

Predicting Student Engagement and Retention through Participation in a Freshman Program:
A Case Study at Benedictine College

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Abstract

This is a research study of a pilot freshman program initiated in Fall 2008 at Benedictine College, a small, Catholic, liberal arts college in the Midwest. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the study examines the program's relationship to student retention and perceived levels of student engagement as measured by the Level of Academic Challenge and Active and Collaborative Learning scales from the National Survey of Student Engagement. The data compares the 35% of the freshman class who participated in the program with the 65% of the freshman who did not. Faculty members teaching the pilot program courses were surveyed as well.

The study found that students enrolled in the pilot program were more likely to be enrolled in the following Fall semester than students not enrolled in the pilot program. Participation in the pilot program yielded a retention rate of 81.8% compared to students not participating in the pilot program whose retention rate was 65.6%. The study did not find any differences between participation and non-participation in the pilot program and student engagement as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement benchmarks of Level of Academic Challenge or Active and Collaborative Learning.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

Benedictine College is a small liberal arts college located in Atchison, Kansas. Founded in 1858, the college is a mission-driven Catholic, Benedictine institution sponsored by two religious communities, St. Benedict's Abbey Monastery and Mount St. Scholastica Convent. Originally founded as two separate institutions, one men's college and one women's college, the two merged in 1971 to form Benedictine College. After the merger the college continued to meet on two campuses several miles apart until 1991, when the precarious finances of the institution necessitated closing one campus. The college formally consolidated onto the St. Benedict's campus site and closed the buildings located at Mount St. Scholastica. At the time of this move to one campus, enrollment had dipped from a high of 1200 in 1971 when the colleges merged to a low of 606 in 1991. Since then, the college has rebounded to a full-time undergraduate enrollment in Fall 2008 of 1,352 full-time undergraduate students.

After recovering from financial exigency in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the growth in enrollment at the college has provided a level of financial stability for the campus. The institution has endeavored to increase its academic profile over the last decade and aspires to become "one of the great Catholic colleges in America" (President Minnis, convocation speech, 2008). This emphasis is reflected in the college's strategic plan, which includes a goal of increasing the four- and six-year graduation rates as well as improving retention rates for beginning freshmen to their sophomore year. Both of these indicators have been lackluster and below aspirational peers. The other important indicator of academic excellence for the college is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) scores, which the college has participated in since its inception in 2000. The college has pushed student engagement, especially with

freshmen, over the last seven years through faculty workshops, book discussions and teaching circles.

Because the college would like to improve in the areas of retention and graduation, the academic dean of the college and a group of volunteer faculty members worked to establish a pilot freshman program in the Spring and Summer semesters of 2008. The program included six courses open only to beginning freshmen across multiple disciplines. The disciplines that participated in the pilot program were Theology, Psychology, Philosophy, Political Science, Criminology and Business. The courses combined normal course material with additional programming focused on freshman transition issues and included a speaker's series. The speaker's series was open to the entire college community, but those enrolled in the pilot program courses were required to attend and had assignments based on the speaker's series. This pilot program is the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to determine if the college's first year seminar pilot program is related to retention and engagement scores. . Benedictine College wants to increase freshman retention (see Table 1, pg. 12, Freshman Retention) and is also hopeful the curriculum in the pilot program will have a positive impact on engagement scores. As mentioned above, in Fall 2008 the college launched a pilot beginning freshman program using student engagement as the primary theoretical framework. The pilot project enrolled 35 percent of the beginning freshman student body. The framework of student engagement was used by the researcher, in part to determine the success of the faculty in assimilating student engagement theory into their classroom curriculum. An examination of the differences between those students participating in

the pilot program and those students not participating in the pilot program may yield helpful data for the college in developing an effective retention and engagement tool for beginning freshmen.

The purposes of this study are to answer the following questions: (1) Are students participating in the beginning freshman program more likely to be retained than those students who do not participate? (2) Does participation in the beginning freshman program result in greater student engagement compared to those students who do not participate? (3) How well were the program goals implemented across disciplines/classes in the pilot program?

