AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND ADMINISTRATORS

WITHIN A PARTICULAR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE PERCEIVED A

NEW-STUDENT ORIENTATION PROGRAM'S EFFECT ON STUDENTS' SOCIAL

INTEGRATION AND RETENTION

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A Dissertation presented to the
Faculty of the Graduate School
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In Partial Fulfillment
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by
TOMMY L. HODUM

Dr. Barbara Townsend, Dissertation Supervisor

May 2007

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

dissertation entitled,

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presented by Tommy L. Hodum

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Dr. Barbara K. Townsend

Dr. Kathy Scroggs

Dr. Joe Donaldson

Dr. Karen S. Cockrell

Dr. Peggy Placier

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ABSTRACT

Because of the difficulties new students may encounter upon starting college, an orientation program's ability to address students' needs could potentially persuade them in their decision to persist or leave. The purpose of this study was to investigate how students, faculty, and administrators within a particular liberal arts college perceived a new-student orientation program's effect on students' social integration and retention.

Findings indicated a majority of interviewed students had a positive experience during the orientation program. The environment provided, the orientation activities, and required participation in the orientation were the topics derived from respondents' comments linking students to social interaction. The orientation program provided this environment by facilitating interaction among new students, establishing a surrogate family for new students, and fostering long-term friendships among students.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

"We were concerned about why they left when we should have focused on what would

have encouraged them to stay." (Hodum, 2005)

Background of the Study

Student attrition is not a new phenomenon in higher education. Edgerton and

Toops (1929) and McNeely (1937) were early researchers conducting empirical inquiry

into retention. Tinto (1982) reported that the rate of student attrition has held constant

between 40 - 45% for more than 100 years. Few problems in higher education have

received as much attention as student departure. Over time, several institutional and

individual variables have been researched as to their effect on retention (Braxton,

Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). Even with a long history of awareness and numerous

research studies, there was still so much we did not know about student retention (Tinto,

1993). The unsolved puzzle of retention forced this focus upon finding the missing

piece(s).

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) and Tinto (1993) emphasized the dilemma higher

education faces in assisting new students' transition effectively into a different academic,

social, and personal environment. ACT's Ferguson stated, "Students tend to drop out

because their expectations of college—academically, socially, or both—don't match up

with the reality once they get there" (2004, p. 2). The failure to retain students was most

evident during the first year and many individuals dropped out within the first six weeks

(Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Levitz & Noel, 1989).

Statement of the Problem

Student retention is a major problem in higher education affecting students, institution, and society. Of the 1.5 million students who departed institutions of higher learning in 1993, 74% will never complete a two-year or a four-year degree (Tinto, 1993). Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) reported that failure to retain students has resulted in 50% of students leaving higher education early. According to the American College Testing Program (2004), 31.7% of students attending four-year colleges or universities leave between Fall-to-Fall semesters. At the institutional level, Lau (2003) found institutions with a major problem of student attrition reaping a loss of finances and lower graduation rates. Also, according to Tinto (1993), "Some institutions, primarily the smaller tuition-driven colleges, have teetered on the brink of financial collapse" (p. 2) because of low student retention rates. Various public colleges were under state mandates to enhance one-year retention and six-year graduation rates (Ryan & Glen, 2004). Implementation of intervention programs such as developmental studies, academic advising, learning communities, and freshmen experience programs— specifically new student orientation programs—have been attempted in institutional efforts to address this problem.

Higher education institutions were not the only stakeholders who lost due to poor student retention rates. America suffered with a weakened ability to be competitive in the world economy due to insufficiently educated workers (ACT, 2004). Baum and Payea (2004) stressed that student attrition was problematic for all involved because they linked students' future productivity and potential to contribute to society to college attendance.

Institutions of higher education lost and our nation suffered loss, but ultimately the students who leave higher education paid the heaviest price for early departure.

Importance of Research

Continued research on the retention problem in higher education was necessary for numerous reasons. According to Burr, Burr, and Novak (1999) retention studies should have helped stakeholders foresee and classify the greatest needs that an ever-changing student population had when entering college. The University of Arizona Student Retention Report (1998) stressed the importance of retention research by concluding that retention research: (a) provides colleges with data that can be used to modify and influence policy, (b) provides recruiters with insight into which students match the particular school's environment, (c) provides colleges with the opportunity to share pertinent information with prospective and current students, and (d) facilitates the identification of initiatives that help students succeed. The importance of new retention research was found in answering two old retention questions that continually yielded different findings: (1) How are those students who stayed different from those who left? (2) What were the main influences encouraging students to stay (Li & Killian, 1999)?

Extensive research on individual student characteristics has examined the impact of age (Lanni, 1997; Windham, 1995), gender (Mohammadi, 1994; Aquino, 1990), ethnicity (Aquino, 1990; Wall, Lessie, & Brown, 1996), student employment (Windham, 1995; Lanni, 1997), high school academic experience, type of college attended, generation of student (St. John, 1990), and other notable variables. Although Astin's (1970) research listed 146 input characteristics of students and Tinto (1975) determined

students' individual skills and background characteristics that influence retention, both argued that institutional variables play a significant or larger role in retention.

The National Center for Education Statistics (1997) reported that different types of institutions—two-year and four-year, public and private, commuter and residential—have varying retention rates. Institutional variables that researchers have examined include structural and organizational features of the institution (Pascarella, 1985), organizational determinants such as housing (Warner, 1994), communication rules, institutional quality (Bean, 1980), and intervention programs (Brawer, 1996). Institutional intervention programs that promote academic and social integration have received a lot of attention recently (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Ryan & Glenn, 2004; Lau, 2003; and Habley & McClanahan, 2004).

One of the specific interventions that has been studied was the orientation program. Research on orientation programs has endeavored to understand students' transition to college (Woosley, 2003), issues of involvement, social and academic integration (Allen & Nelson, 1989; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Berger & Milem, 1999), as well as other aspects directly known to impact new-student retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe (1986) and Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, and Mugenda (2000) maintained that new-student orientation programs had a statistically significant indirect effect on student persistence when the programs promoted students' social integration.

Social integration that could result from an orientation program was important to the research regarding retention of students because, "other things being equal, the greater the contact among students, the more likely individuals are to establish social and

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intellectual membership in the social communities of the college and therefore the more

likely they are to remain in college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 118). Tinto also argued that just

because social interaction was established, does not mean all students were retained, yet

when social integration was missing, the prevalence for attrition to occur increased.

Conceptual Framework

Lau (2003) and Pace (1980) have argued that ultimately the success of higher

education retention depends on the student. However, Gardner has argued, "in spite of all

we know from three decades of research on student retention, colleges are still inclined to

hold students largely responsible for their retention, while dramatically minimizing the

institutional role in this problem" (ACT, 2004, p. 3). Research has shown that a desire to

commit, persist, and make the necessary effort to be involved was contingent upon social

integration (Tinto, 1993). This perspective was partially included in Astin's (1994)

Theory of Student Involvement, where he held that student involvement was the key to

retention. This theory contained two significant factors: students interacting with student

peers and with the faculty (Robinson, Burns, & Gaw, 1996).

Although different in name, Astin's theory contained similar aspects of Tinto's

Interactionalist Theory of College Student Departure. Braxton (2000) has concluded that

Tinto's theory was the classical standard and the most influential model of retention. Part

of Tinto's (1975) model was the realization that "students' background characteristics

(gender, race, high school marks, and family income, etc.) determined how a student

would relate and commit to the post-secondary lifestyle" (McCance & Vanlier, n.d., p. 2).

Tinto's (1993) model not only included the consideration of those background

characteristics, but suggested that students' goal commitments were directly related to

students' integration into academic life and that students' institutional commitment was directly related to students' integration into the social life of the college.

This study was based on Tinto's theoretical Model of College Student Departure (1975, 1987, 1993) and includes the understanding that orientation programs are one institutional effort used to integrate students into the academic and social environment of the institution ("Student Retention . . . ," 1998). According to Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) there were thirteen propositions derived from Tinto's Interactionalist Model. The ninth proposition was, "The greater the level of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution" (p. 123).

<center>Purpose of this Study</center>

Although Tinto's Interactionalist Model has attracted great attention, internal consistency of his theory required empirical assessment in yet unresearched institutional settings. In single-institution studies, Tinto's proposition about the impact of social integration on student institutional commitment has received strong empirical support when studied at residential universities and moderate empirical support when studied at commuter universities (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). However, no studies of this proposition had yet been conducted at a liberal arts college.

"While many students soon adjust, others have great difficulty either in separating themselves from past associations and/or in adjusting to the academic and social life of college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 163). Because of the difficulties new students may encounter upon starting college, an orientation program's ability to address students' needs could potentially persuade them in their decision to persist or leave. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate how students, faculty, and administrators within a particular

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liberal arts college perceived a new-student orientation program's effect on students' social integration and retention.

Research Questions

In this study the following primary questions will be examined:

1. What characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to promote socialization?

2. What characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to have an influence on student retention?

Method

This case study sought to understand the meaning behind students' experience in a student orientation program in relation to their subsequent experience in the college. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), "researchers generally do case studies for one of three purposes: to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, to develop possible explanations of it, or to evaluate the phenomenon" (p. 549). Creswell (1998) defined this phenomenology as "studying the problem by entering the field of perception of participants, seeing how they experience, live and display the phenomenon, and looking for the meaning of the participants' experience" (p. 31). The advantage of a case study was the ability to "inform readers of the motives, values, beliefs, and interpretations of events of an individual who has participated in those events" (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000, p. 104).

Participants in the study were at a small, not for profit, private baccalaureate general college that has a religious affiliation. The participants were purposefully sampled from the following categories:

1. Students who participated in the 2002-2005 orientations and students who participated but dropped out of the college (one from each year). A total of sixteen students were interviewed.

2. Four faculty/administrators that designed participation in or are knowledgeable about the orientation program were interviewed.

3. Four additional nonparticipants from the faculty and administration employed during two successive years under review were also interviewed.

Data collection included in-depth semi-structured interviews, detailed field notes reflecting observations, and an examination of relevant artifacts.

Definition of Key Terms

Terms often developed multiple meanings because individuals applied a definition based upon their personal experience or worldview. To aid in clarification, the following terms were defined:

1. *Academic integration* – includes a number of factors that influence students' ability to become a part of a scholastic college environment. Some examples of these factors are grade point average, students' satisfaction with faculty, participation in study groups, and academic advising ("Student Retention . . . ," 1998).

2. *Attainment* – reaching a desired goal.

3. *Attrition* – a school's loss of students.

4. *Dropouts* – students who leave a particular school and do not return.

5. *Graduation rates* – the percentage of students who graduate from an institution.

6. *Matriculation* – to enroll as a student at a school.

7. *Persistence* – a student's post-secondary education continuation behavior that leads to graduation.

8. *Retention* – re-enrollment of students at an institution they attended the previous year.

9. *Social integration* – refers to formal and informal social interactions that students experience at the university "resulting from personal affiliations and from day-to-day interactions among different members of society" (Tinto, 1993, p. 101). "Social integration refers to the extent of congruency between the individual student and the social system of a college or university" (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997, p. 111).

10. *Transfer* – movement of a student and his or her academic records and credits from one institution to another institution.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study were associated with the methodology used by the field researcher in gathering and analyzing information and were as follows:

1. This type of study utilized subjective assessment of qualitative data.

2. More data could have been gathered from a larger sample. Other data could have been gathered with a different data collection tool.

3. The racial composition of students was limited by the small group of minorities attending this college. Most views were those of Caucasian students.

4. Due to institutional type and size, students' demographics, and the specific orientation program used, as well as the qualitative nature of this study, its

findings could best be suggestive for similar institutions, student bodies, and orientation programs.

Significance of Study

This study was important because it addressed a void in existing research, enhanced the knowledge base surrounding student retention, and offered additional implications for future research. The empirical testing surrounding Tinto's proposition about the impact of social integration was addressed at a liberal arts institution. Although a wealth of research existed regarding retention—the round peg, this information did not completely fill the round hole of attrition. Key aspects garnered from the examination of another new-student orientation program could assist those seeking to improve, develop, or research other orientation programs. Retention of all students entering higher education was unrealistic. However, "a significant portion of student attrition might be prevented through timely and carefully planned institutional interventions" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, p. 61). In practical terms, this study was significant because it addressed the concern educators must have in order to retain more students until completion of their program of study.

Summary

This dissertation was organized into six chapters. Chapter One provided the introduction to the study, including a brief literature review, a statement of the problem, significance of the research, conceptual framework, purpose, research questions, methods, and definition of key terms. The limitations of the study, significance, and summary conclude the first chapter. In Chapter Two, the literature review focuses on the following: (a) an overview of retention research, (b) significant theories about

attrition/retention, (c) intervention programs, and (d) orientation programs. A description

of the research design and methodology are presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Four

contains the findings and Chapter Five presents analysis of findings. Chapter Six includes

the implications for research and practice, and the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature comprises four sections. I began with an overview of the problem of retention in higher education. Secondly, I reviewed the literature on three notable theories about attrition/retention while focusing on Tinto's integration model. Next, specific intervention programs that research has determined facilitate retention were reviewed. Finally, I reviewed the literature on orientation programs as an intervention in student attrition.

Overview of Retention Issues

There has been no shortage of research on student retention in higher education. The literature spans from Johnson's (1926), *Predicting Success in College at Time of Entrance* to Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005), *How College Affects Students*, and beyond. Historically, empirical research has yielded considerable insight into understanding why some students leave college and why some students stay. According to Habley and McClanahan (2004), Lau (2003), Naretto (1995), and Betts (2003), some researched variables that contributed to attrition were: difficulties in a residential hall, unacceptable social atmosphere, inadequate student involvement in campus life, problems with the curriculum, poor student-institution fit, part-time student status, and lack of sufficient financial aid. Research conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (1997), Cabrere, Nora, and Castaneda (1993), St. John (1990), and Thomas (1990) have indicated that academic advising, student academic integration, college GPA, institutional commitment to the student, continuous enrollment, attendance

at a four-year institution, ACT test scores, family income, and full-time enrollment are some factors that can increase retention.

