention will serve as measures of effectiveness.
6. *First-year student*- This term denotes all first-time students (excluding dual enrollment classes) enrolling at a rural community college in the Southeast in the fall semester. Those who have prior credits, excluding dual enrollment, are exempt from the study.
7. *Orientation*- Orientation is any effort to help first-year students make the transition to the collegiate environment and enhance their success. Although orientation programs may vary in scope, purpose, length, timing, and content, most institutions do provide first-year students with information about facilities, programs, and services and give them the opportunity to meet faculty, staff, and other students (Prego & Upcraft, 1989, p. 82).
8. *Retention*-Maintenance of continued enrollment in classes for two or more consecutive semesters (Crawford, 1999). This study examines the state of enrollment in the fall semester without interruption in the subsequent spring semester, as described by Sydow and Sandel (1998).

9. *SDV 108 (College Survival Skills)*- In the Virginia Community College System, Student Development (SDV) orientation courses are a curriculum requirement designed to foster student success in all diploma programs, Associates in Arts and Science, and Associate in Science Degrees. The student success course can deliver a variety of support services to students. Student success courses should assist students in their transition to colleges; provide overviews of college policies, procedures, curricular offerings; encourages contacts with other students and staff, and assist students toward college success through information regarding effective study habits, career and academic planning, and other college resources available to students. Students at the institution in this study are awarded one credit hour for completion of SDV 108 (Virginia Community College System [VCCS], 2009).
10. *SDV 108 (College Survival Skills)*-A one-credit hour course offered at a rural community college in the Southeast. This class has the following objectives: to develop and improve effective study skills and habits; to become aware of college services which contribute to academic success; to build connections with students, professors, and advisors; to understand individual and cultural differences; to clarify educational and vocational goals; and to encourage acceptance of responsibility for decisions made (see Appendix A, B, and C for syllabi of different formats).
11. *Withdrawal from class*-The separation of a student from a class prior to the end of the term.

*Research Questions*

This study, examined the following questions:

1. How do the grade point averages (GPA) of community college students taking orientation their first semester compare to the GPA of their counterparts not taking orientation their first semester?
2. To what degree are community college first-year students who take orientation their first semester retained in the subsequent semester in comparison with their counterparts who do not take orientation their first semester?
3. To what degree does the delivery format used to complete orientation affect retention and grade point averages?

The community college requires students to take orientation; however, students may take orientation at any time. Students self select which semester they will enroll in orientation; the institution only requires that it be taken prior to graduation.

*Hypotheses*

The following hypotheses resulted from the research questions:

- H1 Community college first-year students who take orientation their first semester have higher grade point averages (GPA) than their counterparts who do not take orientation their first semester.
- H2 Community college first-year students who take orientation their first semester are retained in higher numbers than their counterparts who do not take orientation their first semester.

H3 The format of orientation does not influence the retention and GPAs of the participants' (once demographic variables are controlled.)

### *Research Purpose*

This study will evaluate the three instructional methods used to teach first-year student orientation (SDV) at a rural, community college in the Southeast United States. The teaching methods examined include seminar (two-day), traditional (ten-week), and distance learning (the entire semester). Specific student success indicators, retention and grade point average, will act as measurements. These indicators will also be used to compare first-year students completing orientation their first semester of enrollment with their counterparts not participating in orientation their first semester. Although similar research has been conducted (Zeidenberg, Jenkins & Calgano, 2007), a gap exists examining the relationship between participation in orientation and retention and GPA at community colleges. Zeidenberg, Jenkins & Calgano studied students at a Florida Community College and found a significant relationship between students enrolling in orientation and completing a credential. However, this study only examined the percentage of these students who completed a credential (a certificate or an associate degree). Because of the broad mission of community colleges, student success can not be measured alone by the completion of a credential. Previous research has mainly focused on the relationship between participation in orientation and student success without controlling certain confounding variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, and placement test scores. Most of the research investigating the relationship between community college student success and orientation presents qualitative findings.

### *Significance of Study*

In the fall of 2004, 18 million students enrolled in post-secondary institutions in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). During the 2007-2008 academic year, four-year and two-year Title IV institutions in the United States reported a 12-month unduplicated headcount enrollment totaling 25.9 million individual students. Enrollment in higher education in the U.S. is on the rise in all sectors including community colleges. All 23 community colleges in the Virginia Community College System have seen an increase in enrollment (VCCS, 2009). Based on the most recently available data, the Virginia Community College System enrolled 112.2% of fall 2008 Full Time Enrollment Students (FTES) in fall 2009 (VCCS, 2009).

Even though more students are entering colleges than ever before, studies show that during their first year, students are at the highest risk of dropping out (Astin, 1984; Brigman & Stager, 1980). Although almost seven million students were enrolled in two-year colleges in the 2007-2008 academic year, only slightly over one million students actually graduated (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Opp (1986) places responsibility on the institution to enable the student to succeed, pointing to the first-year student hurdle as the most critical time. In 2000, a report by the Policy Center on the First-year of College recommended additional studies on first-year students with the specific mission of “improving the first-year experience and retaining those students most likely to withdraw from higher education” (Sax et al., 2000, p. 3).

Focusing on grade point average and retention, this research attempts to identify whether or not a relationship exists between student success indicators and enrollment in college survival skills at a rural community college in the Southeast United States. The

study will also provide information on the effectiveness of instructional methods (traditional, seminar, and distance learning) used in the teaching of orientation. Although studies performed by Bedford & Durkee (1989), Ness, Rhodes, and Rhodes (1989), Stremba (1989), Tokuno & Cambell (1991), Strumf & Hunt (1993), Glass & Garrett (1995), Keenan & Gabovitch (1995), Cueso (1997), and Hyers & Joslin (1998) agree on the value of first-year student orientation courses and the likely relationship of increasing and producing positive retention results, a gap exists in research focusing on the efficacy of these courses at community colleges. This study hopes to add to the body of first-year student orientation literature to determine if first-year student orientation courses truly do enhance student success, community colleges can intentionally and strategically offer these courses.

### *Overview of Methodology*

The following methodology will reveal if students at a rural community college in the Southeast United States taking orientation (SDV) their first semester have higher GPAs and retention rates than their counterparts not taking SDV their first semester. Students in this study attended a community college which reported a headcount of about 4,000 students in 2010. The sample will be limited to full-time students, regardless of major, enrolling in their first semester of college (excluding dual enrollment) in the fall semesters of 2006, 2007, and 2008. Participants comprise two groups: one, students who enrolled in orientation during their first fall semester of attendance and, two, students who did not enroll in orientation during their first fall semester of attendance. This is a non-random, convenience sample that is purposive as the target group is a particular

group. This is a static group comparison because there will be no random assignment or pretest of the groups.

This study will examine the format in which students at a rural, community college in the Southeast United States take orientation to determine if delivery format of orientation (SDV) affects the retention, GPAs, and graduation rates of community college students. Students enrolling in the three different formats (two-day, ten-week, or distance) were compared based on the measures of GPA and retention from fall, their first semester, into the subsequent spring semester. Measurement of retention continues from fall, the students' first semester, into the subsequent spring semester because the requirements for community college curriculum varies dramatically from certificate programs to associates degrees. As Crawford (1999) points out in offering a definition of retention for community colleges, two semesters is the minimum amount of time for program completion. Historical data from the last three years will analyze retention from fall, first semester, into the subsequent spring semester and GPA. In addition, first-year students enrolling in orientation their first semester will be compared to first-year student not choosing to enroll in orientation their first semester. These groups will be compared based on the measures of GPA and retention from fall, their first semester, into the subsequent spring semester. A limitation of this study is that by only measuring from fall to the subsequent spring semester, there is no way to control for students that stop out and return at a later date.

The Student Information System (SIS) for the State System in which the college being studied belongs provided the data through a primary source. Analysis was completed with SPSS. The researcher has gained permission from the Virginia

Community College System to access all information in the Student Information System. Confounding variables will include gender, age, placement test scores, and ethnicity. A data analysis was conducted utilizing an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and logistic regression. The inclusion of confounding variables or covariates in the statistical analysis provided means of control for observed variation between the groups caused not by the treatment itself but other demographic factors. ANCOVA neutralized the effect of the more powerful, non-interacting variable. Without this intervention measure, the effects of interacting independent variables can be clouded.

### *Limitations*

The major limitation of this study concerns the representativeness of the sample. Although the researcher would like to adequately represent the overall community college population in the United States, accessibility to colleges restricted the demographics of the sample. Only one college serves as the population in this study.

Another limitation is that the sample represents only first-time college, first-year students enrolled in the fall semester. First-time students enrolled in college for the first time in the spring or summer were not included in the study. Another limitation of this study is that by only measuring from fall to the subsequent spring semester, there is no control for students that stop out and return at a later date. Lastly, a limitation is that only three years of data were analyzed. Students enrolled before fall 2006 and after spring 2009 were not included in the study.

### *Conclusion*

First-year student orientation has been the focus of many research efforts; however, much of this research is inconclusive and strictly from a qualitative point-of-

view (Zimmerman, 2000). A diminutive amount of research has focused specifically on first-year student orientation at the community college level. Community colleges are a major force in higher education and workforce development, yet graduation and retention rates are less than desirable. Retention strategies such as first-year student orientation must be thoroughly examined to ensure that desired outcomes are being achieved, which is the purpose of this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Introduction*

For years, researchers have examined college orientation programs. If orientation programs can prove effective as a retention and student success tool, it is important to understand how programs can best be utilized (Marcotte et al., 2005; Sax et al., 2000). A great deal of research has focused on orientation at the four-year level but a major deficit exists in examining orientation at the community college level (Barefoot, 2000; Zeidenberg et al., 2007). Retention rates are much lower at community colleges and community colleges serve students with demographic characteristics that make them more “at risk” in comparison to students attending four-years schools (Forde, 2002; Tietjen-Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, it is imperative that community colleges have a better understanding of orientation as they struggle with student success. Unfortunately, higher education literature lacks substantial research on community college orientation (Marcotte, et al., 2005).

The intent of this study is to address this gap in the literature and to examine community college orientation. This research is unique in that it is quantitative and will examine community college orientation while controlling for certain demographic variables that have proven to influence student success (Zimmerman, 2000). In addition, this study also examined different delivery methods of community college orientation in hopes of identifying if a particular format is more successful. The literature reviewed in this study substantiates the need for this research while providing the reader with knowledge needed to understand particular elements of the study.

This chapter, providing a review of the literature on first-year student orientation, retention, and community colleges. The chapter is organized accordingly, so that the reader will clearly understand the purpose of this study and each topic that is reviewed as it relates to this study. The following topics will aid in this understanding: (a) measures of student success; (b) retention; (c) the evolution/history, purpose, and mission of orientation programs; (d) orientation studies; (e) demographic characteristics and student success studies; (f) community colleges and orientation at community colleges.

### *Measures of Student Success*

In higher education, student success outcomes are often measured by retention and academic performance. However, there is no universally accepted definition of retention, a fact which poses some issues for those who wish to perform research in the community college environment. As Wild and Ebbers (2002) point out: “How student retention is defined and measured is a problem for community colleges” (p. 504).

Retention literature focuses on traditional, four-year colleges (Reisberg, 1999). As noted by Mohammadi (1996), retention theories developed at the university level are not well suited for retention studies focusing on community colleges. Many definitions are limited to four-year settings such as Walleri’s (1981) which defines retention as on-time graduation within 4 or 5 years. He did note that retention needs to be examined from the perspective of the student who is enrolled in special programs or community education programs.

Many theorists and researchers have offered definitions in hopes of providing one that is universal. One offered by Reisberg (1999) states that retention refers to the number of first-semester, first-year students, who maintained 12 units throughout the fall

semester and continued their enrollment into the first week of the next semester with six or more units. Other suggested definitions include Crawford's (1999) which states that retention is the "maintenance of continued enrollment of two or more semesters, specifically from Fall to Spring term and/or completion of a degree/certificate or transfer to a four-year college" (p. 13). This study adheres to this definition since many community college programs only span two semesters. Retention is defined by Wyman (1997) as "the percentage of entering students graduating or persisting in their studies at an institution" (p. 29). Sydow and Sandel (1998) offer that retention is enrollment in a subsequent semester, completing two-thirds of the courses and achieving at least a 2.0 grade point average.

Regardless of the technical definition used for retention, a positive relationship has been shown to exist between retention and college grade-point average. Early retention studies demonstrate that students with higher grade point averages are retained at a higher rate than students with lower grade-point averages (Cohen, 1977). Tinto synthesized research on attrition and concluded that academic performance is the single most important factor in predicting retention in college. This conclusion is also supported by Ammons (1971), Astin (1972), Blanchfield (1971), Coker (1968), Grieve (1969), Mock and Yonge (1969), and Pedrini and Pedrini (1978). Adding to the research connecting academic success and retention, several studies have shown that a relationship exists between grades and test scores, both indicators of student success, and retention (Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Pascarella, 1980). Academic performance has become a widely accepted measure of student success in higher education.

### *Retention*

Retention and the student enrollments they represent translate into revenue, whether from FTE reimbursements or tuition and fees. Retention is a challenge for higher education, considering an alarming number of students are not learning the basic skills needed to succeed in college or work while they are in high school. This potential income loss leads to a national loss of more than \$3.7 billion a year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). Higher education institutions find it is far cheaper for the institution to retain a student than to recruit a new one. The recruiting cost associated with replacing non-persistent students can be expensive. The cost of recruiting one new student at a four-year college approximates the cost of retaining 3-5 already enrolled students (Astin, 1993).

In the numerous studies focusing on the impact of orientation programs, outcomes are always examined. Outcomes are usually defined in terms of retention and persistence; however, neither the four-year or two-year sector of higher education have offered a global definition of these terms. Regardless of the definition used for retention, if students are to reach their education goals, they must be retained and persist. As Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) state:

Social mobility, as defined in occupational status and income is inextricably linked to post secondary education in modern American society. Colleges and universities have been traditionally entrusted not only with the education of individuals, but also with their certification. Indeed the bachelor's degree has often been referred to as the pass port to the American middle class. (p. 369)

The most widely-studied retention theory is Tinto's theory of integration (1975, 1987, 1993). This theory builds on Durkheim's (1951) theory which suggests that when an individual is unable to integrate and gain acceptance into society, suicide may result.

Applying this theory to a collegiate environment, Tinto (1975) suggested that if a student is unable to integrate and gain acceptance in higher education, the result will be departure from the academic environment. Tinto points to the level of integration completed by a student prior to and during enrollment as a predictor of retention. The less integrated and committed students are, the higher the probability is that they will withdraw.

After Tinto's groundbreaking work in 1975, several other studies focused on integration of college students. Such studies include Pascarella and Terenzini's (1983) which examined the integration differences in males and females. They also found (Pascarella and Terenzini 1980, 1983) that high academic ability often compensates for lower levels of social integration. Pascarella and Terenzini (1979, 1983; Stage, 1989) also conducted a study examining the relationship between background characteristics of students and their choice to withdraw or persist. Findings concluded that a relationship does exist between certain demographic variables, such as ethnicity, gender, and age and a student's persistence. Tinto (1987) claims, "Decisions to withdraw are more a function of what occurs after entry than what precedes it" (p. 6). Opp (1986) places responsibility on the institution to enable the student to succeed, pointing to the first-year student hurdle as the most critical time. A successfully implemented orientation program is one means for institutions to provide a successful transition to college life. For the community college, the most efficacious model has not been established.

