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**IMPACT OF THE EOF ACADEMIC COACHING PROGRAM ON SELECTED
FIRST YEAR EOF STUDENTS**

by
Calvin Cheung

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services, Administration, and Higher Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of
Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration
at
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June 26, 2012

Thesis Chair: Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

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ABSTRACT

Calvin Cheung

**IMPACT OF THE EOF ACADEMIC COACHING PROGRAM ON SELECTED FIRST
YEAR EOF STUDENTS**

2011/12

Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

Master of the Arts in Higher Education Administration

The goal of this study was to investigate the impact of the EOF Academic Coaching Program on selected first year EOF students. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling which comprised of six first year EOF students who participated in the Academic Coaching Program during the Fall 2011 semester at Rowan University which is located in Glassboro, New Jersey. Interviews were conducted to learn more about the students' background and experiences prior to attending college, experience during their first semester of college, and future goals and aspirations after college. Findings revealed that the Academic Coaching Program contributed towards first year EOF students' academic adjustment to college. The findings also showed that students found value in their participation in the program because it helped them develop study strategies and provided them support in their academic courses. In addition, students expressed that the program had contributed towards achieving their goals and aspirations.

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Chapter I

Introduction

There have been a number of factors that are used to classify an individual as being of low-socioeconomic status. Factors such as an individual's parental income, education, and occupation have been associated with low-socioeconomic status (Walpole, 2007). Literature describes low-income students as having low persistence and attainment rates towards graduating with a college degree (Walpole, 2003). In response to this issue, colleges and universities have implemented academic support programs geared towards helping low-income students persist through college and achieve their goal of graduating with a bachelor's degree.

It is important for college administrators and student affairs professionals to understand the experiences of low-income students participating in a retention program during their first year of college. Exploring the experiences of low-income students in their first year in college would help student affairs professionals and administrators understand how retention programs are assisting low-income students to persist and achieve academically but also to examine whether these programs are assisting students to learn the skills necessary to become successful after college.

Statement of the Problem

President Obama's (2009) state of the union address mentioned the importance of college completion of all Americans and proposed that by 2020, the United States will

lead all countries with the most people with college degrees (as cited in Bettinger, Baker, & National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011). Previous research has discussed the positive outcomes associated with academic support and retention programs in helping students of low socioeconomic status persist in college. Additional research is needed to examine further the experiences of low-income students and their attitudes from their participation in an academic support or retention program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of first year EOF students participation in the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Academic Coaching Program offered at Rowan University. Undergraduate students are admitted into the EOF program based on low-income status. The study involved interviewing first year EOF students about their pre-college experiences, experiences during their first semester of college, and their goals and aspirations for the future. An interview was conducted with six first year EOF students who participated in the Academic Coaching Program in the fall 2011 semester.

Significance of the Study

The research findings may assist the Director of the Academic Coaching Program in terms of understanding the experiences of first year EOF students' participation in the program. The responses that students provide will reveal whether their participation in an Academic Coaching Program during their first semester of college had an impact on their transition and academic adjustment to college. Furthermore, the findings may assist student affairs professionals and faculty members to better understand the experiences of EOF students enrolled in their first semester of college.

Assumptions and Limitations

The assumptions and limitations of the research study include potential for researcher bias because I was employed as an academic coach for the Educational Opportunity Fund Program at Rowan University during the data collection period. There is also a possibility that a student's experience in the program may be different because of the difference in coaching styles that were used by academic coaches. Academic Coaches work with students on various academic skills; however, the style or approach in which the academic coach implements in assisting the student in learning about these academic skills could influence whether the student viewed the program as beneficial. In addition, a possible assumption and limitation is that students understood each interview question and provided truthful responses.

Operational Definitions

1. Academic Coaching Program: A support program that provides academic assistance to students who participate in the Educational Opportunity Fund Program at Rowan University. EOF students meet with an academic coach for an hour once a week to discuss their progress in their courses and to develop study strategies for assisting them in their academic studies.
2. Academic Coach: A graduate student enrolled in the M.A in Counseling in Educational Settings or Higher Education Administration program at Rowan University. The role of an academic coach is to provide academic assistance to undergraduate students and monitor their academic performance throughout the semester.

3. Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF): A program that assists students who come from disadvantaged communities or have a prior history of financial hardship through academic and financial support.
4. Pre-college Characteristics: Characteristics that are taken into consideration before students attend their first year in college such as socioeconomic status, academic achievement, and high school GPA.
5. Student Persistence: Students at Rowan University who enroll the following year after their first year in college.
6. Study Strategies: Topics that are covered in the Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University include: time management, note taking, test preparation, goal setting, and organization skills.
7. Summer Bridge Program: A program that is required of all incoming first year EOF students in the summer to help them successfully transition from high school to college. The program's intent is to help students acquire the skills such as time management, organization, and motivational skills needed for being successful in college. The program is also known as the Pre-College Summer Institute at Rowan University.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions:

1. How did first year EOF students' background in regards to their demographics, family, prior schooling, and decision to attend college influence their transition and academic adjustment to college?
2. How did first year EOF students' residency and on or off-campus involvement influence their transition and academic adjustment during the first semester of college?
3. What are first year EOF students' experiences in their academic courses during their first semester of college? How helpful was the Academic Coaching Program in their academic success in these courses?
4. What are the experiences that contribute to first year EOF students' success inside the classroom through their participation in an Academic Coaching Program?
5. What are the experiences that contribute to first year EOF students' success outside of the classroom through their participation in an Academic Coaching Program?
6. What did first year EOF students benefit from their participation in an Academic Coaching Program? Are first year EOF students' goals and aspirations influenced from their participation in an Academic Coaching Program?

Overview of the Study

Chapter II addresses the literature used to understand low-income students, previous research studies that examine the impact of academic support programs on low-income students, and college student development theories that are relevant to the research study.

Chapter III explains the methodology used for collecting data. The chapter explains where the study was conducted; information about the interview sample, instrument used to collect the data, and the procedures that were followed.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the research study. The chapter examines the research questions posed in Chapter I. Data are presented qualitatively in the form of tables and quotes from first year EOF students in regards to their pre-college experience, first year experience, and their goals and aspirations for the future.

Chapter V consists of a summary of the study, discusses major findings, offers conclusions, and addresses implications for practice and further research.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Over the years, retention programs such as mentoring, tutoring, and academic support programs have been implemented at colleges and universities aimed at retaining low-income students toward completion of their bachelor's degree. Although retention programs serve an important role in helping low-income students with their academic and social adjustment in college; additional research is needed to examine the impact of a retention program on their transition and academic adjustment to college.

The literature review provides a description of the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program and discusses the impact of various retention programs that assists low-income students to persist and achieve academically in college. College student development theories that are relevant to understanding the experiences of low-income students include: Alexander Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement, Vincent Tinto's (1988) theory of departure, and Nancy K. Schlossberg's (1995) theory of transition. The significance of these theories is that it builds a theoretical framework for understanding the proposed research questions which examine the experiences of selected first year EOF students' participation in an Academic Coaching Program.

Educational Opportunity Fund Program

The Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF) is a New Jersey state funded program that assists low-income students along with other students who come from underrepresented groups in achieving their goal of graduating with a bachelor's degree (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007). "The program sponsors more than one-third of African Americans and Latino students at colleges and universities, at the state colleges, and New Jersey's independent institutions" (State of New Jersey Commission on Higher Education, 2007, para. 4).

Admittance into the program is based on household income; students meeting the criteria for income are granted admission into the program and are required to attend a summer bridge program that assists them in their transition to college (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007). The EOF program has served students by providing academic support, peer counseling programs centered on helping students transition smoothly, and persist in college (State of New Jersey Commission on Higher Education, 2007).

Retention Programs

The EOF program, along with TRIO, which is a program developed in the late 1960s, are geared towards helping at risk students persist throughout their undergraduate education and obtain the skills needed to become successful in college (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). Mentoring programs are a form of retention that allows students who lack the support and encouragement to persist in college through one on one interaction with a mentor (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). Schell (2010) conducted a qualitative study that examined the perceptions of underprepared students towards their experience in a summer bridge program. A finding that the researcher

discovered was that students found that having mentors were one of the most important part of their pre-college institute (PCI) experience because of the support that was provided to them.

