Spring 2019

A Look into the College Readiness Needs of First Time College Students

Lindsey Coomer Cox

Western Kentucky University, lindsey.coomer837@topper.wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses

Part of the Higher Education Commons, School Psychology Commons, and the Secondary Education Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/3102

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses & Specialist Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
A LOOK INTO THE COLLEGE READINESS NEEDS OF FIRST TIME COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Specialist Project
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

By
Lindsey Coomer Cox

May 2019
A LOOK INTO THE COLLEGE READINESS NEEDS OF FIRST TIME COLLEGE STUDENTS

Date Recommended 4-17-19

Dr. Daniel Super, Director of Specialist Project

Dr. Jeremy Dogsdon

Dr. Carl Myers

Cheryl D. Davis 4/23/19
Dean, The Graduate School Date
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge my director, Dr. Daniel Super. He has been a tremendous help throughout this process. I cannot thank him enough for the time he devoted to this project. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Jeremy Logsdon and Dr. Carl Myers, who served on my specialist project committee. Thank you for your ideas, hard work, and guidance throughout this study. These men have been a huge contribution on my three years of graduate school at Western Kentucky University. Thank you for caring so much about students. Lastly, I want to acknowledge my husband, friends, and family. Thank you all for your encouragement and support.
CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction................................................................. 1
Chapter II: Literature Review...................................................... 11
Chapter III: Method................................................................. 24
Chapter IV: Results................................................................. 35
Chapter V: Discussion and Recommendations................................. 64
References........................................................................... 75
Appendix A: ISEC Academy Year One Program Evaluation (Student Survey)...... 84
Appendix B: Focus Group Informed Consent Document................................. 91
Appendix C: Survey Informed Consent Document................................. 93
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Percentage of Participants Commenting on each Theme………………………37
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Map ................................................................. 39
A LOOK INTO THE COLLEGE READINESS NEEDS OF FIRST TIME COLLEGE STUDENTS

Lindsey Coomer Cox May 2019 94 Pages

Directed by: Dr. Daniel Super, Dr. Jeremy Logsdon, and Dr. Carl Myers

Department of Psychology Western Kentucky University

This study examines the college readiness needs of first year college students based on experiences from students and staff involved with a first year transitional initiative program at Western Kentucky University. The purpose of the study is to share students’ college readiness needs with public school systems in hopes to intervene with these needs before students arrive at college. A total of 45 participants volunteered to be in focus groups, an interview, and complete a survey. Two research questions were proposed: What college readiness needs still exist for first time college students upon entrance to a four year public university? In what ways can understanding college readiness needs inform the work of secondary school educators? The researcher found college readiness needs exist for first time college students in connections, motivation and support, accountability, studying, college expectations, life lessons, academic help, transition to college and belonging. Implications for various school personnel to help students with these needs are provided. Limitations of the study are discussed.
Chapter I: Introduction

Both high schools and universities have a goal of educating and preparing students for the often difficult transition from high school graduate to college freshman. However, there is a difference in how high schools and colleges define what “college ready” means. High schools often look at students being college ready as satisfying the requirements for admission, such as obtaining a particular ACT score or GPA. On the other hand, colleges and universities include nonacademic skills, like mindset, and preventing needs for remedial courses as part of what makes students college ready (Tierney & Duncheon, 2015). By these definitions, students may obtain a required score on a standardized exam or master courses at their corresponding high schools while lacking key nonacademic skills needed to for success in college. There is a call for students to become aware of their underpreparedness for college while they are still in high school so intervention can begin sooner (Tierney & Duncheon, 2015).

Not all underpreparedness is created equal. There is a difference in rates of college readiness between African American students and students of the majority. While only a little over half of students in general pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree will earn the degree, the percentage is even lower for minority students (ACT, 2018). There are higher rates of needing remedial classes for students of color than Caucasian students. Students of color are often viewed as not having goals of wanting to attend and graduate from college and more likely to be encouraged to pursue employment than college (Tierney & Duncheon, 2015).
Statement of the Problem

College and career readiness is a topic of concern among high schools in the United States, particularly as it is used as a metric meant to signal that students are positioned for postsecondary success upon graduation from a secondary setting. Students continue to struggle with becoming college and career ready and therefore experience difficulties making the academic and social leap required to successfully matriculate from high school to college. At the national level, only 27% of students who took the ACT met all four College Readiness Benchmark Scores. Students who are persons of color in particular struggle demonstrating the academic preparedness necessary for successful transition from high school to college, with only 11% of African American test-takers meeting at least three ACT benchmarks (ACT, 2018).

A key nonacademic area in which students identifying as persons of color experience difficulty during the transition into the first year of college is in developing a sense of belonging. Students who are persons of color may struggle with finding a sense that they belong academically and socially to their corresponding campuses. Results from a study surveying 2,967 freshmen college students show significant differences in belonging for students of color and students of the majority, with students of color reporting a lower feeling of belonging during their first year of college than students of the majority (Johnson et al., 2007). In addition to racial or ethnic background, a feeling of belongingness on a college campus can also differ by socioeconomic background. Students from a lower economic background feel a lower sense of belonging during their first year of college than their peers whose families have higher socioeconomic status (Soria, Stebleton, & Huesman, 2013).
Minority students, in terms of race/ethnic background, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, and economic background, are concerned with feeling safe and respected as part of feeling as if they belong on a campus (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Minority students also reported valuing authenticity in relationships with others and feeling like their true self, while majority students reported valuing on having fun on campus and fun in relationships with others as part of belonging (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Belongingness has also been associated with other aspects of being successful emotionally, academically, and socially in college. Researchers found a lower feeling of belonging correlated with feeling depressed and a higher feeling of belonging correlated with higher feelings of self-worth, academic competence, and social acceptance in a study surveying minority students’ sense of belonging in college (Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016).

Need for the Study

There is a need to investigate the true college readiness needs that first year college students are expressing. Utilizing a cohort of students involved in a freshman year transition program designed for students of color, the current study examines student reactions as they reflect on their freshman year. This program, called the Intercultural Student Engagement Center (ISEC) Academy, included students who identify as a person of color, are underprepared academically, or have some other need with the transition into college. Participating students nearing the end of their first full academic year are rich sources of authentic voice on the topic of true college readiness needs. Programs of this sort are not necessarily unique, as universities provide support to students in response to residual preparedness needs even though they were successfully admitted and enrolled.
The ISEC Academy took place at Western Kentucky University (WKU), a mid-sized regional comprehensive state university in southcentral Kentucky. WKU is considered to be a predominantly white institution (PWI). With few persons of color attending a PWI, minority students often describe feeling as if they do not belong at college (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Creating a vehicle aiding in the development of sense of belonging in students was one of the main objectives in creating the ISEC Academy. Though a PWI, WKU values diversity as part of its mission statement, which is “WKU prepares students of all backgrounds to be productive, engaged, and socially responsible citizen-leaders of a global society” (ISEC Academy, 2019).

Through collaborative efforts, an opportunity was made available for the researcher, a school psychologist, to look through the lens of the public school system at the works of the ISEC Academy. The school psychologist as a researcher is examining data to draw conclusions as to what public school systems could do to prepare students while they are still in K-12 to become better prepared for college. Examining data describing what students still need to be successful in college, as indicated by students themselves and the educational professionals who work with them, could be shared with secondary schools to help close readiness gaps. Indeed, engaging in honest conversations regarding what it truly means to be college ready – in addition to the nationally normed academic assessments – is an imperative step toward effectively educating secondary students for the challenges associated with succeeding at a university.

One of the qualifications and roles of being a school psychologist is to consult and collaborate with other educators and professionals on academic and behavioral difficulties students are exhibiting. Researchers from one study found that school
psychologists spend 16% of their time consulting with others (Bahr et al., 2017). The purpose for the involvement of a school psychologist in this current study is to examine what skills or preparation first year college students are saying they did not get in high school (or otherwise still do not possess) but need to be successful in college. College and career readiness is defined as “the ability of an individual to be successful in postsecondary education and employment” (Monahan, Lombardi, & Madaus, 2018, p. 2). It is also important, especially for first generation college students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, to consider the nonacademic aspects of being college and career ready (College Board, 2012). The only difference in a high school senior and a college freshman is two to three months. The most effective solutions for preparing students well will result from collaborations between professionals representing both universities and secondary institutions.

There is a need for collaboration between high schools and colleges to ensure students are educated throughout their primary and secondary education years, prepared for college, and then prepared for their careers. Often institutions look at student performance at the secondary level to establish student needs. However, high schools can learn about student needs from colleges as well. Learning and sharing college admissions requirements is an area in which high schools can join efforts with colleges. One study found K-16 collaborations that include intensive involvement, such as creating policies and working together over extended periods of time, have higher graduation rates (Domina & Ruzek, 2012).

Current connections that exist between public schools and colleges to ease students’ transition into college include TRiO Programs, such as Upward Bound, Talent
Search, and Gear Up, as well as dual credit and Advanced Placement courses (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). These TRiO programs are federally funded and geared towards first generation, minority, or low socioeconomic status students. These programs allow middle and high school students to learn more about financial aid, visit college campuses, and meet other students. Dual credit and AP courses allow students at the secondary education level to learn material at the pace and difficulty level of collegiate classes while costing much less. High school counselors also play a key connection in students’ transition into college. School counselors communicate with college admissions counselors, encourage students to explore and set their future goals, and help students fill out college applications (Belasco, 2013).

There is a need for more connections to exist between public schools and colleges to collaborate on transitioning. One area in which high schools and colleges could work together more closely is understanding and communicating realistic and accurate expectations. To ensure college readiness, what students are learning in high school must be aligned with what they are expected to know upon entering college (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Expectations for rigidity of deadlines must also be established at both locations (Rodriquez et al., 2017). Communicating to students the seriousness of deadlines, level of rigor, and volume of workload is valuable only if they are held accountable for accomplishing each.

**Theoretical Framework**

To further understand the purpose and foundations of the ISEC Academy, it is helpful to examine the works of Syracuse University Professor, Vincent Tinto. Tinto has intensively studied college retention and learning communities, especially for
underprepared and low income students (Tinto, 2012). He has pointed out five problems with current theories on student retention.

The first two problems with retention theories are that being aware of why students leave their college is not the same as why students remain at their college and do not tell how to easily apply retention strategies in real life (Tinto, 2010). A third concern is that information that is outside of the control of the university is often a focus, such as the effects of student’s personal situations on retention (Tinto, 2010).

The fourth problem with current retention theories is that retention research often has not separated students who leave college completely and those who transfer to another school. The final issue is that current research looks at various aspects of college in relation to student retention separately (Tinto, 2010). These five problems of current models all share similarities in that they are not under the immediate control of the institution and efforts should be pressed towards areas in which the institution can regulate.

Tinto proposes moving toward a Model of Institutional Action to promote retention through four areas in which colleges can manipulate: expectations, support, feedback, and involvement (Tinto, 2010). Tinto recommended institutions set clear and high yet attainable expectations for students. He also proposed colleges setting expectations for students at the class, major, and university levels (Tinto, 2010). Institutions can share with students college expectations through word of mouth from faculty, staff, advisors, or peers, syllabi and other classroom texts, networking, mentoring. The ISEC Academy used Tinto’s framework by telling scholars of expectations for their first year at WKU through the navigator component, working
closely with professors who taught the students’ shared courses, and networking with other campus departments and community members.

As part of his Model of Institutional Action, Tinto explained how universities can create academic, social, and financial support for students. Institutions can control for academic support by offering remedial courses for underprepared students, study sessions, academic sessions especially in reading, tutoring services, and freshmen seminar courses (Tinto, 2010). The ISEC Academy fostered academic support by putting students in connection with tutoring services and offering session on study skills in conjunction with The WKU Center for Literacy. The Academy also used this framework in that a core piece of their service was students taking courses together. One course was University Experience 175, which is a freshmen seminar course for first year students. Another course students shared was English 100 with an enhanced course option for students who did not meet the ACT benchmark.