Since the introduction of Tinto's theory (1975), much research has focused on the generalization of integration theory. Such research (Attinasi, 1989; Bean, 1983; Bers & Smith, 1991; Tierney, 1992) has attempted to apply Tinto's theory. Specific to

community college retention, Nora (1987) and Voorhees (1987) found that Tinto's theory is not effective in predicting community college student retention.

Although a great deal of research has focused on theories such as student integration (Tinto, 1975), many researchers choose to isolate certain characteristics to determine if a relationship to retention exists. In attempting to evaluate retention strategies such as orientation, it is important to identify student characteristics proven to affect retention. For example, in one such study, Kamens (1971) found that students attending colleges where admission is highly selective, tend to develop a high commitment to the institution. Stoecker, Pascarella, and Wolfe (1988) found that educational completion is significantly influenced by educational aspirations. Although various characteristics have been studied in regards to retention, a gap in the research exists in controlling for these characteristics while identifying if a relationship exists between the participation in an orientation program and retention. Regardless of the characteristics studied, retention continues to be a guiding concern for post-secondary education.

### *The Evolution of Orientation Programs*

The first student orientation course taught for first-year students was taught in 1882 at Lee College in Kentucky (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). In 1888 Boston College followed by offering orientation courses (Gardner, 1986). In 1911 Reed College was the first institution to offer a scheduled orientation course that met weekly and was offered for credit (Gardner, 1986). Other institutions such as the University of Michigan and Oberlin College began to offer similar orientation courses in the early 1900s. The offering of orientation courses fluctuated from institution to institution throughout the years. Dwyer

(1989, as cited by Fitts & Swift, 1928, p. 192), notes the different concerns about these early orientation programs.

Some addressed adjustment problems in general, others attempted to teach the first-year student “how to study,” still others confronted the problems of specialized populations such as first-year students at women’s colleges or religious institutions, and yet another group of orientation courses taught what might be now called current events, citizenship, reflective thinking, and career counseling. (p. 37)

By 1928 the number of colleges and universities offering orientation courses increased (Fitts & Swift, 1928). It was not until the 1970s that institutions began to recognize the importance of such a course due to the “influx of diverse groups of students whose needs were not being met by existing, piecemeal orientation initiatives” (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993, p.142). During this time, Taufest (1961), Shaffer (1962), and Fitzgerald and Busch (1963) made strong arguments to intellectualize orientation which previously had always been generally informational. Smith (1963) introduced the first research to scientifically test the relationship between orientation and retention. Another early study focusing on orientation, conducted by Fley (1962), found that television forums were an effective way to present key people to a first-year student. The foundation of research on first-year college students was provided by these early studies resulting in today’s orientation programs addressing three major outcomes consisting of retention, adjustment, and cognitive development (Sax et al., 2000).

Drake (1966) published research showing that orientation was shifting from the course format to an emphasis on the first-year student week. The data supporting this

shift showed 95% of universities offered a week-long program for first-year students. During this same time period there was a general growth of orientation programs nationally. In their study of 86 Western junior colleges, Yoder and Beals (1966) found that 88% of the colleges did offer some format of orientation.

During the 1970s, colleges saw an influx of non-traditional students enroll in higher education (Felker, 1984; O'Banion, 1969). Colleges were challenged by these new students as they were older, less academically prepared, and, often the first in their family to attend college (Cross, 1971). To address the needs of these new, diverse students, programs were implemented to help first-year students learn about college (Dwyer, 1989). Other programs such as the one created by the University of South Carolina in 1972, University 101, hoped to ease the first-year student transition for traditional students through a seminar course (Jewler, 1989). It is obvious that the changes that occurred to higher education in the 1970s had a dramatic impact on the evolution of first-year student orientation.

The greatest growth of first-year student orientation occurred during the 1980's. Growth occurred in student participants but also in institutional programs and research studies. Shanley and Hearn (1991) point to the 1980s as the "decade of reform" (p. 19) and period of "substantive research" (p. 13) that had a "ground swell of interest in the first-year student year" (p.13). As Barefoot (1993) points out, it was during this time that higher education began to see orientation as a standard part of the curriculum.

Orientation programs now hold a substantial position in higher education; approximately 70% of colleges and universities offer orientation to their first-year students (Barefoot, 1993; Barefoot & Fidler, 1994; Fidler & Fidler, 1991). Research

conducted during the 1990s reports a large body of well-conducted studies that support the effectiveness of orientation in improving retention, degree completion, and academic performance (Cueso, 1997). In their epochal synthesis that summarized how college programs and experiences affect student development, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded that,

The weight of the evidence suggests that a first-semester freshman seminar... is positively linked with both freshman-year persistence and degree completion this positive link persists even when academic aptitude and secondary school achievement are taken into account (pp. 419-420).

Studies during this time period have not only reported positive effects of orientation programs at the university level but also at community colleges (Cueso, 1997).

#### *The Purpose and Mission of Orientation Courses*

Although entering first-year students generally perceive themselves as being capable of attaining their desired academic goals, educators have long recognized the gap between first-year student optimism and the commitment needed to be successful academically (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Colleges often turn to orientation courses to give students the eclectic load of information they will need to succeed, ranging from how to use the library to how to fill out registrar's forms. The rationale for instituting such courses is an effort to integrate students into the institution and, hopefully, reduce attrition along the way. The primary goal of an orientation program is to help students adjust, promote academic success and graduation, reduce trial-and-error behavior, cultivate use of help services, and reduce costly administrative time (Barefoot &

Gardener, 1993; Cohen & Jody, 1978). The majority of orientation courses taken by students are designed to facilitate adjustment to college (Sax et al., 2000).

Many experts contend that helping students address non-academic deficiencies such as poor study habits and lack of clear goals for college and careers is just as essential as the assistance provided through remedial courses (Boylan, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Some researchers have supported the use of first-year programs to help students learn study skills and understand college expectations, justifying that orientation sessions link students with student support services (Fidler & Godwin, 1994).

Since the 1970s, when institutions began to recognize the importance of orientation courses, the number of course offerings has steadily increased. Research has found that such orientation efforts promote student retention, better academic performance, and utilization of student support services (Cuseo, 1991, 1997; Ryan & Glenn, 2004; Sidle & McReynolds, 1999).

Orientation courses are designed to provide essential information needed to academically socialize students to the institution. Seeing that students would be more likely to separate themselves from the institution if orientation just focused on intellect, Warnath and Fordyce (1961) proposed that attitudes and values needed to be an element of orientation.

There is a considerable body of literature on first-year student orientation at the four-year level including well-known studies conducted by Barefoot (1998), Banning (1989), Cuseo (1991, 1997), Fidler and Fidler (1991), and Gardner (1989). This research area has fascinated academia so much that the University of South Carolina houses the National Resource Center for the First-year Student Year Experience where much

research on four-year first-year student orientation has been conducted (Cuseo, 1991).

Although this area of academia has prompted much research at four-year colleges, there is a deficit in orientation-related research at the community college level.

Dunphy, et al. (1981) identified five general goals for students enrolled in first-year student orientation:

1. Acquire a sense of the college community and its structure;
2. Begin to identify skill deficiencies and work on improvement;
3. Identify potential personal growth, goal commitment and career decisions;
4. Learn to solve problems; and
5. Improve academic performance and college life. (p. 52)

Although most higher education institutions offer orientation programs, many students are not taking advantage of these offerings. Based on 2007 research done through the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) found that one out of five entering community college students are unaware of an orientation program. Slightly more than one-third of entering students (36%) say they have participated in a student success course. Only 38% of entering students report that they attended an on-campus orientation program prior to the beginning of classes while 11% say they participated in an online orientation prior to the beginning of classes. Seventeen percent of the students enrolling in orientation say they enrolled as part of their course schedule. Twenty percent of entering students say they were not aware of an orientation program or course. Among entering students who took a success course, 46% report that the course helped them to gain knowledge or skills important to their success.

Currently, few orientation programs are assessed to determine achievement of intended outcome or if they have produced unintended outcomes (Barefoot, 2000). The effectiveness of first-year student orientation is a long-lived debate. In 1933 it was noted in the *Peabody Journal of Education* that college authorities have not agreed on the advisability of having a first-year student orientation period. “While it is true that the larger number of college officials seem to think first-year student day or week is a very splendid help in getting the first-year student started right, a few quite frankly express doubt that the time thus spent is worth very much” (p. 138). Many proponents of orientation programs see it as a valuable student success tool. In their research, “Responding to the Challenge of the At Risk Student,” Roueche and Roueche (1994) recommend mandatory orientation programs. Upon looking at the recent research conducted on orientation program, it becomes obvious that this debate is far from over. This research intends to add to the literature in hopes of resolving this debate and ultimately achieving greater student success.

### *Orientation Studies*

The first research-based study examining orientation was conducted in the late 1950s. Smith (1963) published a study comparing retention rates among African American males completing orientation to their counterparts not completing orientation. Since this initial study, focusing on orientation and its value to higher education, numerous studies have followed in examining the efficacy of orientation. Cueso (1991, 1997) states there may be more empirical research related to orientation than any other single course in higher education, and for that reason American higher education curriculum will always include an orientation component. Despite Cueso’s stance, a good deal of literature

counters this claim, specifically little evidence-based research exists that has focused on orientation courses offered at the community college level. Based on a large body of well-conducted research, Cueso (1997) reports results that support the effectiveness of orientation in improving retention, degree completion, and academic performance. At the university and the community college level, positive effects of orientation programs have also been reported (Barefoot et al., 1998).

Leading retention theories have made a clear case for orientation courses. Specifically Astin's Student Involvement theory, which is prominent in retention literature, states that as students increase their physical and emotional investment to their college campus, their rate of retention increases (Astin, 1984). Students who feel connected to other students and the campus community are more likely to persist to graduation (Astin, 1993). The basic tenet of involvement theory is that the successful student is an active participant in the process of learning rather than a passive observer. Therefore, orientation courses fit the framework of involvement theory where the goal of the course is to provide students with tools that promote active participation.

Although the need for student support services is accepted throughout higher education, researchers have pointed out that evidence supporting the efficacy of these services is sparse (Marcotte, et al., 2005; Grubb, 2001). Marcotte, et al. (2005) noted that much of the literature on the effectiveness of student supports has focused on four-year college populations whose needs differ from the needs of students enrolled in community colleges. They also noted that the data needed to rigorously evaluate program effectiveness is not widely available.

Some researchers have attempted to evaluate the efficacy of orientation programs. In a Georgia study conducted by Farr, Jones, and Samprone (1986) the authors compared four-year college students taking orientation to those who did not. Students were randomly selected for the study, and the researchers accounted for Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores in comparing the control group to the students who took orientation. Although the students who had not taken orientation had higher SAT scores, the results of the study concluded there was no difference in the grade point averages between both groups. In a similar study, Davis (1992) used longitudinal data to examine the retention and academic performance of students taking first-year student orientation. In this study, students with lower SAT scores who participated in first-year student orientation were retained and had higher grade-point averages than those not participating in orientation.

In 2000, Zimmerman found similar outcomes at a two-year college where grades in orientation were shown to be a better predictor of success than high school rank. In this same study, orientation grades proved a better predictor of academic success than American College Test (ACT) scores. Measures of success used in this study were timely graduation and grade point average; however, the results of this study contradict those of an earlier study conducted by Astin (1993). In this study, high school grades and SAT scores were found to be the best predictors of academic success.

For five years, Hoff, Cook and Price (1996) collected data on students enrolled in a first-year student seminar course at a two-year college. Students who took orientation were compared to students who did not take orientation while being matched on age, sex, standardized entrance exam scores, career objectives, and grade point average. Outcomes revealed that students who completed first-year student orientation were retained at a

higher rate (69.5% versus 55.8% for non-participants), attempted more course hours (24.9 versus 22.2 for non-participants), and completed more hours (56 versus 44.6 for non-participants). Although significant results were found in these areas, there was no variance between the two groups related to grade point averages. Similarly, a longitudinal study, conducted by Fidler and Moore (1996) at the University of South Carolina, followed eight freshman cohorts that had enrolled in orientation. The authors concluded that students taking orientation courses persisted at a higher rate than those not taking orientation.

A study conducted by Keenan and Gabovitch (1995) on an eight week, first-year student orientation course. The authors reviewed 4 years of data comparing students taking first-year student orientation to those first-year students not taking the course. The students participating in orientation took a survey, which overall revealed positive feelings about orientation but did not meet the expected outcomes of retention and academic performance.

Over a seven year period, Shanley and Witten (1990) studied students who participated in first-year student orientation at the University of South Carolina. Measures examined included retention and graduation rates. Outcomes of the study showed a strong positive relationship between students completing the orientation course and increased retention and graduation rates. Although this research is pertinent, it does not address the void in the orientation literature focusing on community colleges because it focuses on a four-year institution.

Another longitudinal study occurred over eight years and examined eight cohort groups of first-year student students. Starke, Harth, and Sirianni (2001) compared

students participating in orientation to those not. Findings concluded that students taking orientation had better retention rates, higher grade-point averages, and better graduation rates.

A study conducted by Micceri and Wajeih (1999) at the University of South Florida produced comparable results. Using a matched-group comparison, first-time-in-college students were compared based on those who participated in orientation versus those who did not. Students who took the first-year student seminar course scored consistently higher in all enrollment variables studied. Students enrolled in the first-year student seminar were retained at a higher rate the preceding spring to fall semesters. The students also enrolled in more semesters, completed more cumulative credit hours, and had higher spring to second fall semester grade point averages than the students who did not complete orientation.

Similarly, Williford, Chapman, and Kahrig (2000-2001) studied 10 years of data of students participating in first-year student orientation. The study compared matched groups of participants and non-participants based on academic performance, student retention, and graduation. Findings for most of the years concluded that students participating in orientation had higher grade point averages, retention rates, and graduation rates.

Erikson (1998) conducted a study focusing on first-year students who were deemed at-risk. The study focused on a week long orientation that took place immediately before the beginning of the fall semester. The orientation provided cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills along with literacy training. Student retention and grade point averages were the measures of student success that

were examined. Outcomes revealed that all 23 participants finished the fall semester. The following spring semester, 91% of the orientation participants registered for classes. The subsequent spring semester, 80% of the blind cohort group that did not take orientation registered for classes. In regards to grade points, the students participating in orientation had an average of 2.20 while the blind cohort group had a grade point average of 1.65.

Buchanan (1993) conducted a study focusing on first-year student orientation. Participants were high school seniors who enrolled in a modified version of a first-year seminar course. Results were mixed. After one year in college, grade point averages of non-participants (students not taking orientation) were slightly higher than the students who did participate in first-year student orientation. However, students participating in orientation were retained at a higher rate than those in the control group that did not participate in orientation.