An example of a mentoring program is the Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University which assists undergraduate students in acquiring successful study habits and strategies needed to become successful in college. Bettinger, Baker, and National Bureau of Economic Research (2011) conducted a study on the effects of student coaching at colleges and universities. The study involved a control and experimental group which were used to determine the impact of student coaching on students who participated in the program compared to students who did not participate in the program. The study revealed that students' participation in the Academic Coaching Program increased their persistence rates and the likelihood that they would graduate from college.

The researchers stated that the Academic Coaching Program provided a way for students to feel more closely connected to the university (Bettinger et al., 2011). This may be the result of the interaction that takes place between the academic coach and the student in which the academic coach may encourage the student to become involved in a student organization or take advantage of student support services offered on campus. The importance of mentoring programs has also been successful in assisting students with their adjustment and transition to college. Wallace, Abel, and Ropers-Huilman (2000) conducted a qualitative study that examined students' experiences and participation in a mentoring program. The study revealed that students benefited from the mentoring program in different ways and that two participants felt that the program motivated them

to persist through college because they were not used to others expressing concern about their performance. Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) explain that students who have a mentor may help them become better accustomed to the campus community and recommend services that would be beneficial for them. For instance, if academic coaches discuss personal and career aspirations with undergraduate students, it may have an effect on their academic performance. Studies have shown that programs centered on at risk students have had a positive effect on academic achievement and persistence rates of students (Kulik, Kulik, & Shwalb, 1983).

Low-Income Students

Green (2006) states that low-income students face challenges of adjusting to the academic and social aspects of college and that they do not experience the same success as high-income students. The role of policy makers, administrators, and researchers has been to develop programs or services that are geared towards improving access, retention, and completion rates of underserved students. The development of these programs or services was derived from a deficit model which labeled low-income students as lacking the necessary skills to be successful in college (Green, 2006). Although these programs have been referred to as a solution to fix all problems, there are still issues pertaining to the retention and graduation rates of underserved students. Green (2006) discusses that in a deficit model, underserved students are often judged by what they cannot do rather than what they can do. Additional work is needed in secondary and post-secondary education to emphasize the importance of focusing on students' strengths rather than their weaknesses (Green, 2006).

Walpole (2003) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the differences between college graduates with low-socioeconomic status compared to college graduates with high-socioeconomic status. The findings of the research study revealed that students of low-socioeconomic status were less likely to be involved on campus, had lower GPAs, spent less time studying, and were more likely to work 16 hours or more per week (Walpole, 2003). All of these variables are influential in the persistence and completion rates of low-income students.

Literature has shown that low-income students who work while attending college decrease their level of engagement on campus and time devoted towards their academic courses. Walpole (2011) conducted a qualitative study that examined how social class and the context of the campus influenced the experiences of students enrolled at selective institutions. The qualitative study reported that much of the students' decision to become involved on campus was influenced by financial constraints. For instance, one student expressed how becoming involved in social organizations was expensive. Another student stated that it was not possible to attend a freshman orientation program because the student had to work.

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) examined whether student engagement had an effect on students' grade point average and persistence in college. The findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between student engagement and their academic achievement and persistence in college. The researchers also explored whether pre-college characteristics such as high school GPA and SAT scores had an impact on the level of student engagement in their study. The study revealed that pre-college characteristics are taken into consideration for being admitted into college but are

not effective in determining whether the student will succeed academically in college (Kuh et al., 2008). For instance, a low-income student who lives at home, works part-time, and enrolled full-time in college are factors that may influence whether the student will do well in their courses and persist through college.

Academic Involvement

Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement is referred to as the amount of physical or psychological energy a student invests in a particular activity. According to Fischer (2007), the more a student is involved on campus, the greater the likelihood that the student will persist in college and perform well academically. The importance of student involvement and engaging low-income students academically not only helps them persist through college but also integrates them into the campus community.

Astin (1999) refers to a student as being a "black box" in which programs being implemented at a college or university are evaluated by administrators in terms of their effectiveness. A pedagogical theory that Astin (1999) discusses is subject matter theory which is a concept centered on the belief that if the college or university attracts knowledgeable professors to teach students at their institution, it will improve the intellectual development of college students on campus. The limitation with this approach is that professors would focus on lecturing to students rather than ensuring they understand the material. Therefore, students may become academically disengaged and focus their attention on other interests. According to Astin (1999), students' attention is in competition with a number of factors such as academics, friends, and family; therefore, student affairs professionals have found it difficult to find ways to actively engage students academically. Faculty, administrators, and staff must understand how an

institution's policies, procedures, and resources affect the way students utilize their time in order to improve academic involvement on campus (Astin, 1999).

Impact of Institutional Culture on Engagement

Porter (2006) mentions that engagement has been a popular research topic; however, very little research has been done that explain whether institutional characteristics have an impact on engagement at colleges and universities. Porter (2006) examined three institutions based on selectivity, size, and research orientation to examine the impact of engagement on each institution. He explained that institutions that are selective are more likely to have peer effects in which students are influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of other students who live on campus (Porter, 2006). The size of the institution is important to consider in relation to engagement because institutions that have large enrollment rates may hinder students from becoming engaged on campus. The impact of a research university environment on the engagement of students could mean less time for student and faculty interaction (Porter, 2006).

The significance of this article is that the policies and procedures created within the university have an effect on whether students will become engaged on campus. Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) discuss the concept of reciprocal engagement which explains that not only does the student have the responsibility to take the initiative for becoming more actively involved on campus, but the institution must develop programs, and foster a culture of engagement on campus (as cited in Kuh et al., 2008). In order to understand student engagement on campus and the outcomes associated with involvement, it is essential to understand how the institutional culture affects students at colleges and universities.

Chickering, Gamson, and American Association for Higher Education (1987) compiled seven principles for good practices for colleges and universities which include: encouraging active learning, cooperation among students, prompt feedback, increased student and faculty interaction, time on task, communication of high expectations, and respect for diverse ways of learning. These seven principles are important especially in the first year of college when low-income students are learning about the campus community and the expectations of them as college students. For instance, some of these principles are incorporated into the summer bridge program in which low-income EOF students participate before they attend classes. Some of the principles that are focused upon in the program are the communication of high expectations and the importance of devoting time on a particular task (Chickering et al., 1987). These are important principles to consider because low-income students along with other students in the EOF program may not be aware about the expectations required of them in college.

Reynolds and Weigand (2010) conducted a study that examined first year students' academic and psychological attitudes toward academic achievement. The researchers found that students who were academically or socially engaged on campus had high academic achievement and were more likely to become better adjusted to the expectations of college. The study also revealed that motivation, self-efficacy, and perceptions of the environment did not significantly influence academic achievement. The researchers discussed that a reason for this may be due to their research focusing solely on GPA as being the indicator of academic achievement (Reynolds & Weigand, 2010).

Persistence and Transition of Low-Income Students

Tinto (1988) explains in his theory of student departure the three stages associated with students leaving college. He looks at student departure through the work of Arnold Van Gennep's concept of membership. Van Gennep was a Dutch Anthropologist who viewed life as a series of passages through the utilization of ceremonies and rituals (Tinto, 1988). An example of this is when low-income students enroll in college, their entrance or participation in the summer bridge program serves as a passage way into adulthood and opens a new chapter in their lives.

Van Gennep concluded that as individuals move through these passages they move through three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation (Tinto, 1988). When low-income students move into college, they experience separation as they must separate themselves from family, friends, and the community in which they were brought up. They soon experience transition as they try to adjust to the social and academic aspects of the campus community. After students have transitioned into the campus culture, they experience the incorporation phase as they try to become more inclusive in the campus community. Students may join organizations affiliated with their interests or attend athletic events on campus to feel a sense of belonging (Tinto, 1988). However, Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993), Nora and Cabrera (1996), and Pollard (1990) discuss that it is debatable as to whether Tinto's stage of separation is applicable to low-income students since they need the support of family and friends in order to persist through college (as cited in Fischer, 2007).

Considering Tinto's (1988) theory of student retention, low-income students experience a number of transitions and events during their college career which makes it

difficult for them to persist through college and achieve academically. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) explain that students make sense of their transition by understanding the type, context, and impact of their transition. Low-income students may have unanticipated transitions; for example, their parents may experience financial difficulty and they are needed to provide assistance to their family. The context of the transition is important to consider because it helps the individual understand where the transition is taking place and the relationship that exists between the individual and the transition (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg et al. (1995) describe the impact of a transition as “the degree to which the transition alters one’s daily life” (p. 33). If the transition is causing a student to become depressed or experience uncontrollable anxiety that affects his or her academics, it would be best for the student to re-evaluate their transition.