Universities can also offer students social support to help create a sense of belonging through advising, counseling, mentoring, and ethnic centers (Tinto, 2010). The ISEC Academy is an ethnic center where students of color feel comfortable just hanging out with others or working on homework. Tinto also noted there is a positive correlation between financial aid and retention as well as financial aid awards now geared more toward academic success rather than financial needs (Tinto, 2010). He suggested colleges could support students financially by offering grants and encouraged student participation in work study programs. The ISEC Academy used these suggestions of the Model of Institutional Action by putting students in connections of various scholarship offers.
The next area in which Tinto described how institutions can promote student retention is providing feedback. Feedback allows students to better understand their standing in a course and allows faculty to discover if any adjustments are needed in instruction. Tinto recommended feedback occur often, in a timely manner, and by using formative and summative assessment means (Tinto, 2010). The ISEC Academy used feedback in the form of grade sheets and meetings with professors to keep track of students’ performance in courses, then discussed their performance with the students.

Lastly, Tinto proposed universities engender student engagement, beginning freshmen year, on campus through academic and social activities as part of the Model of Institutional Action. Greater involvement is associated with higher retention, grades, graduation, and critical thinking (Tinto, 2010). Tinto also explained the importance of students finding value in their campus involvement and university staff building relationships and having conversations with students not only in the classroom (Tinto, 2010). Core components of the ISEC Academy were creating events and programming in hopes to create a sense of belonging, purpose, and involvement at WKU.

Tinto’s Model of Institutional Action is also the theoretical foundation for the current study. The researcher kept the mindset of what aspects of college readiness, transition, and retention that institutions are able to control. This was especially important when determining which participants’ statements were significant. Given the structure of this theory, a collaboration between high schools and universities needs to take place. The places of education could communicate with each other to acknowledge which aspect of student preparedness they are able to conveniently and effectively influence.
Statement of Research Questions

The following questions framed the work of the present study:

1. What college readiness needs still exist for first time college students upon entrance to a four year public university?

2. In what ways can understanding college readiness needs inform the work of secondary school educators?
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction

In this chapter, the literature on college readiness is analyzed. This is an area in which great amounts of research exists; however, to maintain the purpose of the current study, only literature including minority students or areas in which high schools could be involved with or influence is examined. First, what constitutes college readiness is reviewed, as well as the responsibilities secondary school employees hold in terms of preparing students to become college ready prior to high school graduation. Current or attempted collaborations between high schools and universities are evaluated. Lastly, various components of student success initiatives that are created to ease the transition into college are separately discussed.

College Readiness

College readiness is a hot topic among educators at all levels. Though both faculty and students want students to be prepared for college, ambiguity in what is considered college ready can blur these lines on whether or not readiness is achieved. One study that examined freshmen students and preparedness defined college readiness as placement “in a credit-bearing course in English or math in the first course they took in that subject” (Herman, Scanlan, & Carreon, 2017, p. 3). By this definition, it is difficult for students to know if they are college ready until well into their senior year as they are registering for classes.

High schools often view college readiness differently than universities. High schools often determine if students are college ready by more concrete, mathematical means, such as GPA and ACT or SAT scores (Tierney & Duncheon, 2015). This route of
determining if students are college ready is likely influenced by national or state standards that must be approached academically at each grade level. The students are then assessed over what they have been taught, the standards, subsequently GPA could be viewed as how well as student has mastered government regulated standards. One researcher discussed how students can meet graduation requirements, but may be considered underprepared for colleges in certain standardized test scores are not met (Hirano, 2015). A common definition of college ready includes that students are enrolled in courses all eligible for credit hours and no remedial courses (Hughes & Petscher, 2016). Students forced to enroll in these remedial courses have a historically abysmal likelihood of graduating (Complete College America, 2012). Such a definition is often accepted by universities. High schools and colleges must communicate with each other to determine what exactly college readiness is to ensure students are prepared or can become prepared sooner and faster.

**Academic Behaviors**

College readiness can be defined in various ways including academic and nonacademic skills. Those who are considered college ready frequently engage in study behaviors. One study found those who are academically succeeding in college spend greater amounts of time studying in comparison to those who are struggling academically as they were found to often only study for five hours or fewer a week. (Beattie, Laliberte, Michaud-Leclerc, & Oreopoulos, 2017). Researchers from this study also found college students who were struggling had worse time management skills, were less likely to communicate with faculty, and were overall less satisfied (Beattie et al., 2017). Another investigation looked at study habits and skills of college students with various GPAs.
Researchers found that those students with lower GPA also had lower study skills and behaviors (Proctor, Hurst, Prevatt, Petscher, & Adams, 2006). While this example does not imply causality, it nonetheless demonstrates that importance of study skills as a part of being ready for college.

Academic behaviors other than studying are also imperative to being considered college ready. Researchers found students need to be engaging in academic behaviors, focusing on academics, obtaining social skills, having learning strategies, and developing an academic mindset (Nagaoka et al., 2013). These are all skills that are not related to knowledge about a specific academic subject or thinking, but require practical skills such as showing up to class on time. Consistent demonstration of these academic behaviors is contingent on and reflective of the intrinsic level to which students are motivated to do so. One study wherein graduates were interviewed found that students who matriculated to graduation were typically highly motivated, worked hard, possessed time management skills, and believed in themselves (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014). Though students may obtain the ability and knowledge to succeed in college, they must have the desire and apply their abilities.

**Role of Secondary Educators in College Readiness**

Secondary school counselors are often the responsible professional within a high school for students to turn when planning for college or the workforce. School counselors also have many other roles as part of their job such as administrative duties, counseling sessions, and assisting with assessments. One study surveyed 852 high school counselors asking about how they define their role and spend their time. Researchers found 52.7% of school counselors reported their biggest focus was on assisting students in college.
preparation (Mau, Li, & Hoetmer, 2016). High school counselors were found to spend most of their time performing these type of college preparation activities. These findings were congruent with the American School Counselor Association’s descriptions of school counselors’ qualifications and responsibilities. This mentioned study also found school counselors have high expectations for students and are cheerful characteristically (Mau et al., 2016).

Another study interviewed a total of 37 students of color to better determine how secondary schools could intervene with minority students’ college readiness needs. Researchers found high school personnel could create meaningful relationships with the students, expose students to collegiate level course work and activities, promote taking college courses while in high school, greater supports for minority students, and view minority students as equally capable in academic (Welton & Martinez, 2014). These ideas to support minority students can be carried out by various public school employees. Teachers, principals, and other staff are able to speak with minority students and show they care through a meaning relationship.

Collaboration between High Schools and Universities

There are collaborations that currently exist between high school and universities. Collaborative efforts that relate to college preparedness were the focus with the present study in mind. One type of collaboration between high schools and universities is campus visits. Often high schools, even middle or elementary schools, create trips where groups of students are able to tour campus and learn more about the college experience. Other collaborations between the two could be in the form of summer camps or weekend
sessions. Students may be able to take ACT prep courses or stay in residence halls among other opportunities available when school is not in session.

More intensive collaborations between high schools and colleges are emerging to better prepare students for success in college. In Florida, the Florida College and Career Readiness Initiative has been established. As part of this initiative all students during their junior year of high school take a college readiness exam then, if needed, take one to five college readiness courses during their senior year (Mokher & Jacobson, 2016). Another rigorous way public schools and institutions are working together to improve college readiness is by aligning college curriculums to Common Core Standards (Valdez & Marshall, 2013). Collaborations such as these typically take significant amounts of time, money, and agreement.

Though there are collaboration between high schools and universities, even more conjoining efforts would be beneficial for students. Typically public schools are the ones learning from and communicating towards the universities, then altering their patterns of behaviors that can be changed to help students. Alternatively, institutions do not as often look at what they can learn from high schools. Further examination of this directionality could allow for interventions that are effective during high schools to be put into play sooner and possibly improve student preparedness.

**Student Success Initiatives Components**

Even though fewer students are entering universities demonstrating college readiness by way surpassing benchmarks on standardized test scores than those students who are, it is still incumbent on universities to properly educate the students enrolled. Universities are establishing programs to support students in the college readiness needs
students obtain upon entrance into college. The purpose of these programs is to ease the adjustment of becoming a college student. Many types of transitional initiatives exist to help students with various needs. Programs have been created to target psychosocial and academic needs of students (Cole, Kitchen, & Kezar, 2019), students from low income backgrounds (Baber, 2018), and better transition non-traditional students into institutions (Kallison, 2017). These programs attempt to fill in gaps students may obtain to encourage success in college. The success of these programs are ever more important as universities across the country are struggling to maintain enrollments and balance the associated financial implications of serving fewer students.

**First year orientation programs.** Approximately 96% of universities provide some type of freshmen orientation program (Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2010). Orientation programs are utilized to provide incoming students an opportunity to meet with advisors, finalize course schedules, meet other students, and familiarize themselves with their new school campus prior to the start of the school year. WKU offers a one day Topper Orientation Program (TOP) as well as the optional weeklong program, MASTER Plan, in which incoming freshmen are able to move in early. The ISEC Academy held their own orientation weekend in addition to these other transition programs.

The length and specifics of orientation programs often vary by college campuses. One type of orientation programs is called summer bridge programs. Summer bridge programs are typically 2-4 weeks long, allow incoming students to preview general education collegiate level courses, and offer academic and social events (U.S Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse, 2016). One study conducted looked at 770 freshmen who attended a summer bridge program at
Georgia Institute of Technology in comparison to 1452 incoming students who did not attend. Researchers of this study found during a follow up that the group of students who attended the summer bridge program had significantly higher graduation rates than those who did not attend (U.S Department of Education et al., 2016). Other institutions have broadened their orientation programs from days to a semester long course to discuss and focus on transition needs. At George Mason University, a group of 284 students who had completed an orientation course had higher sophomore year return rates as well as retention and graduate rates at a five year follow up than a group of 299 students did not complete the course (Cambridge-Williams, Winsler, Kitsantas, & Bernard, 2013).

Researchers have also found differences between Caucasian and minority students in regard to orientation programs. Caucasian students often reported wanting to attend freshmen orientation programs for the academic aspects, while minority students often reported their purpose was for the social aspects (U.S Department of Education et al., 2016). Another study found that for persons of color participating in a freshmen orientation program was associated with a higher GPA and return rate, but only for their freshmen year (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008).

**Living learning communities.** To help foster the sense of connection to the university and to peers in both academic and non-academic avenues, many universities are turning to living learning communities as a way of delivering the educational experience. These communities help foster institutional identity and are most powerful when delivered during the first semester (Laufgraben, 2005). One study looked at results of qualitative data from two focus groups at an institution in the Midwest. One of the focus groups consisted of 25 students who had participated in living learning...
communities that took two to three courses together and were grouped by interests or major, while the other focus group consisted of 17 students who were not part of a living learning community. Members of living learning communities reported studying as a group, feeling connected to those in their living learning community but not the university, a formation of cliques, and more caring, informal relationships with staff members (Arensdorf & Naylor-Tincknell, 2016).

Participation in a living learning communities during a student’s first year of college is associated with higher GPA, retention, and academic involvement (Schneider, Bickel, & Morrison-Shetlar, 2015). Another study compared two different types of living learning communities for first year student: Academic Theme Floors (ATF) and Freshman Interest Groups (FIG). Students who were part of ATF had the same major or other academic interest and partook in many activities outside of the classroom, while students who were part of the FIG took four courses together. Researchers found the freshmen students who were members of the FIG had slightly higher GPAs and were more likely to be retained (Purdie & Rosser, 2011).