In 2002, Franklin, Cranston, Peery, and Purtle found that students who completed an orientation course consistently scored higher than a control group in areas such as student development and integration to campus culture. These students also reported using academic support services at a higher rate than students who did not take orientation. According to Sax et al. (2000), students do report greater satisfaction with overall adjustment to college and faculty contact after completing an orientation course. A 1986 study found that first-year students who complete orientation courses were retained at a much higher rate than those who did not complete an orientation course (Gardener, 1986). In a study of students who enrolled in the first-year student seminar at a public four-year university, Schnell and Doetkott (2003) found significantly greater

retention for students who enrolled in the course than those who did not. In Ryan and Glenn's 2004 study, findings indicate that students who were enrolled in an orientation course were retained and succeeded at a much higher rate than their counterparts who were not enrolled in an orientation course. Similarly, Boudreau and Kromrey (1994) found a positive relationship between completion of the course and retention and academic performance. Although there is ample research addressing the efficacy of a first-year student orientation course at the four-year level, there is a major void at the community college level. Quantitative research has not been conducted examining this relationship at a rural community college.

The Florida Community College at Jacksonville conducted a study of the 2007 cohort comparing students who took their Student Life Skills course to those who did not (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2008). Findings revealed that the students who took the Student Life Skills (SLS) course had a 77% pass rate in developmental courses compared to a 62% pass rate in developmental courses for the students not taking the SLS course. Students from this same cohort who took non developmental classes had pass rates of 78% for the students taking the SLS course versus a 58% pass rate for the students electing not to take the SLS course. The fall to spring retention rate was almost 20% higher for students who took the SLS course. These three studies used a matched comparison group design; however, the researchers do not mention comparing certain student characteristics such as gender, race, and age which show a correlation with retention rates. Derby (2007) and Derby and Watson (2006) examined the course participation and retention of minority students. Their

findings were mixed. Unlike most other studies, the students in their sample attended a community college.

Another recent study examined the impact of student success courses using data from all 28 Florida community colleges (Zeidenberg, Jenkins & Calgano, 2007). This study tracked a cohort of almost 35,000 students over 17 terms, comparing the success of those that enrolled in a student success course and those that did not. The researchers found that students who enroll in the student success course were more likely than their peers to complete a certificate, diploma, or degree over the study time period. Students who enrolled in the student success course were 8 percent more likely than their peers to earn a credential. Students who enrolled in the student success course also had increased chances of retention and transfer to four-year institutions.

In 2005, the Florida Department of Education conducted a similar internal study on an earlier cohort of students comparing the success rates of those students who enrolled in the student success course to those who did not (Florida Department of Education, 2005). Fifty-eight percent of the student success course group was academically successful as compared to 41% of the group who did not enroll in the student success course. The students taking the student success course graduated, transferred, or persisted at a rate at least 5% more than the students not taking the course. The Florida researchers noted that the results held true when the analysis is disaggregated by those who are college-ready and those who need remediation.

Both Florida studies (2005, 2007) contribute valuable research in the field of first-year student orientation. To date, they provide the most extensive research focusing on first-year student orientation at the community college level. When comparing the

Florida studies, it is important to note the difference in research designs. The 2005 study was “descriptive” in that it compared the mean outcomes of SLS completers and non-completers without controlling for student characteristics or considering latent differences between completers and non-completers that might be related to the outcomes observed (Florida Department of Education, 2005). The more recent study (Zeidenberg, Jenkins & Calgano, 2007) used statistical models to see if student success courses still appear to be related to positive outcomes, even after controlling for student characteristics and other factors that might also influence the relative success of students who take such courses.

A recent qualitative study authored by researchers at the Community College Research Center (Hughes, Karp, & O’Gara, 2009) examined student success courses in two urban community colleges. The researchers conducted interviews with community college students during their second semester of enrollment, and re-interviewed the students six months later during the fall semester, whether they remained enrolled or not. Students reported that student success courses were key in helping them obtain information about the college and courses, develop stronger study skills, and develop meaningful relationships. The authors noted unintended benefits as well; the sum of the components of the course led to outcomes that the individual components could not have created on their own. Students reported not only knowing about but also utilizing college services as a result of taking the student success course. The authors recommend that colleges consider making student success courses a requirement in the first semester for degree-seeking students, regardless of whether they are enrolled full or part-time.

*Orientation Formats*

Schroedner (2003) points out that the classroom experience provided in a first-year student orientation program is important, considering that many of today's first-year students are nontraditional and live off campus. This separation leads to less contact with student affairs offices; thus, the orientation class becomes their only means of connecting with the campus. Because the complexion of higher education's student body has changed, it is not safe to assume that current orientation formats meet the needs of today's students. In the words of John Gardner, "the structure of the first college year is the same basic structure that was designed for a population of white, middle-or upper-class males who constituted the vast majority of college students until the last two decades of this century" (Barefoot, 2000, p. 13).

According to a 1991 study (Fidler & Fidler), most first-year student seminar courses offered at two-and four-year colleges in the United States are orientation seminars that focus on the following course content areas: academic planning, library skills, value of college, study skills, managing test anxiety, reading, career planning, general orientation to health, general orientation to campus, and stress management. Although there are several nationally recognized orientation programs such as David Ellis's College Survival, Inc., and John Gardner's First-year student Seminar, institutions commonly tailor such programs to meet the particular needs of their students.

In the literature describing first-year orientation courses, two types prevail: (a) academic socialization models which aim to help the student adjust to the norms, values, and rituals of the institution; and (b) the learning strategies model that focuses exclusively on learning strategies (Ryan & Glenn, 2004). Upcraft and Farnsworth (1984) identify the following as the goals of orientation: academic, personal, and social

adjustment; becoming aware of support services, policies, regulations, and procedures; exploring institution offerings; learning how to study/learn; interacting with faculty and staff; career goal exploration; and knowing what to expect during the college experience.

Thus, the orientation curriculum focused on academic and social adjustment with emphasis on familiarization with institutional facilities, programs, and services (Upcraft, 1984). Barefoot (2000) lists the following as the research based objectives that need to be present in orientation programs: increasing student-to-student interaction; increasing faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class; increasing student involvement and time on campus; linking the curriculum and the co-curriculum; increasing academic expectations and level of academic engagement; and assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for college.

Students are most vulnerable during their initial first eight weeks of college. Other leading retention data state that students need to make meaningful connections with the institution within the first six weeks of matriculation (Gardner, 1989). Interventions should be intentionally targeted during this time. Considering that many of the high-risk students stop out during this period, retention efforts that occur after this time are often in vain (Tinto, 1989).

In a 1998 study, Brown compared three formats of orientation programs. The results of this study suggested students participating in an orientation taking place in an outdoor setting adjusted better with higher retention ration in comparison to the students who participated in traditional orientation programs. In a study conducted by Erikson (1998), a weeklong orientation program was evaluated. The program was completed immediately before the fall semester and focused on cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective,

and behavioral skills along with literacy training. In this study, 91 % of the orientation participants were retained to the spring semester compared to 80 % of the blind cohort group who did not take orientation.

A study conducted at Mississippi Gulf Coast Junior College compared methods of teaching orientation (Fisher, 1975). Recorded delivery of orientation via electronic transmittal was compared to the more traditional lecture method of teaching orientation. The same materials were taught in both courses. At the .01 level of significance, the results concluded that the programmed orientation proved more versatile than the traditional lecture delivery.

Recently, orientation formats offered through distance education have been introduced. Enrollment in distant learning courses has increased dramatically; in 1998, a 100 % increase had occurred in the offering of distance learning classes in comparison to the previous four years (NCES, 1998). During 1997-1998, an estimated 54 thousand different distance learning courses were available, and over 1.4 million students enrolled in these courses (NCES, 1998). In 2002, 1.6 million students were enrolled in online courses in the United States, with the number having grown to 2.35 million in 2004 (Allen & Seaman, 2003; Allen & Seaman, 2005). One estimate suggests that by 2025, most college courses will be available in an online format (Dunn, 2000). Much research has begun focusing on distance learning courses however there is a gap in literature that focuses on the effectiveness of orientation courses delivered via distance learning, specifically at the community college level. This research is unique because it will examine a community college orientation course delivered via distance learning in comparison to other delivery formats.

Much of this growth in orientation delivered via distance learning has been attributed to the vast availability of technology and budget cuts by institutions (Shea, Motiwalla, & Lewis, 2001). Predictions have even been made that distance learning classes will continue to replace in-person delivery of orientation (Winsboro, 2002). To date, very little literature is available examining the effectiveness and formats of distance education orientation courses. In fact, representatives from both the National Resource Center for the First-year Experience and the American Association of Community Colleges admit there is a lack of data regarding outcomes associated with online orientations and first-year seminars (Tighe, 2006).

According to the data collected in the *2003 National Survey on the First-year Seminar*, 28 two-year institutions have elements of their first-year seminars online, and 20 of these institutions offer sections of orientation completely online. Since the fall of 1999, the Virginia Community College System has offered over 100 sections of online orientation (Tighe, 2006). Because of the lack of research on distance learning orientation, it is unclear if any online orientation courses are meeting the standard objectives set forth for an orientation course. In a survey done by Tighe, the instructors teaching orientation through distance education did unanimously agree that the objectives and purposes of the orientation course can be accomplished online.

#### *Demographic Variables Affecting Student Success*

The research in this study will control for certain demographic variables that have been proven to affect student success. One such variable is age. Adults with no previous college experience who are seeking post-secondary education often find community colleges a natural entry point (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). In 2002, adults between age 25 and 64 represented 35 % of full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollments at two-year public

colleges, compared with only 15 % of FTE undergraduate enrollments at four-year public institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Older students are more likely than younger students to find themselves caring for children, working, married, and less engaged with traditional age students in the college (Choy & Premo, 1995; Horn & Carroll, 1996). In particular, it is often argued that older students are less likely to complete degree programs than are traditional age students because they have to balance work, family, and schooling (Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Spanard, 1990). Older students are also more likely to attend part-time, to enroll in technical programs, and to seek an occupational certificate rather than pursue an associate degree or transfer to a four-year institution (Bailey et al., 2003).

Considering the obstacles faced by older students, it is not surprising that age is the one demographic variable cited as making the biggest difference in postsecondary outcomes. As Adelman contends, “One demographic variable makes an enormous difference in the distribution of virtually any postsecondary outcome or process—age at the time of first entry to postsecondary education” (Adelman, 2005, p. 119). Similarly, the 2008 Virginia Community College System study, *A Focus on First Term Success and Persistence to Spring Term*, found that older students are less likely to persist (Jovanovich, 2008). Bean and Metzner (1985) provide a theoretical framework maintaining that nontraditional students (older, part-time, and commuter students) are more negatively affected by environmental factors than they are positively affected by social and academic integration, and therefore they are more likely to stop out and drop out than traditional students.

The characteristics often identified with older students can certainly influence enrollment patterns, enrollment intensity, and the probability of completing a degree

(Choy, 2002a). For example, enrollment consistency and intensity can determine when students reach certain educational benchmarks, such as earning a certain number of credits or finishing a certain percentage of their program (McCormick, 1999). Whether and when an older student achieves various educational milestones can have an impact on graduation probability, whereas milestone achievement does not have the same effect for younger students. In fact, in the *Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study*, Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, and Jenkins (2006) found that 60 % of older, first-time community college students, compared with 40 % of younger, first-time students, did not earn any credential or transfer after 6 years.

#### *Gender and student success studies*

Another demographic variable proven to affect student success is gender. This research will also control for gender as a variable. A great deal of research has focused on gender and education attainment. Initial studies showed mixed results. One of the first conducted by Tinto (1975) reported that men are retained at a higher rate than women. Studies conducted by Brophy (1986), Ramaker (1987), and Sydow and Sandel (1998) found similar findings of women attending a typical two-year college. Studies conducted by Nespolie and Radcliffe (1983), Voorhees (1987), and Adelman (1991) found contradicting results related to persistence and gender. However, research does indicate that women earn higher grades in high school and college (Astin, 1972).

Recent findings indicate that females earn more degrees than males. In 1996-1997, females earned 61 % of associates, 56 % of bachelors, and 57 % of masters degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In 2006-2007, the percentage of associates and bachelors degrees earned by females increased to 62 and 57 %, respectively, and the

percentage of master's degrees increased to 61 %. Females have historically earned fewer first-professional and doctoral degrees than males. In 1996-1997, for example, females earned 42 % of first-professional degrees and 41 % of doctoral degrees. In 2006-2007, for the first time, females and males earned about the same number of these degrees.

Regardless of race, trends of females leading degree attainment continues. In 2006-07, females of each racial/ethnic group generally earned more degrees than their male counterparts for each type of degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). For example, in 2006-2007, African America females earned 69 % of associates, 66 % of bachelors, 71% of masters, 63 % of first-professional, and 66 % of doctoral degrees awarded to African-American students. Females also earned more than 60 % of associates, bachelors, and masters degrees awarded to Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native students. Caucasian females earned more degrees than Caucasian males for each type of degree, except first-professional.

#### *Ethnicity and student success studies*

A great deal of research has focused on ethnicity and student success. Based on the findings of this research, it is clear that student success studies must control for this demographic variable. Therefore, ethnicity will be controlled for in this study. According to The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 29% of all college students in 2002 were racial/ethnic minorities. This number has increased from 1992 (21%) and 1997 (24%). According to the same NCES study (2002), most minority students enroll at community colleges. In 2002, roughly 25% of the student enrollments at four-year schools were minorities while 36% of the students enrolled at community colleges

represented minority populations. For community colleges, this is an increase from 25% in 1992 and 30% in 1997.

While data suggests minority students are matriculating into higher education in greater numbers, studies by Astin (1972, 1993), Baker (1986), Jalomo (1995), Ramaker (1987), and Wells (1989) showed minority groups are not retained at the same percentages as the general student population. For this reason, it is important that retention studies account for race/ethnicity as a variable. In their text, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) call for additional research focusing on the college experience for minority students with hopes of promoting retention.

In regard to studies specific to minorities and orientation programs, Fidler and Godwin (1994) found African-American students completing a first-year student orientation course were retained at a higher rate than non-oriented students.

#### *The Relationship Between Orientation and Academic Performance*

Considering that the goal of first-year student orientation courses is student success, a great deal of research has focused on the effect orientation has on academic performance. Measures of academic performance include retention, grade point average, and hours completed. One of the earliest studies to focus on the effects of completing an orientation course on academic performance was conducted by Kopecek (1971). This study did find students taking orientation had higher mean grade point averages than students not taking orientation; however, the study showed that participation in orientation did not increase or decrease retention.

Maisto and Tammi (1991) studied a group of 150 students enrolled in first-year student orientation. Their findings concluded that students participating in first-year

student orientation had higher grade point averages than a matched group of students not participating in orientation. This study also revealed that orientation participants had more faculty contacts than the first-year student not participating in orientation. Based on Involvement Theory (Astin, 1978), it could be predicted that these students would be more successful because they are more connected to the campus.

In a 1999 study conducted by Sidle and McReynolds, the relationship between orientation and retention, grade-point average, and hours taken was examined. This study had a sample of 862 first-year students and a positive relationship existed between students participating in first-year student orientation and student success, specifically in retention and grade point averages. Oriented students had higher cumulative grade-point averages (2.17) than non-oriented first-year students (1.99). In addition, oriented first-year students had a higher ratio of earned credit hours. The oriented students were also retained at a higher rate than the non-oriented students. Those participating in orientation persisted to the fall semester of the second year at a rate of 63% while the non-oriented students persisted at a lower rate of 56%. In a similar study conducted by Odell (1996), a positive relationship was found between participation in first-year student orientation and the student success measures, retention and grade-point average. In addition to having higher grade-point averages, the oriented students also had a reduction in the number of classes dropped or failed in comparison to the students who did not participate in orientation.