Furthermore, low-income students who undergo a transition such as leaving home to attend college, utilize strategies to help cope with their transition. Schlossberg et al. (1995) refer to situation, self, support, and strategy as coping mechanisms for helping an individual cope and understand the transition that he or she is experiencing. In order to make sense of their transition, low-income students may examine the situation by deciding whether they have any control over their transition such as the decision to attend college. Individuals also consider the “self” in terms of their personal characteristics and psychological resources. For instance, low-income students may worry about whether they have enough money to afford college, which may lead them to interpret their transition pessimistically because there is no guarantee that they would be able to fund their college education (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Students may also use social support

such as friends or family to help cope and take control of the transition they are experiencing (Schlossberg et al., (1995).

Summary of the Literature Review

Literature has shown that low-income students are less likely to graduate from college and spend more time working than their high income peers (Walpole, 2003).

Astin (1999) discusses the positive impact that campus involvement has on the achievement and persistence level of college students. Therefore, low-income students who are not involved on campus may experience difficulty with their transition and adjustment to college.

Prior studies have shown that retention and academic support programs contribute to positive educational outcomes such as high academic achievement and persistence rates. However, additional research is needed in order to further examine the experiences of low-income students attending their first year in college. The research study sought to gain a further understanding of the experiences of low-income students regarding their pre-college experience, first semester experience, and future goals and aspirations after college. Research pertaining to student development theory, studies conducted on retention programs, and a research study conducted at Rowan University that examined the attitudes of underprepared students in regards to their experiences in a pre-freshman summer bridge program (Schell, 2010) were used for comparison in this study.

Chapter III

Methodology

Context of the Study

The study was conducted at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. Rowan University is a four year public university located in southern New Jersey. The university enrolled approximately 10,438 undergraduate students for the fall 2011 semester (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2011). The student population at Rowan University is made up of traditional, non-traditional, transfer, and international students. The campus is composed of 54% female and 46% male. The demographic that represent the student population enrolled in courses include: 76.54% White, 8.75% African American, 8.06% Hispanic-Other, and 3.56% Asian (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2011). The average SAT score for full-time, first year EOF students was 1198 compared to 1728 for full-time regular admit students (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2010).

The mission of the Educational Opportunity Fund Program at Rowan University is to increase access for students that value a culture of high academic standards and learning. An objective of the program is to develop support services that aid students in their persistence towards graduating with their bachelor's degree (Educational Opportunity Fund, 2009). The mission and objectives of the EOF program are aligned with the university's commitment towards fostering an environment that is inclusive of all students from various backgrounds and experiences (Rowan University, 2009).

Population and Sampling

The EOF Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University was initially suggested to 38 first year EOF students by their advisors based on their academic performance in the summer bridge program. In the fall 2011 semester, 15 first year EOF students were successfully paired with an academic coach and participated in the program. The target population for this study consisted of first year EOF students who participated in the EOF Academic Coaching Program in the fall 2011 semester.

Purposive sampling was used to select six first year EOF students to participate in this research study. The criteria used to select these students include selecting students who represented diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds to maintain a sample size that was reflective of the diversity in the EOF program. In addition, students were selected based upon the number of times they attended their academic coaching sessions. Overall, the sample size comprised of three male and three female students who were of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Students were invited to participate in the study based on the number of times they have attended their academic coaching sessions during the fall semester.

Data Collection Instruments

During the months of February and March, data collection was performed by inviting students to participate in a series of three interviews (Appendix A). The first interview focused on learning more about the student in terms of their background and experiences prior to enrolling in college. The second interview examined students' experience during their first semester of college and participation in the EOF Academic Coaching Program. The third interview discussed students' goals and aspirations for the

future. In addition, students were also asked what they benefited from participating in the program.

The interview questions that were used for the study originated from two research studies. Cohen (1999) completed a dissertation that examined the experiences of 10 academically underprepared first year students enrolling in an urban university. The questions that were derived from the study included questions that asked participants to provide background information about their family, schooling, decision to attend college, and their experiences with two courses they took during their first semester of college. Questions that inquired about students' academic adjustment and transition both inside and outside the classroom were taken from a study conducted at Rowan University that examined the perceptions of underprepared students who enrolled in a pre-freshman summer bridge program (Schell, 2010).

In order to ensure content validity, the interview protocol was reviewed by my thesis advisor and the Director of the Academic Coaching Program. The feedback they provided helped ensure that the interview questions were aligned with the research questions that were investigated and reflected the knowledge base of student development theory. In addition, it also determined whether the interview questions used in this research study were appropriately phrased and did not consist of questions that could be misinterpreted by participants.

Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to conducting the research study, the completion of the Human Participants Protection for Research Teams online course sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) was completed. The completion of the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

application and submission for approval was also necessary (Appendix B). All subjects were required to read and sign an informed consent (Appendix C) form prior to participating in the research study. The informed consent form provided participants information about the purpose of the research study and placed emphasis on the confidentiality of their responses. Each participant was aware that he/she had the right to discontinue participating in the study at any time. All participants also agreed that they were of 18 years of age or older and that the interview sessions conducted would be tape recorded to ensure the accuracy of their responses.

Interviews were conducted at a time when both the researcher and participant were available. Interviews were conducted in Campbell Library, Savitz Hall, and the Chamberlain Student Center located on the Rowan University campus. Each interview lasted approximately 15 - 30 minutes. Upon the participant's completion of three interviews, they were awarded \$15 dollars for their participation in the research study.

Data Analysis

When data collection was completed, interview responses were transcribed and content analysis was performed to identify any common themes among the participants' responses. I examined the responses of each participant and categorized the responses under the appropriate research question. Any comments or phrases made by the participant that were not essential to the student's response were edited. In addition, each participant's responses were ranked according to similar responses made by participants (Sisco, 1981).

The responses of participants' enabled me to understand the pre-college experiences of first year EOF students, experiences during their first semester of college,

and their goals and aspirations for the future. The responses collected from the interview were compared to the literature review, student development theory, and a research study conducted at Rowan University which examined the perceptions of underprepared students in regards to their participation in a summer bridge program (Schell, 2010).

Chapter IV

Findings

The findings were generated from the responses of six first year EOF students. Each participant was interviewed three times during the months of February and March in the spring 2012 semester. The first interview focused on the participants' background information such as their family, schooling, and decision to attend college. The second interview examined participants' experience during their first semester of college and their involvement in the Academic Coaching Program. The third interview discussed the participant's goals and aspirations for the future. In addition, the interview was used to also probe whether their participation in the program was beneficial towards their transition and academic adjustment during the first semester of college.

Profile of the Sample

The sample comprised of six first year undergraduate students who participated in the EOF Academic Coaching Program in the fall 2011 semester. Students were recommended by their advisors based upon their academic performance in the Pre-College Summer Institute. Participants were purposively selected for this research study based on the number of times they attended their academic coaching sessions during the fall 2011 semester. The sample included three males and three female students who come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Three participants live with their mother, father, and siblings, two participants reported that their parents were separated, and one

participant reported living on his own. In addition, five out of the six participants reported that one or both of their parents are employed.

Participant A is a female undergraduate student who identified herself as African American. She is from Newark, New Jersey and described her community as everyone keeping to themselves and mentioned the prevalence of crime related incidents where she lives. She attended Newark Vocational High School and described the school as being really small and that everyone in her class had aspirations of attending college at first; however, when senior year arrived, students' lacked aspirations to attend college.

Participant A reported that when she was in high school she did not really care about grades or anything and that she attended high school because of her parents' wishes. She realized how important her education was when she started thinking about college. She mentioned during her sophomore year she tried to maintain a certain GPA to be eligible for scholarships.

Participant A was not really sure what her GPA was in high school. She estimated that it was above a 3.0. In high school, she participated in the drama club and the volleyball team. Her counselor and teachers were very supportive of her to attend college. Her decision to attend college was originally based upon her aspirations of becoming a doctor; however, when she took a course in graphic design in high school it sparked her interest and she became motivated to pursue this career path. Her decision to attend Rowan University was based on cost and proximity away from home. She had two friends who were influential in her decision to attend college; her friends were highly motivated to go to college and they made a pact to make something of their lives. Participant A is a first generation student who aspires to work for a magazine company.