With this knowledge of negative and positive variables, it would have seemed that the retention problem had been solved. On the contrary, educational research indicated that student retention remains a very complex problem (Cooper, 2002) that has many pieces of the puzzle yet to be unraveled (Braxton, 2000). It has not been solved, but we have gained a greater understanding due to previously conducted research. Yet "successful retention efforts are difficult to mount, if only because of our continuing inability to make sense of the variable character of student departure" (Tinto, 1993, p. 2).

Researchers and stakeholders continue to be concerned because they still have unanswered questions: Why did almost one third (31.7%) of the freshmen attending all categories of higher education institutions not return to their initial institution for their sophomore year (ACT, 2004)? Why were just over half (52.1%) of those attending a four-year college completing their bachelor's studies in five years or less (ACT, 2004)? Elkins, Braxton, and James (2000) and Upcraft and Gardner (1989) reported that since most students leave college during their first year and most within the first six weeks, the integration and retention of new students must be the focus of college student success efforts. With current completion rates at four-year BA/BS public colleges and all categories of two-year colleges at the lowest level in more than twenty years, this concern over retention rates was warranted (Habley and McClanahan, 2004).

This low point has occurred even though "obtaining a college degree has never been more important" ("*Higher Education*," 2003, p. 1). According to Levin (1972) and

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Baum and Payea (2004), higher education provided numerous benefits to both individuals

and society:

There is a correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings for

all racial/ethnic groups and for both men and women. The income gap between

high school graduates and college graduates has increased significantly over time.

Any college experience produces a measurable benefit when compared with none,

but benefits of completing a bachelor's degree or higher are significantly greater.

Higher levels of education also correspond to lower levels of unemployment and

poverty, generating decreased demand on public budgets. College graduates have

lower smoking rates, more positive perceptions of personal health, and lower

incarceration rates than individuals who have not graduated from college. Higher

levels of education also correlate with higher levels of civic participation. (p. 7)

Retention not only impacts college students, but also can contribute positively to the

society that we are all part of by increasing the number of college graduates.

Significant Theories on Attrition/Retention

Although retention was first defined in the literature as a problem in the 1920s

(Minnesota University, 1924), McNeely's (1937) *College Student Mortality* was the first

to study variables like time to completion and institution size as they relate to retention.

Ironically, these early studies, to a large extent, did not supply the main underpinning for

the prevalent research on student retention. That honor belongs to Emile Durkheim

(1951), a French sociologist. Durkheim theorized that suicide was the product of a lack of

relationship between individuals and society. "Durkheim demonstrated that the rate of

suicide in a society was associated with the degree of social integration and not with race,

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heredity, cosmic or psychological factors" (Hassan, 1998, p. 168). According to Lester (1992), Durkheim's theoretical framework posited that suicide varies inversely with the degree to which an individual socially integrated with his social group. Durkheim's sociological framework of suicide provided the foundation upon which Spady (1970, 1971) and Tinto (1975, 1993) established their conceptual frameworks for student attrition/retention.

Spady's Theory of Student Departure (1970, 1971)

Spady (1970, 1971) believed that although research had been conducted on attrition/retention, it was not theory based. To develop a theory about student departure, Spady (1970) utilized the correlation between Durkheim's conceptual framework regarding suicide and his model for students leaving college. According to Summers (2003),

> Spady perceived a parallel process occurring in college students who dropped out, albeit not as drastic as suicide. Students who did not share values and orientations similar to other students, did not interact socially with other students, and generally did not feel compatible with the social system of college were more likely to drop out. (p. 2)

Spady's studies concluded that student attrition occurs because of a difficulty or absence of compatibility existing between the student's satisfaction and institutional commitment, normative congruence, academic potential, previous educational history, friendship support, intellectual development, grade performance, social integration, and family background (Armstrong, 1994). Summers (2003) and Armstrong credited Spady

with being the earliest and one of the best-known researchers regarding the problem of attrition/retention.

Tinto's Interactionalist Model (1975, 1987, 1993)

Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) has been credited with refining, developing, linking, extending, and adapting Durkheim's suicide model and Spady's sociological dropout model in the development of his Interactive Model of Student Departure (Thomas, 2000; Summers, 2003; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to Braxton (1999), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997), The Lilly Project (2000), and Braxton and Hirschy (2004), Tinto's conceptual model of student departure was the most popular, influential, and used construct in guiding retention research. Tinto's Student Integration Model provided one of the two comprehensive frameworks on college departure decisions (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993).

Tinto (1975, 1993) theorized that student attrition is a longitudinal process that happens because students are weakly linked to the academic and social systems of the institution (figure 1). Tinto's model suggested that a student's individual skills and background characteristics determine how well a student will adjust and commit to the college setting. Broadly understood, Tinto's model emphasized that the initial commitment of a student to the institution was related to a process of interactions between trait variables ("skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences and dispositions" p. 113) and the academic and social groups within an institution. A student's commitment could be cultivated through facilitating academic and social integration.

Figure 1.

Longitudinal Model of Individual Student Departure (Tinto 1975, 1987, 1993)
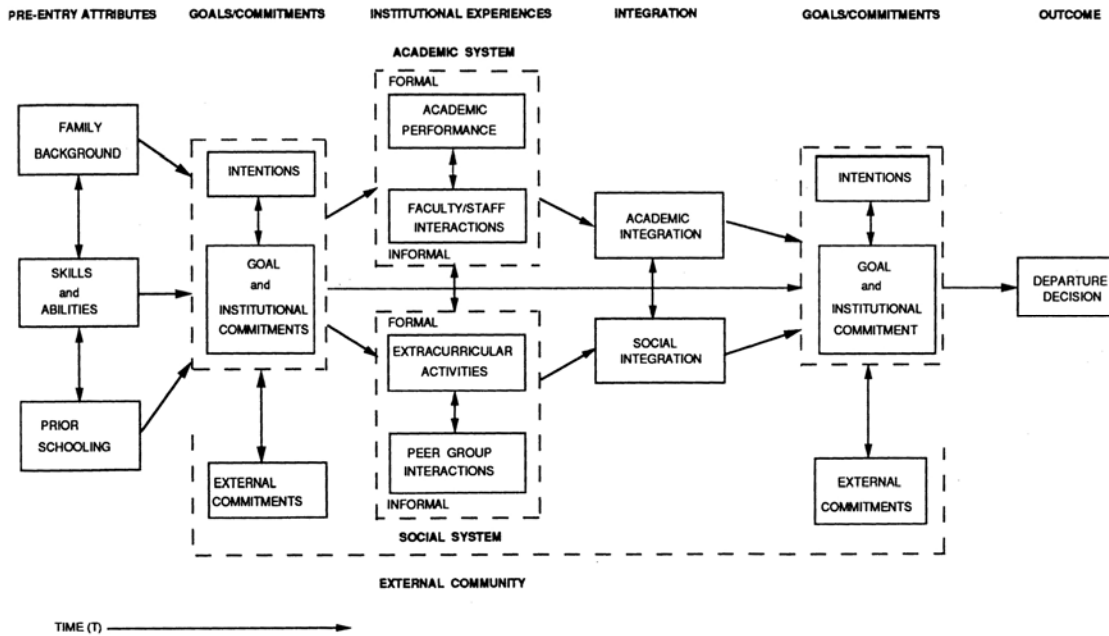
According to Kuh and Love (2000), Tinto's

academic integration represents the extent to which students are doing reasonably

well in their classes, perceive their classes to be relevant and have practical value,

and are satisfied with their majors. Social integration refers to students' levels of

social and psychological comfort with their colleges' milieus, association with or

acceptance by affinity groups, and sense of belonging that provides the security

needed to join with others in common causes, whether intellectual or social. (p.

197)

Tinto (1987, 1993), in expanding his student departure theory endeavored to

create additional understanding of student anomie, personal unrest, alienation, and

uncertainty. To accommodate this, Tinto linked Van Gennep's (1960) *Rites of Passage* to

his adjusted model that now included a separation phase, transition phase, and incorporation phase. Tinto connected these phases to the process through which college students establish membership in the communities (retention) or to the case of student departure (attrition) (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000).

In presenting his model, Tinto maintained,

It is possible to envision the process of student persistence as functionally similar to that of becoming incorporated into the life of human communities generally and that this process, especially in the first year of college, is marked by stages of passage, through which individuals must typically pass in order to persist in college. (p. 94)

Tinto (1993) postulated that when a student departs from an institution, that departure results from a longitudinal process of interactions between the student, specific attributes, intentions and commitments to members of the academic and social system. "Though the presence of interaction does not by itself guarantee persistence, the absence of interaction almost always enhances the likelihood of departure" (Tinto, p. 117). Tinto believed that constructive integration helped students to have higher goals and thus strengthen commitments to those goals and the institution they were attending.

In Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson's (1997) *Appraising Tinto's Theory of College Student Departure,* the authors presented the thirteen primary propositions derived from Tinto's longitudinal theoretical model. The researchers found strong empirical backing for some propositions and only partial or frail support for others. Proposition nine: "The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution" (p. 112) received aggregate support. Tinto (1975) posited, "Informal peer

group associations, extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty and administrators are mechanisms of social integration" (p. 107). However, the support for Tinto's theory as it relates to the institutional type of liberal arts colleges remained an open question for research (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson state, "These possible shortcomings in Tinto's theory do not provide adequate grounds for dismissing it; instead, these gaps point to opportunities for creating stronger theory" (p. 136).

Astin's I-E-O Model of Involvement

Astin (1970) was also one of the early scholars who built a theoretical framework about attrition/retention. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), "Astin proposed one of the first, most durable, and influential college impact models, the now familiar input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model" (p. 53). Astin was determined to discover measurable variables as they relate to reducing attrition. Astin (1993) developed the I-E-O model to evaluate under what conditions student's respond to different environmental influences. Astin's model used the 146 inputs (characteristics of the student at the time of initial enrollment) that are a standard part of retention studies (Tinto, 1987; Pascarella, 1985). Crissman (1999) stated that Astin's model also used 192 environmental variables that he classified into seven categories: "institutional characteristics, students' peer characteristics, faculty characteristics, curriculum, financial aid, place of residence, and student involvement" (p. 21). Input variable(s) plus environmental variable(s) equaled an outcome. Astin (1984) classified 82 outcomes that result from students characteristics interacting with the college environment.

Astin's (1984) Involvement theory contained the following five postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student's overall college experience) or very specific (preparation for a chemistry test).

2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given subject (e.g., some like and study math much more than others do), and the same student can manifest different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times (e.g., one week may be highly involved in, say, homecoming activities, and another week may be focused on studying for mid-term exams).

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for example, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours were spent in study) and qualitatively how well the student understands the material studied.

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or program is directly related to its capacity to increase student involvement. (p. 298)

Astin (1970, 1985, 1993) revealed that the more students were involved with their institution, the higher the probability of student retention.

Jacobi (1991) stressed that Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome Model and Tinto's Student Integration Model had common characteristics and were often used interchangeably. However, Jacobi also emphasized that Astin's I-E-O model focused on

student behavior, with attitude and affect being secondary concerns. In contrast, she explained how Tinto's Integration Model focused on students' attitudes and feelings about their experience with behavior being a secondary concern.

Intervention Programs

While student behavior was an integral piece to the retention puzzle, "institutions must continually assess their actions with an eye toward improvement" (Tinto, 1993, p. 152). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), "as pressures have grown on public and private institutions to increase retention and degree completion, so has the research examining the effectiveness of programmatic interventions designed to promote outcomes" (p. 398). Intervention strategies provided alternative perspectives of attrition/retention that had the potential to significantly influence students (Brawer, 1996). McIntire, Pumroy, Burgee, Alexander, Gerson, and Saddoris (1992) maintained that a single intervention program was inadequate to deal with the numerous academic and social integration issues related to retention. So what were some interventions that research discovered worked in specific situations? Although there were numerous noteworthy intervention programs, in this section I reviewed only four that current research has examined for effectiveness: (1) developmental studies, (2) academic advising, (3) learning communities, and (4) freshman experience programs. "These interventions vary considerably in content, structure, and duration making synthesis of the research on their effectiveness difficult" (Pascarella & Terenzini, p. 398).

Developmental Studies

Developmental studies and other remedial education programs have a long history. Programs have existed since 1849 to help under-prepared college students and

yet research has struggled to establish their effectiveness (Brier, 1984). However, Kulik, Kulik, and Shwalb (1983), Walleri (1987), and Haeuser (1993) concluded that developmental education programs help college students persist. The Weissman, Silk, and Bulakowski (1997) study revealed that under-prepared students who took remedial courses experienced greater success and persisted longer than under-prepared students who did not take remedial classes. "Findings strongly support the formulation of intrusive policies that require under-prepared students to complete their developmental course work prior to or concurrently with enrollment in college level courses" (Castator & Tollefson, 1996, p. 179). That research was validated by Weissman, Silk, and Bulakowski's research, which recommended the following:

1. Skill-deficient students should be required to remediate.

2. Skill-deficient students should be required to begin their programs of remediation upon initial enrollment.

3. Skill-deficient students should be allowed to take college-level courses before completing their programs of remediation as long as they are simultaneously working on remediating.

4. Language-deficient and triple-deficient students should be strongly encouraged to focus on their programs of remediation before beginning college-level courses. (p. 199)

In short, research supported developmental studies and other remedial programs as having a positive impact on students and their retention.