Several studies have been conducted investigating the effects of students participation in first-year student orientation on student integration. In one such study conducted at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, (Davis-Underwood & Lee,

1994) findings revealed that students participating in an orientation course were more integrated to the college and had higher grade point averages than non-oriented students. Similar findings were reported by Bolender (1994) in a study conducted at Mount Vernon Nazarene College in Mount Vernon, Ohio. Results from the sample, 254 first-year student students, revealed that students participating in first-year student orientation had higher grade point averages in comparison to the matched group of non-participants. In addition, this study found that the oriented students had more faculty contacts than non-participants.

### *Community Colleges*

Community colleges lack representation in higher education literature. This study does focus on a community college; therefore, it is important to understand the mission and complexion of community colleges. Because of their convenient location, open access, and low cost, community colleges tend to enroll students who are more academically, economically, and socially disadvantaged than do other postsecondary institutions. In addition, community colleges serve more minority students than traditional four-year schools. For example, nearly 30% of community college students are Black or Hispanic as compared to 20% of students enrolled in four-year public and private postsecondary institutions (Horn & Nevill, 2006). Approximately one-fourth of community college students come from families earning 125% or less of the federal poverty level as compared to one-fifth of four-year college students (Horn & Nevill, 2006). Community college students face a variety of barriers to degree completion, including the need to work, family obligations, and low levels of academic preparation. A 2008 national study on community college students found that over half of community

college students, 62%, attend on a part-time basis while 56% of community college students work more than 20 hours per week, and 33% spend 11 or more hours per week caring for dependents (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2008). The same 2008 survey found that most community college students spend a significant time commuting to school, with 93% commuting at least one hour per week and 21% commuting 6 to 20 hours per week. Entering first-year students at community colleges are more likely to need at least one remedial course than are their peers at four-year colleges, and they are more likely to need to spend a longer period of time taking such courses (Wirt et al., 2004). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003), in the fall of 2000, 42 % of entering first-time students at public two-year colleges took at least one remedial course. This is compared to 20 % of entering students at public four-year institutions.

Community colleges continue to struggle with low student success rates. In a study that followed first-time college students at community colleges, findings revealed that six years after their initial enrollment in 1995-1996, 45% of first-time college students at community colleges had transferred to a four-year institution or earned a certificate or degree (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005). In this study, 47% of the students had left school without earning a credential while only 8% of students were still enrolled. Although community colleges provide services to assist students with degree attainment or transfer, clearly many community college students do not obtain educational credentials.

The community college in this study is part of a state wide community college system that provides comprehensive higher education and workforce training programs

and services under the purview of the State Board for Community Colleges and the individual community college boards. The System is comprised of 23 two-year colleges located on 40 campuses across the state. The 23 colleges in this system operate under a centralized system office with a common set of courses although all colleges do not offer the same array of courses. In 2006-2007, the system served over 230,000 full-time and part-time students, including 170,000 individuals through workforce development services. Admission is open to anyone with a high school diploma, a GED certificate, home schooling certificate of completion, a passing score on the Ability to Benefit test, or high school students approved for dual enrollment. Students may take courses for credit and earn degrees, certificates, and diplomas, as well as transfer credits to four-year colleges and universities. The System also provides noncredit instruction leading to industry certifications and other workforce credentials. All 23 colleges in the System offer the orientation course College Survival Skills (VCCS, 2009). Every Associates Degree program in the System requires this course as part of the curriculum (VCCS, 2009).

### *Rural Community Colleges*

The community college in this study is a rural college. Because rural colleges have unique characteristics, it is important to understand those characteristics. Since 1970, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education has utilized a classification of colleges and universities (McCormick & Zhao, 2005). The Carnegie Classifications are based on empirical data collected from colleges and universities and is published periodically for research and program analysis purposes. This classification system is widely accepted in higher education. Based on Carnegie Classifications, the college in

this study is a rural, medium sized two-year college. The classification rural, suburban, or urban-serving is based on the physical location of institutions within Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSAs) or Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), respectively, with populations exceeding 500,000 people according to the 2000 Census. Institutions in PMSAs or MSAs with a lower total population, or not in a PMSA or MSA, were classified as rural-serving. Institutional size is based on unduplicated credit headcount for the entire academic year. Schools with enrollment ranging from 2,500 through 7,500 are classified as medium.

One prominent purpose for this classification system is to permit the researcher to determine if the size of the community in which a college exists has an effect on the research problem being examined. What holds true for an urban school might not hold true for a rural school due to the extreme differences in characteristics. Characteristics of rural areas often include high levels of illiteracy, low levels of educational attainment, high unemployment, and extreme poverty (Murray, 2007). "Of the almost four hundred counties with poverty rates of 20 % or greater in every decade since 1959, 95 % are rural" (Mosley and Miller, 2004, p. 2). "As of 2001, more than 26 % of metropolitan residents possessed at least a college degree, compared to only 15 % of those in nonmetropolitan areas" (Mosley and Miller, 2004, p. 5). As a result of the community identification concepts associated with community colleges, the activities of rural community colleges are scrutinized more and felt more intensely than their urban counterparts. This can be seen through a ripple effect where the activities of the college will potentially affect the entire community whether intended or unintended. Thus, the characteristic differences between urban and rural schools signals the need for research

questions to be asked in both venues. The 2009 qualitative study conducted by O’Gara, Karp, and Hughes echoes this point. A gap in the literature is identified as the literature lacks a study investigating student success courses at a rural community college.

Often, in rural areas, it is common to experience an outward migration of population. This occurrence can make it extremely difficult for colleges to recruit new students. Non-success is costly to the institution in terms of less efficient use of faculty and staff and support services. It is also costly to the student in terms of lost momentum and having to repeat courses. The more colleges can do to support students to be successful in the first term, the more likely students are to maintain momentum, to persist, and ultimately attain success.

#### *Community College Orientation*

Although Carnevale (2002) and Washchull (2001) conducted studies to address classroom attrition, few studies address how specific classes, such as orientation, affect community college attrition (Derby & Smith, 2004). Even though community colleges see orientation programs as a powerful retention tool, virtually no information is available indicating how orientation programs can be best utilized. Although most community colleges utilize orientation courses, little research has been conducted on their effectiveness (Zeidenberg et al., 2007). Bailey and Alfonso (2005) also recognize this deficit, noting that much of the literature on the effectiveness of student support has focused on four-year college populations whose needs differ from the needs of students enrolled in community colleges. They also noted that the data needed to rigorously evaluate program effectiveness is not widely available.

One of the few studies focusing on community colleges and orientation courses examined the success Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC) reported in improving retention rates of first-year student students since 1984. This success, in part, was attributed to a course called College Success (Cuseo,1991). The results of MDCC's initial study indicated that students participating in the course during their first semester in college were more likely to persist and earn acceptable grade-point averages. After one year, findings indicated that 67% of participating students were retained, compared to 46% of nonparticipants (Belcher, Ingold, & Lombard, 1987, p. 21). Researchers concluded that if all first-time-in-college (FTIC) students in the semester studied had taken the course and received similar academic results, the college could have retained revenues in excess of \$200,000. Grade-point averages were also higher for students participating in the course when compared with those not participating.

A more recent study conducted by the Florida Department of Education compared the outcomes of students who completed a student success course (SLS course) with those of students who did not take or complete such a course at Florida's 28 community colleges (Florida Department of Education, 2006). Findings revealed that SLS course completers were more likely than non-completers to achieve one of the following three identified indicators of success: earning a community college credential, transferring to the state university system, or remaining enrolled in college after five years (Zeidenberg, et.al., 2007). This research conducted by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) found that the Florida community college students who take a student success course are 8% more likely to earn a certificate or associate degree than are students who

do not take such a course. CCRC reports that all but two of the 28 Florida community colleges are seeing positive results from these courses.

In a recent qualitative study, student interview data were used to examine student success courses at two urban community colleges. Findings concluded that such courses are critical for students because the various benefits reinforce one another and magnify their influence (O’Gara, Karp, & Hughes, 2009). The study identified the following benefits: learning about the college, classes, and study skills while allowing students to build important relationships with professors and peers.

#### *The Virginia Community College System*

Tighe’s (2006) research on the Virginia Community College System Online Orientation, suggested that “re-examination of the SDV course description and curricula objectives is necessary to ensure students receive what they truly need.” VCCS Policy 6.4.0.1 Orientation/Student Development states:

All curricular students, except those in career studies certificate programs, shall participate in an SDV course designed primarily to foster student success. This course should be completed within the first 15 credit hours of enrollment at the community college, unless the student is not required to complete an SDV course because it is waived.

Despite this policy, SDV course enrollment patterns do not seem to align with policy and practice. Of the 28,615 VCCS college students who were part of the fall 2003 cohort of first-time students, only 11, 534 or 40% completed SDV at some point in time during a four-year period (VCCS, 2008). Based on these findings, VCCS Vice Chancellor, Dr. Monty Sullivan raised the following questions during a formal presentation: “Are SDV

policies appropriate? What student benefits result from SDV?” To date, no answers have been provided. This research hopes to yield some answers.

### *Summary*

In summary, orientation programs have been a tool used by higher education institutions for over 118 years. Throughout history, the complexion of orientation has changed to meet the needs of students. However, the purpose of orientation, to integrate students into the institution, has remained a constant. In hopes of fine tuning programs to produce the most favorable results possible, a great deal of higher education research has focused on orientation. In recent years, scholars have conducted numerous studies with results pointing to a positive relationship between participating in an orientation program and academic integration (retention, grade point average, and hours completed). Retention studies point to numerous factors that contribute to student retention and attrition.

Community colleges have become the force responsible for training America's workforce. As an academic melting pot, community colleges serve a diverse student population often not seen at four-year institutions. However, providing support services for these populations presents community colleges with complex challenges. The academic success of students attending community colleges is often thwarted by external conditions unique to nontraditional students. Therefore, effective and intentional retention strategies are essential.

The literature does offer a great deal of research on orientation and student success at community colleges. However, little research is available, specifically focusing on orientation programs at community colleges. In addition, research cannot be

found that focuses on orientation at rural community colleges. The results of this study will begin to fill this void.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

#### *Introduction*

Although most community colleges utilize orientation courses, research have produced little information on their effectiveness (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007). A great deal of research has focused on orientation at the four-year level; however, a gap in the literature reveals that the literature lacks studies investigating student success courses at the community college level. Like most community colleges, the small rural community college examined in this study requires the Student Development (SDV) orientation course as a requirement for all Associates of Arts and Science (A.A.S.) and Associates of Science (A.S.) Degrees. Little research analyzes student success measures to identify if a relationship exists between orientation and student success. The intention of this study is to examine the relationship between the orientation course and certain student success measures. Measuring this relationship compared students enrolled in the course in addition to the type in which they enrolled. As Hughes, et al., (2009) points out, more quantitative work is necessary to establish a relationship between participation in student success courses and positive student outcomes. In addition, no available research compares orientation formats at a small rural community college.

#### *Research Design*

To identify if students at a rural community college in the Southeast United States taking orientation (SDV) their first semester have higher GPAs and retention rates than their counterparts not taking SDV in their first semester, this study used the following

methodology. An ex post facto design is appropriate as the researcher seeks to determine the reason for preexisting differences in groups of individuals (Kumar, 2005). Research such as this is classified as ex post facto since both the effect and the alleged cause have already occurred. In this research, a hypothesized relationship compares between participation in orientation and GPA with retention. The sample size is 1,398 students who did or did not participate in orientation their first semester. This sample size should help to stabilize the standard of error estimates. The independent variables tested include the students' participation or non-participation in orientation. In addition, the delivery format (two-day, ten-week, or distance education) served as an independent variable for students who participated in SDV. The dependent variables representing student success are retention from the fall to subsequent spring semester and grade point average (GPA). Retention was measured based on continuous enrollment for two semesters because many of the students at this college enroll in certificate programs that can be completed in two semesters. Regardless of a student's educational goal, associate's degree, diploma, or certificate, the minimum amount of time a student could enroll and still be considered successful is two semesters. Covariates include the students' gender, age, ethnicity, and placement test scores. Statistically controlling the covariates allowed for the possible emergence of relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables. Further explanation of these variables in Table 1 which illustrates the overall study design.

Table 1  
*Overall Study Design*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Independent Variable &amp; Covariates</b>	<b>Dependent Variables</b>	<b>Analyses</b>
1. How do the grade point averages (GPA) of community college students taking orientation their first semester compare to their counterparts not taking SDV their first semester?	Enrollment in SDV Placement Test Scores Ethnicity Gender Age	GPA at the end of the fall semester	ANCOVA
2. To what degree are community college first-year students who take orientation their first semester retained the subsequent semester compared to their counterparts who do not take orientation their first semester?	Enrollment in SDV Placement Test Scores Ethnicity Gender Age	Retention in concurrent spring semester	Logistic Regression
3. To what degree does the delivery format in which community college students complete orientation affect their retention and grade point averages?	Format of SDV Placement Test Scores Ethnicity Gender Age	Retention in concurrent spring semester  GPA at the end of the fall semester	Logistic Regression ANCOVA.

### *Research Questions*

This study assesses the relationship between taking an orientation course, and the formats of that course with certain student success measures. Specifically, to address a gap in the literature, this study investigated this relationship at a community college. Based on student success literature, grade point average (GPA) and retention were acceptable measures of student success. In this study, retention is defined as enrollment in the fall semester without interruption in the subsequent spring semester (Sydow & Sandel, 1998). Using these measures, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do the grade point averages (GPA) of community college students taking orientation their first semester compare to their counterparts not taking SDV their first semester?
2. To what degree are community college first-year students who take orientation their first semester retained the subsequent semester in comparison to their counterparts not taking orientation their first semester?
3. To what degree does the delivery format in which community college students complete orientation affect their retention and grade point averages?

The present study tested the following hypothesis:

- H1 Community college first-year students who take orientation their first semester do have higher grade point averages (GPA) than their counterparts not taking orientation their first semester.

- H2 Community college first-year students who take orientation their first semester are retained in higher numbers than their counterparts not taking orientation their first semester.
- H3 The format of orientation does not influence the retention and GPAs of the participants once demographic variables are controlled.

### *Setting and Sample*

Students in this study attend a community college, which in 2008 reported an annual attendance of 3,773 students (Institutional Research Office, 2009). Thirty-seven percent of these students usually attended on a part-time basis while 63% attended full-time. Forty-five percent of the student population is male while 55% is female. Ninety-six percent of the student body is Caucasian, 2% is African American, and the remaining 2% from one of the following ethnicities: Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Hawaiian, or other. In regards to age, 15% of the students enrolled are 18 years of age or younger, 21% are age 18 or 19, 11% are ages 20 or 21, 8% are in the age range of 22 to 24, 10% are in the age range of 25 to 29, 13% are in the age range 30 to 39, 9% are in the age range of 40 to 49, 10% are in the age range of 50 to 64, and 1% of the students are 65 years of age or older. In the fall of 2008, 30% of the enrollments came from the science curriculum, 30% came from the humanities curriculum, and 12% came from the business division (Institutional Research Office, 2009).