Participant B is a male undergraduate student who identified himself as Hispanic. He originally grew up in Colombia and immigrated to the U.S when he was 13. He currently lives in Elizabeth, New Jersey, an urban environment. He said it was a tough transition coming from a small city to a large town. He described his community as mostly immigrant and found it tough learning a new language and getting accustomed to the different cultures. He described his high school as having a lot of students and expressed that students did not really care about school. Participant B reported that when he started high school it was tough, he mentioned that he was a good student and kept trying to raise his GPA each and every year. He graduated from high school with a 3.5 GPA.

In high school, he participated in the National Honor Society, football team, and performed community service. His counselor and teachers encouraged him to attend college. He mentioned that his counselor got him a \$10,000 scholarship. He decided to attend college because he wanted to improve his lifestyle and look for a better future. He decided to attend Rowan University because of the football program and was recruited by the college to play for them. When asked who was influential in his decision to attend college, he mentioned his mom and dad were most influential and that his mom had encouraged him to get a higher education. Participant B is a non-first generation student who aspires to go to medical school then become a cardiologist.

Participant C is a male undergraduate student who identified himself as African American and Hispanic. He is from Vineland, New Jersey, an urban environment. He described the community as being close when it comes to big events and not bad in terms of crime. He attended Vineland High School and expressed that he did not know about

the attitudes of students, counselors, and teachers in regards to going to college because his experience in an honor's track was different from other students. He mentioned that his peers' attitudes towards high school were to get good grades and to attend college. His teachers and counselors were very supportive of him to attend college, he said "I loved my teachers especially my senior year; they really helped me push towards college. They would incorporate their college experience in their lessons." Participant C considered himself a well-rounded student in high school. He graduated from high school with a 3.4 GPA.

In high school, he ran track and participated in a number of clubs such as the African Club and Yearbook Club. He decided to attend college to better himself so that he can be a positive role model to his little sisters and cousins. His decision to attend Rowan University was based upon his experience during high school when he participated in the Creating Higher Aspirations and Motivations Project (CHAMP) program which is a program that assists students in developing skills to succeed academically and prepare them for college. His counselor in the CHAMP program informed him about the EOF program and he chose to attend Rowan because he considered it was the best choice for him financially. When asked who was most influential in encouraging him to attend college; he mentioned that he is close with his friends and they are competitive. He enjoyed the competition and felt that having a competitive drive helped him maintain a good GPA. Participant C is a non-first generation student and is not too sure what career path he would like to pursue; however, he knows that he wants to pursue a career in something that he enjoys doing.

Participant D is a female undergraduate student who identified herself as African American but also mentioned that she is of Irish, German, Cuban, and Native American descent. She is from Trenton, New Jersey and described the community as being close when something goes wrong. “It depends on the people, some are close with others and others keep to themselves” said Participant D. She also mentioned that there have been shootings and violence in her community and that you just need to be careful of certain areas. She attended Trenton Central High School West and described her high school graduating class as having high aspirations for attending college. She mentioned that the teachers and principal were very strict and could sense that they really wanted to help. She mentioned her high school stressed going to college by offering workshops. Participant D considered herself as being a good student who focused on graduating with a high school diploma. She graduated from high school with a 3.5 GPA.

In high school, she was not involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. She mentioned that she was involved in one organization called “Ladies as Leaders” (LAL) which is similar to a mentoring program where upperclassmen would serve as role models to the underclassmen. In addition, she also participated in the Princeton University Preparatory Program (PUPP) which is a six week summer program that helps students develop academic skills such as time management and organization. Her teachers and principal were very supportive of her to attend college. Her decision to attend college was because of her ambition to get a higher education, get a good job, make money, and make her parents proud. Her decision to attend Rowan University was based upon her first impression when she toured the college, she thought it was a vibrant community and thought that the proximity of the college was not too close or far from

home. Her mother was most influential in her decision to attend college because she had seen her struggle as being a single parent and her mother really pushed her to do her best. Participant D is a first generation student who aspires to attend graduate school to pursue her Master's in Spanish or Criminal Justice and then her doctorate degree afterwards. She states "I just want to have a good job and still stay in an institution that I am getting knowledge. I never want to stop learning."

Participant E is a male undergraduate student who identified himself as Asian. He is originally from India and immigrated to the U.S when he was six or seven. He currently lives in Parsippany, New Jersey and described the community as being calm and safe. He attended Parsippany Hills High School and mentioned that in his graduating class there were not a lot of students who went to college. He mentioned that counselors did not really push as much to attend college and that it was based upon students' own personal choice of whether they would like to attend college. He maintained good relationships with some of his teachers and coaches who were most supportive of him in his aspirations to attend college. Participant E reported that when he was in high school he was motivated to get his work done but struggled at times. He maintained close relationships with his coaches and if it were not for their support and advice, he does not think he would have been accepted by Rowan University. He graduated from high school with a 2.7 GPA.

In high school, he was involved on the cross country and track team and was also involved in Distribution Education Clubs of America (DECA). His decision to attend college was based upon getting a good job, making money, and having a different experience. His decision to attend Rowan University was because of the cost,

recommendations by coaches, and he had friends who were already enrolled at the college. Participant E mentioned that his family was influential in his decision to attend college; however, he felt personally that he pushed himself to attend college. Participant E is a first generation student who aspires to graduate from college and become a physical education teacher and track coach.

Participant F is a female undergraduate student who identified herself as Puerto Rican. She is from Camden, New Jersey and described the community that she lived in as a good area because she lived in a school zone. She described her high school as being really small and students' attitudes towards going to college were different at each grade level. She mentioned that her graduating class had the most students enter military service out of all graduating classes. In addition, she mentioned that teachers and counselors really pushed students to attend college. Participant F graduated from high school with a 3.2 GPA.

In high school, she participated in the softball, volleyball team, and was in the National Honor Society during her freshman year. The counselors and teachers were very supportive of all students to attend college as they would offer a lot of prep classes for the SATs and HSAs. She considered her high school as focused on preparing students for college as soon as they enter high school. She decided to attend college because of her cousin who motivated her a lot. She mentioned that when he was in the army it meant that she had to step up and get a higher education. Her decision to attend Rowan University was based on having a jump start on college classes because she enrolled in a dual credit class while she was in high school and she was aware of the EOF Program. When asked who was most influential in her decision to attend college, she stated that her

cousin, mother, and one of her teachers were influential in her decision. Participant F is a first generation student who aspires to work in television production.

Analysis of Data

Research Question 1: How did first year EOF students’ background in regards to their demographics, family, prior schooling, and decision to attend college influence their transition and academic adjustment to college?

Table 4.1 displays common themes among participants’ responses in regards to whether their pre-college experience was influential in their transition and academic adjustment during the first semester of college. The theme that was common among most participants’ responses was related to their prior schooling experience.

Table 4.1

Influence of Pre-college Experiences on Transition and Academic Adjustment of First Year EOF Students

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Prior Schooling	College Preparation Difference between high school and college	4	1
EOF Pre-College Institute	Discipline Expectations of College Networking	3	2
Pre-college experiences: background, prior schooling, and decision to attend college	Encouragement	1	3

Two participants described their experiences in the Pre-College Summer Institute Program as being influential in their transition and academic adjustment. The Pre-College Summer Institute is a program required of all incoming EOF students to help them develop the skills needed to succeed academically and transition smoothly to college.

Both participants mentioned that the program helped them become more disciplined and understand what was expected from them as college students. One participant mentioned that when he hears other students complain about attending a two and a half hour class, it is nothing to him because he recalls doing four hours of classes during the summer. The participant also discussed that coming through the EOF program, he was able to network with students prior to starting classes at the college which helped him adjust socially.

The second participant said “I think that the pre-summer college institute really helped me just by the course that I took and how strict my professor was and that I will not be getting as much sleep as I used to get and just being focused and studying more.” In addition, another participant mentioned how if it were not for each of the factors such as their family, prior schooling, and decision to attend college she would not be here. She mentioned the importance of encouragement and that people need encouragement to go anywhere.

Research Question 2: How did first year EOF students’ residency and on or off-campus involvement influence their transition and academic adjustment during their first semester of college.