Academic Advising

Noel (1985) argued that "academic advising is the only structured activity on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution" (p. 17). Astin (1993) maintained that the retention of students was strongly influenced by meaningful interaction developed with staff, faculty, and peers. Studies indicated that poor integration with the college community, lack of clear academic or career goals, uncertainty, adjustment and isolation problems create the atmosphere for attrition to occur (Tinto, 1987). Thomas (1990) concluded that academic advising was the most important variable when considering persistence. Rendon's (1995) study collaborated those findings by concluding that constructive advisement between students and college personnel during their first term facilitated persistence. Research has shown that students who receive effective academic advising tend to feel positive about the institution and thus have an increased retention rate. (AASCU, 1997; Ward-Root & Hatch, 2003). Seidman (1991) determined that students receiving pre and post admissions advisement persisted 20% more often than students whom received no advisement. Additional studies by Beil (1990), Elliott and Healy (2001), Peterson, Wagner, and Lamb (2001), and Steele, Kennedy, and Gordon (1993) emphasized the importance of participation in advising programs. Noel and Saluri (1985) maintained,

> It is the people who come face-to-face with students on a regular basis who provide the positive growth experiences for students that enable them to identify their goals and talents and learn how to put them to use. The caring attitude of college personnel is viewed as the most potent retention force on campus. (p. 17)

Learning Communities

Learning communities were designed to allow students to become involved with smaller groups of students and teachers. Students involved in block scheduling and registration facilitated this process. As a cohort, they took specific classes together (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

> Such courses can be organized along curricular lines, common career interest, a vocational interest, residential living areas, and so on. These can be used to build a sense of group identity, cohesiveness, and uniqueness; to encourage; and to counteract the isolation that many students feel. (Astin, 1985, p. 161)

Studies revealed students involved in learning communities had higher grade point averages (Tinto, 1997; MacGregor, 1991), developed better support networks (Astin, 1993), and usually were more involved in campus activities (Levine, 1999). The research indicated two important outcomes of learning communities: students involved in learning groups had a higher retention rate and students not prepared for college continued on to the next semester in equal rates to those better prepared (Levine, 1999). Those findings correlated with Tinto's (1993) research on freshman-experience programs providing "a higher rate of retention even for those students who were initially less well-qualified than students who did not participate in the program (p. 167).

Freshman-experience Programs

Freshman-experience programs are multi-faceted programs that had a goal to encourage retention, academic success, and completion of program of study. According

to Barefoot (2000), by and large these programs had the following six overall research-based objectives:

1. Increasing student-to-student interaction

2. Increasing faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class

3. Increasing student involvement and time on campus

4. Linking the curriculum and the co-curriculum

5. Increasing academic expectations and levels of academic engagement

6. Assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for college. (p. 14)

Astin's (1993) research strongly supported the first objective by arguing that a student's peer group was the most powerful influence on a student's development. Davig and Spain (2003-2004) found support for Tinto's Model of integration in first-year seminars due to topics and activities supporting social networking and integration into the institution. According to Fidler (1991, 1999), Barefoot (1993), Boudreau and Kromrey (1994), Barefoot, Warnock, Dickson, Richardson, and Roberts (1998), Sidle and McReynolds (1999), Upcraft and Gardner (1989), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005), research produced consistent evidence that student participants enrolled in freshman-year programs had a statistically positive advantage of persisting from the first to the second year and maintained higher grade point averages. "Research on freshman-experience courses consistently indicated that they positively influence a variety of desired outcomes including retention, feelings of satisfaction, development of various cognitive skills, participation in extra-curricular activities, and academic performance" (Andreatta, 1998, p. 28).

Orientation Programs as an Intervention

"For institutions, the freshman year is a period during which programs have the greatest impact on subsequent student development and persistence" (Tinto & Goodsell, 1993, p. 8). One type of first-year program was a new-student orientation. History records that Lee College, Kentucky, in 1882, Boston University in 1888, Harvard University in 1909, and Stanford University in 1910 all proposed programs to orient new students to institutions of higher learning (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993; Crissman, 1999). Although El- Khawas (1984) found 75% of America's colleges in the 1980s were involved in freshman orientation programs, Fidler and Fidler (1991) later found the number leveling off at 70%. According to Perigo and Upcraft (1989), "Orientation is defined as any effort to help freshmen make the transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment and enhance their success" (p. 82). Moxley, Najor-Durack, and Dumbrigue (2001), Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004), Colton et al. (1999), Fidler (1991), and Tinto (1993) determined that orientation programs have a strategic part in students' transition from high school into college.

Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, and Mugenda (2000) argued that orientation helped build institutional integration and social networks. Orientation programs did this by having three basic goals: family support, personal success and integration into the institution, and academic success (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). Colton et al. (1999), Fidler (1991), Tinto's (1993), Miller (1985), Horton (1987), and Stupka (1986) indicated the positive effects of orientation programs on retention. However, in Morgan's (1990) analysis of the National Orientation Directors' Association data bank, findings failed to

support evidence "of a significant influence of orientation courses on the retention rates of North American public institutions" (p. 116).

In summarizing this brief review of interventions, Kuh (2001-2002) recommended:

> Just as no single experience has a profound impact on student development, the introduction of individual programs or policies will not by themselves change a campus culture and students' perceptions of whether the institution is supportive and affirming. Only a web of interlocking initiatives can over time shape an institutional culture that promotes student success. (pp. 30-31)

Because some interventions had not consistently shown statistically significant difference between participants and nonparticipants, "We need more information about what works, as well as tested models and tools for assessment. We need evidence - not assumptions and not tightly held beliefs based on our own experience" (Barefoot, 2000, p. 18).

Summary

This review of the literature indicated that the problem of retention in higher education remained unanswered. However, the literature has documented existing theories regarding student retention/attrition. Spady's (1970, 1971), Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993), and Astin's (1970, 1984) models provide the foundation for past, present, and future research. Validation and modification of these theories and development of new theory can only assist us in or quest for answering the retention/attrition question.

Further, the responsibility of institutions of higher education to provide an atmosphere of integration received substantial support from the literature. Student integration was a key component known to facilitate retention. While most of the

literature focused on freshman-year programs as an intervention, numerous studies have

supported other intervention programs that promoted social and academic integration.

Such programs were known to contain a component that assisted students in being

completers of a program of study rather than a dropout statistic. Orientation programs

were one of the various intervention programs designed to help students succeed by

persisting.

Conclusion

Gaps existed in the research utilizing Tinto's Model of Integration. Tinto himself

stated, "Despite the mass of quantitative evidence on reasons for student departure, we do

not fully understand, for example, how students perceive their own departure at varying

points in their college careers" (1988, p. 450). Studies examining the validity of Tinto's

proposition about the impact of social integration on student institutional commitment at

liberal arts colleges were absent. Studies assessing the validity and overall impact of

orientation programs facilitating social integration were limited. Therefore, there was a

need to study the effect of orientation programs on student retention in liberal arts

colleges.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students, faculty, and administrators within a particular liberal arts college perceived a new-student orientation program's effect on students' social integration and retention. This chapter begins with a discussion of the research questions and philosophical framework of this study. The design, setting, data collection procedure, sampling of participants, and the development of interview questions are presented. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis procedure.

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer two primary questions:

1. What characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to promote socialization?

2. What characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to have an influence on student retention?

Philosophical Framework

This study used a naturalistic/constructivist paradigm. Constructivism was used because human experience, development, and interaction were researched in this study. Crabtree and Miller (1992) advocated this methodology by stating, "Knowledge of the inner lives of others, however, can be gained only by dialogue between people, in the course of which the meaning of utterances and actions are explored, refined and verified— the eye of the mind" (p. 238). I wanted to "inductively and holistically

understand human experience in [a] context-specific setting" (Patton, 1990, p. 37). This study described and interpreted the meanings given by individuals who have interacted with a new-student orientation program. Tinto's ninth proposition, as listed by Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997), was compared with the respondents' lived experiences and the validity of the proposition in this particular setting was reported.

Design

This study used a qualitative approach described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a research method that allows a perception of the subject's lived experiences to be captured and then allows inductive analysis to discover like experiences and relationships. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach that allowed me as a researcher to accumulate detailed and descriptive data on the influence of a specific new-student orientation program upon students. Crabtree and Miller (1992) stated that qualitative studies use "specific data collection methods, sampling procedures, and analysis styles . . . to create unique, question-specific designs that evolves throughout the research process" (p. 5). It was impossible to know the multiple realities of multiple respondents creating multiple outcomes before I began (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rather, as Crabtree and Miller (1992) stated, "the inquirer enters an interpretive circle . . . [is] faithful to the performance or subject, must be both apart from and part of the dance, and must always be rooted in context" (p. 10).

Because of the research questions studied, I used interviewing as the primary method of inquiry to obtain the subjects' accounts of their perceptions of the orientation program. According to Crabtree and Miller, this research style asked: "(a) What is going on here? (b) What is the nature of the phenomenon? (c) What are the dimensions of the

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concept? and (d) What variations exist?" (p. 7). I wanted to know and endeavored to understand the meaning behind students' experiences.

<p style="text-align:center">Setting</p>

The college selected for the study was a private, church affiliated, highly selective, not-for-profit, baccalaureate general, residential college located in the south central part of the United States. In this study, the college was referred to as Summit College (SC). The mission of SC, as stated in the student handbook, was fivefold:

1. Academic Goal - To provide a sound education, based in the liberal arts.

2. Vocational Goal - To promote a strong work ethic, encouraging the development of good character and values.

3. Spiritual Goal - To foster the Christian faith through the integration of faith with learning, living, and service.

4. Patriotic Goal - To encourage an understanding of American heritage, civic responsibilities, love of country, and willingness to defend it.

5. Cultural Goal - To cultivate an appreciation of fine arts, an understanding of the world, and adherence to high personal standards (2003-2005, p. 5).

At Summit College an emphasis on community exist rather than exploration of individual identity.

Summit's orientation program is called Character Camp. Character Camp introduces all new students to character development and the importance of character in being successful at Summit. Two upperclassmen serve as an orientation Mom and Pop to a dozen incoming students. They spend ten days with their orientation family, teaching

them about the expectations of the college, locating buildings, how to use services on-campus, and visiting their work stations.

Summit College offered 31 undergraduate majors to the 1,450 students enrolled in the fall of 2005. As of September 2005, 44% of the students were male and 56% were female. Students were of traditional college age: 18-22. The white, non-Hispanic student population accounted for 93% of enrolled students. Summit had 89 full-time instructors and 34 adjuncts with 60% holding a doctoral/terminal degree. The student-faculty ratio was 14:1. The 2003-2004 cost to attend SC was $10,900. Through an extensive on campus work-study program, students work off their tuition. They also can work additional hours during the summer and during breaks to pay for their room and board. As of 1999, each semester new students are required to attend Character Camp as their orientation to campus. The duration of the program is seven to ten days. During Character Camp, students are inculcated into institutional expectations (2003-2005). Fall-to-Fall retention rates for Summit College for the years reviewed were: 76% for 2002-2003, 79% for 2003-2004, 86% for 2004-2005, and 81% for 2005-2006.

<div align="center">Data Collection Procedure</div>

Data collection occurred during 2006. The reason this time frame was selected was because it facilitated the incorporation of an additional semester of students who attended orientation to be included in the study. In-depth interviews of currently enrolled students, faculty, and administrators were conducted on campus. In-depth interviews from previous orientation attendees who left SC before program completion were also conducted. Interviews were recorded and field notes of the observed reaction to questions being asked were taken. Transcription of the interviews was done as quickly as possible

with informant member-check feedback utilized for credibility. Measures to ensure confidentiality/anonymity of informant data and sources were also used. The specific procedures approved by the IRB were followed. Artifacts were gathered whenever possible. An external reader/auditor was used to check for dependability/confirmability of transcripts to the interviews.

<div align="center">Sampling of Participants</div>

A purposeful sample was used in this study. According to Ertmer (1997), a phenomenological study depends on in-depth interviews, so it is extremely important for purposeful sampling to occur. The criterion for students included in the sampling depended upon previous participation in Character Camp. In the case with faculty or administrative participants, four interviewees' were required to have been involved with the program while the remaining four faculty and administration interviewees' only needed to have been employed during two successive years reviewed, 2002-2005. A total of twenty-four individual participants, a number commonly needed when seeking divergent or correlation responses, were interviewed (see Table 2). According to Crabtree and Miller (1992), "this purposeful sampling of individuals and the inclusion of conflicting, as well as complementary, accounts strengthens an ethnographic description" (p. 87).

Twelve students who participated in the 2002-2005 Character Camp and four students who participated but dropped out of the college (one from each year) were the remainder of the purposeful sample. Some students currently enrolled received an initial verbal invitation followed up by a written informational explanation of the research purpose in their respective student lounges. The time for this activity was determined by

Table 2.

Participant's Information

Interviewees Name	Year they attended Orientation	Category
Kent, Kate, Howard, and William (DO)	2002	Students
Charlotte, Alan, Samuel, and John (DO)	2003	Students
Sarah, Irving, Margaret, and Amelia (DO)	2004	Students
Sally, Rebecca, Karen, and Robert (DO)	2005	Students
Catharine, Elizabeth, Martha and Charles	2002-2005	Administration participants
Martha	2004-2005	Administration participant
Charles	2003-2005	Faculty participant
Archibald, Richard, Marshall, and George	2002-2005	All are faculty nonparticipants

Note: DO signifies a student who dropped out from Summit College and did not return

the administration according to feasibility and access to the largest part of the student

body.

Other students who were currently enrolled were selected and invited to

participate from an inclusive list of students who attended Character Camp during the

years under review. An applicable inclusive list of students who left the institution prior

to completion of program of study was provided by the college. Those students

received an invitation to participate. Those who responded received a follow-up with

additional information. In this qualitative study, the validity of sampling "hinges to a

greater extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the researcher because the observer or interviewer is the instrument" (Patton, 1997, p. 252). Faculty and administrative interviewees were selected from an inclusive list of faculty and administrative personnel provided by the college. An invitation to participate in this study was extended by a personal visit or a phone call. The first respondents provided the sample from which the faculty and administration interviews were acquired. An informed consent form, following the Institutional Review Board's criteria, was utilized informing all participants that their confidentiality was maintained.

Interview Question Development

Questions were designed to be open-ended, thus allowing follow-up responses to increase the descriptive nature of the data. My goal was for participants to unreservedly express their opinions and experiences regarding the questions being posed. Thus, predetermined responses that promote the researcher's bias were avoided (Patton, 1990). Patton's (1990) admonition to ask clear questions using participant language was followed. A field test of the interview protocol attempting to validate the interview instrument was conducted (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). A student who attended Character Camp, but was not included in the purposeful sample, was interviewed to test the interview protocol. Using Patton's (1990) guidelines, the interview questions followed the research questions, literature review, and the specific orientation program being researched.