In addition, this community college serves approximately 15,000 area residents through non-credit and community service programs. This two-year institution offers more than 80 programs of study leading to an associates degree, diploma, certificate, or career studies certificate. This college is one of the 23 community colleges in the

Virginia Community College System. The four counties served by this community college are rural, with low socioeconomic statuses as based on the average for the state of Virginia. In the first quarter of 2009, each of the four counties registered below the Virginia average per capita earnings of \$921 per month. The three largest sectors of employment in the four counties were government (all levels), retail/wholesale trades, and health care/social assistance.

All participants in this study enrolled at this rural community college in the Southeast between fall 2006 and spring 2009. Participants in this study included students who enrolled in an orientation course rather than just the students who completed the course. This inclusion addresses the concern that selecting just those who completed the course would bias the results toward students who might have latent characteristics that also increase their likelihood of completing a credential. Therefore the data analysis controlled for identified characteristics to account for the myriad reasons students dropout.

The use of a limited sample is an effort to control for environmental variations that might exist in other first-year student cohorts. The sample was limited to students enrolling in their first semester of college (excluding dual enrollment) in the fall semesters of 2006, 2007, and 2008. Participants were divided into two groups; students who enrolled in orientation during their first fall semester of attendance and students who did not enroll in orientation during their first fall semester of attendance. This was a non-random, convenience sample that is purposive with a particular group being targeted. This was a static group comparison because there was no random assignment or pretest of the groups.

Students enrolled in the SDV course by self-enrolling or through an advisor/counselor. However, it is up to the students to choose the format in which they will enroll. Students enrolling in the three different formats (two-day, ten-week, or distance) were compared based on the measures of GPA and retention from fall, their first semester, into the concurrent spring semester. Although it is suggested that students enroll in a SDV course within their first fifteen credit hours, this is not enforced through mandatory enrollment. Students have complete discretion as to when they will enroll in the course.

The population of this study is 1,398 students that were *first-time, full-time* students in the fall semesters of 2006, 2007, and 2008. The mean age of participants is 25.4, the standard deviation is 7.36 while the range is 48. Additional demographic characteristics of the college's Fall 2006, 2007, and 2008 student body and students electing to enroll in SDV appear in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5. The demographic characteristics of ethnicity, gender, and age were similar in the 2006, 2007, and 2008 student bodies in comparison to the demographic characteristics of the students in this study.

The majority of the students at this school are Caucasian; moreover, this is an accurate representation of the ethnicity of the four counties in the school's service region. In 2006, 98% of the students were Caucasian; in 2007 97.6% were Caucasian; and in 2008, 95.9% were Caucasian. In this study, the majority of the students were also Caucasian (96.6). Due to the low level of participation of ethnic groups other than Caucasian, all other groups (Asian, African American, and Hispanic) had to be collapsed during the logistic regression portion of this study. Table 2 illustrates the ethnic

representation ethnic representation of the student population and the samples from 2006, 2007, and 2008 population.

Table 2

*Ethnicity of Student Body in Comparison to Study Participants*

Ethnicity	Study Sample <i>n</i>	Study Sample	2006 Student Sample	2007 Student Sample	2008 Student Sample
Caucasian	1,350	96.6%	98%	97.6%	95.9%
Asian	4	.3%	.1%	.1%	.1%
African American	38	2.7%	1.8%	1.8%	2.7%
Hispanic	6	.4%	.1%	.1%	.1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>n</i>	1,398	1,398	3,580	3,716	3,984

The majority of the students at the school in this study are females. In 2006, 55.5% of the students were female; in 2007, 58.7% were female, and in 2008, 54.1% were female. Table 3 represents the gender of the study participants. The gender representation in this study is very similar to the gender representation of the total student population in the school where the study took place. These figures are similar to national figures that also show more females enrolling in higher education than males (IPEDS, 2007).

Table 3

*Participants by Gender*

Gender	Study Sample <i>n</i>	Study Sample	2006 Student Sample	2007 Student Sample	2008 Student Sample
Male	664	47.5%	44.5%	41.3%	45.9%
Female	733	52.5%	55.5%	58.7%	54.1%
<i>n</i>	1,397	1,397	3,580	3,716	3,984
Total	1,397	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Note.* One case did not report a gender and was excluded from the study.

The majority of the students attending the school in this study are 29 years of age or younger. However, at least one-third of the student body in 2006, 2007, and 2008 was over the age 29. The age of the participants in this study proved to be similar to the average age of the student body. Based on information presented in Table 4, the average age of a student at this school in 2006 was 24; in 2007, it was 26; and in 2008, it was 27 years of age. These figures are very similar to the average age of the participants in this study, which was 25.4. This representation of age is also similar to national findings (IPEDS, 2006).

Table 4

*Participants by Age In Comparison to Student Body*

	Study Sample	2006 Student Sample	2007 Student Sample	2008 Student Sample
Mean	25.4 years	24 years	26 years	27 years
SD	7.36	7.24	8.02	7.12
Total ( <i>n</i> )	1,396	3,580	3,716	3,984

*Note.* Two cases did not report an age and were excluded from the study

To be included in this study, students were enrolled full-time. Table 5 illustrates that in 2006, 52.9% of the student body population was full-time, while in 2007, 56.1% was enrolled full-time and in 2008, 54% was enrolled full-time. Students eligible for the study had to be classified as first year, meaning they had taken 15 credits or less, excluding dual credit classes. In Fall 2006, only 30.6% of the students were classified as first year; while in 2007, 28.5% were first year; and in 2008, 27.8% were first year.

Table 5

*Students by Fall Enrollment*

Enrollment Status	Study Sample	2006 Student Sample	2007 Student Sample	2008 Student Sample
Student population classified as first year	100%	30.6%	28.5%	27.8%
First year students enrolled in 12 or more credits for term (full-time)	100%	52.9%	56.1%	54%
First year students enrolled in fewer than 12 credits for term (part-time)	0%	47.1%	43.9%	46%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>n</i>	1,396	3,984	3,716	3,580

This study focuses heavily on students enrolling in orientation. Orientation is not mandatory for all new students; the programs that do require orientation allow students to choose what semester they will take the course. Orientation enrollment seems to be declining; in this study, enrollment was highest in 2006, with 22.3% of the student sample enrolling. Enrollment dropped in 2007 to 19.2% and even more in 2008, to 18.8%. Less than half (41.6%) of the students meeting the criteria for this study enrolled in orientation as seen in Table 6.

Table 6

*Students by Orientation Enrollment*

Orientation Enrollment	Study Sample	2006 Student Sample	2007 Student Sample	2008 Student Sample
Enrolled in Orientation in Fall Semester	41.6%	22.3%	19.2%	18.8%
<i>n</i>	568	888	713	673

*Placement tests*

Students at the college in this study must take one of the following assessments for placement purposes: Compass, Asset, ACT, or SAT. A student's placement in English and Math is a strong indicator of his/her college readiness. As found by the 2008 Virginia Community College System study, *A Focus on First Term Success and Persistence to Spring Term*, students needing developmental classes succeed at lower rates than non-developmental education students. Based on this relationship between course placement and student success, course placement was a variable controlled in this study. The following described tests are all used for course placement.

Compass, Asset, and ACT, products of American College Test Program (ACT), are widely used in universities and colleges (ACT, 2006). Each assessment helps postsecondary institutions in making course placement decisions. These assessments evaluate a particular individual's math, reading, and writing skills. Similarly, SAT scores are also used by the college in this study for placement purposes. SAT is a product of the College Board, students who take the SAT receive three separate test scores: Critical Reading, Writing, and Mathematics. In this study, students take the Compass and Asset Test on the campus of the college. The difference between these two assessments is that the Compass, given on a computer, is not timed, and the scores are produced instantly. The Asset, given utilizing paper and pencil, is timed, and is scored by hand. The SAT and ACT, are administered at approved College Board sites, tests are timed and are given with paper and pencil.

Concordance studies have compared all assessments: SAT, ACT, Compass, and Asset (College Board, 2003). Concordance is a method for establishing comparable levels of performance across the tests. Based on the concordance of the Compass, Asset, ACT, and SAT, the chart in Appendix D interprets test scores for English and Math placement purposes at the college in this study. The scores on these assessments indicate what the students' skills level is in math and English so that these students can be placed in courses accordingly. Placement can include college level English (course 111 and above), math (course 151 and above), developmental English (05 and below), and math (04 and below). The majority of the students in this study took the Compass assessment.

Table 7 illustrates the most common placement for the population in this study. Based on their reading and writing scores, the majority of students do place in English

111. However, based on math scores, the developmental Math 03 is the most common placement.

Table 7

*Placement Test Scores by Academic Year*

Score Placement	Study Sample	2006 Student Sample	2007 Student Sample	2008 Student Sample
Math score placement into Math 03	48.5%	51.5%	46.8%	47.1%
Reading score placement into English 111	66.8%	47%	63.6%	68.5%
Writing score placement into English 111	53.2%	77%	52.7%	52%

*Variables*

As illustrated in Table 1, the independent variables tested include student participation or non-participation in orientation. Controlling for these independent variables allowed the researcher to answer research questions one and two to determine if there is a relationship between participation in orientation and retention and GPA. Furthermore, by controlling for delivery format of orientation (two-day, ten-week, or distance education) as an independent variable for students who participated in SDV, the researcher was able to answer research question three. These formats are further described in Table 7.

The dependent variables measuring student success are retention from the fall to subsequent spring semester and grade point average (GPA). The researcher measured student success using these variables based on their acceptance in the literature and their regularity in similar studies. Because many of the students at this college enroll in

certificate programs that can be completed in two semesters, retention was measured based on continuous enrollment for two semesters. Regardless of the educational goal- associate degree, diploma, or certificate- the minimum amount of time a student could enroll and still be considered successful is two semesters. Grade Point Average (GPA), the other measure of student success used in this study, is calculated on a 4-point scale as shown below in Table 8.

Table 8

*Grade Point Average Scale*

Letter Grade	Meaning	Points Awarded
A	Excellent	4 grade points per credit
B	Good	3 grade points per credit
C	Average	2 grade points per credit
D	Poor	1 grade point per credit
F	Failure	0 grade point per credit

Covariates include the students' gender, age, ethnicity, and placement test scores of the student. These variables were chosen based on the compelling body of literature that validated their significant influence on student success. Chapter Two references such literature for each covariate. Statistically controlling the covariates allowed for the possible emergence of relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables so that all three research questions received sound answers. These variables are further explained in Table 1, which illustrates the overall study design.

*Data Collection and Analysis*

This study analyzed historical data collected from the 2006, 2007, and 2008 academic years. All 23 colleges in the Virginia Community College System use a common Student Information System (SIS) program designed by Peoplesoft (VCCS, 2009). All students complete their admissions application utilizing this software, while academic records are electronically compiled. This system proved to keep accurate and dependable records. Data were obtained using the SIS (Student Information System) system and analyzed through SPSS. The President of the College and the Vice President of Student Services granted the researcher written permission to access the Student Information System records for the school in this study.

Students' retention from fall, their first semester into the subsequent spring semester and their GPAs of the first semester were the measures used. Again, retention is being defined as continuous enrollment from fall to the concurrent spring because many programs only require two semesters for completion. Grade Point Average (GPA), the other measure of student success, uses a 4-point scale as shown in Table 7 above. Based on the amount of time required for a course, a credit hour value is assigned. A credit is equivalent to one collegiate semester hour credit. Usually, the student receives one credit for a course of approximately three hours of study weekly. College survival skills (SDV) is a one credit course as it requires only one hour of lecture plus an average of two hours of out-of-class study. Based on Table 7, a grade of "A" or 4 grade points per credit, is the highest grade that can be awarded for the class and is calculated into the semester GPA. Students should enroll in SDV within the first 15 credit hours of their academic career. However, policies are not in place forcing enrollment; therefore, students self-select

when they enroll in the course, often leaving the course to their last semester. Table 9 compares the three formats of SDV analyzed in this study.

Table 9

*Comparison of SDV Course Formats*

<b>Format</b>	<b>Delivery</b>	<b>Instructor</b>
Ten-Week	Class is taught on campus and convenes at the beginning of the semester and meets once a week, for one hour, for ten consecutive weeks for a total of 10 hours in the classroom. Classes are held in traditional classrooms in class sizes that range from 10 students to 30 (see Appendix A for syllabus).	Each class taught individually by 1 of 7 instructors. All instructors have a Master's Degree or higher.
Two-Day	Class is taught on campus for two consecutive days prior to the beginning of the semester for a total of 16 hours in the classroom. In groups of approximately 25, students rotate through sessions (3 hours in duration each) with each instructor. The last session is an information session (see Appendix B for syllabus).	Taught by 3 different instructors, each one specializes in a certain content area. All instructors have a Master's Degree or higher.
Distance Learning	The course convenes at the beginning of the semester and ends at the end of the semester. The class is an independent study where students have no contact with the instructor, unless they initiate contact. The student is given a packet with certain activities that must be independently completed (see Appendix C)	Taught by 1 instructor who has a Master's degree or higher.

*Confounding Variables*

Confounding variables considered for significance included gender, age, placement test scores, and ethnicity. All of these variables, considered based on previous research and findings, suggest that these variables can individually influence student success. Specifically the research conducted by Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calgano (2007) controlled for gender, age, race and ethnicity. They also controlled for math, reading, and writing test scores because students with higher test scores generally earn credentials at higher rates than those with lower scores. There may be significant differences in test scores between those who enroll in a SDV course and those who do not (Zeidenberg, Jenkins & Calgano).

Again, the researcher obtained all demographic information through a primary source utilizing the SIS system. A data analysis utilized the tests analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and logistic regression. Both tests were used to control for student characteristics that the researcher hypothesized could be related to the decision to enroll in a SDV course or to the completion of a credential. The inclusion of confounding variables or covariates in the statistical analysis is a way to control for observed variation between the groups caused, not by the treatment itself, but by other demographic factors. The logistic regression neutralizes the effect of the more powerful, non-interacting variable. Without this intervention measure, the effects of interacting independent variables could be clouded. Table 9 further explains the variables and values used during the regression.

Table 10

*Description of Variables*

Variables	Values
(a)	Gender 1=male, 0=female
	Age 1=0-22 0=23-78
	Ethnicity 1=Caucasian 0=Other
	English 1=Eng ,3,4,5 0=Eng 111
	Math 1=Math 2,3,4 0=Math 151
(b)	10 week 1=10 week class 0=no
	2 Day 1=2 day class 0=no
	Distance 1=Distance class 0=no
	Constant

*Ethical Protection of Participants*

Since this study uses historical data, this research does not present any potential harm to participants. However, measures were taken to conceal the identity of all participants. Each student received an assigned case number in an Excel spreadsheet where all data extracted from the SIS System was kept. No identifying information included in this spreadsheet could link the number back to the participant. This spreadsheet was password protected; after the research, the electronic data will be permanently destroyed.

Furthermore, the Human Subjects Committee of the Darden College of Education (approval number 200902116) termed this study exempt.