All but one participant lived on campus during the fall 2011 semester. The sample included two students who worked on campus, two students who worked off-campus, and two students who did not work. In regards to involvement, two students reported participating in a sport on campus, two were involved in the Harley F. Flack Mentoring Program, one student volunteered for the graphic design club, and another student mentioned not participating in any extracurricular activities. When asked if participants had any additional obligations or activities they were involved with while attending

college; participants' provided varied responses which included volunteering, working, participating in sports, and attending classes. Two participants reported that they were required to fulfill requirements for the EOF program which included meeting with their counselors once a month and meeting with their academic coach as being other obligations they had during the fall semester.

Furthermore, participants were asked how many hours they spent studying, participating in extracurricular activities, working, and engaging in social activities during the fall 2011 semester. The responses of participants varied in terms of studying. Two participants studied less than 10 hours per week, two studied less than 20 hours a week, one reported studying 28 hours a week, and another participant mentioned that it varied every week and he could not put a number on how many hours he studied each week consistently. In regards to extracurricular activities, the two participants that were involved in sports committed more than 15 hours; however, all other participants reported being involved less than two hours a week. Only one participant mentioned she was not involved in extracurricular activities. Participants also reported working less than 30 hours a week and reported less than 15 hours a week engaging in social activities. One participant mentioned that she spent about 40 hours a week hanging out with friends.

Table 4.2 displays common themes that were derived from participants' responses in regards to whether their residency or involvement on or off-campus was influential in their transition and academic adjustment during their first semester of college. Three participants reported that their involvement on campus helped with their transition during their first semester of college in terms of networking with staff members and other students on campus. For instance, one participant mentioned her desire to become more

involved on campus especially with the graphic design club. She mentioned that volunteering for the organization and being able to establish a relationship with the person who oversees the organization might open doors for her in the future. Another participant mentioned that being involved on the football team helped him network with a lot of administrators on campus and make a lot of friends prior to the start of the semester.

Table 4.2

Factors Influential in Transition and Academic Adjustment Among First Year EOF Students

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Involvement	Networking Academic Engagement Inclusiveness/Community	6	1
Attitude toward college	Motivation Preparation	2	2
Misc.	Living at home, employed, and family	1	3

Furthermore, the findings of the study also touch upon the theme of community. One participant expressed that living on campus afforded her the opportunity to engage in different experiences and participate in different activities. The participant mentioned that she felt inclusive to the campus community and that this helped her transition to the university. Another participant reported that being involved on the cross country team helped him develop a sense of camaraderie among his teammates. He mentioned that during his first semester of college he would usually hang out mostly with his teammates and that this helped with his transition.

In addition, two participants who participated in athletics mentioned how influential their involvement was in their academic studies. One participant mentioned

how his involvement on the football team also contributed towards his academic success because as a student athlete he would participate in a structured study hall which required him to work on his academics. The participant mentioned that everyone received straight As because his coach would check his work and monitor how much he completed every two hours. The second participant reported that being involved on the cross country team taught him discipline and he understood that in order to maintain eligibility in his sport he needed to succeed academically in his classes.

Two participants also reported that a student's transition and academic adjustment are not influenced entirely by a student's involvement or whether they live on or off-campus. One participant stated:

I don't think spending 15 hours a week to hang out with friends and party had an impact on my academic adjustment because I just think me being lazy did because when I went out with my friends it was on the weekend. I had enough time in the beginning of the week to get my work done.

The second participant expressed that it does not matter if you live on or off-campus, the participant said "I just think it's based on the person and if you are ready and prepared before you get here then you're better than somebody who is not so much prepared." Only one participant reported the difficulty she had adjusting during her first semester of college; she said "It was everything, the fact that high school and college were different and me working and being at home and not just focusing on my studies but my whole entire family."

Research Question 3: What are first year EOF students' experiences in their academic courses during their first semester of college? How helpful was the Academic Coaching Program in their academic success in these courses?

Table 4.3 displays the factors that contributed to participants' experience in an academic course that they performed well during their first semester of college.

Participants reported some similarities among the responses they provided. For instance, participants' expectations prior to attending class included the anticipation of what the professor's attitude would be like and what would be expected from them in class. Two participants expressed that prior to attending class they were pessimistic about their performance and perceived their class to be difficult. For instance, a participant stated "I was so scared because the class looked so hard. The teacher looked mean. It was hard but I liked it." Another participant mentioned that she did not know much about the course and did not think she would pass.

Table 4.3

Contributing Factors in First Year EOF Students' Experience in an Academic Course they Performed Well

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Expectations prior to attending class	Professors Attitude Class Requirements and work Performance	7	1
Academic Coaching	Development of Study Strategies Assistance with Course Material Balanced Course Work	6	2
Difference from High School	Professors Class size and atmosphere Responsibility Focus oriented in college	6	2
Preparation for the course	Confidence Course Work	3	3
Use of support services	Tutoring Appointments with Writing Center	1	4

Furthermore, participants reported the difference between high school and college was having more responsibility and what was expected of them in college. In regards to participants' preparation for their particular course, three participants reported they were prepared for the work. "I think I was pretty prepared for the work because I guess the professor gave us sort of leeway because most of the class were freshmen so he knew it was a big transition but then again it was hard because most of us came from the EOF program" said one participant. Another participant mentioned that he was prepared for the work because he knew the material already.

When asked how helpful the Academic Coaching Program was for their particular course, all participants' reported that their participation in the program helped them in regards to acquiring study strategies and keeping them on top of their school work. One

participant stated “My academic coach was helpful, she would actually tell me how to do stuff even though sometimes I would not listen but it was actually helpful because I’m using some of the stuff she taught me now.” Another participant stated “My academic coach kept me on track. I was already on track but he made sure I stayed on track.”

Three participants reported using support services such as tutoring and the writing center for their specific course; however, only one student had utilized the services over the course of the entire semester. One participant utilized the writing center and said that without the help of the writing center he would not have received a B- in his Comps class. The second participant mentioned that he had a friend who worked in the writing center and would go to his friend for assistance. The third participant mentioned that she attended only two sessions of tutoring for her Arabic course because she was assigned the tutor when it was close to the end of the semester. The participant stated:

I actually signed up for tutoring but they didn’t get back to me until the end of the semester when I was about to take my final...it was weird...I was like no thank you. I did go to two sessions but there was no point of it because I was passing. I thought the two sessions helped because he was basically teaching me other stuff because I told him I didn’t really need any help and just wanted to come because I didn’t want to be rude.

Table 4.4 displays the factors that contributed to participants’ experience in an academic course that they did not perform well during their first semester of college. Only five out of the six participants answered this question. When asked what expectations did participants’ have prior to attending college; two participants expected the class to be difficult. One participant stated “I knew this class was going to be hard

because it was a lot of concepts, principles, theories that I would have to learn about in this course.” Two other participants reported that they expected the class to be easy. “I thought it would be easy because psychology is my major. I should know this stuff” said one participant. The second participant mentioned he is retaking his writing course from the summer and knew what to expect but understood that he needed to work on his writing.

Table 4.4

Contributing Factors in First Year EOF Students' Experience in an Academic Course they did not Perform Well

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Academic Coaching	Development of Study Strategies Assistance with Course Material Advice and Support	6	1
Difference from High School	Professors Class Requirements and Work Support	5	2
Expectations prior to attending class	Class Requirements and work Performance	4	3
Preparation for the course	Test-taking Professor's expectations	3	4
Use of support services	Tutoring Writing Center	2	5

Two participants reported that class requirements and the work for their courses were different from high school. One participant mentioned that more support is given to students in high school than college. For instance, the participant explained that in high school, teachers would provide extra credit or assign additional assignments to help improve their grade for the course; however, this was not the case in his macroeconomics

course. Another participant explained how the tests were different between high school and college. She described the work for her Essentials of Psychology course:

I did my readings, I would read, I would highlight and study. Just those tests, it was just like “what!” Are you sure this is what I read? I mean I got some Cs but most of the time I got Bs and we had this paper in APA format. I’ve heard of APA but have I ever done an APA paper? No, that was my first time.