Student Personal Data:

1. What year of study are you in?

2. What is your major?

3. How long have you been at SC?

4. When did you attend Character Camp?

Interaction with SC:

1. What experience(s) have had the most impact on your stay here at SC?

2. Do you see SC as being different from what you thought it would be like?

3. What do you remember about Character Camp?

4. Were any goals for Character Camp mentioned?

5. How would you describe Character Camp as a whole?

6. How, if at all, did Character Camp impact your social experience

   here at SC?

7. Are there ways Character Camp could be improved?

8. Have you ever thought about leaving SC?

9. What is the greatest need incoming students have at SC?

Student Personal Data of those who left SC:

Student Personal Data:

1. What year of study were you in when you attended SC?

2. What was your major?

3. How long were you at SC?

4. When did you attend Character Camp?

5. Can you explain the circumstances surrounding why you did not return?

Interaction with SC:

1. What experience(s) most impacted your stay while at SC?

2. Do you see SC as being different from what you thought it would be like?

3. What do you remember about Character Camp?

4. Were any goals for Character Camp mentioned?

5. How would you describe Character Camp as a whole?

6. How, if at all, did Character Camp impact your social experience

   at SC?

7. How could Character Camp be improved?

College Administrators or Faculty data:

1. What do you teach or what specifically is your responsibility at SC?

2. How long have you been at SC?

Involvement with Orientation

1. What is SC doing to help students adjust to college?

2. How would you describe Character Camp as a whole?

3. What are the goals for Character Camp?

4. How do you see Character Camp helping students complete their program

   of study?

<center>Data Analysis</center>

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study. After the interviews were

completed and transcription was done, member check was conducted by asking

participants if they wished to review and edit, if needed, the transcripts of their

interviews. Triangulation of the data was achieved by using multiple data sources, such

as artifacts and current records, and independent analysis by the investigator (Bogdan &

Bilken, 1998). In analyzing the interviews, a system of categorizing/coding was used in

determining overriding concepts and findings. Codes were used to determine

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characteristics that promoted social integration, characteristics that influence retention, changed or consistent preconceived ideas, and similar or opposite definitions of a successful orientation program.

Summary

The research methodology included: research questions, philosophical framework, qualitative design, setting, data collection procedure, interview question development, and data analysis. Findings follow in Chapter Four,

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students', faculty, and administrators within a particular liberal arts college perceived a new-student orientation program's effect on students' social integration and retention. In this chapter, findings from 24 interviews with students, faculty, and administrators are presented. The 24 interviewees included: 12 students who participated in a Character Camp during the 2002, 2003, 2004, or 2005 academic year; four additional students who participated in Character Camp during one of those years, but dropped out and did not return to Summit College; four faculty or administrators involved in Character Camp during the years reviewed; and four faculty who were employed at the college during two of the successive years reviewed, but did not participate in Character Camp.

Interviews followed a written protocol with several open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' lived experiences. According to Patton, "An open-ended interview . . . asks the respondent to describe what is meaningful and salient without being pigeonholed into standardized categories" (1997, p. 279). Moreover, Patton indicated the "qualitative approach seeks to capture what a program experience means to participants in their own words, through interviews, and in their day-to-day program settings, through observation" (1997, p. 273). Ultimately, the interviews in this study were conducted to understand the meaning behind participants' experiences.

Three students from each academic year (2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005) who attended Character Camp and graduated, or were currently enrolled were asked

approximately nine interview questions related to the two research questions. The first research question was what characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to promote socialization? The second research question was what characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to have an influence on student retention?

Additionally, four students who attended Character Camp (one from each year reviewed), but dropped out and did not return to Summit College were asked approximately nine interview questions related to the research questions. Three administrators and one faculty member involved in Character Camp were asked approximately four interview questions related to the research questions. Four additional faculty members who were employed during two successive school years, but did not participate in Character Camp during the years reviewed, were asked approximately four questions related to the research questions.

<div style="text-align:center">Reponses to the Interview Questions</div>

<div style="text-align:center">*The Group of Twelve Students*</div>

What experience(s) most impacted your stay while at Summit College?

When asked what experience(s) had the most impact on their stay at Summit College, five students (one from each of the first three years and two from the last) answered "their friends". A typical response was that of Rebecca who stated, "At Character Camp, we had a [orientation] family. We grew close to some of our siblings, and our parents. So those bonds—we're still friends and we always have friends to fall back on during our whole stay here." In similar language, Howard answered, "All my friends who I look up to a lot, they were there to encourage me."

Kate, Charlotte, Margaret, and Sarah indicated in their answers that the professors had a significant influence. Kate reported, "Definitely going to class was a big part of it, but building relationship with my professors. I think they had a really big impact on me." Sarah reported, "At a lot of colleges, the professors and students don't have a relationship. I feel that the professors really do care about the students here." On the other hand, Kent replied he did not believe anything academic had impacted him.

Do you see Summit College as being different from what you thought it would be like?

When students were asked if they saw Summit College being different from what they thought it would be, five respondents said yes and five said no. In the affirmative, Kent stated:

Yeah, I guess I had some apprehensions about the rules and the strictness that I saw coming in. I just kind of had a feel for it being like a very tight, very rule-based and legalistic place, but that definitely dissipated when I just came and encountered [it]. It's just not like that. There are rules, but it's more of a grace atmosphere. Some people could find it stifling, but only because they are not big on being moral or something to that effect. The rules are just in line with morality so if you are big into morality, then you are going to have no problem with the rules for the most part.

Sally indicated her discovery of a different reality:

Yes, very [different]. Well, I didn't really want to come to this college, and I just thought—I don't know really what I thought. I did not think it would be fun at all. I thought it was just not the kind of people that I hung around; I thought they were all about school and very school-oriented. But once I got here, I realized what a

great opportunity it really was. I could really relate to the people here and how welcomed we were and how much fun I had here. So much more fun than I ever had in high school.

In their responses, Samuel, Charlotte, Margaret, Rebecca, and Karen did not find Summit College very different from their expectations. Karen gave the typical response, "Not really [different]. I knew a lot of people who went here before I did. I already had an idea what to expect."

Howard and Alan answered that they thought college would be like high school. Howard stated, "I really didn't know what to expect. I thought college was going to be like high school. My high school was really big, and I wasn't super close to a lot of people." Alan reported:

> I think I expected it to be kind of more like in high school, where I would be more
> in control and I would pick more of what I was going to do and I had this plan and
> how I was going to go through it.

What do you remember about Character Camp?

When students were asked what they remembered about Character Camp, seven respondents stated, "family." Alan, who worked at the college the 12 weeks prior to Character Camp, answered this way:

> If they would have had that [Character Camp] the first week that I came down
> here I would have been like, "Whoa, this is awesome." My [orientation] family,
> the fellow freshmen that came in with me and my Character Camp parents were
> just awesome. It was a good experience and I think it helped kind of, you know,

helped since I was kind of burned out from the summer. It helped rejuvenate and encouraged me for the school year and college experience.

Sarah recalled being really nervous when she came to Character Camp and added:

I had a great [orientation] mom and pop. They had contact with me before I came, which really helped. I didn't know anybody, besides my [biological] sister's friends, but we lived three hours away, so I didn't come down that often. I got a letter from them, so I felt like I knew these two people for sure. And then I met my [orientation] family, brothers and sisters, and we had some really good icebreaker games, and everyone got to learn things about each other. It was really great that we had to always sit together. We reserved tables for our [orientation] family. We were Character Camp number [X]—and there was always a reserved time for us, and we were always sitting together.

Besides remembering her orientation family talking about the school and really finding out what the college was all about, Sally described part of her Character Camp experience this way:

I probably remember the [orientation] family groups, all coming in together as one big group and all going up and doing our roll call together. It took a lot of time; it was really fun and interesting, and you really got to see how people want to be involved here and how fun it was.

Kate started her response by relating how she had arrived late for Character Camp. She then continued to describe how this impacted her interaction with her Character Camp family:

I think that I remember most is my [orientation] family and just how really

divided [we were]. I came into it a couple days late, and by the time I got there, I

really saw that about four or five of the girls had paired together in a little group,

and the rest of the girls had paired together, so it was like two different camps.

For me, going in and trying to figure out how to be friends with everybody, that

was interesting.

Three of the students reported feeling awkward at the beginning of their Character

Camp experience. Kent recalled:

I just remember sitting in the auditorium not knowing anyone, not a single person.

I sat next to somebody I had never met before. So I was like, "Hey, my name is

Kent," you know, and say hello to someone. I didn't really talk to them the whole

rest of the college experience, but it was just kind of scary, not necessarily scary,

but uh, just wondering like this is the beginning of something and I have no idea

what's going to happen.

Samuel also remembered the uneasiness he felt with the new surroundings:

You didn't know anybody and you are just in this room with 300 strangers and

you get put into [orientation] families. It's still a little awkward, of course as

anything would be, but the thing was, that once you got to meet your [orientation]

family then it definitely got better, because you could open up more. Definitely

[the start of orientation was] awkward . . . being in your own bubble with 300

other people.

Howard's answer stated that during Character Camp he had made some of his closest friends. Irving recalled the effort of those involved in Character Camp to help nurture friendships:

Character Camp was, from the moment I stepped into the auditorium—where all the freshmen and moms and pops were gathered, high energy. There was this crazy excitement, making it a real rush and a real positive atmosphere. I wasn't expecting that. I was thinking it was going to be some formal, boring, dry event. I showed up, and every person who was involved in the leadership of Character Camp, including the [orientation] moms and pops, helped to make it an exciting time. They made every effort to open the door for new friendships.

Were any goals for Character Camp mentioned during the orientation?

When students were asked if the goals for Character Camp were stated during the orientation, there were three typical responses. The first, as described by Kent, was getting to know people, your peers—the other students. Howard elaborated on that in his answer:

My Character Camp parents, they told us what the school is about. How the Character Camp program is to ease people into college rather than just throwing them all into taking classes where they don't know anybody. It's just to build friendships and get a good base before classes start.

Secondly, as Alan recalled, one of the goals of Character Camp was disseminating school policies. He stated it this way in his response, "Well, they just kind of went over the rules, and went over what was expected as far as conduct and what the college was aiming to do. Of course, they want everybody to graduate." Irving and Sally's answers

concurred; a goal for Character Camp was "informing students about the college, its policies, and expectations."

Last, Sarah, Samuel, and Rebecca stated, they were "sure there were goals; they just could not remember any." Samuel answered the question this way: "I would say yes. I mean I can't remember for sure, but I'm pretty sure I had a good idea what Character Camp was for and why we were there."

How would you describe Character Camp as a whole?

When asked how you would describe Character Camp as a whole, half the students' responses again referred to the Character Camp family to which they were assigned. Charlotte's response typified the others: "It's a week of activities . . . with a group; you call it the [X] family. You have male and female group leaders who are your [orientation] mom and pop, who get you acquainted with the college and its goals."

Kent gave another typical response shared by Alan and Samuel. Kent stated, "There are a lot of different aspects to it, but overall I would just say simply an orientation to Summit College life. Ten days of fun and learning about the college."

According to three students' responses, Character Camp informed them of what was expected of them by the college. During his interview, Irving answered it this way:

Character Camp is a fun and very proactive environment, trying to thrust students into community and student body life here at Summit. It promotes the issues of character that the college stresses and holds really important. So right away, you know what's expected of you. You know about the opportunities in the school that you have at your fingerprints, to thrive here at the school.

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How, if at all, did Character Camp impact your social experience at Summit College?

When asked how, if at all, Character Camp impacted their social experience at Summit College, Kate, Samuel, and Rebecca's responses were typical of students stating Character Camp had impacted their social experience. Kate responded:

Socially, it was good in the beginning to help me feel comfortable with that small group of people. It definitely did help me feel comfortable at first. Instead of looking at a campus of 1,500 people and saying, "What do I do now?" it was very manageable. There were six girls and five boys, and I had to get to know their names. I can do that. We'll work together and play together, and that's doable.

Further Rebecca stated,

Character Camp makes you get out more. You get adjusted, and you're not just shut in your room moping and crying and missing home. You're out meeting people, so you can form bonds with them if you want to later. You're out with your [orientation] family throughout the week. The brothers have their time and the sisters have their time, where we met with the mom or the pop.

Margaret was the only student that indicated Character Camp had not helped her social experience at Summit College. When asked if Character Camp helped her socially, she answered, "It didn't. It actually did not at all, because there is one [orientation] sister I keep in contact with, just one. I was not at all connected with anybody in my [orientation] family except that one sister."

Are there ways Character Camp could be improved?

When asked if Character Camp could be improved, six students stated it accomplished what it was supposed to do. Kent's answer was typical for that group:

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I think, honestly, they take care of that every semester. They do a follow-up with

the [orientation] moms and pops. They do a follow-up with each student. They do

an evaluation. I remember writing out my evaluation when I was a student and

they improve on it.

Alan and Sally requested more free time during Character Camp. Karen and

Irving indicated they wanted more time with everyone. They stated how mingling more

with the other Character Camp families would have been appreciated. Margaret and

Sarah mentioned a desire for something more academic at some point in Character Camp,

although they declared they had a fun time.

Did you ever think about leaving Summit College?

When asked whether they had ever considered leaving Summit, five students said

they had considered leaving and seven students said they had not. Kent stated,

"Everybody at some time or the other thinks about leaving." The students who considered

leaving had a variety of reasons. Margaret said she consider leaving because of "a

[biological] family situation." Kate indicated that she had contemplated "going to a

different school with a larger music program." Rebecca reported that she wanted to leave

when she became concerned about her academic major.

I put a lot of stress on myself for knowing a major. You're trying to pick one, and

it's for the rest of your life; what do I want to do the rest of my life. You really

don't know what you want to do for the rest of your life. But the summer came

pretty fast that semester, and I took a semester to think about it.