*Limitations*

The major limitation of this study is the sample. The college used in the sample is in the state of Virginia. For this reason, the results can only truly be generalized to Virginia community colleges. One limitation is that this study did not control for students that stop out and return at a later date because the study only measured from fall to the subsequent spring semester. Another limitation is that the study did not include

students enrolled part-time; these students may have benefited more from orientation than students who were enrolled full-time. All students must take a placement test before enrolling in a math or English course; however, not all take a math or English course in their first year. Over 300 students who were eligible for the study based on all the other criteria were eliminated because they had not taken a math or English placement test.

### *Conclusion*

The purpose of this study was to compare the success of students who take orientation their first semester with students who do not take orientation their first semester. In addition, this study explored the three different formats (traditional, two-day, and virtual) used to teach orientation to determine if there is a significant difference in student outcomes. This study analyzed three years of data and isolated demographic variables associated with student success. Measures used to identify student success included retention and grade point average. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics, analysis of covariance, and logistic regression.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Results

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the outcomes of GPA and retention were used to compare students enrolling in orientation their first semester to the students who did not enroll in the orientation course their first semester. Second, the purpose was to evaluate three instructional methods (two-day, ten-week, and distance learning) used to teach the Student Development (SDV) orientation course at a rural community college in the Virginia Community College System. This study examined each teaching method in relation to retention the semester following enrollment in the orientation course. Grade point averages of the students enrolled in the different instructional methods were compared. The following research questions guided this study:

**How do the grade point averages (GPA) of community college students taking orientation their first semester compare to their counterparts not taking SDV their first semester?**

Table 11 represents the GPAs of all study participants. Based on a 4.0 scale, the mean GPA of participants was 2.351 ( $SD=1.378$ ). On a letter grade scale a 2.351 is equivalent to a B-. The mean GPA for the study participants was similar to the mean GPA ( $M=2.296$ ) of the entire student population in 2006.

Table 11

*Mean GPA of Participants in Concurrent Spring Semester Based on a 0-4.0 Scale*

Study Sample	
Mean	2.351
SD	1.378
Range	0-4.00
<i>n</i>	1,398

A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. The independent variable was enrollment in SDV. The dependent variable was the students' GPA at the end of the fall term. An ANCOVA was used for this analysis because it adjusts for differences based on the covariates. In this study, it was not possible to randomly assign subjects to different groups; therefore, existing groups had to be used. Because these groups differ on a number of attributes, an ANCOVA can reduce some of these differences. The attributes or covariates in this analysis were gender, age, ethnicity, and math and English placement test scores.

As seen in Table 12, the ANCOVA reveals a significant relationship between enrollment in SDV and GPA,  $p < .05$ . The strength of the relationship between GPA and enrollment in SDV was not strong; as assessed by a partial  $\eta^2$  only .7% of variance in GPA can be attributed to enrollment in SDV.

Other variables in this analysis did prove to significantly impact GPA. Gender did significantly impact GPA,  $p < .05$ ; however, based on a partial  $\eta^2$  only .7% of variance in GPA could be attributed to gender. Age was another variable that proved to be significant,  $p < .05$ , but based on the partial  $\eta^2$  only .6% of variance in GPA could be attributed to age. Ethnicity did not significantly affect GPA ( $p = .865$ ). English placement test scores did not prove to significantly affect GPA ( $p = .329$ ). Math placement test scores did significantly impact GPA,  $p < .05$ ; however, results of the partial  $\eta^2$  reveal only 1.3% of variance in GPA could be attributed to math placement test scores. The significant variables in this analysis all have weak relationships, pointing to an underspecified model. This leads the researcher to question what variable, not included in this research, could account for this variance.

Table 12

<i>Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Based on the Dependent Variable GPA</i>						
Variables	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P	Partial Eta Squared
SDV Enrollment	10.853	1	10.853	6.273	.012	.007
Gender	10.349	1	10.349	5.982	.015	.007
Age	8.931	1	8.931	5.162	.023	.006
Ethnicity	.050	1	.050	.029	.865	.000
English	1.649	1	1.649	.953	.329	.001
Math	19.774	1	19.774	11.430	.001	.013

Since a significant relationship was established between enrollment in orientation and GPA, it is important to further consider the relationship. An analysis of marginal means GPA can be used to determine the difference between the GPAs of students who took orientation compared to those who did not. Marginal means is the measure used because all covariates from the ANCOVA have been accounted for. As seen in Table 13, the students in this study who enroll in orientation did have a slightly higher GPA (2.404) as compared to those students not taking orientation (2.171). As previously stated, although significant, this is not a strong relationship.

Table 13

<i>Marginal Means GPA of Participants in Concurrent Spring Semester Based on a 0-4.0</i>					
SDV Enrollment	<i>n</i>	Mean GPA	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Enrolled	568	2.404	.061	2.284	2.525
Not Enrolled	828	2.171	.067	2.040	2.302

*Research Question 2*

**To what degree are community college first-year students who take orientation their first semester retained the subsequent semester in comparison to their counterparts not taking orientation their first semester?**

Table 14 represents the method of instruction for the study participants who enrolled in orientation. This table also presents data on those study participants who did not take an orientation course. Retention in this study was defined as enrollment in the fall semester without interruption in the subsequent spring semester (Sydow & Sandel, 1998).

Table 14 illustrates that over half of the study's population (59.4%) did not participate in orientation.

Table 14

<i>Study Participants Based on Orientation Enrollment</i>		
Orientation Enrollment	<i>n</i>	Percentage of Study Population
Enrolled	568	40.6%
Not Enrolled	830	59.4%
Total	1,398	100%

A logistic regression was the analysis used to identify if there is a relationship between retention and enrollment in orientation. Retention from the fall semester into the subsequent spring semester served as a dichotomous dependent variable in this analysis while enrollment in an orientation course was the independent variable. A logistic regression allows the researcher to test models to predict categorical outcomes with two or more categories, otherwise known as a dichotomous dependent variable. In this case the categories were those students who were retained in the spring semester and those students who were not retained in spring. This analysis also controlled for covariates to

assess their predictability of influence on the independent variable. The attributes or covariates in this analysis were gender, age, ethnicity, and math and English placement test scores.

As seen in Table 15, the logistic regression revealed a significant relationship does not exist between enrollment in SDV and retention into the concurrent spring semester,  $p=.083$ . These findings contradict much of the literature on orientation that points to a relationship between orientation enrollment and increased retention (Zeidenberg et al., 2007). However, other variables in this analysis did prove to significantly impact retention. Age proved to be significant,  $p<.05$ , in predicting spring retention. Based on the B value for age, .015, the students who are under the age 23 (category one, students over the age 23 were in the omit category) were more likely to return in spring. The variable GPA was also significant in predicting spring retention,  $p<.05$ . Based on the B value for GPA, -.913, the lower a person's GPA was the less likely he or she was to be retained in the spring semester. The other variables in this regression did not significantly impact spring retention, gender ( $p=.923$ ), ethnicity ( $p=.055$ ), English placement scores ( $p=.983$ ), and math placement scores ( $p=.461$ ).

Table 15

*Comparing Fall Orientation Enrollment Regressed on Spring Retention*

Variables	B	S.E	Wald	Df	P	Exp (B)	95.0% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
SDV Enrollment	.113	.065	2.999	1	.083	1.120	.985	1.27
Gender	.018	.190	.009	1	.923	1.019	.701	1.47
Age	.015	.007	5.113	1	.024	1.015	1.02	1.02
Ethnicity	.474	.248	3.669	1	.055	1.607	.989	2.61
GPA	-.913	.073	154.823	1	.000	.401	.348	.46
English	-.001	.069	.000	1	.983	.999	.873	1.14
Math	-.071	.096	.543	1	.461	.932	.772	1.12

*Research Question 3*

**To what degree does the delivery format in which community college students complete orientation affect their retention and grade point averages?**

To answer the third research question, an ANCOVA and a logistic regression were used for analysis. Both tests are needed to answer the research question because descriptive and categorical data will be analyzed. The ANCOVA was conducted utilizing the SDV format of enrollment as the independent variable. The dependent variable was the students' GPA at the end of the fall term. Similar to the earlier analysis, an ANCOVA was used because it adjusts for differences on the covariates. The attributes or covariates in this analysis were gender, age, ethnicity, and math and English placement test scores.

A logistic regression was the analysis used to identify if there is a relationship between retention and format of enrollment in orientation. Retention from the fall semester into the subsequent spring semester served as a dichotomous dependent variable in this analysis while the format of orientation course enrollment is the independent variable. This analysis also controlled for covariates to assess their predictability of influence on the independent variable. The attributes or covariates in this analysis were gender, age, ethnicity, and math and English placement test scores.

Table 16 reveals that participants in this study have the propensity not to enroll in orientation during their first semester of enrollment (59.4%). This tendency builds a case for this research as policies are not currently implemented requiring students to enroll in orientation during their first semester of attendance; however, such policies are being considered. The students who did enroll in orientation have a higher tendency to enroll in

the two-day format (18.2%) over the ten-week format (17.6%) and the distance learning format (4.8%).

Table 16

*Participants Enrollment by Format of Orientation for Fall Semesters*

Orientation Format	<i>n</i>	Percentage of Study Population
Ten-Week	246	17.6%
Two-Day	255	18.2%
Distance	67	4.8%
Did not enroll	830	59.4%
Total	1398	100%

A one-way analysis of covariance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between GPAs of respondents and the format of orientation in which they participated. The covariates gender, age, ethnicity, and placement test scores were controlled in this analysis. Tables 17 shows that significant differences could not be found between the variables GPA and orientation format,  $p=.125$ . In addition, significant relationships could not be established between the variables gender ( $p=.550$ ), age ( $p=.749$ ), ethnicity ( $p=.315$ ), and English placement test scores ( $p=.056$ ). A significant relationship could be established between math placement test scores and format of orientation,  $p<.05$ ; however, results of the partial  $\eta^2$  reveal only 1.2% of variance in GPA could be attributed to math placement test scores

Table 17

<i>Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Based on the Dependent Variable GPA</i>						
Variables	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P	Partial Eta Squared
SDV Enrollment	7.014	2	3.507	2.087	.125	.007
Gender	.601	1	.601	.357	.550	.001
Age	.172	1	.172	.102	.749	.000
Ethnicity	1.702	1	1.701	1.013	.315	.002
English	6.172	1	6.172	3.673	.056	.007
Math	11.199	1	11.199	6.664	.010	.012

Although orientation format did not significantly affect GPA, an ANCOVA provided an analysis of marginal means GPA that could be used to compare the GPAs of students who took orientation. Marginal means is the appropriate means because all covariates from the ANCOVA have been accounted for. As seen in Table 18, the students in this study who enrolled in the ten-week orientation did have a slightly higher GPA (2.482) as compared to those students enrolling in the two-day orientation (2.262) and those students enrolling in the distance learning orientation (2.244). This comparison of GPAs further supported the finding that the format or orientation did not significantly influence GPA.

Table 18

<i>Marginal Means GPA of Participants in Concurrent Spring Semester Based on a 0-4.0</i>					
SDV Format	<i>n</i>	Mean GPA	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Two-Day	246	2.262	.083	2.098	2.425
Ten-Week	255	2.482	.081	2.322	2.642
Distance	67	2.244	.160	1.929	2.559

Utilizing a logistic regression, the possibility of a correlation between the independent variables (gender, age, ethnicity, placement test scores, GPA, and orientation

format) and the dependent variable (spring retention) was explored. Findings shown in Table 19 concluded that only the independent variables age ( $p<.05$ ) and GPA ( $p<.05$ ) had a significant relationship with spring retention. Variables not significant to spring enrollment included orientation format (ten-day  $p=.750$ , two-day  $p=.870$ ), gender ( $p=.328$ ), ethnicity ( $p=.354$ ), and English ( $p=.110$ ) and math ( $p=.750$ ) placement test scores.

Table 19

*Comparing Orientation Formats Regressed on Spring Retention*

Variables	B	S.E	Wald	Df	P	Exp (B)	95.0% C.I. for EXP(B) Lower	Upper
Two-Day	-.126	.395	.102	1	.750	.882	.406	1.91
Ten-Week	-.064	.393	.027	1	.870	.938	.434	2.02
Gender	.239	.245	.955	1	.328	1.270	.786	2.05
Age	-.030	.013	5.269	1	.022	.970	.945	.99
Ethnicity	-.500	.539	.860	1	.354	.606	.211	1.74
GPA	-.945	.097	94.697	1	.000	.389	.321	.47
English	.103	.064	2.558	1	.110	1.108	.977	1.25
Math	.021	.065	.102	1	.750	1.021	.899	1.15

### *Summary*

This chapter presents a discussion of the analysis and the results of this research. The analyses indicated that the majority of first-semester students attending college for the first time do not elect to take orientation during their first semester of enrollment. Of these students, those enrolling in orientation have a slight preference for the two-day course over the ten-week course; however, students have a clear preference for the two-day and ten-week course over the distance learning course. The study population was similar to the overall student body population in regard to the demographics of gender, age, ethnicity and placements test scores.

Findings concluded that students who did enroll in an orientation course their first semester were not more likely to reenroll in the spring semester in comparison to the students who did not enroll in an orientation course. This finding contradicts much of the literature which shows a significant relationship between orientation enrollment and retention.

A significant relationship does exist between enrollment in orientation and GPA. Although enrollment in orientation is significant to GPA, the format of orientation is not significant. In addition, the format of orientation was not found to be significant to retention. Significant findings include that younger students were more likely to reenroll in the spring term when compared to older students. In regard to the success measures of GPA and retention through spring enrollment, there was a significant relationship between these variables. The participants who had higher GPAs were more likely to be retained in the spring semester. This relationship seems to be well established in the literature (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980). Although this study did not

intend to explore the relationship between placement test scores and student success, it is worth noting that English and math placement test scores did not have a significant relationship on retention and only the math placement test scores had a significant relationship on GPA.

A complete discussion of these results and further recommendations are presented in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

#### *Overview of the Study's Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between student success and participation in an orientation course. The study compared students who participated in orientation to those who did not participate as well as the instructional methods used to teach orientation. The instructional methods examined include a two-day format, a ten-week format, and a distance learning format. This study examined three years of data and measured student success based on retention and grade point average. This chapter examines the findings of the three explored research questions. This chapter also includes a discussion of limitations of the study, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future study.

#### *Summary of Major Findings*

This chapter provides further discussion of the major findings of this study. The independent variables were the enrollment or non-enrollment in an orientation course and the format of enrollment (two-day, ten-week, distance learning). The dependent variables were the grade-point average at the end of the fall semester and retention, based on enrollment in the concurrent spring semester. A total of 1,398 students were eligible for the study; however, two cases did not contain an age value and were excluded. The total *n* used for data analysis was 1,396. Although a much larger group of students participated in SDV in 2006, 2007, and 2008, many students were eliminated to control for certain characteristics (must be a full-time and first-time student). Almost 50% of the participants matriculated in matriculated in 2006, and the number declined for each

following year. Possible explanations for this decline could be explained in students' perceptions of SDV and the declining student population at the college at the college where the research was conducted.