When asked how prepared they were for the work in their course? Three participants reported they were prepared for the work but also identified other aspects in the class they struggled in. One participant mentioned that she was prepared for the readings in her class but realized her weakness was taking tests. Another participant expressed a similar response in terms of being prepared in other aspects of class but identified a weakness in understanding what the professor wanted him to learn:

It wasn’t more so work, it was just showing up, being part of the lecture, and then just knowing the actual material for the tests. I feel like I knew the material but I wasn’t sure what the professor was looking for because most of her questions were what she brought up in class and if I would miss a class, I would miss that question.

When asked how helpful Academic Coaching was for their particular course, all participants’ reported that their participation in the program helped them for their specific course in regards to acquiring study strategies and receiving assistance with their courses. Participants mentioned that they would work on assignments with their academic coach. One participant described a time when her academic coach helped her develop an outline for a paper for her Sociology course. Another participant mentioned what he learned from

his academic coach, “He helped me gain strategies on how to study because I didn’t know how to study before I had Academic Coaching because I never had to study in high school.”

Furthermore, findings showed that four out of the six participants did not utilize support services for the course they did not perform well in. One participant expressed that tutoring did not work well for her and another participant mentioned that she did not utilize support services because she knew a classmate in class that was doing well and sought help from her with the course. One participant who utilized support services on campus found the writing center helpful and discussed that a staff member had helped him develop a thesis statement and taught him how to effectively convey his thoughts in his writing.

Research Question 4: What are the experiences that contribute to first year EOF students’ success inside the classroom through their participation in an Academic Coaching Program?

Table 4.5 displays the experiences that contributed towards first year EOF students’ success inside the classroom from their participation in an Academic Coaching Program. Participants reported that their participation in the program helped them develop strategies for performing well academically in the classroom. A participant mentioned that his academic coach helped him develop time management skills and described a time when he worked on this skill with his academic coach:

I had to do a monologue, it was like five minutes long and I was like I could not memorize anything. My academic coach broke my monologue into parts and told

me to memorize this part this week and the next part for next week and this actually helped me get an A in this class.

Another participant mentioned that his academic coach would always tell him to raise his hand if he did not know something and to not be afraid to ask questions. He found this helpful because it provided him better clarification of what was being taught in class. In addition, he mentioned that his academic coaching sessions helped him stay on track and be an active listener. A third participant discussed that her participation in the program had helped her open up more. She expressed that she used to keep to herself and would finish assignments without any assistance; however, she now feels comfortable to ask for help when she needs it. Two participants reported that the Academic Coaching Program did not have any effect on them at all. One participant expressed that she did not understand why she was placed in Academic Coaching.

Table 4.5

The Effect of the Academic Coaching Program on Student's Success Inside the Classroom

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Academic Coaching	Development of Study Strategies Time Management Personal Growth	5	1
No Affect		2	2

During this portion of the interview, I also asked participants to describe an important academic decision they made during their participation in Academic Coaching. Four out of the six participants reported that they were never faced with an academic decision while participating in the program. Although two participants reported that they were considering dropping out of college and contemplated on withdrawing from a

course; participants reported that these decisions were never discussed with their academic coach. Only two participants mentioned that they had an academic decision that they discussed with their academic coach and found the conversation helpful. One participant mentioned that she was contemplating on dropping her psychology course but decided not to because of the conversation she had with her academic coach. Another participant mentioned that he canceled a meeting with his academic coach because he was scheduled to work at the same time of their meeting. The next session, his academic coach had a discussion of the pros and cons of working compared to the importance of focusing on his academics. The participant stated “It kind of helped because I am more so worried about my academics than my job because before it was my job over academics so he helped me make that tough decision because I even cut my hours to two days a week.”

Research Question 5: What are the experiences that contribute to first year EOF students’ success outside of the classroom through their participation in an Academic Coaching Program?

Table 4.6 displays students responses of whether students’ participation in the Academic Coaching Program had an effect on their outside the classroom experience. Most participants responses centered on the theme of support and guidance. A participant mentioned that her academic coach helped her become involved on campus and helped her declare a major; the participant said “We would sit there and talk for a long time. She was like you seem to enjoy graphic design so why not try that and if you don’t like it you can always change it but at least you have something to fall back on.” Another participant described his experience in Academic Coaching as a mentorship

experience; he stated “Well it’s somebody to talk to about your classes. If you are stressing about class or whatever and have somebody to talk to that’s not all about academics.”

Furthermore, participants experienced support from their academic coach. One participant said “Well I am a shy person. I have to get more comfortable with my surroundings and the people and then I open up. I think my academic coach he was so calm and made me comfortable that I didn’t feel tense and I just think it helped me both in and outside the classroom.” Another participant reported that he was going through a lot last semester and his coach helped him with things he was going through personally.

Table 4.6

The Effect of the Academic Coaching Program on Students’ Success Outside the Classroom

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Mentorship	Support Guidance	5	1
Career Aspirations	Declaration of Major Decision about Career	2	2
No Affect		1	3

I also asked participants to describe an important non-academic decision they made during their participation in Academic Coaching. A majority of the participants needed clarification with this question and responded that they never had an experience making a non-academic decision while they were participating in the program. One participant mentioned that her academic coach encouraged her to submit her portfolio for admission into the art program but overall participants were not placed in a situation where they needed to make a non-academic decision. When the question was asked to

one participant, he said “I don’t think there were any; I am trying to think of one. Everything was basically academics and I can’t think of anything.”

Research Question 6: What did first year EOF students benefit from their participation in an Academic Coaching Program? Are first year EOF students’ goals and aspirations influenced from their participation in an Academic Coaching Program?

Table 4.7 displays what participants valued the most from their participation in an Academic Coaching Program. All participants reported that they benefited from their participation in Academic Coaching during their first semester of college.

Table 4.7

What Students Valued from their Participation in an Academic Coaching Program

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Guidance	Support Advice	5	1
Academic Skills	Time Management Test-taking Strategies Study Habits	4	2

Most participants’ responses revolved around the notion of guidance and having the support of an academic coach in regards to their academic success. A participant stated, “Basically the guidance and having someone there pushing you to do something. She was a motivational type. The fact that she made me pick a major that was one thing. I would have been still undeclared right now.” Another participant valued the advice and support her academic coach provided:

I valued someone who’s been where I am and completed their bachelors and is on another stage of their life and just give me helpful advice that I am going to need. I might not need it right now but I know sooner or later that I’ll need it so I value

the advice and the help that my academic coach gave me. Sometimes we wouldn't talk about academics. Sometimes we talked about life in general and how it can get hard at times and life is not easy of course but when you have hard times those are challenges to see how strong you are and if you can get through that you should be okay.

Furthermore, participants also valued the academic skills they learned and were able to develop through their participation in the Academic Coaching Program. One participant mentioned that his academic coach taught him how to study because in the past he did not spend a lot of time studying. This experience helped him understand how to manage his time more wisely which has helped him value his time more on studying. A second participant reported that being more open and receiving help from her academic coach is what she valued the most from her experience in the program. A third participant reported that he developed better study habits through his participation in the program. However, the participant also expressed that he would follow through with the advice that his academic coach provided but could not understand why the suggestions did not work for him. The participant said "I guess from Academic Coaching, test-taking strategies I guess it did help me a little bit but not really up to my potential. I mean the idea what the coach was telling me was pretty good but I couldn't process them pretty much."

The next portion of the interview asked participants if they make academic decisions the same way as they did before they participated in Academic Coaching. Five out of the six participants mentioned that they do not make academic decisions the same way as they did before participating in Academic Coaching. Participants made comparisons from their attitudes in high school to their attitudes now that they have

completed their first semester of college. One participant said “I didn’t take school seriously but now I really do take it seriously.” Another participant said “It’s different because now I really study. In high school, I did not really study.” Only one participant reported that he still makes academic decisions the same way as he did before he started Academic Coaching. “If a teacher or professor gives me an assignment I would look at it and attempt to do it on that day no matter when it is due. My priority would be to get it done before the due date so I pretty much did the same thing in high school” said one participant.

A third question was asked of participants pertaining to whether their participation in the Academic Coaching Program provided them with the academic skills to adjust and transition academically into college. All but one participant mentioned that it provided them with the academic skills to adjust and transition academically to college. For instance, one participant expressed that one skill that was discussed with his academic coach and helped him in his academic courses was to read a chapter assigned for class before, after, and during class. He mentioned that it taught him that if he wants to be ahead in his academics he should try reading the chapter to get an idea of what will be discussed prior to class and to be a step above all his classmates. The second participant mentioned that her academic coach helped her by suggesting her to use note cards as a way to study for her courses. She mentioned that this really helped her in studying for her law course.