Positive outcomes and implications have also been found when utilizing living learning communities with minority students. A study examining pilot living learning communities at Norfolk State University, a Historically Black University with a large first-generation college student population, showed an increase in retention the following fall semester (Ericksen, Walker, Laws, Fitzgerald, & Burwell, 2015). Another recent study recommended the development of living learning communities for first year, first generation students of color at Predominantly White Institutions to help generate feelings of comfort, connection, and community (Blackmon, 2018).
**Targeted programming.** Programming can take a variety of forms and focuses. Some program sessions for students are required while attendance for others is optional. One type of programming that has been implemented discusses a more social, personal aspect of campus life. Counseling departments of universities have aided in creating program sessions to increase awareness of relationship violence (Hays, Michel, Bayne, Neuer Colburn, & Smith Myers, 2015). Some programming sessions that are offered at colleges are academic focused. One known type of academic programming is Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) or Supplemental Instruction, which provides study sessions for specific courses for college freshmen (Van der Meer, Wass, Scott, & Kokaua, 2017). Positive results of PASS or Supplemental Instruction have been found. Researchers from one study reported higher retention rates and degree completion for freshmen students who attended up to 13 sessions in comparison to students who chose not to go to the PASS sessions (Van der Meer et al., 2017).

Nonacademic program sessions have been implemented and researched for students of color. A variety of topics have been the focus of nonacademic programs at college campus, such as safe sex (Kanekar & Sharma, 2011). Another study examined 10 program sessions called Claiming Your Connections, which targeted women of color and their coping skills (Jones, Ahn, & Chan, 2016). Researchers from this study found the 49 women who attended the sessions felt less stressed and had more of an external locus of control than the group of 47 women who were not part of the program sessions (Jones et al., 2016).

**Peer mentoring.** Navigators, or peer mentors, are another key component of student success initiatives. Mentorships can take many forms, such as role of mentor,
frequency of meetings, and characteristics for pairing. One study described mentorships created based on Early Childhood major students in which upperclassmen were matched with about five mentees. Findings based on written reflections of the mentors showed the importance of preparing for meetings with mentee and using electronics for communication as well as the development of social support and friendships (Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh, & Wilss, 2008). Faculty mentors or academic coaching are more formal, academic, and executive functions such as goal setting focused options available for students to learn from others (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010).

Mentors can also be involved with orientation or similar programs. Walters and Kanak (2016) described upperclassmen involvement with a leadership retreat in which welcome incoming freshmen to an honors program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. They also reported positive effects for not only the mentees, but the mentors were also able to learn about leadership and organizational skills (Walters & Kanak, 2016).

Mentorships specifically for persons of color have also been implemented at the college level. One example of this is mentor programs created for African American college athletes in which the influence of race on their sports career is discussed (Bimper, 2017). At Johnson C. Smith University, a historically black college, a mentorship program called the Case Manager Program allowed first year students to meet with mentors who were freshmen advisors (Summerskill & Jones, 2013). This particular type of mentor provided students another resource for easing the transition into college and created more comfort or open conversation. Research specifically on peer mentorships
between persons of color appeared to be sporadic and was not widely represented in the literature.

**Belongingness.** Creating a sense of belonging is arguably the ISEC Academy’s most important component. Broadly speaking, there are many organizations, initiatives, and events designed for first year and other college students to build camaraderie and feel part of their college campus. A recognizable opportunity available for first year students to develop a sense of belonging is by joining a fraternity or sorority.

Vincent Tinto further examined the various components of initiatives in place to ease the transition into college. He explained how many of the programs do not change the academic aspect of students entering college and often do not include professors (Tinto, 2001). Tinto described many reasons why students leave their corresponding institutions after beginning courses, such as lack of financial means and changes in one’s goals. Another reason students do not stay is they do not feel a sense of belonging at their school. Tinto encouraged the development of learning communities to promote retention, especially for freshmen college students. Learning communities have many benefits including improvements in teamwork, increasing student involvement in academics, and students spend time together in and out of the classroom (Tinto, 2001).

Researchers from one study examined students’ sense of belonging at community colleges. Community colleges are unique in that residence halls and other activities and facilities people often associate with belonging at a college are not offered. As part of this mentioned study, 44 freshmen students were interviewed and then 36 of the students participated in another interview six months later. Researchers found 70% of the students felt a sense of belong to their college and 90% of those students who felt a sense of
belonging had returned in their sophomore year (Karp, Hughes, & O’Gara, 2010). Additionally, 84% of the students who described feeling a sense of belonging to their institution had been involved with an information network. An information network was a relationship among people that involved the communication of information. This relationship had many academic and social advantages, but started out within educational settings.

One study looked at participants who were now college students and had attended Lakeside Academy program. As part of this program students were able to spend four weeks on a college campus each summer during their high school years. Researchers from this study found greater sense of belonging when paired with supportive staff, academic supports, and welcoming residence halls (Mean & Pyne, 2017). Interestingly, students’ feelings of belonging to their corresponding colleges began before starting classes there.

Various aspects of a college campus and class can influence students’ sense of belonging. One study surveyed 238 first year students to examine the students’ sense of belonging college within a classroom and as part of a campus. Researchers found associations between belonging within a classroom and student’s confidence to reach their educational goals, intrinsic motivation, perceived importance of classroom activities, professor’s organization skills, professor’s encouraging class participation, and professor traits like honesty (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Researchers from this study also found an association between belonging on the campus and social acceptance.
As previously described, students of color struggle even more with belonging when transitioning to college than students of the majority. Several organizations, initiatives, and events have also been carried out specifically for creating belonging among minority college students. One intervention is Black Culture Centers. Black Culture Centers were developed to continue the traditions and history of African Americans as well as give students of color a place where they feel like they belong (Harris & Patton, 2017). Another type of program created to help students of color feel as if they belong and other difficulties faced as a first year student are Black Male Initiative (BMI). BMI programs encompass many specific programs for African American male college students. In one study, researchers interviewed 63 students who had participated in a BMI program and found senses of belonging was created through support as well as discussions over persistence and identity (Brooms, 2018).
Chapter III: Method

This study investigated a student success initiative for incoming students of color on the campus of a mid-sized university in the southeastern United States. Rather than examining the data to infer the level to which the initiative positively affected student participants, the present purpose was to view the program through the lens of public school preparation for college. If college freshmen, all of whom self-identify as underrepresented minorities, either need or can benefit from such an initiative as they transition to college merely a few months after high school graduation, what could public schools have done differently to assuage the need for such programs?

Research Questions

1. What college readiness needs still exist for first time college students upon entrance to a four year public university?

2. In what ways can understanding college readiness needs inform the work of secondary school educators?

Participants

A total of 48 students participated in the ISEC Academy during its initial year. All students identified as minorities such as African American, Hispanic, multiracial, and other Non-Caucasian races. When looking at WKU as a whole, 75.2% of first time first year students are white. A significant portion, 46.6%, of scholars were first generation college students, substantially more than the 33.2% of the general student body. Some students were underprepared for college in the area of academics. The mean ACT Composite for scholars in the ISEC Academy is 17.46 and the mean high school GPA is 2.76. In comparison, the mean ACT score for first time first year students at WKU is 22.8
and the mean high school GPA is 3.31 (WKU Fact Book, 2018). The vast majority of scholars also came from a low socioeconomic background as 82.2% of scholars were Pell Eligible.

A total of 19 participants responded to the ISEC Academy Student Survey. All participants in the survey were 18 years old or above and scholars in the ISEC Academy at Western Kentucky University. All participants were a person of color and a first year and first generation college student, Pell Grant eligible, or “had some academic need with their transition, persistence, and graduation at Western Kentucky University” (WKU Mission and Vision, 2019). With a population of 48 ISEC Academy students, 39.58% of ISEC Scholars volunteered to complete the ISEC Academy Student Survey. Participants in the ISEC Academy Student Survey may or may not have been participants in the student focus groups.

Participants in focus groups and interviews were classified into three categories: ISEC Academy students, ISEC Academy staff members, and ISEC Academy Director. All student focus group participants were 18 years old or above. All student focus group participants were persons of color, met the requirements to be a scholar of the ISEC Academy, and had completed two semesters at WKU. A total of 22 ISEC Academy students were voluntary participants in three simultaneous focus groups. One student focus group was composed of seven students, a second focus group was composed of 10 students, and a third focus group was composed of five students. Of the student participants, nine students were male and 13 were female. This is a 45.83% student participation rate in focus groups out of a population of 48 ISEC Academy students.
All three ISEC Academy staff members participated in a focus group. One staff member’s role was planning and promoting ISEC Academy programs, as well as recruitment of future ISEC Academy scholars. Another staff member’s role was administration and record keeping. The third staff member’s role was coordinator, and she was responsible for meeting with the scholars. Staff members were also responsible for planning and conducting activities during the orientation weekend, as well as documenting student attendance at events. These three participants were all female and all persons of color. An interview was conducted with the ISEC Academy Director. This participant was female and a person of color.

Description of ISEC Academy program

The ISEC Academy is a program created for students who are a person of color and met at least one of the following requirements: first year and first generation college student, Pell Grant eligible, or “have some academic need with their transition, persistence, and graduation at Western Kentucky University” (ISEC Academy, 2019). The ISEC Academy began its pilot year at Western Kentucky University during the 2017-2018 school year. The creation of the ISEC Academy consisted of six key components: an orientation weekend, living community, learning community, programming sessions, navigators, and belonging. Students interested in becoming a scholar in the ISEC Academy underwent an application process prior to entering their first semester at WKU. The scholars participate in the ISEC Academy for two semesters, then continue to be involved with the academy throughout their remaining college years through leadership and other positions.
ISEC Academy students participated in a three-day orientation weekend prior to the start of their first year at Western Kentucky University and as part of entrance into the academy. ISEC students were able to move into their dorms before other students then participate in the standard freshmen opening week called MASTER Plan. During this orientation weekend, students were acclimated to campus buildings, policies, staff, and departments as well as met other ISEC Academy students. Team building activities, recreational events, and a ceremonial pinning with students’ parents occurred during the orientation.

Another important component of the ISEC Academy was the creation and implementation of a living learning community. As part of the living portion of the living learning community, scholars all lived in the same co-ed residence hall. The male and female resident assistants assigned in this hall for the scholars were persons of color. The learning part of the living learning community consisted of scholars taking two courses together each semester for one year. Fall semester the scholars had English 100 (Introduction to College Writing) and University Experience 175 together, then spring semester scholars had Communication 145 (Fundamentals of Public Speaking and Communication) and English 200 (Introduction to Literature) together. Professors for these courses had monthly meetings with the ISEC Academy director and participated in the orientation weekend by attending a movie with students and meeting their parents.

To provide continual support, as well as to foster community, students were expected to attend at least 1-2 program sessions per semester. Programming included academic sessions over topics such as study skills and note taking. There were also social, cultural, or professional sessions with activities such as sports tournaments and
tips for dressing for interviews. A staff member kept a spreadsheet of who attended each programming event.

Philosophically, it was imperative for students in the academy to be provided with mentors called navigators. The purpose of navigators were to develop a relationship with the students to create a sense of belonging, met regularly with students, and answer any questions the students may have about college life. Navigators were upperclassmen and people of color. Requirements to be navigators were to have at least a 2.7 GPA, a leadership role on campus, no discipline marks, a recommendation, and an interview with the ISEC Academy Director. There were about 20 navigators assigned to no more than 4 students. Navigators were matched to their students by interests and major. Navigators underwent an application process and training as part of their role.

The final component of the ISEC Academy program is the intentional development of a sense of belonging for these students at a PWI. In many ways, this component is actually the underpinning and overarching goal of the Academy: To foster a greater sense of belonging on the campus of WKU as well as among each other and ISEC staff members. A sense of belonging was created through forming a community among the scholars. ISEC Academy students formed meaningful, personal relationships with each other and staff members. The ISEC Academy gave the scholars a place to come to for resources, be together, and feel comfortable that they may not have had otherwise as a minority student attending a predominantly white institution. The ISEC Academy also created ways and events for students to become involved on the campus of WKU.
**Instruments**

A survey, the ISEC Academy Student Survey (Appendix A), was created by the researchers and distributed to gather data. The ISEC Academy Student Survey contained 56 open-ended and Likert scale type questions derived from the seven components of the ISEC Academy and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Primarily, questions offered participants the opportunity to react to the seven components of the Academy: orientation weekend, living communities, learning communities, program sessions, navigators, belonging, and academic sessions with WKU Center for Literacy. Questions related to these seven components inquired how each component related to the goals of ISEC Academy. As the Likert scale type questions asked students primarily about their satisfaction with various aspects of the ISEC Academy program, results from these questions were not included in the current study to maintain its purpose and public school focus. Additionally, a set of standard questions/prompts were derived from the survey open-ended questions and served as the focus group interviewer protocol. These were presented to students, staff, and the director with opportunity for follow up questions and responses.