The first research question asked if community college students taking orientation their first semester had higher grade point averages (GPA) than their counterparts not taking SDV their first semester. To answer this question, the researcher began by examining the relationship between GPA, the independent variable, enrollment in SDV and the covariates. Based on the findings discussed in Chapter Four, the conclusion is that participation in orientation does significantly impact GPA. Again, possible explanations for these results are further explored in the implications of findings section.

The second research question addressed whether community college first-year students who take orientation are retained in greater numbers than their counterparts not taking orientation. Results of this study indicated that the majority (59.4%) of first year students do not participate in orientation during their first semester. After controlling for the variables age, ethnicity, gender, and test scores, the results suggested that whether or not students enroll in orientation during their first semester of enrollment is not a significant predictor of retention into the second semester. Possible explanations for these results are further explored in the implications of findings section.

The third research question compares delivery formats of community college freshman orientation to see if the format in which students complete orientation (two-day, ten-week, or virtual) affects their retention and grade point averages. Although findings revealed that the majority of students do not take orientation their first semester, the students who do enroll in orientation slightly prefer the two-day format (18.2%) over the

ten-week format (17.6%) and the distance learning format (4.8%). As previously stated, there is a relationship between the enrollment in orientation and GPA; however, the format of orientation does not significantly impact GPA. In regards to retention, a significant relationship was not seen between retention and format of orientation.

An inadvertent finding of this study that should be mentioned is that a significant relationship did not exist between the students' English and math placement scores and retention. In addition, English placement scores are not significant in predicting GPA. These findings are troubling, considering the English and math placement tests are supposed to be indicators of student success. This study did not include the exploration of a relationship between these variables and student success. However, it seems these results are an indicator of incongruence in the placement tests and their ability to predict student success. The state system from which the school in this study belongs is currently conducting a self-study and redesigning their math and English placement process.

### *Implications for Practice*

This research provides an increased understanding of the impact a community college course can have on retention and grade point averages of first-semester students. In addition, this research provides insight into the different instructional methods of orientation to determine if a relationship exists between these methods and retention and grade-point average. It is critical that all stakeholders in the orientation process- community college leaders and administrators, faculty, staff, practitioners, students, and other constituents- realize the implications of this and other community college orientation research.

To understand the implications of this study, it is important to recognize that this study was distinctive in many ways. Previous studies, such as the ones conducted by Zeidenberg in the Florida Community College System (2007) and the Virginia Community College System (2009), examined entire community college systems. In Virginia, this includes 23 colleges; in Florida, it consisted of 28 colleges. The research in this study focused on one community college in a rural area. It is possible that these results are more unique to rural community colleges. Due to lack of literature focusing on rural community colleges, the researchers are unable to support or refute similar studies.

#### *Implications for Community College Leaders and Administrators*

As stated by Barefoot and Gardener (1993) and Cohen and Jody (1978), the purpose of a college orientation course is to help students become more successful in college. Because orientation classes are often not seen as part of the academic curriculum, failure to evaluate such programs is not unique to the school in this study. It is the responsibility of community college leaders and administrators to make the evaluation of orientation courses and programs an institutional priority. Results from studies such as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2008), the Florida Department of Education (2005), Zeidenberg, et al. (2007), Marcotte et al. (2005), and Zimmerman (2000) indicate that students who were enrolled in an orientation course were retained and succeeded at a much higher rate than their counterparts who were not enrolled in an orientation course. The findings of this research differ in regards to retention. Conflicting findings signal the need for evaluation to occur at individual

institutions. It is the responsibility of community college leaders and administrators to prompt such evaluation.

In addition, community college administrators and leaders should uphold standards for orientation so that colleges offer programs with quality based on validated best practices offered by literature. If community college leaders and administrators disregard orientation as a potential student success tool and institutional priority then orientation programs will become haphazard and ineffective, such as the one examined in this study. Furthermore, system-wide program evaluation is merited. In many cases, orientation teaching loads are outsourced to adjunct faculty. It is up to community college leaders and administrators to determine the place for orientation at their institution, ensuring quality and standards.

#### *Implications for Community College Faculty, Staff, and other Practitioners*

As George Vaughan (2006) points out in his book, *The Community College Story*, greater emphasis on teaching exists at community colleges in comparison to four-year colleges where research is a heavy priority. Since community college faculty are not required to conduct research, a paucity of literature exists focusing on community colleges. As pointed out by this study, a lack of research exists specifically in the area of community college orientation. Even though community college faculty, staff, and practitioners are not required to conduct research, in order to validate their pedagogy they should pursue research. Specifically, those community college faculty, staff, and practitioners involved in orientation programs should evaluate such programs for effectiveness. Additional research should compare delivery formats. This study was unique in that it did compare different formats of community college orientation. As

Cuesco (1997) points out, orientation is possibly the most studied course in American higher education; however, only a few studies exist comparing orientation formats at the community college level. Best practices should be shared in hopes of promoting student success.

In addition, community college faculty, staff, and practitioners should advocate for orientation programs with community college leaders and administrators. In many cases, programs might not be producing favorable results due to a lack of resources. It is up to those who work closest with orientation- community college faculty, staff, and practitioners- to make sure orientation programs are an institutional priority with administration.

#### *Implications for Community College Students and other Constituents*

Most colleges have some form of a mandatory orientation program in which the goal is helping students become more successful in college. Institutions expend resources to offer these programs, and students' tuition dollars help finance such programs. Considering the necessary resources for an orientation program, students and other constituents contributing funds should see a return on their investment. If students have the option of choosing between delivery formats, they should be informed of success rates. Considering the results of this study, administrators should advise students at the institution studied that there is not a difference in the success rates produced by the different formats. In addition, if orientation programs do not increase student retention, students should question policies that force them to spend tuition dollars on such programs. Considering the State and Federal funding spent on higher education, policy makers should also question the return of investment seen from orientation programs.

*Limitations, Delimitations, and Implications for Future Research**Limits of the Study*

This study was limited by the following, which should be considered in future research:

1. The sample did not include first-time students enrolling in college for the first time in the spring or summer semester. This exclusion was an attempt to control for external variables. Therefore, the sample only represented first-time students beginning in the fall semester.
2. This study only included students enrolling between the fall semesters of 2006 and 2008. Therefore, this study only utilized three years of data.
3. This study only included full-time students (taking 12 or more credits). If part-time students had been included, the population would have been much larger.
4. This study only included students with placement test scores. The college in this study does not require all new students to take a placement test; to control for academic abilities, only the students who had test scores were used in this study.
5. The population used in this study is largely homogeneous in ethnicity. Because of the limited ethnicity, this affects the ability to generalize the results.
6. A major limitation of this research is the study design. An ex post facto or casual-comparative design does not provide researchers with true experimental data due to the inability to manipulate variables such as age or

gender. Since the independent variable had already occurred, the same types of controls could not be exercised, as in an experimental study. Caution must be applied in interpreting results because the alleged cause of an observed effect may in fact be the effect itself or there may be a third intervening variable. Caution must be exercised in attributing cause-effect relationships based on causal-comparative research. Only in experimental research is the degree of control sufficient to establish cause-effect relationships. Only in experimental research does the researcher randomly assign participants to treatment groups. In causal-comparative research the researcher cannot assign participants to treatment groups because they are already in those groups.

7. Data extracted from the Student Information System (SIS) database used to maintain student records for the entire community college system for the college provided this study. The accuracy of the data in this study depended on the accuracy of the data in the SIS. Although the SIS reports consistent accuracy, confirmation of accurate data for the participants in this study was not possible.

#### *Directions for Future Study*

Although most of the literature reports a strong relationship between the enrollment in an orientation course and student success, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Belcher, Ingold, and Lombard (1987) point out that the positive impact is not lasting and diminishes over time. This study only focused on student success from one semester into the concurrent semester and cannot provide explanations for this leveling-off of academic performance in the second semester. Further studies attempting to answer this question

are warranted, particularly longitudinal studies examining the relationship between student success and orientation courses.

The researcher was surprised by the findings which did refute the second study hypothesis. Based on these findings, the researcher suggests that college personnel evaluate the college survival skills curriculum to ensure that the course objectives are adequately met. The distance learning format of orientation that was evaluated in this study has recently been evaluated and redesigned. Based on the limitations of this study, the researcher suggests further research be conducted in this area. Similar populations should be targeted. It is critical that future replication control for the covariates controlled in this study. As previously stated, without controlling for those variables, a clear relationship between community college orientation and student success cannot be established. In addition, replication utilizing a random sample rather than a convenience sample could also further strengthen research.

The research in this study focused on one community college in a rural area while previous studies focused on entire State Systems (Zeidenberg, 2007 and VCCS, 2009). It is possible that these results are more unique to rural community colleges. As indicated by the Carnegie Classifications (1970), rural colleges serve a unique population. What holds true for an urban school might not hold true for a rural school due to the extreme differences in characteristics. Characteristics of rural areas often include high levels of illiteracy, low levels of educational attainment, high unemployment, and extreme poverty (Murray, 2007). Thus, the characteristic differences between urban and rural schools signal the need for research questions to be asked in both venues (Murray, 2007). The 2009 qualitative study conducted by O’Gara, Karp, and Hughes echoes this point. A lack

of literature investigating student success courses at a rural community college presents a problem.

The researcher is unable to support or refute similar studies due to the lack of literature focusing on rural community colleges. The researcher strongly recommends that this study be replicated at other rural schools, particularly at the sister community colleges located in the same geographic region as the school in this study.

Based on these findings, the researcher recommends the school in this study conduct a program evaluation on the orientation courses. The school needs to conduct a thorough assessment of the curriculum, delivery formats, and overall structure. Part of this program evaluation should include focus groups involving first-semester students who have and have not taken orientation. Since it seems other community colleges have seen positive outcomes from their orientation programs; this college should arrange interviews and visits to those schools (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007). Obviously the current orientation offerings are not sufficient, and action is needed. Specifically, at the college in this study, the fall 2010 semester offered fifteen sections of orientation. If these courses are being taught without producing favorable results this problem needs to be addressed. Based on the results of this research, the SDV courses taught at the college in this study are not significantly impacting student success based on the measure of retention.

Orientation programs were created to answer a need in higher education. Research consistently reminds practitioners that the need is imminent. It is risky and careless for institutions to provide student success tools without validating their efficacy. Particularly at the community college level, where the population is more “at-risk”,

students need reliable success tools. If orientation courses are not serving their intended purpose, then higher education must rethink the place of orientation in the higher education curriculum. As higher education has become more diversified, it is important that colleges constantly be evaluate student success courses in various settings. It is not safe to assume that what once worked will continue to work, or what works at four-year institutions will work at community colleges.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**SDV 108-COLLEGE SURVIVAL SKILLS**  
**Course Syllabus**

**SDV 108-College Survival Skills**-This course will cover goal setting, study skills, career planning, self-management and coping skills, and strategies for making positive connections within the college culture. This course is for the first time student and the student who seeks to earn a degree, diploma, or certificate from the College.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

1. To understand the concept of accepting personal responsibility for decisions made.
2. To develop and improve effective study skills & habits.
3. To clarify educational and career goals that are personally relevant.
4. To increase awareness of college services which contribute to academic success.
5. To learn to build positive connections with students, professors, advisors, and the workplace.
6. To understand individual & cultural differences.
7. To improve self-understanding and plan college success strategies.

**THE STUDENT IS EXPECTED TO:**

-Attend all class sessions and participate in class discussion/activities. Because attendance and participation is the basis for your grade, tardiness will not be tolerated. **Classes will begin promptly on time, each tardy will count as 1/3 of an absence.** Because your participation is critical to making classes effective, participation will count towards attendance. If you are physically present, but not mentally (talking on the phone, text messaging, or conducting side conversations) this will result in the subtraction of attendance points.

-Complete selected course activities (see reverse side)

**The use of personal electronic devices, including, but not limited to, cell phones, MP3 players, gaming devices, radios, CD players, computer laptops with sound, etc., should not be used in classrooms or classroom areas in ways that are disruptive to the teaching and learning environment.**

**GRADING:** You will earn 50 points for each class period you attend.

ACTIVITY	Student Progress Column: (add up your points)
Class #1	
Class #2	
Class #3	
Class #4	
Class #5	
Class #6	
Class #7	
Class #8	
Class #9	
Class #10	
Extra Activity #1:	
Extra Activity #2:	
Total Points:	

A- 700+
B- 650
C- 600
D- 500
F- Below

**NOTE:** The instructor encourages students to contact them anytime additional coaching or assistance is needed:

## APPENDIX B

### TWO-DAY-SDV 108 COLLEGE SURVIVAL SKILLS

#### Course Syllabus

**SDV 108-College Survival Skills**-This course will cover goal setting, study skills, career planning, self-management and coping skills, and strategies for making positive connections within the college culture.

**TWO-DAY FORMAT:** The class will meet **Wednesday, August 11th , 8:00AM-4:00PM and Thursday, August 12<sup>th</sup> , 8:00AM-4:00PM.**

#### COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To understand the concept of accepting personal responsibility for decisions made.
8. To develop and improve effective study skills & habits.
9. To clarify educational and career goals that are personally relevant.
10. To increase awareness of college services which contribute to academic success.
11. To learn to build positive connections with students, professors, advisors, and the workplace.
12. To understand individual & cultural differences.
13. To improve self-understanding and plan college success strategies.

#### THE STUDENT IS EXPECTED TO:

- Attend all class sessions and participate in class discussion/activities
- Formulate an Individual Success Plan

#### GRADING:

Setting a Plan for Success	150 points
Planning Your Career Path	150 points
Developing Effective Study Skills	150 points
Building Positive Connections	150 points
Finalizing Individual Success Plan	<u>100 points</u>
<b>Total Points earned during 2-day sessions:</b>	<b>700points</b>

A- 800-900 points
B- 700-799 points
C- 600-699 points
D- 500-599 points
F- Below 500 points

#### WORKSHOP SCHEDULE:

##### Wednesday, 8/11/10

	<b>GROUP 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>GROUP 3</b>
8:00 AM-8:25 AM	.....All Groups-- Sign in/Tazewell Hall 119.....		
8:30 AM-8:55 AM	.....All Groups---Tazewell Hall 119.....		
9:00 AM-12:00 Noon	B123/Call	B121/Peery	B161/Ellis-O'Quinn
12:00 Noon-12:55 PM	Lunch (Free pizza in the cafeteria)/ Time for Extra Points Activities		
12:30 PM-12:55 PM	B123—LASSI Interpretation (50 Extra Points)		
1:00 PM- 4:00 PM	B 161/ Ellis-O'Quinn	B123/Call	B121/Peery

##### Thursday, 8/12/10

8:00 AM- 8:30 AM	Time for Extra Activities		
8:30AM-9:00 AM	Dr. Betsy Summerfield, Campus Security Awareness, T-119		
9:00 AM-12:00 PM	B121/Peery	B 161/ Ellis-O'Quinn	B123/Call
12:00 PM-1:00 PM	Lunch (Free pizza in the cafeteria)/Time for Extra Points Activities		
1:00 PM-4:00 PM	Making Positive Connections- All Groups- Dellinger Hall 118, Recruitment Staff		

#### Note:

- Upon successful completion of this workshop, students who complete all activities will earn 700 points-Grade B and 1 CREDIT, which will satisfy the Student Development requirement for all applicable majors at SwVCC.
- **Students can participate in activities attached to this Syllabus to earn 100 additional points for Grade A.**
- The course design assists students in developing *college success strategies* and to formulate an action plan to incorporate the strategies into their daily agendas.
- Instructors encourage students to contact them anytime additional coaching or assistance is needed

APPENDIX C



**SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**SUMMER 2006**

**DUE: JULY 26, 2006**

Dear Student:

Your SDV 108 V1 College Survival Skills course material is attached. This course, as an independent study, is divided into three distinct sections – **SECTIONS ONE, TWO and THREE.**

**SECTION THREE must be completed** and requires the use of the text Making Your Mark available in the Barnes & Noble Bookstore. When graded at 90% correct, **SECTION THREE** allows for a 'C' grade. To qualify for a 'B', **SECTION THREE** plus **SECTION TWO** must be completed at 90% correct. For an 'A', **SECTIONS THREE, TWO plus ONE** must be completed at 90% correct.