Another participant expressed that he already had the skills but didn’t apply them. He mentioned that his academic coach really helped him apply the academic skills more to his academic courses. One participant did not feel that the Academic Coaching

Program provided him with the skills to adjust and transition academically into college.

The participant stated “I don’t think it did because I have to figure it out myself. They can tell you anything they want but if you don’t do it by yourself you will never figure it out.”

In the latter part of the interview, each participant was asked whether they felt that participation in the Academic Coaching Program had influenced their goals and aspirations. Four of the six participants reported that the program did not influence their goals and aspirations because their aspirations were careers which were derived from their own personal interests. One participant said “No, because I always wanted to be a one (cardiologist).” Only two participants agreed that their goals and aspirations were influenced by the program because the program had helped them decide their major in college.

The next question addressed whether their participation in the program had contributed towards achieving their goals and aspirations. Participants needed clarification because they did not understand the question at first; however, participants mentioned that the role the program played on their academics and providing them support was important towards achieving their goals and aspirations. One participant expressed “I would say it helped me make a definite decision on what I wanted to do. I tried to gain something out of each session.” A second participant mentioned “It helped me pass my courses and stay at Rowan.” Other responses from participants centered on the support and guidance that was provided from their academic coach. A participant valued the advice that their academic coach gave to her because he has been through the experience she is going through in terms of attending college to pursue a higher

education. In addition, another participant expressed that it felt good to have someone to guide him, keep him in check, and on track in his academics.

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The research study investigated the impact of the EOF Academic Coaching Program on selected first year EOF students. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and comprised of six participants that included three males and three female EOF undergraduate students. The students were enrolled at Rowan University in the 2011-2012 academic year.

Qualitative data were collected through three interviews that were conducted in the months of February and March in campus locations that include the Campbell Library, Chamberlain Student Center, and Savitz Hall. The first interview focused on learning about each participant in regards to their background, prior schooling, and decision to attend college. The second interview concentrated on understanding the experience of each participant during their first semester of college and whether their participation in Academic Coaching had an effect on their academic performance. The third interview discussed what students gained from their participation in Academic Coaching and their future goals and aspirations after college.

When data collection was completed, interview responses were transcribed and content analysis was performed to identify common themes among the participants' responses. I examined the responses of each participant and categorized the responses

under the appropriate research question. Each participant's responses were ranked according to similar responses made by participants. The responses provided enabled me to understand first year EOF students' pre-college experience, experiences during their first semester, and their future goals and aspirations after college.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study revealed that students' experiences prior to starting college had an influence in terms of their transition and academic adjustment to their first semester of college. Students varied slightly in their responses but overall discussed how their experiences in high school were influential in the transition to college. Similar to Schell's (2010) study in which she examined the perceptions of underprepared students in regards to their participation in a pre-freshman bridge program; students experienced differences in their expectations between high school and college. For instance, one student mentioned that the expectations of his professor were different in that his professor expected students to participate and know certain material in class. In addition, it was up to the student on whether they wanted to take notes in class.

Students' residency and on or off-campus involvement also contributed towards students' transition to college. All but one student in the study lived on campus. Tinto states that students who live at home may not understand the importance of living on campus and learning the expectations of college (Tinto, 1988). One student who lived off campus mentioned that she had difficulty with adjusting during her first semester of college because she was focused on work, family, and school. Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993), Nora and Cabrera (1996), and Pollard (1990) discussed that Tinto's stage of separation is debatable for low-income students because they need the support to

persist in college (as cited in Fischer, 2007). This was not relevant to most of the students that participated in this study. Most students in the study felt they transitioned smoothly into college and were supported by both family and friends. Students who experienced difficulty in their academic courses during their first semester of college were derived from adjustment to the expectations of college rather than having to fulfill obligations to their family.

In regards to involvement on campus, some common themes among students' responses was the notion of community, academic engagement, and that being involved on campus helped them develop relationships with other students and staff members during the first semester of college. Two students who were involved in sports teams found their involvement contributed towards their academic engagement. Astin (1999) discusses that students who are involved in sports are more likely to be isolated from the campus community. Astin's (1999) concept does not generalize to all student athletes as one student in the study worked 17.5 hours a week, was involved in the Biology Club, and football team while maintaining full-time enrollment. Moreover, two students reported that a student's residency or involvement does not influence their transition and academic adjustment on campus because they felt it is more of a personal decision by the student in regards to being responsible for their own academic success.

Overall, first year EOF students found their participation in an Academic Coaching Program beneficial during their first semester of college. Students reported that their participation in Academic Coaching had helped them develop study strategies which included time management, test-taking tips, along with others that provided assistance in their academic courses. Furthermore, students utilized the strategies they learned from

their Academic Coaching sessions inside the classroom. One student expressed that the program helped her open up more and feel more comfortable asking for help in class. In regards to students' success outside the classroom, students responded that the support and guidance from their academic coach was helpful. One participant mentioned that her academic coach encouraged her to become involved on campus and also helped her select a major.

Schell (2010) reported in her study that many of the students in PCI found great value from student mentors in terms of providing support and encouragement. Similarly, students in this study reported that they benefited from the guidance and support they received from their academic coach. Students appreciated the advice they provided and conversations they had with them. This finding is also reflective of Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering's (1989) statement that if a student has a developmental mentor they are more likely to become better accustomed to the campus community. For instance, one student mentioned how her academic coach helped her become more open on campus. She expressed that she considered herself shy and mentioned through her participation in the program she became more comfortable and started to open up more to her surroundings.

Overall, each student in the study had a unique relationship with their academic coach. One student expressed that his academic coach helped him personally with things that were going on in his life and another student expressed that his academic coach helped him academically because he was in the same field that he was pursuing and could help him understand the material more effectively. This is similar to Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman (2000) study in which they found that participants' in their study had

different experiences with their mentors. Another similar finding was that participants in their study felt supported in a way that they had never experienced before (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). Participants in this study also valued the support they received from their academic coach. One student mentioned that she valued having an academic coach who has completed college and not only helped her academically but also encouraged her to do better.

Moreover, participants were asked if they make academic decisions the same way as they did before they participated in Academic Coaching. Students reported a change in attitude in regards to their academics and a change in their study habits which is similar to Schell (2010) who had asked students if they were the same person they were before they started the PCI program. Students in her study reported that after their experience in PCI they had become more confident about their classes and responsible in terms of how they make academic decisions. In comparison, students who participated in the Academic Coaching Program reported that their attitudes have changed in terms of taking school more seriously and utilizing the strategies they learned from academic coaching and applying them towards their academic courses.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that the Academic Coaching Program is influential in the experiences of first year EOF students' academic adjustment and transition during their first semester of college. Students found value in having an academic coach because of the support, advice, and guidance they provided them. For instance, students mentioned gaining strategies and advice that assisted them in their academic studies such as time management, test-taking, and study strategies. In addition, the findings revealed that

student involvement is important in their transition to college. Students mentioned the importance of networking with other students and staff members outside the classroom through their involvement in clubs and organizations.