During the interview Sarah shared two instances when she had considered leaving:

Some rules at Summit College are very extreme. I knew the rules coming into

college, but of course, sometimes you don't always want to follow all the rules,

you know. I don't think the rules were—being 21 years old, I think things should

be a little more lax. Like, my girlfriends and I stay off campus on a Thursday, one

Thursday. That turned into a big huge deal, and we were going to get kicked out

for staying out on Thursday. I was like, this is crazy. That's it, I'm leaving. I'm

going to a normal college. And then, I did some soul searching and some praying,

and I realized all these rules are for a reason. My [biological] sister talked some

sense into me, so I ended up staying. I have two times, actually. I worked in the

cafeteria my first semester, and I absolutely hated it. The supervisors were so

mean every day. I'd go home and cry the first two weeks, they were so mean. I

think I had the worst supervisor. I didn't want to be here anymore. I'm not a baby,

I can take things. But that's how bad it was. So I was given a position out of the

cafeteria the next semester. I can't do it again, I just cannot do it. I would have to

quit, I hated it that bad. So I got moved from the station I was in at the cafeteria to

a different station, so it wasn't half as bad. I almost left my freshman year because

of the work station, that's for sure.

What is the greatest need students have or difficulty they face when they arrive at Summit

College?

Karen and Rebecca mentioned an ongoing struggle that students have with

Summit's rules. According to Karen:

A lot of people have difficulty with the rules. A lot of people aren't used to rules

in their life, and so they don't want to listen to these rules. I think that is the main

reason people leave, if they do.

Rebecca added:

I think that the rules are difficult for some students to face. Not all students were

disciplined as a child and that shows up when they come to college and get a lot

of rules that are strict. I personally know some students that have had problems

with these rules that you are expected to follow and I think it is because they

didn't have discipline as a child. One thing to keep in mind . . . every student signs

a statement that is kept on file saying that the student agrees to follow the rules of

the college and that they understand the consequences to breaking the rules.

In answering the question, what are students' greatest needs, Samuel listed three

needs that typified the remaining respondents' answers:

The first need is to get to know people and make new friends because the students

will not enjoy the first couple of weeks or months [of college] if they do not know

anyone. Another difficulty, [a student] does not know what to major in. Many

students come worrying about not knowing their major. Thirdly, I think the

students need to feel welcomed and at home by the college faculty and staff.

Responses of Students' Who Dropped Out of Summit College

Can you explain the circumstances surrounding why you did not return to Summit

College?

When asked why they did not return to Summit College, three of the four students stated, one of the reasons they withdrew from SC was the area of study decided upon was not offered. John reported:

I couldn't fulfill the graduation requirements that I wanted to, because they didn't have an adequate program. They didn't have any program, really. I wanted to find a place that did have a program, so I wouldn't have to treat it like it was a graduate college.

William stated:

There were a couple of different factors. The area of study that I wanted at the very beginning was not offered by the college, and I decided not to settle for just a business degree, which is basically a blanket degree. I decided to move out and finish at a different college. That, and family life—it was a far commute.

Amelia added, "I switched majors, and they didn't have the major I wanted. I could have done independent study, but I figured I could do more good at some other school."

The fourth student's reasons included another institutional deficiency—no football team. In addition, Robert said he missed his home church: "I like being involved in the church in another city where my father was pastor."

What experience(s) most impacted your stay while at Summit College?

When this group of students was asked what experience(s) most impacted their stay at SC, all four answered, "the people". William answered:

You meet some of the best friends you'll have the rest of your life at college. The relationships I built with a lot of people I met in my freshman and sophomore

years and developed those friendships, because you're in such close contact with them. You take classes with them; you're suitemates with them, that sort of thing.

John added, "To tell the truth, I think it was the tight-knit, close camaraderie that I had. The people that I got set up with from the beginning, I really enjoyed." Amelia stated, "The people I worked with, the people I lived with, I absolutely fell in love with them. I really got to know a lot of people here. And it was the people that kept me here for so long."

Do you see Summit College as being different from what you thought it would be like?

When asked if they saw SC as being different from what they expected, students gave diverse responses. Amelia stated:

The fact that I went to Character Camp was a big, big deal, because normally everyone goes into college not knowing anybody; they're left on their own. At Character Camp, you had an automatic family of eight to twelve people who you were with day and night, every day for a week. You had people who knew what they were talking about, that got you everywhere you needed to go, got you all the papers you needed filled out, in order, so that you were ready to start class on the first day. You weren't out on your own at first. They treated you like a high schooler who's never been to college who didn't know what they were doing, which is exactly what we were.

John reported:

Yes and no. It was different because when you read about it (this isn't going to make it sound the best, but whatever), and when you talk to people about it—especially in your interview, I was ready to get down to business working. My

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first day, I was ready to work my butt off, however long I was there. They call it a

work week, so I figured it was going to get there and work eight hours, nonstop. I

was in landscaping. But I found out that people who have been there before have

been taught by people before them, and it's not that they didn't get the job done,

it's just they didn't really work all that hard. So that kind of changed my thinking.

Robert stated, "No, sir. I had two siblings that had gone there before me. I pretty

much expected what it would be [like] going in. I knew what to expect."

What do you remember about Character Camp?

When asked what they remembered about Character Camp, Amelia, Robert, and

William gave similar answers. Amelia stated:

All the activities. We had activities every day. We had to think of a group name;

we had a group number. We thought of a song for every day. All the groups

would come together in the auditorium. The Character Camp family, like your

mom and pop, prepared for you to come. They got you presents and made posters

for you. They knew who you were before you got here. We had activities every

day. We did things in the town and got together with other [orientation] families

who were friends of our Character Camp mom and pop. We networked with

everybody. We got to know everybody during all the interactive stuff.

Robert reported:

Just you were always with the people that were in your families, and you did

things as a group, and everyone was together. They really got you involved. They

really got you plugged in good. They got you meeting people, was the main thing.

People you could study with later on down the road. People you could have fun

with, obviously, because you want to have friends. Meeting people was the big thing that really helped me and is helpful to kids at Summit College.

William added:

Character Camp brought you out of your shell. When you first come in, you don't really know anyone. You don't know who anybody is. You don't know what to expect. They got some of the most real people; they call them [orientation] moms and pops. They designate them to [orientation] families with one guy and one girl upperclassmen, with a group of 12-14 underneath them. They did a whole lot of crazy fun things, a lot of different activities. They had us do an obstacle course, where you had to come together as a team to be able to make it through.

John elaborated about his memories of Character Camp this way:

Probably being pushed to do things that I wouldn't want to do, necessarily, because I thought I was cool. This is the type of stuff people do in church camp. We still have to do this? We graduated high school and this is what middle schoolers have to do. I remember that we were kind of forced to do things that made you—not lessen your self worth, but kind of brought you down a notch. You were put in a position that was outside your comfort zone, no matter who you were. I remember Character Camp was a lot more like a seminar. They had etiquette classes. They had rules to go over, because there are a lot of rules. I remember sitting a lot and watching a lot of stuff and getting kind of tired but not being able to sleep. Not because it was so boring, but just because I remember having to actually listen and hear all about the college, because they give you history classes, which I think are really important.

Were any goals for Character Camp mentioned during the orientation?

When students were asked if the goals for Character Camp were stated during the orientation, William and John stated that they did not remember exactly what the goals were. In contrast, Robert and Amelia recalled Character Camp goals. Robert reported:

They want you to build character, and they want to help you be ready for college. Maybe not people like me so much, who had siblings that have been there. They just say, "Hey, our college, this is what we're about." And Character Camp is led by juniors and seniors at the college. They take you through and say things like what happens if you get—they do case studies with you and tell you what happens if you get caught with this or that, because there's a lot of controversial rules down there. People might say, "Why do they have that rule?" They go over things like that. That's a big reason, and obviously to get you plugged in and meet a lot of people.

When asked about the goals for Character Camp, Amelia stated:

Yeah, they did. They mentioned them a lot in the big group time. The goals were pretty much to help you meet people, and help you get acquainted with your class schedule, your work schedule, and where everything was. They knew all the buildings, what type of classes were in what buildings. Really that was the goal, to get you acquainted with what you'd be doing every day.

How would you describe Character Camp as a whole?

When asked to describe Character Camp, John expressed Character Camp as "an orientation course that students receive one credit for their required participation." Robert portrayed it this way:

I would say it's like a big family with a bunch of kids. For ten days, you're going to be with twelve kids your age, and that's all you're going to be with. Even things like, if you have a girlfriend, it's going to be hard even to talk to her very often, unless she's in your [orientation] family. When you're in Character Camp, it's your [orientation] family and that's it for ten days.

Amelia stated:

Character Camp is a place where you get introduced to a [orientation] family of people. Most of them are just like you, and your two group leaders are going to introduce you to everything you need to know, and they're going to make it fun.

How, if at all, did Character Camp impact your social experience?

When asked about the impact of Character Camp on their social experience William, John, and Amelia stated, that it had helped them develop friendships. William expressed how Character Camp gave assistance in establishing his initial friendships.

It helped start it, without a doubt. If you ever start a new school, you're the new person, and you walk into an open cafeteria, you have no idea where to sit. But Character Camp gave you a group of people to go in and start with. Whether you carried on all those friendships—it helped break the ice from the beginning. If you have something you need to talk about, you have people to talk to. It kept me there longer, because it was the people that kept me there—because of the friendships that I made. They were like brothers to me. We still call ourselves brothers now.

Robert added:

It impacted it in a big way. Like I said, my best friends were in my [orientation] family at Character Camp. Those friends—I have three or four of them that I still talk to now, and I haven't been there for a good year. Socially, when I went to class, I saw kids in my family [orientation family]; I sat by them and studied with them. And obviously, I made other friends too. But the easiest ones to talk to in the first couple weeks were the Character Camp family. Socially, it did impact me in a big way. It got you talking to people, and it broke the ice, so you didn't have to go and make friends. You already had friends. You could make more friends if you want to.

Amelia illustrated the impact of Character Camp this way:

If I didn't have Character Camp, I wouldn't have known anybody. It introduced me to my first group of friends. And even though after a while, we all went our separate ways, they were the first people I knew. We got to be friends really quick. Most Character Camp families will still sit together at lunch and stay the same group for months after Character Camp is over, until they really start to branch out into their majors and things like that. So really, your freshman year, that is your group of friends.

Are there ways Character Camp could be improved?

When asked how Character Camp could be improved, two students, John and Robert had no suggestions, but the other two former students did. William requested less rigidity, more freedom, and time to sleep. He did state, "They do a real good job screening the [orientation] moms and pops. They're usually just really fun, real people.

So keep that up. I think for what it sets out to do, it does a pretty good job of it." Amelia enjoyed Character Camp, but she suggested:

> I had a blast at Character Camp. Maybe have a little bit more time to explain where things are. The first week is pretty chaotic, trying to find out where to go for class registry, where to get all that, student ID photos, financial aid. It would be a little bit more helpful if it was more organized. Maybe a little bit more structured that way. That's the important stuff, that's the stuff you worry about. Is everything paid for? Is my loan coming through? Have I gotten my picture? Am I registered online? All that stuff.

What is the greatest need students have or difficulty they face when they arrive at Summit College?

While all four students were asked, only three students directly answered the question, "What is the greatest need students have or difficulty they face when they arrive at Summit College?" Each student gave a differing answer. William stated:

> I think the greatest need in people's lives is just to feel loved, first of all. They get that in a family. So what they try to do is create a social ring around you to help you feel loved and wanted— fitting in.

John responded:

> I think the greatest need or difficulty is very much like coming to any other college. Either you need help finding your social friends, which is what Character Camp is for, or developing the right habits that bring you to success. In both colleges, I had friends that didn't go to class as much as they should. They didn't

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really know that they were supposed to do that in order to do well. Some of them were not disciplined enough to do that.

Robert added:

This is different person to person, too, but maybe abiding by all the rules. I didn't keep every rule there. Obviously, I wasn't doing terrible things, but I wasn't doing everything exactly by the guidelines they would want me to do. For a freshman going into Summit College, it's hard because they take away your car for your first year. That's a bummer, but it's for a good reason. They've seen better grades from it. That's something every freshman, or people that hear about Summit College, say, "Man, they take away your car, that stinks." So that's something that would be a difficulty.

<center>Administration and Faculty Responses</center>

What is Summit College doing to help students adjust to college?

When asked what Summit College is doing to help students adjust to college, all eight responded, "Character Camp". Catharine, an administrator involved in Character Camp, gave the typical response:

Character Camp is a program that started a few years ago and has developed over time into a program that gives them an introduction into college, into the work program, the academic side, the activities side. But more than anything else, I think that the Character Camp does for our new student is give them a [orientation] family group, a unit, to identify with. There is someone else on campus that they know when they go to the cafeteria, go to class, and when they start school in the fall. The student that walks in on day one of school, with no

Character Camp program, nothing to initiate them to the college, only a few meetings with a few deans, which gives them a system overload to begin with information, which no one would comprehend or keep in their memory. They would go to their room and then start classes and not know a soul. Go to the cafeteria and not have anyone to sit down to eat with that they would know as a familiar face. Character Camp provides that for the everyday student.

Marshall, a faculty member who was a nonparticipant in Character Camp, added: We are interested in kids basically not getting overwhelmed by the change from home in terms of social aspect. In our Character Camp, they are divided up into [orientation] families, with about 15 kids in each family. Each one of those has what we call a [orientation] mom and a pop which are male and female upperclassmen. Of course, during those two weeks, they do everything together as a family. There is a close bond for each one of these kids. Once the semester gets going, obviously school starts and they have other responsibilities and they have work responsibilities, but their families still continue to operate for the entire first year of school. So they have at least that bond with the 15 kids before school even starts. As a result, they don't have quite the socialization problems, plus not only with those 15 kids, but they are here with every brand new freshman and several hundred of them are all together for that two weeks so they all have that in common. Certainly they intermix a lot in terms of their activities during that time as well. Especially a kid that comes in and they are the only one from their home town, and that can be very traumatic for some kids.

How would you describe Character Camp as a whole?

When asked to describe Character Camp, all but one respondent mentioned family. George and Martha's responses typify those using orientation families in their answers. George, a faculty member involved in Character Camp, described Character Camp this way:

It's almost like a party atmosphere. They do a lot of fun activities, team building activities; they are vibrant, full of energy. There is not really a dull moment. There is a lot of team building, like I said. They are broken up into what they call [orientation] families where they are given an upperclass [upperclassmen] female and male to lead, that are known as mom and pop, and then their fellow freshmen are their brothers and sisters, so it is a family and they feel like a real part of a family. It is very exciting.