The numbers in parenthesis ( ) after each question reflect the maximum number of points for that question. All written material should be of the right **quantity**, of good **quality** and, if hand written, must be readable. Please make sure that your printed and signed **name** appears on your work, **which means that the work was done by you.** **Do NOT** place your material in a binder or a folder (which only adds to your cost) and please **do not** photocopy questions – simply fill in the blanks in the appropriate areas.

Your grade will be available via our website along with your other grades. I will not be able to email your grade or to give out your grade over the phone.

Your material **will not** be returned to you. If you wish to discuss your grade, we will need to do so **prior** to the end of the next term.

If you have questions, please contact me in Tazewell Hall, Room 112 or call [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Director of Admissions & Counseling

[REDACTED]

## SDV 108-SECTION V1

### SECTION ONE

#### PART I

FOR A GRADE OF "A" YOU MUST COMPLETE SECTIONS ONE, TWO AND THREE.

- On a separate (8 ½ x 11) sheet of paper, discuss the career that you have chosen to pursue. In your five (5) well-developed paragraphs, you should discuss the reasons for your career choice, events or other people who have influenced your decision, educational requirements for the career you have chosen, where you plan to live and work, additional training you might need beyond SVCC, and what you plan to be doing five years after graduation.
  - As you evaluate your career choice, you may include in your discussion information on your strengths and weaknesses as well as special assistance you might need. You may wish to interview someone who actually works in your chosen field. A poorly written or "short" essay will affect your grade on this section. Each paragraph should contain four or more sentences. (100 points) \*
- 

### SECTION ONE

#### PART II

- Attend a college or community sponsored cultural activity (i.e. play, speaker, etc.) during this current term.
  - On a separate (8 ½ x 11) sheet of paper, discuss the activity by providing a paragraph describing who, what, where and when.
  - In three additional (well-developed) paragraphs, describe your reaction, reasons for your reaction, the value of the activity for the audience, and the need for future activities of this nature.
  - Attach your event program to the essay. (100 points) \*
- 

### SECTION ONE

#### PART III

Choose an agency/organization/church/club (not an individual) and volunteer for one hour. This experience cannot be a paid activity, should not be an activity you currently do, and must be completed during the current term.

On a separate (8 ½ x 11) sheet of paper, discuss fully, in five (5) paragraphs, the activity you chose, why you chose it, what you actually did, how you felt about it, what you learned from it, would you do it again, and would you recommend it to others. Name the person and provide a telephone number who can verify your participation in the activity. Finally, provide the date on which you completed the activity. (100 points) \*

\* If handwritten, please make each paper readable.

## **SDV 108-SECTION V1**

**FOR A GRADE OF "B", COMPLETE SECTIONS TWO AND THREE**

### **SECTION TWO**

#### **PART I. Library Assignment**

The Library of Southwest Virginia Community College is a valuable resource for your academic success. By becoming familiar with its services and resources, you can enhance and improve your academic performance.

The Library assignment consists of five questions. The worksheet containing the four questions as well as extensive background and instructions are available **online**. To locate these materials, from the Southwest Virginia Community College home page (<http://www.sw.edu>), choose Library Services and then select Library Exercise for SDV 108. (Call 964.7265/7266 for direct assistance or visit the Library in Russell Hall during regular hours.)

You must email your answers to the five questions to [teresa.alley@sw.edu](mailto:teresa.alley@sw.edu). Confirmation of your grade for this activity will be emailed to you and the SDV 108 instructor.

Successful completion of this activity is worth **100 points**.

#### **PART II. Campus Identification Card**

As students register for classes at SwVCC, a College ID can be obtained through the Library. Your proof, in submitting the above assignment, of obtaining the ID is worth an additional **50 points**.

SDV 108-SECTION VI

**SECTION TWO**  
**PART III**

The information necessary to answer the following questions will be found in the SwVCC Catalog – see section heading (in the catalog) to understand where to find the answers. Please do not recopy. Write or print clearly.

**GENERAL INFORMATION SECTION:**

1. SVCC serves the counties of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (4)
2. SVCC is one of \_\_\_\_\_ (how many) community colleges in the Virginia Community College System –ASK!!! (1)
3. The current tuition fee per credit for Virginia residents is \_\_\_\_\_. (1)
4. SVCC is accredited by the Southern \_\_\_\_\_ of  
\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_. (3)
5. Southwest's main campus is located in \_\_\_\_\_ county. (1)
6. SVCC opened to students in the fall term of \_\_\_\_\_. (1)
7. Refunds on tuition payment are only available during the \_\_\_\_\_  
period of each term. (1)

**ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION SECTION:**

8. The three educational program areas of study at Southwest include  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and certificates. (2)

9. The \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Degree is made up of courses designed to transfer to senior institutions. (3)
10. A full time student must register for \_\_\_\_\_ credits. (1)
11. The student who has completed 30 credit hours of college work will be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. (1)
12. List the three (3) graduation honors. Show GPA required with each. (6)
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
13. To graduate from any SVCC program, the student must have an overall GPA of \_\_\_\_\_. (1)
14. A student may earn a \_\_\_\_\_ in a course by withdrawing prior to the end of the first 10 weeks of the fall or spring semester. (1)

**INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM AND SERVICES SECTION:**

15. List three types of services that provide cultural and educational opportunities for the College's service area. (3)
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
16. To be eligible for the SwVCC Honors Program, the student must have a \_\_\_\_\_ GPA. (1)
17. The LRC is made up of three departments to include the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (3)

**STUDENT DEVELOPMENT SERVICES SECTION:**

18. SwVCC offers, at no charge, the ASSET or the \_\_\_\_\_ as entrance assessments for new students. (1)
19. Financial aid applications must be filed every \_\_\_\_\_. (1)
20. Work-study students must be enrolled for \_\_\_\_\_ or more credits. (1)
21. The SwVCC scholarship deadline is March \_\_\_\_\_. (1)
22. Talent Search assists individuals between the ages of \_\_\_\_\_ to 18. (1)
23. Name 3 financial aid sources for students available at SwVCC  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (3)
24. Two services of the CRC are \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_. (2)
25. Student Support Services offers assistance through \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (4)
26. Academic advisement helps the individual student to \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_. (2)
27. SwVCC's professional counselors assist students in making  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_ decisions. (4)
28. The College (Upward) Bound Program serves students from homes where neither parent has completed a \_\_\_\_\_. (1)

SDV 108-SECTION V1

**SECTION THREE**  
**PART I**

**FOR A GRADE OF "C": COMPLETE SECTION THREE ONLY.**

Refer to the SwVCC catalog – Student Handbook Section.

1. Complete the grade point average (GPA) for the following courses [show your work]:

<u>Course</u>	<u>Credit</u>	<u>Grade</u>
ENG 111	3	B
MTH 163	3	A
PED 111	1	D
PHY 201	4	A
PSY 200	3	B
SDV 108	1	A

- a. The GPA for the above courses is \_\_\_\_\_. (5)
- b. Would this student receive an academic warning notice?(1)  
\_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No
- c. If this GPA remained constant, could the student graduate from SVCC?(1)  
\_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No
2. List five (5) student clubs. (5)
- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
3. What is academic warning?(1)\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is academic dismissal?(1)\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

5. A student must \_\_\_\_\_ for graduation through the Admissions Office. (1)
6. List six (6) areas (actual misbehavior) of student misconduct. (6)
- a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  - f.
7. The Barnes & Noble Bookstore is open from \_\_\_\_\_ am to \_\_\_\_\_ pm. (2)
8. To maintain "satisfactory" academic progress for financial aid, a student must complete \_\_\_\_\_ percent of work attempted. (1)
9. To succeed at SwVCC, a student should study \_\_\_\_\_ hours for each hour of class. (1)
10. Students driving to campus must obtain a \_\_\_\_\_ from the Admissions Office to place on their vehicle. (1)
11. Student picture ID's are available through the SwVCC \_\_\_\_\_. (1)
12. Disciplinary problems are handled by the \_\_\_\_\_. (1)
13. The College prohibits the use of \_\_\_\_\_ products in any college buildings. (1)
14. Explain what a student must do to change programs at SVCC. (2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Explain what a student must do to have transcripts sent to other colleges or businesses. (2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. What must a student do to officially withdraw from the College? (2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

17. Explain fully what it means to "audit" a class. (2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

18. In order for a student to be on the "Dean's List", what GPA must he or she have?(1) \_\_\_\_\_

19. If you need help in choosing a course or program of study, whom should you ask for assistance? (2) \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

20. Student lockers are available at a cost of \_\_\_\_\_. (1)

**PROGRAM OFFERINGS SECTION:**

21. SwVCC's six transfer degrees include \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. (6)

22. SwVCC's associate degrees require 60 to \_\_\_\_\_ credits for graduation. (1)

23. Students should \_\_\_\_\_ a course in which a grade of "D" is earned. (1)

24. SVCC has four two-year health majors to include \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (4)

SDV 108-SECTION V1

**SECTION THREE**  
**PART II**

The following information **plus** answers are found in your text – “Making Your Mark” (LDF Publishing) from the SwVCC Barnes & Noble Bookstore. **Please keep your text for future reference.** Write or print clearly.

1. Objective exams may include multiple choice, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ questions. (3)
  
2. General or “grab bag” exam study tips include (5):
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Your text gives you the **two core principles of learning** (page 8) which are r\_\_\_\_\_ and r\_\_\_\_\_. (2)
  
4. The textbook note taking system called S4R (also a reading system) suggests that you \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. (5)
  
5. If you can't concentrate then you should \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (5)
  
6. List four (4) of seven (7) ways to “cope with it all”. (4)  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  
7. Name five (5) note taking tips. (5) \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

'Skills leading to success in college can also lead to success in the workplace.'

8. There are thirteen (13) 'don't forget to remember' ideas. Name six. (6)

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

9. Give five (5) hints for preparing for essay exams. (5)

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

**SHORT ANSWER:**

1. Being a "time wise" student is important. List four (4) of the time management techniques and include a one-sentence explanation in your own words. (8)

2. Write five (5) sentences on how to "eliminate exam anxiety". (10)

3. Your text discusses three (3) guidelines for marking your College textbooks. Describe them. (6)

4. The text suggests that papers and assignments should be kept simple – which means? List five (5) suggestions. (5)

5. Timing is everything in college, so completing course work is a priority. How do you do that and what are the advantages of staying ahead of your workload? (10)

6. List each and summarize the six "LISTEN" listening techniques. (12)
7. Name five (5) of the "17 Ways to Study Smarter" and explain each in your own words. (10)
8. College survival skills are listed on pgs. 41- 44. Name and paraphrase four. (8)
9. Many employers list \_\_\_\_\_ as the number one trait desired in an employee. (1)
10. Communication skills include written, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and presentation 'skills'. (2)
11. Two senses \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are important in memory work. (2)
12. Plagiarizing includes taking words, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ from some other source/person without giving credit to the source. (2)

**SDV 108-SECTION V1**

**SECTION THREE**  
**PART III**

Find an article on careers of the future in your local library or the SVCC Library in Russell Hall. Give **source**, **article name**, **author** and **your reaction** to the information in a full one-page (8 ½ X 11) paper. (50 points)

**SECTION THREE**  
**PART IV**

Discuss in a **one-page** (8 ½ X 11) essay an **invention** that you wish you had designed or discovered, detailing the **reasons for your choice**, **how it would benefit society or you**, and **other products or inventions it might suggest**. (50 points)

**SECTION THREE**  
**PART V**

You have discovered that your spouse has amassed a credit card debt of \$25,000.00 through the use of three credit cards which you mutually possess. Along with your other regularly monthly payments, this new debt is a real burden. Discuss in a **one page** paper how you will deal with this situation – divorce and bankruptcy are not part of the accepted action.(100 points)



# ASSET

## ASSESSMENT SCORES

### ENGLISH

<u>TEST</u>	<u>SCORES</u>	<u>COURSE</u>
Writing Skills	23 - 35	ENG 01
	36 - 40	ENG 03
	41 - 54	ENG 111
Reading Skills	23 - 35	ENG 04
	36 - 38	ENG 05
	39 - 53	No Reading Class Recommendation

Progression: ENG 01 → 03 → 111  
ENG 04 → 05

Possible Combinations:

ENG 01 & 04 OR ENG 01 & 05  
ENG 03 & 04 OR ENG 03 & 05  
ENG 111 & 05  
ENG 111 Only

### **SAT**

Verbal 430 +  
Math 430 +

### **NEW SAT**

Writing 430 +  
Reading 430 +  
Math 430 +

### MATH

<u>TEST</u>	<u>SCORES</u>	<u>COURSE</u>
Numerical Skills	23 - 37	MTH 02
	38 - 55	MTH 03, 120, 126
Elementary Algebra	23 - 37	MTH 02
	38 - 42	MTH 03, 120, 126
	43 - 55	MTH 04, 115, 120, 126, 151, 152, 157, 240
Intermediate Algebra	23 - 34	MTH 03, 120, 126
	35 - 40	MTH 04, 115, 120, 126, 151, 152, 157, 240
	41 - 55	MTH 163 or 240 or any lower number course
College Algebra	23 - 36	See Intermediate Algebra Score
	37 - 55	MTH 271, 240, 175/177 or any lower number course

# COMPASS

## ASSESSMENT SCORES

### ENGLISH

<u>TEST</u>	<u>SCORES</u>	<u>COURSE</u>
Writing	0 - 37	ENG 01
	38 - 68	ENG 03
	69 - 99	ENG 111
Reading	0 - 60	ENG 04
	61 - 75	ENG 05
	76 - 99	No Reading Class Recommendation

Progression: ENG 01 → 03 → 111  
ENG 04 → 05

Possible Combinations:

ENG 01 & 04 OR ENG 01 & 05  
ENG 03 & 04 OR ENG 03 & 05  
ENG 111 & 05  
ENG 111 Only

### **ACT**

English 13+

Math 13+

### MATH

<u>TEST</u>	<u>SCORES</u>	<u>COURSE</u>
Pre-Algebra	0 - 33	MTH 02
	34 - 99	MTH 03, 120, 126
Algebra	0 - 35	MTH 03, 120, 126
	36 - 43	MTH 04, 115, 120, 126, 151, 157, 240
	44 - 99	MTH 163 or 240 or any lower number course
College Algebra	0 - 40	See Algebra Score
	41 - 99	MTH 271, 240, 175/177 or any lower number course