The research study also revealed that most students had very little discussions with their academic coach in regards to academic or non-academic decisions. One student reported that much of the program is stressed upon academics. Moreover, most students indicated that participation in the Academic Coaching Program did not influence their goals and aspirations; however, the program contributed towards the achievement of their goals and aspirations for the future in terms of providing them support and guidance in their academic studies. Overall, students who participated in this study had unique experiences both prior and during their first semester of college that may have influenced their transition and academic adjustment. For instance, some students mentioned they were involved in academic support programs prior to attending college such as CHAMP, involved in intercollegiate athletics during their first semester of college, or involved in the Harley F. Flack Mentoring Program which could have caused students' first year experiences to be different compared to other students who may have not been involved in these opportunities.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are presented:

1. Colleges and universities should develop and implement academic support programs open to all students.
2. Colleges and universities should develop an effective assessment tool to evaluate the performance of their academic support programs, its effect on the students participating in the program, and identify areas for improvement.
3. The Academic Coaching Program should begin during the first week of classes instead of a few weeks after the start of classes in order for the academic coach and the undergraduate student to establish a relationship and begin assisting the student with their academic courses.
4. Open communication among faculty members, EOF counselors, and academic coaches are needed to provide insight into student's progress in their academic courses and better assistance to the student.
5. The Academic Coaching Program should provide additional professional development workshops for academic coaches to improve professional practices in regards to working with different student populations.
6. The Academic Coaching Program should provide additional workshops, services, and events to engage students towards their academic studies and introduce them to various resources on campus that may assist them during their college career.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based upon my findings and conclusions, I recommend the following:

1. A mixed method study that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative research to further understand the experiences of first year EOF students' participation in an Academic Coaching Program.
2. Increase the sample size of students used in the study to obtain a sample generalizable of all students that participate in an Academic Coaching Program.
3. Conduct a study that examines the similarities and differences among first year EOF students who participate in the Academic Coaching Program and first year EOF students who do not participate in the program.
4. Research similar programs at colleges and universities and evaluate the effectiveness of their programs compared to ours.
5. Further research that examines the coaching styles that the academic coach uses to conduct their Academic Coaching sessions.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocols

Interview I:

Introduction: This interview is intended to get to know who you are in regards to your background and experiences prior to attending college. Feel free to share any experiences or ideas that come to mind as we proceed through the interview. The responses you provide will be kept confidential.

General Background Information:

1. Name?
2. What is your race or ethnicity (Asian American/Pacific Islander, African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic-Other, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Multi-Racial, White)?
3. Where are you from?
 - a. Have you lived elsewhere?
 - b. Describe the neighborhood where you grew up in regards to atmosphere?
4. Tell me about your family?
 - a. Family members (parents, siblings)
 - b. What is the highest level of educational attainment for each of your parents?
 - c. What are your parent's occupations?
 - d. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend college?

Schooling:

1. Describe your high school?
2. What were the attitudes of students, counselors, and teachers at your high school in regards to going to college?
3. What kind of a student were you in high school?
4. What was your overall GPA?
5. Were you involved in extra-curricular activities while in high school?
 - a. What extra-curricular activities were you involved with?

Decision to attend college:

1. How and why did you decide to attend college?
2. How and why did you decided to attend Rowan University?
3. Who was influential in your decision to attend college (friends, family, counselors, mentors, etc.)?
 - a. Explain why.
4. How influential was your high school in encouraging you to attend college?
 - a. If yes, explain why.
5. Were you involved in any programs that supported you academically prior to attending college?
 - a. Which programs were you involved with?

Do you feel your background in terms of family, prior schooling, and decision to attend college influenced your transition and academic adjustment in your first semester of college?

- a. Explain why.

Is there anything else you would like to add that provides me additional information about your background and experiences prior to enrolling at Rowan University?

Closing: Thank you for your time and willingness to share. As I said earlier, your identity will be kept confidential.

Interview II:

Introduction: Thank you for continuing with this study. Your continued participation makes it possible to learn more about the EOF Academic Coaching Program experience at Rowan University. The responses you provide will be kept confidential.

General Background Information:

1. Do you reside on campus, off-campus, or at home?
2. Did you work last semester?
 - a. On-campus or off-campus
3. Were you involved in any extracurricular activities on campus last semester?
 - a. If yes, what clubs were you involved with?
4. What other activities or obligations were you involved with while attending college last semester?
5. Based on an average week, how many hours do you spend:
 - a. Studying/doing work for class
 - b. Extra-curricular activities (clubs, volunteer, etc)
 - c. Work
 - d. Social activities (hang out with friends, party)
6. Did your residency or involvement on or off-campus influence your transition and academic adjustment in your first semester of college?
 - a. Explain

Beginning College:

1. Pick one class that you took during your first semester that you performed well.
 - a. What did you expect prior to the first class?
 - b. How was this class different from high school?
 - c. How prepared were you for the work? (readings, tests, papers, etc.)
 - d. Did you utilize any of the support services on campus? (tutoring, writing center, etc.)
 - a. If yes, how helpful were these support services?
2. How helpful was Academic Coaching for this course?
3. Pick one class that you took during your first semester that you did not perform too well.
 - a. What did you expect prior to the first class?
 - b. How was this class different from high school?
 - c. How prepared were you for the work? (readings, tests, papers, etc.)
 - d. Did you utilize any of the support services on campus? (tutoring, writing center, etc.)
 - a. If yes, how helpful were these support services?
4. How helpful was Academic Coaching for this course?

Academic Coaching Experience:

1. How did participation in the Academic Coaching affect your experience inside the classroom?
2. How did participation in the Academic Coaching affect your experience outside the classroom?
3. I am interested in your perspective on how to best make decisions. Can you describe an important academic decision you made during your participation in Academic Coaching?
4. Can you also describe an important non-academic decision you made during your participation in Academic Coaching?

Is there anything else you would like to share to help me understand your experience during your first semester of college?

Closing: Thank you for your time and willingness to share. As I said earlier, your identity will be kept confidential.

Interview III:

Introduction: Thank you for continuing with this study. Your continued participation makes it possible to learn more about the impact of the EOF Academic Coaching Program experience at Rowan University. The responses you provide will be kept confidential.

1. What did you value the most from your participation in the Academic Coaching Program?
 - a. Explain
2. Do you make academic decisions the same way as you did before you participated in Academic Coaching?
3. Did the Academic Coaching Program provide you with the academic skills to adjust and transition academically into college?
 - a. Explain
4. What are your goals and aspirations after college?
 - a. Explain
5. Did your participation in an Academic Coaching Program influence your goals and aspirations?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, explain why.
6. Do you feel that participation in the Academic Coaching Program had contributed towards achieving your goals and aspirations?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, explain why.

Is there anything else you would like to share to help me understand your perspective on your overall experience in Academic Coaching?

Closing: Thank you for your time and willingness to share. As I said earlier, your identity will be kept confidential.

APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



January 18, 2012

Calvin Cheung
553 Duquesne Blvd.
Brick, NJ 08723

Dear Calvin Cheung:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your project:

IRB application number: 2012-143

Project Title: The Impact of the EOF Academic Coaching Program on Selected First Year EOF Students

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for **one calendar year** from the date of this letter. If your research project extends beyond that date or if you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Please retain copies of consent forms for this research for three years after completion of the research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman (hartman@rowan.edu or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam, Associate Provost for Research (shreek@rowan.edu or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser (heiser@rowan.edu or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harriet Hartman".

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Burton Sisco, Educational Services, Administration and Higher Education, Education Hall

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Rowan University
Principle Investigator: Calvin Cheung
M.A. Higher Education Administration Candidate
Department of Educational Services, Administration, and Higher Education

By signing this form, I agree to participate in a study entitled "The impact of the EOF academic coaching program on selected first year EOF students," which is being conducted by Calvin Cheung, a M.A in Higher Education Administration candidate at Rowan University.

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of first year EOF students' participation in an Academic Coaching Program through a series of three interviews. The interviews will require participants to discuss their background in terms of their family, prior academic experience, and decision to attend college. A second interview will be conducted to discuss students' current experience in their first semester of college in terms of their academic adjustment and transition. The third interview will focus on what students gained from their participation in the program and their goals and aspirations after college.

I understand that I am not obligated to participate in the interview sessions, however, if I do, I am aware that I will be asked to divulge personal information related to my experiences in the Academic Coaching Program. I also understand that in order to receive the \$15 for my participation, I must complete all three interviews required for the study.

I acknowledge that I am of 18 years of age or older and understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Calvin Cheung by phone at (732) 604-2296, or by e-mail at cheung84@students.rowan.edu or Dr. Burton Sisco by phone at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3717 or e-mail at sisco@rowan.edu.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Investigator)

(Date)

Tape Recording Consent Form

Rowan University
Principle Investigator: Calvin Cheung
M.A. Higher Education Administration Candidate
Department of Educational Services, Administration, and Higher Education

By signing this form, I provide consent to be tape recorded in order to ensure the accuracy of the responses provided in the interviews. The interviews will take place in the graduate seminar room located on the fourth floor of Campbell Library and all sessions will be tape recorded. The recordings will be used only for the purpose of data collection and that the responses that I provide will be kept confidential. In order to ensure the confidentiality and safety of my responses, tape recordings of your interviews and responses will be kept in a locked drawer. Upon completion of the research study, all tape recordings and data will be destroyed or removed by deletion software.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Investigator)

(Date)