This study used both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the following research questions:

- 1) How was the beginning freshman program curriculum implemented across disciplines and faculty teaching in the pilot program?
- 2) What is the relationship between participating in the pilot program (or not) and perceived level of academic challenge and perceived level of collaborative learning as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)?
 - Controlling for relevant variables of ACT composite scores, gender and parent educational level, how does participating in the pilot beginning freshman classes relate to perceived level of academic challenge and active and collaborative learning as measured by the NSSE scale?
 - Controlling for relevant variables of ACT composite scores, gender, freshman year cumulative grade point average, and parent educational level, how does participation in the freshman pilot program relate to returning to the college for the sophomore year (enrollment in Fall 2009 classes)?

- Controlling for relevant variables of ACT composite scores and gender, how does participating in the freshman pilot program relate to cumulative grade point average?
- 3) How might the program be improved for implementation with the entire beginning freshman classes in the future?

Description of Benedictine

The four pillars of Benedictine College are: Catholic, Benedictine, Residential and Liberal Arts. The college has invested heavily in the residential aspect of student life, adding four residence halls in the last five years. In total there are eleven residence halls. By Board mandate the college must maintain a residency of, at minimum, 72 percent of full-time undergraduate students. In the 2008-09 academic year the college had 78 percent of its full-time undergraduate students living on-campus.

The college has two sponsoring communities, the nuns of Mount St. Scholastica and the monks of St. Benedict's Abbey. The monks and nuns both serve in multiple capacities on campus as faculty, administration and board members. Because of the continued involvement of these two sponsoring communities, the Catholic and Benedictine pillars of the mission remain firmly embedded in the culture and identity of the school. The curriculum in the pilot program includes presentations by members of the sponsoring communities and their role in the life of the college and students.

In the late 1990's then President Daniel Carey led the Board of Directors to invest in student athletic and student residence facilities. A new stadium, track, and residence halls were built and remodeled. During this time, little to no additional resources was directed to the academic programs. With the advent of a new dean, Dr. Kim Shankman, and a new president,

Mr. Stephen Minnis, the Board of Directors were encouraged to focus additional resources on academics. Beginning with a board meeting in 2002 when the dean did a presentation on what constitutes “academic excellence” more resources have been directed to academics. This has included new technology resources, improved classroom facilities, new budget lines for faculty hires, and new majors.

Current Picture

The enrollment in the Fall of 2008 was 1347 full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students with a total student enrollment of 2033 for all programs. The college offers forty majors in a variety of disciplines such as Theology, Art, Dance, Mass Communications, Business, Foreign Languages, Philosophy, Natural Science and Education. The college also offers 33 minors including Latin, Classics and Liberal Studies. The most popular majors are Business, Education, Theology and Biology. While the college emphasizes its liberal arts nature it has also launched majors in business, nursing, and engineering, and offers Bachelor of Science degrees in Biology and Biochemistry. The graduate programs are small and the college offers only a Master’s in Business Administration and a Master’s of Art in School Leadership. The majority of the student self-identify as Catholic (78%). Roughly 40% of the students are recruited for athletics, with football comprising the largest recruitment tool of men and transfer students.

The Problem of Student Retention

College and universities have been grappling with the knowledge that overall high school enrollments, and therefore the pipeline that supplies college students, is projected to decline drastically in most states over the next several years (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). This trend has motivated many colleges to not only increase their recruitment and branding efforts, but to focus more resources on retention efforts. It is not enough to provide a

revolving door in which students enter in the freshman year and disappear by their sophomore year. Institutional budget constraints, national calls of accountability, accreditation agencies, employer needs, and pressure from students and parents have required institutions to develop strategies to help students be successful in college, and in doing so assist colleges and universities to increase both retention and graduation rates of their students (Hurtado, 2007; Kuh, 2005, 2006, 2007; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