**Design**

The present study utilized a qualitative research design, collecting student participant and staff comments and reactions via focus groups, interview (program director was separated from the staff), and open-ended survey prompts. This approach was chosen to allow participants to provide their honest, specific thoughts that could vary from person to person. Open-ended questions allow a participant to state their thoughts without being limited by choices.
Student and staff commentary and reactions were solicited via three concurrent focus groups. Focus groups were chosen as the data collection procedure because they can provide a rich source of information through the collective and individual responses encourage by the setting (Glitz, 1998). Recent research indicates that conducting between three and six separate focus groups is likely to capture 90% of the emerging themes (Guest, Namey, & McKenna, 2017). Focus groups and director interview were used in the current study to allow participants to offer further explanation of survey questions, contribute opinions both through conversation and anonymous written response, and provide qualitative data that would not be feasible to gather by other means.

A survey was used in this study for convenience to participants for ease of completion and reasons of anonymity. Opened-end questions were included on the survey for students to describe and elaborate on their personal thoughts and experiences of the ISEC Academy and school career thus far. The choice to deliver the survey to students near the end of the second semester of participation was made deliberately in an effort to gain insight into the salient and residual value of program components. Only after students experience their freshman year can they make meaningful judgments regarding the long-standing importance of the features of the intervention, their true preparedness for the rigors of what is required for successful college completion, and their reflection on their freshman year.

These qualitative data were coded using the in vivo coding method to look for themes in participants’ statements. The in vivo coding method was chosen because it uses participants’ word-for-word statements to create coding themes or groups (Onwuegbuzie,
Frels, & Hwang, 2016). It was appropriate to examine participants’ statements to gain an understanding of their exact opinions and experiences.

**Procedures**

First, IRB consent for student focus groups and survey (Appendices B and C) for the present study was obtained through Western Kentucky University’s Office of Research Integrity to conduct data through both surveys and focus groups. For the survey portion of this study, all 48 ISEC Academy students were sent a link by Program Manager to the Qualtrics™ survey. The survey was also printed on paper as another completion option for students. ISEC Academy staff provided the students with information regarding the purpose and nature of the survey.

Students who volunteered to complete the survey signed stamped IRB informed consent forms. Participants then filled out the survey electronically or via paper during one of the ISEC Academy’s monthly meeting sessions. All participant information, including names, was de-identified. There were no known risks for participating in the student survey.

Following the completion of the ISEC Academy Student Survey, the focus group and interview portion of this study began. Questions asked during the focus groups and director interview were given by interviewers who were not involved with the ISEC Academy. Focus group questions were based on survey questions to give participants the opportunity to further explain their opinions and experiences within the ISEC Academy.

During one of the ISEC Academy’s monthly meeting sessions with students and staff, the purpose and nature of the student focus groups were discussed by the director. The director also discussed the nature and purpose of focus groups with ISEC Academy
staff members. Student, staff, and the program director who volunteered to participate in focus groups or interview signed stamped IRB informed consent forms. The three student focus groups occurred concurrently during one of the ISEC Academy’s monthly meetings at the Intercultural Student Engagement Center in Downing Student Union.

Statements made during the three focus groups, one staff focus group, and one director interview were video recorded, de-identified, and transcribed. Pseudonyms were given to all participants to maintain integrity of what the person said with respect to privacy. There were no known risks for student, staff, or director participants in focus groups or interview.

Data Analyses

The data collected via the aforementioned procedures were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis of qualitative data requires the systematic process of coding, examining of meaning, and describing the social reality of the emerging themes (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). This qualitative descriptive approach was selected because it requires a relatively low level of interpretation and maintains the authenticity of the student voice (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). The first step required the researchers to become familiar with the data (Kumar, 2014). All data collection sessions were transcribed by the researcher. Each statement from the transcriptions was carefully read by the researcher to determine what the participants were conveying in their answers. The perspective through which the researcher is interpreting the data, in the present case from the lens of a public school employee, guides the coding process (Saldaña, 2015). The qualitative data from focus groups, director’s interview, and surveys were examined keeping in mind the
guiding research questions related to college readiness and the impact public school preparation can have on students’ readiness for transition. The researcher looked for themes in what was explicitly stated (semantic themes) as well as what was implied (latent themes), such as statements of agreement that students did not do or learn in high school or still needed to master presently as a college student. Latent themes emerge beyond the explicit and surface meaning provided by participants. These themes are inferentially related to the research questions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Any statement given that could be related to underpreparedness, secondary education, learning, first year of college needs, transitioning to college, or any area in which public school service providers could influence were selected. Statements related to logistics of the ISEC Academy program, specific only to college life such as dorm preferences, or shared as opinions that are not associated to the public school lens were ignored.

All significant statements were then grouped together based on themes in participants’ statements. Similar statements or related skill sets were coded under the same theme, such as studying, life lessons, motivation, and networking. There were a total of 15 topics that emerged and were each given a code. The number of people who made contributing salient statements out of the total number of people was calculated. Relevancy was determined by which themes were pertinent to answering the research questions. Also taken into consideration was the percentage of participants who commented on the themes and the extent to which public schools can intervene with the presented qualitative results. For example, K-12 public schools cannot alter a student’s personal life situations as easily as it could adjust teaching students how to fill out their financial aid applications prior to beginning their freshmen year of college. When
examining what public schools could learn and how they could intervene based on the data, the services and roles of administrators, teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, and other public school faculty were all considered.
Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

Data were examined to answer the two research questions: What college readiness needs still exist for first time college students upon entrance to a four year public university? In what ways can understanding college readiness needs inform the work of secondary school educators? The researcher examined the data based on the framework of Tinto’s Model of Institutional Action. The researcher focused on what aspects of student success from high school into college that could be controlled for by educators.

The results of the data are presented with the descriptive statistics and then qualitative data from focus groups and director interview. For each theme, the researcher’s interpretation of participants’ statements is given. Qualitative data from the ISEC Academy Student survey is then presented and interpreted. These findings can answer the presented research questions as they provide areas in which secondary schools can interfere to increase college readiness before the students arrive at their institution.

This study is needed as being college ready is often a goal for students when graduating high school and entering their first year of college. However, students are entering college underprepared for collegiate level coursework. It is reported that 40% of freshmen students must take one or more remedial courses and this number is even higher for minority students (Kodama, Han, Moss, Myers, & Farruggia, 2018). Programs, such as the ISEC Academy, are being put into place to help minority students with their transition into college. The researcher, a school psychologist, is looking at the data of those who have been involved with such transitional programs to inform other public school system professionals to fulfill these readiness needs sooner.
Qualitative data were coded using the in vivo coding method. This type of coding was chosen to create themes based on the exact statements of participants. It was important not to change the participants’ phrasing as the researcher wanted to obtain an accurate representation of what the ISEC Academy provided students to fill their readiness needs and what needs still exist going into their second year of college. As these transcriptions were recorded and coded, body language and other non-verbals were not easily included. For the sake of clarity, the researcher used square brackets to finish any thoughts that were completed by the participants during the interviews but appear to be incomplete in their transcribed format.

Qualitative data were collected from three student focus groups, one staff focus group, and one director interview in which participants answered questions based on their experiences with the ISEC Academy. The participants’ statements were then de-identified, transcribed, and coded. A total of 19 participants volunteered to complete the 56 question long ISEC Academy Student Survey. Qualitative data from the surveys were coded similarly to the focus groups and director interview.

**Descriptive Statistics**

A total of 22 students participated in the focus groups. Of these 22 students, nine students are male and 13 are female. Another focus group consisted of three staff members. One director interview was also held. All of these ISEC Academy faculty members are female. A total of 19 students completed the ISEC Academy Student Survey. All participants in this study are persons of color.

During the coding process, using the in vivo coding method, the researcher found 15 themes that were coded, as shown in Table 1. To quantify the frequency of significant
responses made, the number of people who commented on the particular theme was divided by the total numbers of participants in focus groups, interview, and surveys. This number was then converted to a percentage of the whole. Nine of the themes – connections; motivation and support; accountability; studying; college expectations; life lessons; academic help; transition to college; and belonging – best answer the two research questions of this study. This was determined by considering the percentage of participants commenting on each themes, the influence public schools could have on each area, and how each theme could be applied to each question. The other themes that emerged are important to students, as participants discussed them, but do not answer the research questions. These themes – campus locations; mental health; campus life; minority and cultural differences; financial aid; and out of comfort zone – are still

Table 1

*Percentage of Participants Commenting on Each Theme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number Commenting</th>
<th>Percentage of Whole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation and Support</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Lessons</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Expectations</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Help</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Comfort Zone</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to College</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Locations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Life</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority and Cultural Differences</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* There were a total of 45 unique participants across all themes. For themes that had the same number of participants commenting, they were placed in this table in alphabetical order. No priority should be inferred.
included in this table to reflect the entirety of the codes. These themes could potentially inform the researcher and readers of areas of future research.

**Thematic Analysis Map**

The creation of a thematic map is part of completing a thematic analysis when using qualitative research. A thematic map helps researchers and readers to conceptualize the themes that emerge within the data. A thematic map uses a visual to describe the relationships among the themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These are often used in research involving education. The thematic map for the current study is in Figure 1.

This thematic map helps when answering the research questions. The size of the boxes represent the impact of each theme on answering the research question. The number of people who mentioned statements from the themes and the themes’ ability to answer each question were considered when determining sizing of the boxes. The positioning of the boxes, from left to right, show directness in answering each question. The dotted line acts as a bridge to answer both questions.

**Themes**

Of the 15 topics that emerged from participants’ statements in the focus groups and director’s interview, nine topics best answer the research questions. These nine themes are connections; motivation and support; accountability; belonging; transition to college; studying; college expectations; academic help; and life lessons. Each theme will be discussed as each appears on the thematic map, going from left to right, to answer the research questions in chronological order.
Figure 1. Thematic analysis map. This thematic map denotes the relative importance of each code in answering the questions.

The connections category encompasses any significant statement that was related to students building connections, relationships, and networking with other people. Any significant mention of resources provided for students was also included in the connections theme. Any significant statement made about students’ drive to succeed in college and the people who encouraged or helped them was coded under motivation and support. The accountability code includes any significant statement participants made about students being responsible for their course work and other obligations. Any important statements about the positive characteristics the staff members showed to ISEC scholars and the feeling of being a part of something were coded as belonging. The transitioning to college theme is made of statements that describe hardships, such as
difficulty of leaving home, that students faced while changing from high schoolers to college students.

Any significant statement that described students preparing for exams or other course activities was coding under studying. The college expectations theme included any significant statement describing what students need to be aware of during their freshmen year of college. This includes expectations with housing, in the classroom, and socially, as well as related topics. Any significant statements made related to educational skills or course specific needs were coded as academic help. Lastly, the life lessons theme included statements about what skills that students need to succeed during their first year that are not course content specific.

Statements that were deemed as significant and given a code are reported verbatim. This is to ensure the content of the statement is interpreted as the speaker intended. Statements are labeled as to whether it was a student or staff member who had spoken.

Connections. Participants described scholars forming connections or networking with various people to contribute to their freshmen year of college. Participants described the benefits of making connections with faculty, organizations, and others on campus as part of being involved with the ISEC Academy. One student said,

It’s putting us like in, President Caboni was up here last week, so it’s putting us in front of those people, those powerful people on campus so that they know our face, they know our names, that they know that we’re trying.
Another student stated, “Yeah, so they make it easier for us to network on campus.” One recurring trend in the connections section was students noting the importance of networking with various people across campus.