Martha, an administrator also involved in Character Camp, reported:

I usually describe [Character Camp] as an orientation program in which the students are placed in groups that we call families; with a mom and a pop who are upperclassmen, that they learn about the expectations of the college, the essence of the college, and they participate in anything from an etiquette class, to a community project, to a physical tour of campus, to an address by our president. It's just helping them integrate well and to connect with the institution and its values.

Richard, a faculty member who was a nonparticipant in Character Camp, answered:

[Character Camp] is seven or eight days of intense, I guess you could call it indoctrination, identification of what we are and what we try to be here at the Summit College. A lot of meetings, actually, there is some community service that is involved in it. Also there are a lot of social activities. They get out being a part of our community and visiting some of the things.

What are the goals for Character Camp?

When asked about the goals of Character Camp, Marshall, a faculty member not involved with Character Camp, stated, "Assisting the acclimation process so students are ready to start." Two additional faculty members, not involved in Character Camp, had similar responses. Archibald and Richard mentioned "student retention" as a goal of Character Camp. Charles, a faculty member involved in Character Camp, stated that the development of "friendships and having an adequate introduction to the college" were goals that he perceived for Character Camp.

Martha gave the typical response for administrators involved in Character Camp: Understanding expectations and lining those out very specifically. Learning rules and regulations of the institution, so we don't have any surprises. We are all on the same page. Everybody is getting the same information. But the key is they are getting it from their peers. These upperclassmen are their [orientation] mom and pop, are doing a lot of the communicating, which is very effective.

How do you see the Character Camp helping students complete their program of study?

When asked how Character Camp assists students to graduate, Elizabeth gave a typical answer for faculty or administrators involved in Character Camp:

You give them those hypothetical situations in Character Camp for example, the

character case studies in a situation you might find yourself in. How are you

going to handle it? So they get a practice run at just sitting around talking about it,

but they have actually thought about it and then when they are faced with those

things they still may not make the right decision, but it's not totally foreign to

them. I mean, it is like we have made this bridge. Character Camp is helping by

virtue of introducing them to the very services that the college provides. If the

student finds themselves in a crisis they have a support system via their Character

Camp leaders which are known as their [orientation] moms and pops. Even

though they have also been introduced to the various student services, they have

someone that I would consider more immediate, more on their peer level through

the [orientation] mom and pop. There is a support network in place for students.

She continued:

The one thing I would attribute to Character Camp, wherein you can say it is an

effort toward retention and to a positive campus life is participation: student

participation, student involvement, and campus activities as a whole. You

basically have no choice but to participate in the activities that your [orientation]

family participates in during Character Camp.

Archibald, a faculty member not participating in Character Camp, stated his

response in this manner:

Well, I think this is what happens: I can't base it on any facts, but this is just what

I believe happens, is that the role of the [orientation] mom and pop is huge,

because those are upperclassmen talking to beginning students about what goes

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on and how certain things happen here. So, as a result, I think that they can give

them from a student's point of view, how to be successful and complete their

degree program.

Richard added, "It [Character Camp] gets students off to a good start."

Summary

In this chapter the findings from the 24 interviews were presented. The 24

interviewees included four groups of respondents. The academic years reviewed were

2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005. The interview questions were directly related to the purpose

of the study, which was to investigate how students', faculty, and administrators within a

particular liberal arts college perceived a new-student orientation program's effect on

students' social integration and retention. Analysis of findings follows in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Chapter Five focuses on themes derived from the interviews with 24 participants selected through purposeful sampling. Interviews followed a written protocol with several open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' lived experiences. When the responses were color coded, all responses were coded even though a response may have occurred while a different question was being asked. Their responses were reviewed to determine emergent themes, which were then categorized into four major themes to investigate how students, faculty, and administrators within a particular liberal arts college perceived a new-student orientation program's effect on students' social integration and retention. The chapter concludes with a summary of the analysis of findings.

Social Atmosphere

In recounting their experiences in the orientation program, students spent a significant amount of time discussing Character Camp's social atmosphere. This social setting was conducive to the new students attending Summit College who naturally preferred team or group activities. According to Tinto:

> Interactions among students in that system are viewed as central to the development of the importance of social bonds that serve to integrate the individual into the social communities of the college. The social (personal) integration and resulting social rewards which arise from it lead to heightened institutional commitment (1993, p. 118).

Respondents' comments linked to this heightened institutional commitment—retention, were grouped under the topics: environment provided, activities, and required participation.

Environment Provided

Numerous characteristics were noted in comments regarding the environment provided by the orientation program. They included facilitating interaction, establishing a surrogate family, and fostering long-term friendship.

Facilitating Interaction

Students discussed the importance of the Character Camp encouraging contact with fellow students. Several students talked about the apprehensions they and fellow students naturally had about meeting fellow students and how Character Camp facilitated interaction between students. For example, Karen summarized that apprehension and Character Camp's impact:

It's just the fear of meeting new people, but that goes away so quickly. After the first family meeting, you already decide who you're going to hang with the rest of the week. It definitely impacted me a lot. I think it made me know from the beginning that I was going to enjoy college and to not be afraid of being lonely for four years.

Three of the students stated how Character Camp removed self-imposed barriers to involvement with others. Irving expressed how that occurred: "Normally you don't have multiple people coming up to you asking your name and where you're from. You didn't need to pursue other people right away; they were pursuing you." William reminisced about being placed into his orientation family and then being asked to

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introduce himself. He stated, "If you have something you need to talk about, you have people to talk to."

Faculty also perceived that Character Camp facilitated student interaction. George, a faculty member who participated in Character Camp said, "You have those that lack in those skills and need help in interaction. Character Camp forces them to get involved and pushes them in that direction. It helps them to know they are accepted and we welcome them here."

Establishing a Surrogate Family

Most interviewees referred to the small group students were placed in while participating in the initial portion of Character Camp. Students reported they were comfortable with these smaller groups called families. John expressed the pervasive attitude, "That's why they called it families, to give you somebody to lean on." Kate described it, "There were six girls and five boys, and I had to get to know their names. I can do that. We'll work together and play together, and that's doable."

Irving linked his ability to interact on the size and structure of the family unit. To him, involvement and the resulting socialization were a natural occurrence. He felt involvement was not something at which one labored; "it wasn't work." For him the orientation family context was natural; "it just happened."

Several students identified the small size of the group allowing close relationships to develop. Karen indicated how this brought understanding within the orientation family and helped students with other relationships. She commented that when her orientation family learned to work well together, it helped them make friends with other families when involved in a large group activity.

Elizabeth, an administrator involved in Character Camp, also commented on how participation within small groups facilitated current and future socialization.

All the walls come down in that little [orientation] family. I mean, it's just like a real family. Sometimes you get along, sometimes you hate each other. When those barriers come down, you are more likely to participate and that transcends outside that [orientation] family.

Fostering Long-term Friendships

Several students and faculty made reference to the orientation program affecting the development of friendships. Although Kent could not explain how it happens, he described the result as follows:

My social experience here at Summit College was shaped very much by Character Camp. My [orientation] brothers and sisters, one of them actually is still my very, very good friend. Two of them are still my very good friends to this day. I don't know if that is just how it happened, like I would have become friends with them anyway, but I got to know them very well during Character Camp and they are still two of my best friends and probably will be in my wedding coming up.

Describing their experiences, Charlotte and Sarah, specifically credited their orientation families for enduring friendships. The taking of meals together with their orientation family, acknowledging an orientation family member met while crossing the campus, and just hanging out together were just a few of the circumstances students attributed to taking pressure off them and allowing them to build lasting friendships. Irving, in continuing to express the positive sentiment of other students noted, "I met my

best friend who is now my roommate and has been since my freshman year. I met him the third or fourth day of Character Camp."

Faculty and administrators were not oblivious to these outcomes. Faculty member George, a participant in Character Camp, stated it this way:

I know during their freshmen year they refer to each other long after Character Camp is over, as [orientation] brother and sister and mom and pop. They have [orientation] family reunions throughout their college career. I think this sets up some long-term friendships and long-term relationships. Right off the bat it establishes an atmosphere of loving, caring, and giving.

Although most students, including all four students who dropped out of Summit College, felt Character Camp created an environment for lifelong friendships to initiate, Margaret and Sally were the exceptions to that belief. Margaret's responses were usually neutral or negative in reflecting upon her own experience during Character Camp. She described the friendship aspect in this manner: "There is one sister I keep in contact with. Just one. And I was not at all connected with anybody in my [orientation] family except that one sister." Sally, although extremely positive about her overall experience at Summit, indicated "I didn't end up making my real strong group of friends from Character Camp, but it made me feel so much better going into school, knowing that I'd already been here for ten days with other people."

Activities

Common to most students' experience and involved administrators descriptions were the positive comments given in reciting what they actually did during the orientation. Many of the most positive responses about Character Camp were about

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events students participated in. William vividly remembers having to go through an obstacle course. He commented on how "you had to come together as a team to be able to make it through." Alan and Rebecca described the diversity of other activities. Alan stated, "Just all kinds of activities. You do everything, like riding the Ducks. We played basketball and went to a water park. It was cool." Rebecca added, "A couple families went bowling one time. We saw shows around here. There was a dance that the school put on." Sarah, in reflecting back to her experience, recounted how students initially started to socialize during the above and other activities.

> Then I met my [orientation] family—brothers and sisters, and we had some really good icebreaker games, and everyone got to learn things about each other. It was really great that we had to always sit together. We reserved tables for our [orientation] family. We were Character Camp [X]. There was always a reserved time for us, and we were always sitting together.

Many of the students indicated they were aware of the purpose for specific orientation activities. For example, Charlotte said,

> I think the overarching goal is to start to build community and help us be comfortable at school, so that was just known. We did teamwork activities, things that we started knowing it was an activity that was supposed to build cohesion in our team.

Martha, an administrator who participated in Character Camp, indicated that some orientation activities give students an opportunity to interact with not only other students, but faculty and administration. She identified a pool party hosted at the president's house

as one such occasion. Similarly, Marshall, a faculty member not participating in Character Camp, described his experience:

> We see them all the time, not just in class. Where I taught before, I was teaching kids on the internet. You just don't develop the same relationships that way, where here you see them all the time. Last night we had what we call Mud Fest. I'm in the mud pit with those kids, that doesn't happen in most schools! So there is just a closer bonding and therefore kids are willing to share their problems.

Required Participation

Interviewees reported Character Camp as a requirement for new students. Several participants stated that the mandatory nature of the program resulted in desired and facilitated results. For example, Robert described required involvement in Character Camp this way:

> There were people that didn't want to get involved with playing games. Kids that did sit back and try to not get involved with the case studies, they [orientation parents] would say, "Hey, you need to get involved with this." The [orientation] parents, the upperclassmen, will say, "Look, you wanted to come to this college." They would almost force your hand. Not forcing you, but they would use peer pressure and things like that. It was good to get kids involved that maybe were shy. They helped bring them out. If a kid doesn't want to participate, you can't just sit there, because they'll come get you in your room. You can't just say, "I want to sit in my room."

Elizabeth, an administrator involved in Character Camp, stated how she wished they would have had a similar orientation program when she started college. Her comments showed little or no sympathy for students who were reluctant to participate.

You basically have no choice but to participate in the activities that your family participates in during Character Camp. It is just like one of those things you can be the little kid that sulks on the side of the road while everybody else is out having a good time. Some of them, yeah, they harp on them; well not harp on them, but community service projects are required. People are going to pull their weight and if you have a deadbeat over here not pulling his weight, [orientation] mom and pop are going to tell them to get with it. Is that forced socialization, maybe, maybe not? I think it is having good expectations of someone and then, you know, sometime he may just need a kick in the pants, you know to get going. The other activities, I don't know if I would call it forced socialization? I wouldn't just because I'm a fun kind of person and I'm going to get involved and pay attention. Force people to come out of their shells? Maybe more than that. If you are sitting around in a group of people and you are the one that is quiet, you are the one that is an observer, maybe you are just a background person, or maybe you just don't like that kind of thing. There are some people who just hate that kind of stuff, you know. Before long you don't feel like the odd man out any more so you just get in and get involved and (a) either suffer through it and come out on the other side, or (b) wind up having a good time.

John expressed his disbelief that Character Camp leaders required him to be involved in certain aspects of the program. He stated how he had to do things he didn't

want to do because it might change the image others had of him. "This is the type of stuff people do in church camp. We still have to do this? We graduated high school and this is what middle school students have to do." Although he was surprised by the involvement required, he admitted he understood the purpose:

Many students believed the mandatory participation leveled the field for all incoming students. Most students appreciated the compulsory nature of the program because they realized other students were just like them. The administration specified outcomes they desired to occur naturally and others, like student interaction, they felt needed facilitation. Margaret commented on being a recipient of facilitated student interaction:

I think it's different for everybody. I think it's a good thing. I'm glad I did it, because it made me . . . . I'm a people person, but it made me get to know thirteen other strangers that I probably would never, ever sit in the cafeteria with if I had to.

According to Strange and Banning (2001) "Educational environments are most powerful when they offer students three fundamental conditions: a sense of security and inclusion, mechanisms for involvement, and experience of community" (p. 13). Character Camp provided all three conditions. The environment provided, activities, and required participation of Character Camp helped students through Van Gennep (1960) and Tinto's (1993) so-called rites of passage (separation, transition, and incorporation) to not only a higher level of maturity, but retention.

Retention

The descriptions of participants regarding Character Camp revealed several characteristics that appear to impact student retention. Interviewees identified characteristics as either being a trait of the institution or a student characteristic. Traits controlled or impacted by the institution and the characteristics of students are presented under applicable headings: Should I leave? Where do I go? Who cares? What rules? and I don't want to!

Should I leave?

Although four students who withdrew from Summit before graduation were part of the purposeful sample, five of the remaining student participants gave serious consideration to withdrawing from the college. Their reasons for considering leaving included: unjust treatment, a desired program somewhere else, difficulty deciding on a major, work conflicts, and rules of the institution. Sarah described why she had considered leaving: "So I was given a position out of the cafeteria the next semester. I can't do it again, I just cannot do it. I would have to quit [college]. I hated it that bad." She continued, "Some rules at Summit are very extreme. I was like, this is crazy. That's it! I'm leaving! I'm going to a normal college."