In a similar vein, one student commented on the significance of participating in a panel of important campus individuals. This student stated,

Yeah, that was at the panel where they had that panel of important people, on this campus. I still see some of those people on campus to this day. And I’ll smile and wave and they’ll acknowledge I was a part of ISEC.

Clearly, the connection for students to the ISEC membership is an important part of their participation in this program.

One student added, “Even if it’s getting campus connections with other people ‘cause they like to tie in the program with other organizations on campus.”

Further, another student remarked, “Yeah, that’s actually the reason why they got me involved with the housing department and now I have a job with it.”

Meanwhile, staff members had their own observations of the impact of connections on the ISEC participants. One staff member said, “Students were able to talk to key stakeholders on campus while the parents were getting information about financial aid and things like that.”

Another staff member commented, “From not even on behalf of ISEC but just go in there and speaking, and I would see so many people, so many students getting involved, and the community getting involved with their campus community.”

Participants also discussed how students were able to build connections with people outside of campus, such as community members and alumni. One student said,
“That was a networking event for him ‘cause he wants to be a lawyer when he’s older. So maybe even networking outside of campus to see what other people outside of campus offer.”

Another student stated, “So you said, it’s like, you know, it’s more than just on campus, it’s also, you know, real-world connections outside like she said outside of campus.” This student also saw the value of networking outside of campus.

Participants spoke of the connections they were able to make among others who are involved with the ISEC Academy. A student reported, “…building connections and relationships with new people, makes it feel more enjoyable.”

One student said, “I’m glad I joined because it has helped me make connections to people and to know some of the staff.” Value was found in developing relationships with staff members and other scholars.

This was a reoccurring theme among many of the students. Another student remarked, “Same thing as them – I’ve made a lot of friends through ISEC.”

The opportunity that ISEC presented to meet students and others was discussed. One student stated, “I agree, I feel like ISEC gave me the opportunity to know people that I never would have spoken to without ISEC.”

One student said, “I’m not from here. I didn’t know anybody, like, at all. So me coming here like literally alone, ISEC was really helpful for me. I made some friends basically and then after that you just do you.” Students acknowledged making connections when coming to a new school.

The resources made available for the students during their freshmen year were discussed.
One student said,

But like it’s being able to go knock on somebody’s door, hey do you have this? Can I borrow this? Or if somebody had already taken the class that we were about to take, I went and bought her book off of her.

Where a student can find needed resources was a frequently described. Another student reported,

It gave me a sense of direction on where I can go or where to start. It was like a starting point and then you could just, you know, go out. They tell you where everything is, you know stuff like that, there isn’t just one place to study. They want us to come study but it’s not just here, there’s like quiet rooms you can go to and stuff like that. So it’s just a sense of direction, a starting point in a maze.

One student stated,

But that’s going to be valuable as we go along. Because once we started, especially when we started in our majors, like this being able to come back here we have so many resources in this office. Like you know, needing internships, you know, needing places to go if we need a tutor for a certain subject, like it’s going to be helpful then.

Students acknowledged the resources available to them with the ISEC Academy office.

Also falling into the connections theme, one student stated, “One thing that has been valuable to me over the last two semester is to make sure that you have connection with your professors.” This student found value in working closely alongside their professors during the freshmen year.
Another unique connection is that the ISEC Academy built relationships with the students’ families. A staff member said, “…connect the parents, let me back up with the parents first. To connect the parents with names and faces.”

One student stated, “Yeah, she loves to talk to my parents.” Students commented on the communication between ISEC staff members and their families.

A last connection that the students were able to form was with their mentors. A student remarked, “Like I know if I called my navigator, I can call him now and be like hey man I need some help so [I could get that help.]”

Students looked at their mentors as means for resources needed during their first year of college. One student said, “I expected my navigator to be like resources I would not be able to get as a freshman.”

**Motivation and support.** Participants described how being a part of the ISEC Academy gave students the motivation to stay in college and return a second semester. One student said, “I’m glad that I did ISEC because ISEC kept me motivated in the last semester, like as in coming back. It was like the inner support system that kept me here.”

Participants also stated that students did not feel motivated in high school, but in college became motivated to want more for themselves. A student stated, “Before college, like I didn’t really, like high school, I didn’t really care about it at all. Then once I got here I met people in ISEC that kind of motivated me to want more for myself.”

Another student agreed. This student remarked, “I could say the same thing he said, high school was just really bad for me, but when I got here, it was just like everything would motivate me…” First year students described feeling unmotivated in high school.
One student provided “Just having motivation from people in ISEC,” when asked what was valuable to students during their first year.

Another student stated, “I became part of a group of people that wanted me to be successful and made me feel like I had someone wanting the best from me,” when asked about what help create a feeling of belonging. This was coded under motivation and support due to the student describing the support system the people of ISEC created for the freshmen students.

Students who completed the survey also had similar feelings and experiences as expressed in the focus groups in that some students contribute staying at the institution to participation in the ISEC Academy. One student remarked, “Being in ISEC, without them, I feel as if I wouldn’t be at this school.”

**Accountability.** The next theme that was discussed often is accountability. Participants spoke of a grade sheet that students were responsible for getting filled out.

One student stated,

It helped me stay on track a lot because we had a grade sheet that we had to turn in. We also had to come up here and see Dr. Sales, Ms. Kristina, and them every day. So they were not just like, hey how are you today? They asked how classes were and everything else. They made sure that we were getting things done we’re supposed to be doing besides socializing.

In addition to the sense of accountability the grade sheets brought, participants spoke of the benefit of staff members communicating with the students via texting or emailing to acknowledge the students’ academic performance. One student said, “Them just being there, like what’s going on with your grades? Someone is actually trying to
hold us accountable.” Reporting to the staff members aided in developing accountability for the students.

There were significant survey responses that fell within the topic of accountability. One student responded “grade checks” when asked knowing you know now about freshmen year what navigators could have provided to their mentees. This student wishes to have an upperclassman to monitor the first year students’ academic progress.

Another student also spoke about accountability when asked about how ISEC helped the scholars feel a sense of belonging at WKU. This student responded, “Holding me accountable.”

**Belonging.** The last of the nine themes that answers the research questions is belonging. Participants described the importance of giving first year students purpose, a place, and a sense of belonging on campus. Participants also spoke of the benefit of conducting team building activities for the students. The warm and caring relationships students formed with other scholars, staff members, and other people on campus were also crucial to first year success. Participants described the importance of honesty, understanding, protection, and guidance from the relationships that were developed. Lastly, participants valued the feeling of family that was developed among those involved with ISEC.

Participants felt as though involvement with ISEC brought enjoyment and was a reason for students returning second semester. One student said,
I feel like if I wasn’t in ISEC, I wouldn’t enjoy it here as much as I do. And I don’t think I would have came back this semester. But being in ISEC, I’ve met a whole lot of people. I felt like I was supposed to be here. Being together with other persons of color was also valuable in the return of students second semester. Another student stated,

Just us being all together, cause obviously there’s color people on campus, but just us being together, that’s kind of what kept some of us here. Because if it was just like, scattered with the roaches, I was not coming back last semester seriously. So I think like them keeping us together here like this is what [kept me here]…

Also, as part of belonging, students were explicitly told they matter at WKU. One student remarked,

They had ice cream but she basically made us – this is your home, like what you make out of these next four years or even in the next semester or two, you matter on this campus. I think it like it reassured us with coming to a PWI that we as minorities matter.

The notion of belonging as a person of color at a predominantly white institution was significant for many participants.

Students participated in team building activities during the orientation weekend. One student mentioned,

They used the team building exercises at the beginning I think to build that foundation with us to show, like, it’s okay, you know, to be the class clown, it’s
okay to do what you’re doing, but at the end of the day, we’re still gonna love you, we’re gonna be here for you.

Another student reported,

What about the outdoors course? That had to be biggest one of all of them because that’s where most of us gained those relationships with other people. We had fun out there. A lot of us didn’t like it at first, but we ended up loving it.

Participants felt as if the team building activities brought a sense of belonging.

Another key piece in developing a sense of belonging was the caring nature of the staff members towards the students. One student said, “I like the fact that they, they kind of grab us as like their children and take care of us. And we can come and we can talk to them about literally anything besides school.”

In addition to staff members, others involved with the ISEC Academy such as navigators and resident’s assistants helped created a sense of belonging for the first year students. One student mentioned,

And it was more than just, you know, ISEC, this is about real-world things with him, like, he’s always that type of person you can come in to talk. And he played a big brother role with all of us. We all hung out and we studied together, did our homework together. We helped each other when anybody need help. So he played a big part in why we came back and our success so far.

Another student reported, “I feel like living with ISEC has helped us like build a family ‘cause we kind of are a family.”

One student stated, “During orientation weekend, activities that I thought were valuable were the team building activities and the networking event where we were able
to meet people from different organizations on campus.” This response is comparable to statements made during the focus groups and director interview about the influence of team building activities and the networking event on students’ freshmen year of college.

When asked about the most valuable part of orientation, a student said, “I was late to orientation weekend, but I remember how everyone was so new, yet came together very quickly. We formed a family, a strong family and made sure everyone stayed on the right track.” The familial feeling created among those who were involved with the ISEC Academy was valuable as students arrived on campus.

A staff member said,

So those one on one conversations, initial conversations, I had parents to say I was really afraid about leaving my son here, but now, since I’ve gone through this process, he's going to be okay. He's got a family here, or she's got a family here. Staff members supported what students were saying in that students involved with the ISEC Academy had a family on campus.

Participants also described the feelings of protection that staff members provide. One student stated, “Like, we know that these people aren’t going do anything to harm us and they’re going to watch over us.”

Another student remarked,

Mrs. Kristina always reached out and, you know, if I see her, she knows me by name. You know, you don’t go to a lot of places where Dr. Sales knows you by name or high school you got a principal that don’t even know you, you know what I’m saying. So it just made you feel capable and like you had a family really.
Students also thought staff members knew them personally in comparison to high school where students may not know the staff well.

Students also described the importance of staff members being genuine with them. One student mentioned, “And they’re like honest with you.”

Another student shared similar views in saying, ‘Cause in high school, not even in high school, here I see, I’m an RA, I see some hall director, they be like, hey, how’s it going in class, just basically small talk.

But when you come here, it’s like actual genuine.

Students valued meaningful conversations with others on campus.

A last part of belonging is the staff showing students the same feelings and expectations as their parents. One student said, “It feels like a home. The people who work there, they show us a lot of love and they always stay on our head, just like a real parent would.”

**Transitioning to college.** Any significant comment that was related specifically to becoming a college student was coded under this theme. Participants described how involvement in the ISEC Academy created comfort for the student when being away from home. The challenge of first generation students not knowing or having a person to go to who has attended college is mentioned. The growth students developed throughout their year as a freshmen college student is described. Participants also explained the difficulty students felt when leaving for college. Lastly, participants spoke of the challenge of dealing with the new independence that comes with attending and living on a college campus.
Participants felt ISEC brought comfort during the transition to college. A student said,

ISEC has definitely made it more comfortable for me to also be away from home. ‘Cause I feel like if you’re not comfortable in your environment, you can’t really do good on other things like your schoolwork and grade wise.

Another student mentioned, “But yeah, everything you said, basically it helps with the transition of being away from home...” This student agreed that involvement with ISEC eased the transition of being a high schooler into a college student.

Participants spoke of the difficulties of transitioning into college when students do not know others who attended college. A student stated, “And I feel like because some of us don’t have older siblings that went to college or even have older friends in college, so this is like literally our first go around.”

One student remarked,

No, but it’s really the growth and the growth that we see in ourselves, where we came from to where we are now. Because since we’ve been doing these orientations for TOP, people think I’m an upperclassmen; nope, I’m a freshmen.

Participants acknowledged the growth students develop from the start to the end of their freshmen year of college.

A student reported,

I think the growth in us, even coming in last semester we weren’t doing half of the stuff now ‘cause we were still in a high school mentality. Coming from Louisville, nobody going to tell me how to do this. I’m grown.