These reasons were important. Three of the four students who withdrew gave an academic related reason, "a desired program elsewhere", as their rationale for departing Summit College. Further, Amelia, a student who withdrew, described a situation similar to Sarah's regarding rules playing a significant role in her decision to withdraw from Summit College.

Where do I go?

Common to most students' responses was that Character Camp assisted their knowledge of the campus facilities. For example, although Margaret reported being disappointed with several aspects of Character Camp, she acknowledged it was successful in familiarizing her with the campus. Kent was very positive in his description of the process that acclimated students to Summit College.

> A goal for Character Camp was getting you familiar [with] the college. It is a new surrounding for everyone and they want to make sure you know how to get around, how to pretty much flourish in the college environment and Summit's environment—how to get around from class to class.

Several other students described how they were given a personal tour of the campus during Character Camp. Rebecca summarized that assistance as follows:

> The first week, we went to the registrar's office, and they had our class schedule waiting for us. So we picked that up, and during our one-on-one time with our [orientation] mom, she took us to our classes. She told us if she had had the classes, what the professor was like and what the class was like. 'Don't worry, you'll do fine.' I was prepared for classes. My [orientation] mom had taken me around to them and explained them to me.

Participants reported that they knew Summit College was different from other institutions of higher education. Catharine, an administrator involved with Character Camp, stated that other institutions did "nothing to initiate students to college" or they "give them a system overload." Kate, and other students described Character Camp's

process of creating familiarity with the campus as an added benefit that incoming students at other institutions may not receive. Karen and Irving expressed the typical sentiment. Karen depicted it this way:

> You know where your classes are, you know where your work site is, and you don't feel scared your first day, because you know where everything is. You feel like you have an edge on most college freshmen that don't know anything about their classes and stuff.

Irving recounted his experience this way:

So Character Camp definitely helps you get in touch with different places, like the Center for Writing and Thinking, the math labs, science labs, and business department. It gets you in touch with those places, where you can go for help and go with questions. It was nice to know where those places were at starting school.

Even though John and Amelia were students who left Summit College before graduation, they were in agreement that Character Camp had sufficiently acquainted them with Summit's campus. They stated when students arrived; they had no clue where things were. Character Camp changed that when it not only informed them, but showed them. They acknowledged how they learned where to go and what they needed to do. Although Elizabeth, an administrator involved in Character Camp, agreed that the orientation program brought familiarity, it also confronted students with their new reality.

Who cares?

Students described an overarching caring atmosphere on campus, with Character Camp being an essential component of that caring. Most student interviewees expressed gratitude for the concern shown students during orientation and beyond. As described by

William, "You have something you need to talk about; you have people to talk to. It kept me there longer, because it was the people that kept me there."

According to the administration and faculty, Summit's helpful concern for students was reflected by Character Camp. Elizabeth, an administrator involved in Character Camp, described Summit's atmosphere of care as follows:

> Character Camp is helping students complete their program of study by virtue of introducing them to the very services that the college provides. If the student finds themselves in a crisis, they have a support system via their Character Camp leaders which are known as their moms and pops. Even though they have also been introduced to the various student services such as counseling, residence hall advisors, their work supervisors and things like that, they have someone that I would consider more immediate, more on their peer level through the [Character Camp] mom and pop. There is a support network in place for students.

> Charles, a faculty member involved in Character Camp, added:

> They know what the services are in terms of counseling when they come here. I mean, they are introduced to those departments of the college that are there to help them should they need it. They are very intentional about making those connections with them. I think what they try to do is put them in these [orientation] families and get them in a support network pretty quickly, that's what they are trying to address to make them feel comfortable.

What rules?

Almost all of those interviewed, in some manner or another, drew attention to the rules at Summit College. Martha, an administrator involved in Character Camp,

commented on how the president of the college in his introductory remarks to students and their parents communicated the values and ideals of the institution. He informed them that they were expected to follow the guidelines established by the institution. "He is very clear about that." She concluded:

> The [orientation] mom and pop are also reinforcing the laying out of the expectations of the institution. So you have the president giving it, you've got the administrative staff that are interested in the students, and you have the [orientation] mom and the pops giving it. Let there be no mistake that they know the expectations that we have here at the college. It works. We are grateful for that. I think that the sense of belonging that it develops in the students is key.

Not only did the vast majority of interviewees draw attention to the rules at Summit College, but they stated how Character Camp informed them of the college's expectations of students. Alan remembered them going over the rules during Character Camp. He stated that he knew what was expected of him and what type of conduct the college considered inappropriate. He indicated that he understood the purpose for rules: ". . . they want everybody to graduate." Irving expressed similar sentiments:

> Not only does it lay out the rules, what's expected, but it really communicates to you that the faculty and the administration and everyone here is not just looking over your shoulder trying to make sure you're following every rule. They're actually there alongside you, striving with you to succeed.

Participants indicated that during Character Camp case studies were used to illustrate real-life situations. Students felt they were being prepared for something they

might encounter. Others believed it gave a greater understanding and appreciation for certain rules. As Robert described his experience:

Character Camp is led by juniors and seniors at the college. They take you through case studies and tell you what happens if you get caught with this or that, because there are a lot of controversial rules down there. People might say, "Why do they have that rule?" They go over things like that.

Elizabeth, an administrator involved in Character Camp, expressed it similarly:

You give them those hypothetical situations in Character Camp. For example, the character case studies in a situation you might find yourself in, and how are you going to handle it? So they get a practice run at just sitting around talking about it. They have actually thought about it and then when they are faced with those things they still may not make the right decision, but it's not totally foreign to them. I mean, it is like we have made this bridge.

I don't want to!

Students indicated that those who reluctantly participated in the orientation program were those who usually withdrew or were dismissed from the college. Respondents reported that those who did not work well with fellow students and those who did not participate in Character Camp activities failed to stay enrolled at Summit. Charlotte remembered the students that were reluctant to participate in Character Camp this way: "Most of them didn't [persist]. Most of the ones that I can think of, unless they had a strong tie, like their parents wouldn't let them leave or they were an athlete." Rebecca had similar memories: "It helped going through Character Camp if you were

open to it, because I had some [orientation] siblings who weren't open to it and just goofed off, and they're the ones that actually no longer go here."

John, a student who withdrew from Summit, stated his disbelief and displeasure in having to participate in specific aspects of Character Camp. However, John and the three students who withdrew commented on their enjoyment of Character Camp and belief in Character Camp's benefits. Three of the five students who had considered leaving Summit reported, they were nervous or scared not knowing anyone as they approached their participation in Character Camp. However, all five agreed that Character Camp was a valuable experience.

Students, administration, and faculty indicated their understanding of the importance for all students participating in Character Camp. Administration linked participation to retention and students acquiring and maintaining a positive campus life. Richard, a faculty member not participating in Character Camp, described it this way:

> One reason I believe that we have the success from our program we have is that we tell them they have to buy into our rules program here, and if they don't buy into it, they can't make it here and they won't. Kids that don't buy into it don't make it.

Students required to participate in Character Camp received the benefit of not facing the "normlessness" that Tinto (1993) linked to anomic suicide and thus individual student departure. Students who attended Character Camp were not left with inadequate "guidelines for the conduct of their personal [collegiate] daily lives' (Tinto, 1993, p. 100).

A Previous Picture

According to Moxley, Najor-Durack, and Dumbrigue (2001), "Each student
brings to higher education a background formed from the influence of personal and
family experiences, economic, cultural, and social forces" (p. 25). That background
influences a student's ability to adjust to situations encountered. A preconceived idea of
college by a student determines whether incongruence, mismatch, or lack of fit will occur
(Tinto, 1993). If students have no previous perception of college life, but allow a negative
perception to develop, "that perception leads the person to perceive him/herself as being
at odds with the dominant culture of the institution and/or with significant groups of
faculty and student peers, then withdrawal may follow" (Tinto, 1993, p. 53). However,
half the students interviewed reported beginning their college experience with little or no
predefined perception of college life. Kent stated, "I guess I had no idea what it was
going to be like." Samuel based his response on his previous environment. "Of course,
where I was from, not very many people attend college. So I didn't really know what to
expect." Irving, although he agreed with Kent and Samuel about not knowing what to
expect, approached college as a quest.

> Coming here, for me, was an adventure. It was something that I looked at not as a
> challenge, but as a privilege. From day one, from the time you apply, you realize
> your chances are slim of getting in, and you're thankful that you get in.

> For two students, they believed college was going to be just like high school.

> Howard not only thought that it would be a continuation of curriculum like high

school, but his social interaction would be limited. "I really didn't know what to expect. I
thought college was going to be like high school. My high school was really big, and I

wasn't super close to a lot of people." Alan expected it to be like high school and came with a preconceived plan of approach. "I think I expected it to be kind of more like in high school, where I would be more in control and I would pick more of what I was going to do. I had this plan and how I was going to go through it." Students who lack a proper perspective of what college life is like can develop a disproportional concern for finding out who they are rather than where are they going and what should they be doing. According to Tinto (1987), educational expectations or clear goals, are a predictor of persistence. However, "Searching for and developing identity is at the center of social integration undertaken during the college years" (Ward-Root & Hatch, 2003, p. 59).

Those Who Lead the Orientation

Common to most participants' responses were the praises given to experienced upperclassmen who directed Character Camp. Students, faculty, and administrators described these orientation moms and pops as genuine friends willing and wanting to assist their surrogate family anyway possible. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), "Peers constitute another powerful socializing agent in shaping persistence and degree completion" (p. 418). Kate realized the importance of these student peer-leaders when she stated:

> It still can be very hit-or-miss, because it just depends on the family that you're put into, what your experience is. But I think that has a lot to do with the [orientation] moms and pops, too. I think they do a good job of picking out people that are going to work out really well. It can always go wrong, depending on what happens in the [orientation] family.

Several students described the friendly interaction they encountered with their Character Camp parents. Students realized that these peer-leaders spoke from experience. Most interviewees commented on the great strides taken by student leadership to make Character Camp a positive experience for all involved. Irving described it this way:

> I showed up, and every person who was involved in the leadership of Character Camp, including the [orientation] moms and pops, helped to make it an exciting time. They made every effort to open the door for new friendships. It sets up about 60 different upperclassmen who you know are solid people, that you can look up to and go to if you have questions.

Kent and William expressed similar sentiments describing the moms and pops of Character Camp. Kent stated they are "solid personable people." William added, "They got some of the most real people, they call them moms and pops." Participants expressed how much they appreciated these leaders for facilitating interaction with other students, sharing on a peer level the expectations of the college, and familiarizing students with the campus logistically. The significance of personnel familiarizing Amelia to Summit College is described below:

> The Character Camp family, like your mom and pop, prepared for you to come. They got you presents and made you posters. They knew who you were before you got here. I got a letter in the mail a month before Character Camp started. They decorated it. It had pretty letters and glitter. They wrote about themselves, they were funny; they introduced you to who they were and gave us an itinerary of what we'd be doing the first week. My [orientation] mom and pop were there the day I moved in. They helped me move in. I didn't realize it was my

[orientation] pop at first, but he helped me and my dad move everything into my room. They wanted to meet you the first day, first thing, before you really got into anything else. They were super helpful. You had people who knew what they were talking about, that got you everywhere you needed to go, got you all the papers you needed filled out, in order, so that you were ready to start class on the first day. You weren't out on your own at first.

Administration and faculty members commented on the overall benefit they perceived these student leaders brought to the campus environment. Catharine, an administrator involved in Character Camp indicated:

You know and I know a student is much more likely to go ask another student than they are to come to faculty or anyone in administration; especially if that student is an older student that they know in the way of a Character [Camp] mom or pop.

Continuing to express similar sentiments for student leaders, Archibald, a faculty member not involved in Character Camp, described the impact this way:

I think it has a great influence. You walk across campus with students and they say, oh, there's my [orientation] daughter, or there's my [orientation] mom or there's my pop. Well, that leads to a sense of community and that sense of community I think is very important in terms of achieving a goal that you are here to achieve, which is to graduate. It contributes to it.

Summary

This chapter focused on analyzing the descriptions obtained from the 24 purposeful interviews. The emergent themes (See Table 3) were then categorized into

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four major themes to investigate how students, faculty, and administrators within a particular liberal arts college perceived a new-student orientation program's effect on students' social integration and retention.

Table 3.

Emergent Themes and Supporting Sub-themes

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Additional Characteristics
Social Atmosphere	Environment provided	Facilitating interaction, Establishing a surrogate family, and Fostering long-term friendships
	Activities	
	Required participation	
Retention	Should I leave?	
	Where do I go?	
	Who cares?	
	What are the rules?	
	I don't want to!	
A Previous Picture		
Those Who Lead Orientation		

Data from the interviews indicates that the vast majority of students at Summit College participating in Character Camp had a very positive experience. Participants believed socialization was facilitated by Character Camp. As a result of the social atmosphere provided, it appeared that retention was also impacted. On the other hand, some students noted only minimal benefit received from required participation. Half the

students reported they arrived with a vague or blank perspective of what Summit College would be like. Many believed the overall success or failure of Character Camp was directly related to those leading the program. Participants generally agreed the greatest need incoming students have was finding friends. The conclusion follows in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students, faculty, and administrators within a particular liberal arts college perceived a new-student orientation program's effect on students' social integration and retention. The study was designed to answer two research questions: What characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to promote socialization? What characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to have an influence on student retention? Because of the research questions studied, this qualitative study used interviews as the primary method of inquiry to obtain perceptions of the orientation program.

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings. Next, each research question and the validity of Tinto's ninth proposition, in this research setting, are addressed with the findings for each question compared to previous research and existing theory. Next, the chapter includes implications for research, policy, and practice, and the study's limitations. The chapter ends with a chapter summary and conclusions about the study.

Summary of Findings

A majority of interviewed students described having a positive experience during the orientation program. The environment provided, the orientation activities, and required participation in the orientation were the topics derived from respondents' comments linking students to social interaction. The orientation program provided this environment by facilitating interaction among new students, establishing a surrogate family for new students, and fostering long-term friendships among students.