The change of the mentality into a college student was discussed.
The difficulty of coming to college was mentioned during the focus groups. One student said, “Yeah, leaving for school was hard.”

Another student stated, “Yeah, leaving for school was difficult. I felt like how he feels. I just feel like I need to be there for my momma even though she can [take care of herself].” Students described the difficulty of leaving their family when coming to college.

Staff members also spoke of this difficulty. One staff member remarked, “I mean, you’ve gone from being at home with your parents with all this direction to being in a classroom where your teachers coddle you so to speak and get you through…”

**Studying.** The theme of studying also arose from what was said during the focus groups and interview. Participants revealed that they did not study while they were in high school. One student stated, “Because in high school I didn’t study, it’s just, I didn’t do it. So I wanted to learn how to study.”

There is also a need for students to know how to study to be successful in college. One student said, “When they taught us how to study, when we all said, hey, I don’t know how to study. ‘Cause I didn’t know how to study, that’s the best program that I remember.” Participants revealed not only are students not studying while in high school and as freshmen, they also do not know how to study.

**College expectations.** There are various expectations participants expressed that could be shared with students that are transitioning from high school into college. One expectation is classroom structure. The participants described classes that felt like a high school class. Another expectation that participants described is planning and following course schedules. Campus life expectations, such as residence halls and policies, were
also discussed. Preparing for college and having the mindset of a college student is another expectation. The difficulty level of collegiate coursework is another expectation for first year students. A last type of expectations that was discussed is expectations for a first generation college student.

Participants felt knowing the other student in a class was similar to a high school class. One student said,

We have Communications together and that’s like a high school class because most of the people you know are in that class. And we get our work done and if we need help we ask everybody, but we tend to socialize a lot.

Other participants spoke of the differences between the feeling of a high school class structure and a college class. One student remarked,

It was a high school feel but I felt like that was great for us ‘cause a lot of us passed that class with B’s and A’s, just because we helped each other. We looked out for each other. We always made sure one another was on task and doing what we was supposed to. So yeah I have, I have positive [feelings].

The feeling of a high school classroom is described as the students knowing and helping out each other.

Another expectation participants wished students would have known earlier is schedules. One student reported,

About my schedule, I wish I learned about my schedule. It would have saved me so much time. And more so really getting to understand. Like, for me being a first student in college in my family, I really didn’t have the guidance that I needed or knew the stuff that I needed to know. So once something passed I was like, oh
okay, that’s what I need to do. So first semester it was just like, okay, this is what’s to be expected of me and then second semester was putting it into action. And I feel like I didn’t need to have that. It was like somebody should have told me, okay look, first semester this is what’s gonna be expected of you.

Students found benefit in staff members helping them with their schedules. Another student stated, “Dr. Sales, she’s helping me with my schedule next semester because I just changed my major…”

Students are also acclimated to the expected policies of one’s institution. One staff member said, “…but policies and procedures to introduce them to those things.”

Participants felt uneasy about college expectations their first semester, then grew more confident second semester. One student stated, “I feel like our first semester was like us getting our feet wet, then we actually know what to do, we was told everything.”

Faculty echoed the students’ feelings about being new at a university. One staff member expressed, “…to coming to an institution where you’re just turned loose. And you’re set free but whatever that looks like for you and you don’t know how to contain that.”

Another expectation students developed was the thinking of a college student. One student said, “They’ve helped me feel like the mind state of a college student.”

A staff member reported, “Every year is a freshmen year because there are going to be new things to learn…” Not only are there going to be new things for students to know during their first year but throughout their college years.
Participants described another expectation that freshmen students did not have, which is the difficulty level of college classes. One student stated, “Yeah, it got harder. I didn’t expect it to be as much as it was.”

A last expectation the students needed to be equipped with is things they need to know as a first generation college student. A staff member said, “To provide them precautions as well as encouragement on things that they may have to face especially being first generation.”

Multiple survey responses were coded under the theme of college expectations. One student wished to have known during orientation weekend, “That this is the real world. It doesn't get easier, it only gets harder.” Similarly to data from focus groups and interview, students wished to have known about the college expectation of difficulty level.

Another student commented, “I feel like the classes are good, but almost feel like the class was being babied a little too much like it was a high school class.” This student was discussing the feelings of being in a high school class compared to a college class.

**Academic help.** Another theme that emerged among participants’ statements that answers the research questions is academic help. Any significant statement related to course content and skills needed to succeed academically during college were categorized under academic help. Some participants were in favor of students taking more or other courses together. One student said,

‘Cause me not taking gen eds with them when they took English, I feel like it kinda put me behind. And they could have just saved so much stuff that I didn’t
understand in class or I was having trouble writing my essay, me being in class with them would have changed that.

A student stated, “I feel like they should probably look into trying to get us some classes together too for the people who weren’t in the classes the first two semesters.” Students saw the benefit of taking the same courses together.

Faculty held similar views. One staff member said, “I wish we had a specialized 199 course. You know just a unique 199, ISEC 199 course, whatever we wanted to call that.” This would be another course the first year students could take together potentially tailored to literacy and academic skills development.

As part of academic help, participants voiced students taking a core course together. Another staff member remarked, “I feel like it needs to be more of a core academic class.”

A narrower focus on academics for college freshmen was also discussed. One student said, “A lot of the navigators, they’re in Greek life, so they invite us to the events and stuff but push that like you push the academics. Oh there’s a communication thing today or there’s a photojournalism thing.” Seemingly, first year students are invited to non-academic events, but also wish to be invited to academic related events on campus.

Faculty showed concern with students still needing to have academic or scholarly skills. One staff member stated,

Learning with minority students, you can put them anywhere and they don’t have a problem knowing how to be minority but they don’t know how to be scholars.

And so that’s the heavy piece the ingraining, incorporating I should say, the
scholarly piece to have them not just see themselves as scholars but have the skills
to be a scholar.

Participants voiced the idea of having study sessions based on specific course
content to help students during the freshmen year of college. A student said, “But I would
like to see study sessions based on a like a course, like a psychology study session or a
math study session, just different ones. Some people might struggle in other subjects,
another person wouldn’t.”

Faculty mentioned biology as a course needed to have content specific study
sessions. One staff member stated, “Biology is one of the ones that they seem to want to
study together on.”

Another staff member reported, “They need having class, but then be able to say,
now come and let’s have a working session where we’re working through some of these
projects or whatever cause they usually have the lab with the biology as well.” Both
faculty and students voiced having more academic help through course specific study
sessions.

Participants also saw a benefit in having academic sessions early and often. A
staff member said, “We started doing academic sessions towards the end, maybe doing
more like in the… trying to set that tone of let’s come in more frequently even when
[professor who can help] can’t be there or someone can’t be there.”

One staff member stated, “But I think academic, we just need to get more
integrated throughout the whole year…” Faculty see a benefit in holding academic
sessions for the freshmen students starting at the beginning of the school year.
In addition to having the academic sessions early, participants also expressed increasing the amount of academic sessions. One staff member remarked, “But overall I think that part and I think having more academic sessions focus more on the academic piece, be intentional in everything.” Having a purpose with the academic sessions is an important part of helping first year students succeed academically.

**Life lessons.** Life lessons were mentioned among students and faculty members. The category includes any non-content specific skill that participants feel students need to learn to be successful during their first year of college. One area in which participants found value in was students learning how to appropriately dress for certain occasions. Participants also discussed the benefit and desire of obtaining advice from older people as a first year student. Skills that are not specific for a certain subject area but are still needed to succeed as a college student and member of society were mentioned. Participants expressed concern for first year students not having organizational and everyday skills. Lastly participants voiced the effect that personal life has on a college student’s performance in school.

Participants saw benefit in a program session over appropriate dress. One student said, “I know they did one for the females and it was just, you know, what to wear and what not to wear when you go out, how to dress more, you know classy.”

Another student stated, “And then I think it was all us go out and buy a little suit and just get together and dress more appropriately.”

Another student reported,
Some of us are not just looking for help for school, but more so life lessons. People that’s older that we associate or see ourselves in, just to figure out how they would do and what they would do in our certain situations. Students are needing help for those who are older in academics and in other areas. Other students affirmed the need for first year students to receive guidance from those who are older. A student remarked,

The simple fact is that I might have did something and I need help or I need older people advice and I don’t know if she’s really going to help me or is she going to just sweep it under the rug.

Another student said, “So I think that something we should’ve did more learning about, like this is how you handle stress…” Participants expressed the need for first year college students to know stress management.

Students still need to know other skills to succeed in college. One student stated, “…how to take a quiz, you know like what to do some tips and stuff like that, that’s very useful as a college student learning tips like that.” A staff member reported,

…of some programming prior to the semester starting is key. So we’re gonna focus on real life experiences. We realized early on, we did a Thanksgiving dinner and we had cards… I got these cards with envelopes for them to send to people they were thankful for or whatever. And they didn’t know how to address a card. They didn’t know what goes at the left and what goes in the middle. They didn’t know any of that. So that made me think, do they know how to write a check? Do they know how to balance stuff? Do they know how to budget? Do they know
about certain things that we take for granted? In that there are certain skills, like skills that we don’t really teach in college. And a lot of our students who come from that first generation, it’s important that they leave here with more than just a grade on their transcript. They need to be prepared for the real world. So we’re gonna gear more of our programming towards that. Like having the academic, then when we do the socials and stuff, making sure that we put in there some… like dressing like how they should dress, or how they interview, resume. A lot of them don’t know what is a cover letter, what is a resume, what do I say when I go to apply for this job, email etiquette…

Staff members were in agreement with students that students need to learn other skills, such as using money, to be successful in college and life.

Another life lesson students need for college is managing their time. One staff member said, “They don’t know what time management is.”

Another staff member stated, “They need to know about time management, they need to know how to write a paper, you know a scholarly paper. They need to know how to research.”

The last part of the life lessons theme that was discussed is personal life of student, in particular male students of color. One student reported,

And then for a black male, if anything is going on in your house, you always feel responsible that you have to take care of it. So if there is something going on in my house and I’m in school, if I have to go home and work for my family then I feel like that’s what I have to do ‘cause I’m obligated…
Another student remarked, “Personal life plays a big part.” Participants felt as though the situations students are facing in their personal lives can impact their life at college.

**Other themes.** There are also six other themes that emerged but do not best answer the research questions. The first of these is campus locations. This is defined as students knowing where buildings and facilities are located physically at their corresponding college campus. Participants were in favor of students learning sooner where buildings are located on campus and amenities within the city of their institution. Students expressed a need to be shown where places were located on campus.

The next theme that emerged is mental health. This topic includes any social, emotional, or cognitive aspect to the student’s wellbeing. Participants mentioned the need to learn how to become aware of and deal with emotions, anxiety, and other mental health concerns.

Another theme that arose is campus life. Campus life is any part of living and being involved with events at a university. Participants spoke of how ISEC students became involved and developed leadership with organizations on campus.

In addition to involvement on campus, the need for students to know all aspects of their institution is mentioned. Knowing about campus as a whole is needed for first year students.

Minority and cultural differences is another theme. Students and faculty members occasionally made statements about the diversity on a college campus compared to high schools.
Students also noticed the staff members’ passion for minority students, as shown by this student’s statement, “You know and she’s about others, you know, minorities and others but us as just people, just being blacks…” Students found value in the ISEC Academy’s staff interest and care for students of color.

Another topic that was given a code is financial aid. Any significant statement participants made about the means of paying for college was coded under financial aid. Participants explained how students do not know how to fill out financial aid applications. In addition to struggling completing financial aid forms, means of paying for college is a challenge students are facing during their first year of college.

The last of all 15 codes is out of comfort zone. Any significant statement made about students feeling uncomfortable was coded as out of comfort zone. Participants described the feelings of discomfort when starting the first year of college as students may not know others at their institution.