Students enjoyed the fun and activities surrounding Character Camp, yet they were just like other students who want to know what it takes to succeed at college (Jones,

2002). Character Camp's required participation attempted to help incoming students be successful by being involved. However, some students indicated they received minimal benefit from required participation.

Through a series of open-ended questions it was revealed that participants believed socialization and retention were facilitated by the orientation program. Half the interviewed students described not having any or only a nominal preconceived picture of what Summit College would be like. Many believed the overall success or failure of Character Camp was directly related to those leading the program. The majority of participants agreed that the greatest need incoming students had, was finding friends.

Research Questions

The first research question was, "What characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to promote socialization?" As Astin has stated, "The effectiveness of an educational policy or program is directly related to its capacity to increase student involvement" (1984, p. 298). According to the findings, Character Camp's structure supported and encouraged student involvement by helping students socially integrate into their new environment. The findings suggested Character Camp's duration, goals, size, group activities, and personnel collaborate to assist peer-to-peer relationships, student-to-faculty relationships, and small group interaction while facilitating and in some cases forcing socialization.

Duration

The findings revealed duration as one of the distinguishable characteristics of Character Camp. Various lengths for an orientation programs agenda have been utilized by institutions. Character Camp began with an initial two week intensive and then

continued throughout the first year. Researchers have maintained that an extended

orientation program's design reinforces the orientation experience (Upcraft & Gardner,

1989). Character Camp's format was supported by Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe's

(1986) research in which they stated "Rather than a one-time experience of limited

duration preceding enrollment, orientation to college might be more effectively

conceived as an institution's ongoing attempt to enhance students successful integration

into the campus academic and social systems throughout the freshmen year" (p. 172).

The orientation of new students to college—including their socialization— is a process

that requires time rather than being described as an event. Character Camp's duration

allowed socialization to be facilitated, additional goals to be introduced, and the

reinforcement of the expectations of Summit College to occur.

Goals

The underlying goals for Character Camp included an adequate acclimation to

the college, student retention, and the development of friendships. These goals

demonstrated Summit College's commitment to its students. Having goals for Character

Camp revealed a previous assessment of need, a focus to create structure, and a reason

for continued evaluation (Ward-Root & Hatch, 2003). Since, according to Mann (1998),

"orientation is the first formal exposure of many students to their new academic and

social environment" (p. 20), Character Camp served as "a means for the institution to

convey [its] academic and social expectations (Nadler, Miller, & Casebere, 1998, p. 27).

Character Camp, like other orientation programs, strived "to integrate the institutional

mission and [assist] the personal growth of entering students" (Ward-Root & Hatch,

2003, p. 39). The goals for Character Camp, which promoted institutional expectations and socialization, were continually reiterated in the large and small group settings.

Size

The findings supported the approach Character Camp used in dividing the incoming group of students down into a more conveniently sized unit called an orientation family. According to Ward-Root and Hatch (2003), "The most successful presentations also allow for small group experiences, where a level of intimacy and trust can develop" (p. 60). The orientation family unit—an upperclassmen orientation mom and pop and a dozen new students—presented not only an environment suitable for intimacy and trust, but a unit that students believed they could manage in their interactions within it. Astin's (1993) research found that of all institutional characteristics, large size affects educational attainment negatively. Although Astin's study looked at total size of an institution, the same could be true regarding the overall size of an orientation group. Stoecker and Pascarella (1991) found larger enrollments tended to suppress students social integration. The manageable size of the orientation family unit allowed and at times forced all orientation family members to participate in an activity.

Group activities

Students attending Character Camp were required to be involved in the multifaceted program and supporting activities. Tinto (1993) stated, "Involvement leads to the appreciation of the need for involvement and both lead, in turn, to an increased likelihood that students will continue to be involved in the future" (p. 69). The purposes for most of the activities were two-fold: dealing with current circumstances and

considering future situations. Planned activities gave Character Camp an internal element

that assisted socialization. Character Camp helped students develop immediate

friendships, within their orientation family, and a long-term personal network.

Networking with others occurred as a result of those structured activities. This study

found the established activities encouraged group discussion, teamwork, and friendships.

This facilitated not only socialization, but presented students familiar with independent

problem solving to group think (Wellner, 1999). Although the success for an activity to

accomplish its purposes was directly related to the individual student, the Character

Camp personnel also had a significant role.

Personnel

Character Camp's personnel were a key element in the program's overall

success. In an effort to affirm entering students' membership with Summit College,

student leaders, who formerly participated in Character Camp, directed many of the

activities. These upperclassmen who had encountered similar difficulties in their new

environment and had similar feelings about the unknown and still persisted now assisted

new students during their transition to college life. According to Mann (1998),

"upperclass [upperclassmen] students are . . . effective in setting expectations for new

students [and] conveying the differences between high school and college in the area of

academics, studying, and assuming responsibility for one's actions, and in passing on

school traditions" (p. 18).

Students reported not only the value, but the difficulty that can arise if the wrong

persons were selected to be Character Camp parents. Students even suggested continued

vigilance in the selection process of orientation moms and pops. Students appreciated the

candid and personal interaction provided to them by the Character Camp moms and pops. These student peers addressed important expectations, rules, campus history, while sharing their own personal history in a manner void of any hidden agenda (Ender & Newton, 2000).

The importance of these peer leaders was also noted in their initial contact with new students prior to the orientation program. Character Camp moms and pops establish the atmosphere for their new students' encounters with not only other upperclassmen, but the entire incoming freshmen class. According to Ward-Root and Hatch (2003), "These student leaders, who often times are the first contact new students have with a college or university, will make the difference in creating excitement or discouragement in the hearts and minds of these new students" (p. 75).

The second research question was, "What characteristics of a new-student orientation program are perceived to have an influence on student retention?" According to Patton (1997), "Different stakeholders will bring varying perspectives to the evaluation" (p. 316). Although 24 individual perspectives were obtained, specific aspects deemed relevant to an orientation program influencing retention were usually agreed upon. These aspects were ones iterated in Tinto's (2002) research, which found four conditions that stand out as supporting retention: expectations, support, involvement, and learning.

Expectations

Although learning—an integral part of academic integration—was beyond the focus of this study, the findings repeatedly reiterated how Character Camp informed students regarding Summit's expectations of them. "However expressed, research is clear

that students quickly pick up expectations and are influenced by the degree to which those expectations validate their presence on campus" (2002, p. 3). Because Summit College was a highly selective institution, students were reminded that they were privileged to be there. With any privilege comes responsibility. Summit College had high expectations for its students. One of those expectations was that students persist and graduate.

Support

Character Camp informed students about support network Summit had established to assist student success. Irving expressed it this way: "So Character Camp definitely helps you get in touch with different places, like the Center for Writing and Thinking, the math labs, science labs, and business department. It gets you in touch with those places, where you can go for help and go with questions." According to Ward-Root and Hatch's (2003) research, Character Camp promotes retention by giving students information to help them cope with change and find help for issues they encounter.

Involvement

Character Camp promoted an environment for student involvement. Tinto (1993) stated, "Though the presence of interaction does not by itself guarantee persistence, the absence of interaction almost always enhances the likelihood of departure" (p. 117). Character Camp students were encouraged and at times forced to interact with fellow students. Students were placed in an atmosphere structured for networking, interacting, and socializing with others. This atmosphere was provided, as the involved faculty member Charles stated, ". . . in a place where they feel safe, they feel comfortable, and they are with their peers."

Peers

The importance of establishing friendships and involvement with other student peers during Character Camp was noted by Astin (1993) who said, "The student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398). During Character Camp, when student-to-student interaction and student-to-staff interaction occurred, student persistence was promoted (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1997; Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Just as Tinto concluded, "Simply put involvement matters" (2002, p. 3), Character Camp positively influenced retention by promoting student involvement.

<div align="center">The Validity of Tinto's Ninth Proposition</div>

According to Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) there are thirteen propositions derived from Tinto's Interactionalist Model. The authors previously did not identify any investigation of the thirteen propositions at a liberal arts college. This study examined at a liberal arts college Tinto's ninth proposition, "The greater the level of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution" (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997, p. 123).

Although four of the students interviewed were dropouts from Summit College, the students who dropped out had an orientation family and friends. Even though the research of Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) found that sufficient contact with other members of the institution to be the most important predictor of eventual departure, those four socialized students withdrew from Summit College. Their reasons for leaving were based on the Summit's programs being insufficient for their needs. According to Tinto (2002),

Knowing why students drop out does not tell us what institutions can do to promote student retention . . . retention is not the mirror image of dropout; the factors that help explain why students leave are not the same as those that explain an institution's ability to help students stay and graduate. (p. 2)

Eleven of the other twelve students felt that Character Camp did a good job of socially integrating them. Students who had considered leaving Summit all gave reasons based on other areas of concern. This finding is supported by Tinto's (1993) work where he says, "These theories implicitly assume all departures arise from the same sources—an assumption we know not to be correct" (p. 90).

Based on Tinto's (1993) own words: "Other things being equal, the greater the contact among students, the more likely individuals are to establish social and intellectual membership in the social communities of the college and therefore the more likely they are to remain in college" (p. 118), it appears looking at this specific liberal arts college, Summit College accomplishes that with Character Camp. The findings from all 16 students and 8 faculty and administrators interviewed revealed Summit College's Character Camp socially integrated students with a subsequent commitment to the institution being a notable result. Therefore, Tinto's ninth proposition appears viable in this specific liberal arts college setting.

<center>Suggestions for Future Research</center>

There are several suggestions for future research. Due to the uniqueness of Summit College, this study needs to be replicated at other liberal arts colleges. The study should also be replicated reviewing all of the years Character Camp has existed at Summit, noting any significant changes made in the program due to the student

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evaluations of the program. A longitudinal study using the student evaluations of

Character Camp as a data gathering tool should be pursued. Attempts should be made to

not only replicate the study at Summit College, but at a larger institution of higher

education. The question of whether this study's positive orientation characteristics are

applicable at larger institutions or whether there are other dominant influential

characteristics could be researched.

Although an equal number of male and female students were sought as part of the

purposeful sample, a study looking specifically at how male and female students respond

to specific aspects of the orientation program might show what facilitates socialization

for one gender and hinders it for the other. A component-specific evaluation of the

different aspects of the orientation program might facilitate such a study.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The results of this study and the support of literature suggest some implications

for those who have the responsibility to create and implement higher education

orientation programs. Although Tinto (1993) stated "Much of what we think we know is

wrong or at least misleading" (p. 3), the question of how to better promote students social

integration continues to beg for orientation professionals' attention. Let the debate

continue over which aspect is of greater importance—academic or social integration.

Both are essential. Both influence retention. Both are necessary for a student to persist

until completion of a program of study. Programs that best facilitate academic and social

integration can complement one another when students' best interests are involved.

This study suggests that social integration is not just a goal, but a process.

Character Camp endeavored to assist students' adjustment and growth in their new

environment. This growth process started even before the students arrived on campus and continued well after the two-week initial program. Those who have the responsibility for orientation would do well to have a strategic systematic plan that looks at the stages/periods that a student encounters as they approach, arrive, and endeavor to acclimate to college life. As with Character Camp, evaluations are needed. From this study, it is suggested that a ten-day period of reflection be allowed immediately after the Character Camp intensive before an evaluation of the program occurs.

As this study discovered, those developing and implementing orientation programs will certainly enhance their program by incorporating elements that build small-group activities. Although dividing up into families of fifteen may not be practical for an institution of 5,000 students and above, certainly attention can be given to promoting small groups with extended periods of accountability and interaction.

Based on the findings and the collaborating literature I would suggest to institutional policy makers that a new-student orientation program be mandatory. Research supports a program that would include, at minimum a one-week thorough introduction to the college and its student resources as well as participation in social activities followed by additional meetings throughout entering students first semester. Transfers students, with adequate pre-requisites— that have been established by the enrolling institution—would be exempt from mandatory participation, but strongly encouraged to participate. Participants should receive credit equal to a course requiring similar time and participation. A token of one credit does not support the time required, the value of, or the benefits gained from participation in a program that potentially affects students during the remainder of their educational career and beyond. True, institutions

cannot make people learn, but requiring their participation/involvement can lead to something positive—socialization.

Upperclassmen who have the desire, academic qualifications, and the personal integrity should be recruited to facilitate the orientation program. Screening of students and evaluation of specific orientation components must be approached consistently and vigilantly. Integration of components assisting student's academic integration should be an integral part of the orientation program.

Finally, institutional members need to continue to ask themselves, "What are we doing or neglecting to do that creates incongruence for students?" Yes, individual student characteristics are a valid measure of why some students have not been able to adapt to college life. However, the institutional role in retention is significant and, as was the case with Summit College, there is always the opportunity to improve an already influential program.

Limitations

A potential limitation of this study was the inability to know the impact Character Camp had on students' retention until they complete their program of study. Due to the years reviewed in the study, rates of persistence until graduation were incomplete. I am confident that I have reported the essence of the experiences of students, faculty, and administrators with Character Camp. However, a different perspective might have occurred if others were part of the purposeful sample. Although interviewees' experiences were real, they are unique to the setting of Summit College. This study has found characteristics that impact socialization and thus retention, but the ability to extrapolate those findings to other like institutions of higher learning is not yet known.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter began with an overview of the study that included the purpose, research questions, and study design. Next, the two research questions were analyzed from the findings and compared to previous research and existing theory. Then the validity of Tinto's ninth proposition in this research setting was presented. Implications for future research and implications for policy and practice followed. The chapter and study ends with the following conclusion.

I started this study asking myself if the wrong question regarding retention was being asked, "Why are students leaving?" That was the purpose for the personal introductory quote, "We were concerned about why they left when we should have focused on what would have encouraged them to stay." Yes, I do believe we need to understand student departure. However, I also believe and have discovered the correct answer is derived from asking the correct question, "Why do students stay?" I further believe that this study validates the importance of not only a new-student orientation program, but presents some characteristics that can help students socially integrate into their educational environment and persist until graduation.

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VITA

Tommy L. Hodum   Spring 2007

U.S. Representative at CMM

1445 Boonville Ave.   200 Bluebird Lane

Springfield, MO 65802   Lebanon, MO 65536

(417) 862-2781   Email: TLHatCMM@aol.com