**Summary**

A total of 15 themes developed when coding the qualitative data. Nine of the themes – connections; motivation and support; accountability; studying; college expectations; life lessons; academic help; transition to college; and belonging – answer the two proposed research questions. Six other themes – campus locations; mental health; campus life; minority and cultural differences; financial aid; and out of comfort zone – emerged but do not best answer research questions.

Definitions of each code were given, examples of quotes supporting the theme, and researcher interpretation was then provided. This was first carried out for the focus groups and director interview data and then for the open-ended ISEC Academy Student
Survey questions responses. Many important statements were discussed for the focus groups and director interview data, such as the need for life lessons like time management and study sessions as students explained they did not study in high school.
Chapter V: Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine what college readiness needs exist for first year students to find solutions that can be implemented at the secondary school level. This was accomplished by examining what student needs staff and students expressed and what was beneficial to students’ first year success after participation in a college transition program. This study will impact first year students as it is their needs that are the focus and possible solutions will be discussed to lessen their struggles during the freshmen year of college. The study will also impact students of color. This is because all participants in this study were persons of color; therefore, data are likely to best represent this population. Lastly, this study will impact public school personnel, such as school psychologists, school counselors, administrators, and teachers. This is because the researcher is trying to find ways to intervene with college transition needs prior to the students beginning college. Therefore, it will be this group of people carrying out the possible solutions to college readiness needs.

The purpose and groups affected by the current study helped to develop the framework of focusing on what college readiness needs exist that can be controlled or changed by those working in public schools. This chapter explores a discussion of findings in relation to the proposed research questions, implications of the findings, methodological limitations, future research areas, and closing thoughts.

Discussion of Findings

Answers to the two proposed research questions are explicitly stated below. These answers are based on results shared by the participants and coded by the researcher. This
information came from the nine themes that best answered the two research questions. Areas of application within public schools systems for the findings will later be discussed. Ideas of potential education personnel who could carrying out the implications will be provided.

**Research Question 1.** Upon entrance to a four-year university, first year college students have many college readiness needs. These students need to build relationships with staff, professors, administrators, and other students at their corresponding college campuses. Students also need to connect and network with other people outside of their college campuses, such as community members and alumni. Having resources available for students or knowing where to go for resources are college readiness needs for students.

Students also need to develop motivation to remain at and try in college. Another college readiness need freshmen students display is being held accountable for their academic performance. First year students have the college readiness need of difficulty in starting studying and not knowing how to study. These students also need to know what to expect in different areas of college. There are readiness needs students must be aware of and prepared for to succeed in their freshmen year and throughout college. One of these is collegiate level classroom structures, such as rules and approach to teaching. Other expectations students need to be prepared for are schedules, residence halls, university policies, difficulty level of course work, and first generation needs.

Students also have college readiness needs of needing to learn professional, organizational, independent, and everyday skills. In the area of academics, first year students need to have a narrower focus on academics and need more academic skills.
Additionally, this group of students need to know others who are in college or have been to college as well as how to handle the challenge of new independence during college due to being away from home. Lastly, first year students need to form genuine relationships with others; feel a sense of family and belonging; and having a purpose and place at their institution.

**Research Question 2.** Understanding college readiness needs can inform the works of secondary school educators in many ways. One way understanding the college readiness needs of first year students can inform public schools is to prepare the students while they are still attending secondary schools. Treating these transitional needs sooner could allow students to feel more comfortable and prepared as they started their first year.

Understanding these needs can also help secondary schools create interventions to target the students’ needs. This would allow professionals to help students in their area of expertise and determine who is responsible for caring for which college readiness needs. College expectation, academic help, studying, life lessons, transition to college, and belonging are areas in which educators can have impact directly. Additionally, public school personnel could become more understanding of students’ thinking and behavior when they are informed of what students still need upon entering their freshmen year of college.

Consideration of the college readiness needs of students could increase communication and collaborations between secondary schools and universities. Determining responsibility to meet these needs sooner would require communication with educational professionals at the post-secondary level to bring awareness and gain their support in the process.
Implications of the Findings

The college readiness needs that exist for first year students could be tackled while the student is still within the public school system. Ideas for various solutions to these needs are presented with how the concern could be controlled for during the student’s high school years. Each student services-related profession is discussed with possibilities of application to meet the transition needs of students. However, school personnel could be creative in the means that the college readiness needs information is presented to students.

Implications for school psychologists. School psychologists are trained in many educational and behavioral areas that could be utilized to increase college readiness for students. One area of help from school psychologists is to consult with teachers to implement a reward system that encourages and rewards academic engagement within the classroom at the public school level. This could increase student motivation. If students become motivated while in high school, this could carry over into being motivated during college. School psychologists could also use reward systems to encourage studying behavior during high school. School psychologists could hold sessions that teach students while they are still in high school how to study.

School psychologists are also trained in adaptive behavior including independent, social, and everyday skills. School psychologists could hold group sessions that teach, model, and practice life skills that students need to be success in college, such as organizational skills. Another type of group session that school psychologists could start at a high school is on positive decision making. Promoting positive decision making
could help students make safe and smart choices as they deal with the independence that comes with on moving away from home and onto a college campus.

**Implications for school counselors.** School counselors play an important role in bridging the transition from high school to college for students. Therefore, there are many ways school counselors could intervene with transitional needs for students based on results of this study. One way school counselors could help students is creating ways for students to build relationships with people at their potential colleges of interests. This could be accomplished by the school counselor setting up meetings, campus visits, and personally introducing students to representatives of corresponding institutions like admissions counselors. School counselors could also help familiarize students of resources available at universities. One way this could be accomplished is by providing and explaining procedures or other handouts that describe resources and amenities that college campuses offer.

High school guidance counselors can play a large role in the area of expectations. School counselors could help students with the transitional need of needing to know about schedules in college. While the students are still in high school, school counselors could share sample course schedules, explain the process of creating schedules in college, and provide websites or other materials that share more information on course offerings and requirements. School counselors can also inform students of what is to be expected for residence halls and campus policies. Handbooks, websites, and other materials specifying this information about each particular college could be shared with the students prior to the start of their freshmen year of college.
School counselors could also hold sessions with any interested high school student who would be a first generation college student to present some of the needs this specialized group of students could face during their first year. A last idea is that school counselors could create a mentorship program that place students with someone who is currently attending or has graduated from the institution the student is interesting in attending. The mentor could be a source of answers for questions the students may have as well as a familiar face that could be seen on campus.

**Implications for administrators.** High school administrators can intervene with college readiness needs that exist for students. Administrators could develop and incorporate networking events, such as job fairs, that provide students the opportunity to speak with community members in which they may have similar interests and aspirations. Administrators could also plan and create high school courses that teach life skills, such as time management and balancing checkbooks, to solve the challenge of students not obtaining these skills during their first year of college. High school principals and other administrators can also influence the overall school climate at a high school. As students have a transitional need of developing genuine relationships with others, relationships can form while the student is at the secondary school level or even earlier. A familial feeling within the school can help create a sense of belonging and purpose. Administrators could provide a space that is available for students to comfortably come.

**Implications for teachers.** High school teachers can play a role in preparing students for college. Teachers can help hold students accountable for their academic performance. This could be accomplished by maintaining high, yet attainable, goals and grades for students. Teachers could hold grade checks for these students as well as
explain the purpose of being accountable for good grades and consequences of not obtaining good grades.

Teachers can also intervene in the area of students needing to know what is expected within a college classroom. High school teachers can reflect the setup of college classes within their own classrooms. Teachers could provide students with syllabi, calendars, rules, lectures, and activities similar to what professors do in college classrooms. If students are familiar with this type of class structure while in high school, they could feel more comfortable and prepared when they began taking class their freshmen year. Similarly, teachers can describe to students the difficulty level of collegiate course work and present to them samples of this type of classwork. Lastly, teachers can help students create a narrower focus on academics. This can be done within high schools classrooms by prioritizing classroom activities and time. If students are focused on academics during their high school years, they are likely to be focused on the importance of academics during their college years.

Implications for others. Many other public school employees and persons outside of the school system could help students better prepare for their freshmen and following years of college. For example, parents could hold high expectations and forms of accountability for their child’s academic performance. School interventionists and tutors could help students develop a greater number of academic skills. If a high schooler was struggling in reading, strategies could be put into place to improve their reading so their academic concern would not follow into the student’s college years when an abundance of reading is required. All persons involved with a student’s life could influence the student’s motivation. Others encouraging and explicitly telling the student
that they want the student to be successful and achieve dreams could be a source of motivation.

Methodological Limitations

There are some limitations to the set up and carrying out the methods of this study. One limitation is that the current study is not a randomized educational research design. Randomization is strived for in research to ensure all participants have an equal chance as being assigned to a group that does or does not receive an intervention. However, a randomized research design when studying in the field of education is unethical. Students cannot be denied educational services that are considered necessary for learning (Sullivan, 2011). It would not be fair nor ethical to deny a student participation within the ISEC Academy for the sake of this study.

Another limitation of the current study is participation. While 22 students total participated in the focus groups, 26 students did not. Similarly, not all scholars of the ISEC Academy completed the ISEC Academy Student Survey. There is participant bias as there was no random sample of ISEC students. Students who felt strongly about their experiences during their freshmen year may have chosen to participate in the focus groups or survey over those who did not hold as intense feelings. Another weakness in the area of participation is that the researcher was aware of students who began as scholars in the ISEC Academy but left WKU during their first year. These students were excluded from the study.

An additional limitation of the study is researcher bias. The researcher attempted to represent all data throughout the coding and reporting of statements made by staff and students. The researcher was the only person to determine what were significant
responses by students and staff and then code into corresponding themes. Interpreting what is and is not significant for a study, definitions of themes, and how statements are sorted may vary from person to person that analyzes the data. Due to only one person interpreting the results, there is a lack of interrater reliability that could strengthen the findings of this study.

There are also limitations with the format of collecting data through focus groups, interview, and surveys. Students may have been unwilling to talk and share their thoughts and experiences during a focus group. This could be due to characteristics of the person, such as being shy or fear of disagreement from others in the group when talking. A weakness with collecting qualitative data through surveys is students intentionally leaving open-ended questions blank.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There are many areas in which future studies can be developed based on findings from this study. One possibility would be to examine how the concerns of students and university staff in campus locations, campus life, financial aid, mental health, minority and cultural differences, and out of comfort zone could be addressed within public schools. These areas could require significant planning and support from both the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Another possibility for future research is examining similar college transition programs to the ISEC Academy that are already in place in various regions of the United States. This study took place at WKU, which is PWI located within the southeast region of the U.S. Other universities that vary in size, location, demographics, and government affiliation could result in different college readiness needs for students.
Future research could examine college readiness needs for other minority groups of students other than students of color. Students from other racial or ethnic minority groups, religious, sexual orientation, and other minority groups may express different college readiness needs than those discussed in this study. While participants from this study are persons of color, there was no other population examined for comparison of transitional needs between groups. Therefore, it cannot be determined if these college readiness needs are different for students of color than other students. Comparisons of minority students’ needs to those of the majority could reveal unique needs for various student groups and be valuable for implications.

Lastly, future studies could measure the progress and retention of students who participate in college transition program similar to the ISEC Academy throughout their years at a corresponding university. Entrance to college from high school, completion of freshmen year, and return sophomore year is very important. However, the goal of post-secondary educational institutions is to produce graduates. Knowing graduation rates in follow up studies to support carrying out of these types of programs could also reveal areas of improvement and guide future research.

**Closing Thoughts**

There are differences in college readiness for students of color, especially in the area of belonging. High schools and universities are also defining college readiness differently. This study examined a transitional program established at WKU through the lens of a school psychologist. The researcher, while considering Vincent Tinto’s Model of Institutional Action, focused on college readiness needs that could be influenced by public school personnel. The purpose in this was to find transitional needs and then
discuss ways these needs could be reached before the students’ freshmen year of college. Two research questions were proposed: What college readiness needs still exist for first time college students upon entrance to a four year public university? In what ways can understanding college readiness needs inform the work on secondary school educators? Results from this study were gathered based on qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, and the ISEC Academy Student Survey open-ended questions. A total of 45 student and staff participants were a part of the focus groups, interview, and survey. Responses from these data gathering means were coded using the in vivo coding method. A total of 15 themes emerged from the data. However, only nine themes – connections; motivation and support; accountability; belonging; transition to college; studying; college expectations; academic help; and life lessons – answered the two research questions. Implications for various public school personnel were provided with possible ideas of ways to meet this college readiness needs of students. Limitations of the current study as well as areas of future research were discussed.
References

ACT. (2018). The condition of college and career readiness. Retrieved from:
https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/cccr2018/National-
CCCR-2018.pdf

Arensdorf, J., & Naylor-Tincknell, J. (2016). Beyond the traditional retention data: A
qualitative study of the social benefits of living learning communities. Learning
Communities: Research & Practice, 4(1), 1-16.

community college students in a college transition program. Community College

Bahr, M. W., Leduc, J. D., Hild, M. A., Davis, S. E., Summers, J. K., & Mcneal, B.
(2017). Evidence for the expanding role of consultation in the practice of school
psychologists. Psychology in the Schools, 54(6), 581-595. doi:10.1002/pits.22020

college thrivers and divers apart? A contrast in study habits, attitudes, and mental

influence on postsecondary enrollment. Research in Higher Education, 54(7),
781-804.

Bimper, A. Y. (2017). Mentorship of black student-athletes at a predominately white
American university: Critical race theory perspective on student-athlete


doi:10.5204/intjfyhe.v2i1.119


Orientation Weekend
In reflecting on what you experienced during the Orientation Weekend in August 2017:

1. During your freshman year, what do you remember as having been valuable to you from the Orientation Weekend?

2. Who during the Orientation Weekend made the greatest impact on you?

____________________________
In what way(s)?

3. In what ways did the Orientation Weekend meet or exceed your expectations?

4. Knowing what you know now about your freshman year in college, what do you wish you had been told/experienced during the Orientation Weekend?

Please rate the following experiences from the Orientation Weekend with 1 being the lowest rating (least value to you) and 10 (most value to you) being the highest rating.

CIRCLE ONE NUMBER: 1 = LOW 10 = HIGH

5. Session 1: Counseling and Testing (Friday)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

6. Session 2: Student Conduct (Friday)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

7. Session 3: WKU Police (Friday)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

8. Session 4: CCPD/SARC (Friday)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

9. Session 5: Financial Aid (Friday)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

10. Dr. Dye: Body (Saturday)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall
11. Dr. Laves: Mind (Saturday)

Do not recall

12. Ms. Satterwhite: Soul (Saturday)

Do not recall

13. Denise Hardesty: Academically Cultured (Saturday)

Do not recall

14. The Orientation Weekend activities were important to me.

Do not recall

Housing (Living arrangements)

In reflecting on the experience of housing with other ISEC Academy students:

15. What were some of the positive aspects of living with other ISEC Academy students?

16. In what ways did living in the same dorm as other ISEC Academy students help you socially?

17. In what ways did living in the same dorm as other ISEC Academy students help you academically?

18. Describe the pluses (or any minuses) of living in the same dorm as other ISEC Academy students in terms of your success your freshman year.

Please rate the following experiences from living in the same dorm as other ISEC Academy students with 1 being the lowest rating (least value to you) and 10 (most value to you) being the highest rating.

CIRCLE ONE NUMBER: 1 = LOW 10 = HIGH

19. I believe that the housing arrangements of having the ISEC Academy students live in the same dorms was good for me.

Do not recall
20. I believe that living in the same dorms with ISEC Academy students helped me socially.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

21. I believe that living in the same dorms with ISEC Academy students help me academically.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

22. I believe that housing arrangements that put ISEC Academy students together in dorms is important.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

Learning Communities

In reflecting on the experience of having classes with other ISEC Academy students:

23. What were some of the positive aspects of having classes with other ISEC Academy students?

24. In what ways did having classes with other ISEC Academy students help you socially?

25. In what ways did having courses as other ISEC Academy students help you academically?

26. Describe the pluses (or any minuses) of living in the same dorm as other ISEC Academy students in terms of your success your freshman year.

Please rate the following experiences from having the same classes as other ISEC Academy students with 1 being the lowest rating (least value to you) and 10 (most value to you) being the highest rating. CIRCLE ONE NUMBER: 1 = LOW 10 = HIGH

27. Having classes with other ISEC Academy students was beneficial for me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

28. Having classes with other ISEC Academy students helped me socially.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

29. Having classes with other ISEC Academy students helped me academically.
30. It is important that the ISEC Academy provide courses for students to take together with other ISEC students.

Programming/Sessions Offered in the ISEC Academy

In reflecting on what you experienced by attending the sessions scheduled for ISEC Academy participants each month during your freshman year:

31. What do you remember as having been valuable to you over the last two semesters?

32. Which session stands out above all others as the most impactful session you attended? _________________

A. Describe the session and explain in what way(s) it was helpful to you?

33. In what ways did the sessions scheduled for ISEC Academy students meet or exceed your expectations?

34. Knowing what you know now about your freshman year in college, what do you wish had been offered as sessions?

Please rate the following experiences from the ISEC Academy programming sessions with 1 being the lowest rating (least value to you) and 10 (most value to you) being the highest rating.

**CIRCLE ONE NUMBER: 1 = LOW 10 = HIGH**

35. I felt like most of the sessions were a good use of my time.

36. The ISEC Academy sessions helped me socially.

37. The ISEC Academy sessions helped me academically.
38. I believe that the ISEC Academy sessions were important to my success.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

Navigators

In reflecting on what you experienced in working with the ISEC Navigators during your freshman year:

39. What do you remember as having been valuable to you in meeting with and working with the Navigators over the last two semesters?

40. In what ways did working with the Navigators help you (specific examples)?

41. In what ways did working with the ISEC Navigators meet or exceed your expectations?

42. Knowing what you know now about your freshman year in college, what do you wish the Navigators had done or provided for you that would have helped you?

Please rate the following experiences from working with the Navigators with 1 being the lowest rating (least value to you) and 10 (most value to you) being the highest rating.

CIRCLE ONE NUMBER: 1 = LOW 10 = HIGH

43. Having a Navigator to meet with me was important to my success.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

44. My Navigator helped me fit in socially.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

45. My Navigator helped me be successful academically.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

46. The ISEC Academy should keep having Navigators for students.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

47. My Navigator was always there at the scheduled time.
48. My Navigator was always interested in me and my well-being.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

**Belonging**

What does “**belonging**” mean to you in terms of being a member of the ISEC Academy?

49. In what ways has the ISEC Academy helped you feel like you belonged at WKU?

50. What are some of the experiences you have had at WKU that you attribute to your sense of belonging?

Please rate the following experiences in being in the ISEC Academy in terms of BELONGING with 1 being the lowest rating (least value to you) and 10 (most value to you) being the highest rating. **CIRCLE ONE NUMBER: 1 = LOW 10 = HIGH**

51. I think that the ISEC Academy help me belong at WKU.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

52. I do feel like I belong at WKU because of being in the ISEC Academy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

53. I believe that it is important for me to feel like I belong at WKU.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall

**WKU Center for Literacy Academic Study-Skills Sessions**

Respond to each of the following in terms of the sessions you attended with the **WKU Center for Literacy**.

54. How many sessions offered through the WKU Center for Literacy (Dr. Logsdon) did you attend in April 2018?

____________

55. How would you rate the usefulness of the sessions you attended?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do not recall
56. What suggestions do you have for future sessions that would help you?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B
Focus Group Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: ISEC Academy Year One Program Evaluation (focus group)
Investigators: Dr. Daniel Super, Daniel.super@wku.edu
Dr. Pamela Petty, pamela.petty@wku.edu

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. **You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.**

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this project is to evaluate the services and interactions provided by you during the ISEC Academy in fall of 2017 through spring semester 2018. The investigators will use the information gathered regarding this programming to inform and improve future interactions, content, and delivery. Additionally, we want to know some things about how motivations and expectations of this Academy were experienced by you. We are interested in tailoring this work to provide the best and most supportive experience for all involved.

2. **Explanation of Procedures:** We are asking that you provide honest, confidential responses in a focus group regarding as many as seven (7) aspects of the ISEC Academy this last year.

   1). Orientation Weekend reflection
   2). Living communities (being in same dorms)
   3). Learning (cohort courses)
   4). ISEC Academy Programming (sessions offered to you)
   5). Navigators value to you
   6). Belonging (impact of ISEC Academy on your personal feeling of belonging)
   7). Academic sessions through the WKU Center for Literacy

3. **Discomfort and Risks:** There are no known risks or discomfort associated with your voluntary decision to take part in this study.
4. **Benefits**: The information you provide to the investigators of this project will prove valuable to their understanding of how best to provide supports and to structure the ISEC Academy. You will receive the benefits of participating in the program regardless of your decision to participate in the data collection procedures described in step number two.

5. **Confidentiality**: The researchers will not divulge any identifying information that may associate you with the information you provide in completing these surveys. Finally, all reporting of findings yielded by this study will be aggregated and/or blinded to identifying information. All data collected for this project will be secured in an office at WKU for a minimum of three years.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal**: Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

   You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

____________________________   ________________
Signature of Participant              Date

____________________________   ________________
Witness                              Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. *(Initial here)*

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mason, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2120

WKU IRB# 18-341
Approved: 3/30/2018
End Date: 12/31/2018
Expedited
Original: 3/30/2018

92
APPENDIX C
Survey Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: ISEC Academy Year One Program Evaluation (survey)
Investigators: Dr. Daniel Super, Daniel.super@wku.edu
Dr. Pamela Petty, pamela.petty@wku.edu

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University.
The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be
used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions
you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below.
Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person
who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project: The purpose of this project is to evaluate the
programming provided for you during the ISEC Academy in fall of 2017 through spring
semester 2018. We will use the information gathered regarding this programming to inform and
improve future content and delivery. Additionally, we want to know some things about how
motivations and expectations of this Academy were experienced by you. We are interested in
tailoring this work to provide the best and most supportive experience for all involved.

2. Explanation of Procedures: We are asking that you provide honest, confidential
responses on a survey regarding seven (7) aspects of the ISEC Academy this last year.

   1). Orientation Weekend reflection
   2). Living communities (being in same dorms)
   3). Learning (cohort courses)
   4). ISEC Academy Programming (sessions offered to you)
   5). Navigators value to you
   6). Belonging (impact of ISEC Academy on your personal feeling of belonging)
   7). Academic sessions through the WKU Center for Literacy

You will be asked to complete a survey (approximately 20 minutes) regarding your experience in
the ISEC Academy. We are asking that you provide some insights into your thoughts,
motivations, and expectations as a participant in the ISEC Academy. This will be a paper
survey, but we will NOT ask for identifying information. You will have an opportunity to
volunteer to participate in focus groups to better tell about your experiences in the ISEC
Academy in your own words.

WKU IRB# 18-341
Approved: 3/30/2018
End Date: 12/31/2018
Expedited
Original: 3/30/2018

93
3. **Discomfort and Risks:** There are no known risks or discomfort associated with your voluntary decision to take part in this study.

4. **Benefits:** The information you provide to the investigators of this project will prove valuable to their understanding of how best to provide supports and to structure the ISEC Academy. You will receive the benefits of participating in the program regardless of your decision to participate in the data collection procedures described in step number two.

5. **Confidentiality:** The researchers will not divulge any identifying information that may associate you with the information you provide in completing these surveys. Finally, all reporting of findings yielded by this study will be aggregated and/or blinded to identifying information. All data collected for this project will be secured in an office at WKU’s main campus for a minimum of three years.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

   *You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.*

   
   
   Signature of Participant               Date
   
   Witness                              Date

   THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
   THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
   THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
   Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
   TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

   WKU IRB# 18-341
   Approved: 3/30/2018
   End Date: 12/31/2018
   Expedited
   Original: 3/30/2018