Student success in the freshman year or an early exit from college has been attributed to multiple factors such as the academic rigor of high schools, first-generation status, desire to persist, and mission fit (Astin, 1993; Astin and Oseguera, 2005; Braxton, 2005; Braxton and Lien, 2000; Kuh, et al., 2007; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Seidman, et al., 2005; Tinto, 1975). However, there is strong research that indicates a significant role in student retention is found in the freshman year (Ishler and Upcraft, 2005; Noel, Levitz, and Saluri, 1985; Upcraft and Gardner, 1989). Colleges and universities have adopted strategies to help beginning freshmen integrate into the academic culture of their institutions, the chief among these being what schools label the “beginning freshman program” or “first-year seminars” (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Pope, Miklitsch, Weigand, 2004; Upcraft and Gardner, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot, 2005).

Research describes the nature of the difficult transition of a variety of students who enter into the academic environment for the first time (Astin, 1975; Banning, 1989; Chickering, 1969; Hunter and Linder, 2005; Kuh, 2005; Kuh and Love, 2000; Williams, 1986; Tinto, 1987). Whether it is adult learners, first-generation students, or traditional eighteen year-olds transitioning from high school to college, understanding the expectations of college and their role in the environment can be difficult, and how well student’s experience the first year can set the

stage for the rest of a student's academic career (Kuh, 2005; Pope, Miklitsch and Weigand, 2005).

While excitement is part of the first-year college experience, so is dread and anxiety in this new environment. In leaving for college, students leave behind what is familiar and comfortable: friends, family and home, for what frequently feels like an unfriendly environment, often living with a stranger in a small room with a bed and just a few reminders of the life back home (Kuh, 2005). Within this new environment students soon encounter expectations from professors, bad cafeteria food, new living arrangements, differing viewpoints and new relationships, and all this in an unknown social setting (Chaskes and Anttonen, 2005; Kuh, 2005).

Making connections with faculty, staff, and other students is significant during this initial stage of college life (Astin, 1993; Pope, et al., 2004; Tinto, 1975). The first year of college, by its very newness and by the developmental challenges being experienced by the students, makes this an extremely critical year that can either begin a successful college experience or end a promising academic career (Mach, 2004; Pascarella, 2004, Pope, et al, 2005; Upcraft et al, 2005). Research supports the fact that students are most likely to exit college in their freshman year (Clark, 2005; Kuh, et al, 2007, 2008; Reason, et al, 2007; Schilling and Schilling, 2005; Upcraft, et al, 2005).

Because the first year of college is believed to lay the ground work for the remaining four years of college, many first-year programs rely on packing the first-year student experience with more support and hands-on interaction than subsequent years (Schilling and Schilling, 2005). In addition to the initial first-year programs, institutions commit resources to create policies, approaches, atmosphere and curriculum to support the first-year student (Pope, Miklitsch and

Weigand, 2004, Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985; Upcraft and Gardner, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot, 2005). More on research and studies of beginning freshman programs and their role at increasing student retention will be shared in chapter two.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is student engagement. “Student engagement has two key components. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities and experiences associated with the outcomes that constitute student success. The second is how the institution allocates resources and organizes student learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from such activities” (Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2007, pg. 37).

For the purposes of this study, I studied engagement as represented by scores on the level of academic challenge (LAC) and active and collaborative learning (ACL) benchmarks of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE); both LAC and ACL were used as variables in this study. The NSSE survey was developed to “assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experience” (Kuh, 2001, pg. 2). More information about student engagement and NSSE will be explored in the literature review in chapter two.

The Pilot Beginning Freshman Program

In the 2008 academic year Benedictine College celebrated 150 years of operation. As part of the celebration a series of special speakers and activities were planned. As previously noted, the Academic Dean and several volunteer faculty members from multiple disciplines developed a pilot beginning freshman program. This program attempted to incorporate academic readiness and sought to increase the level of academic challenge experienced by incoming

freshman students in the curriculum. The committee as a whole reviewed the NSSE results and read George Kuh's (2005) book, *Student Success in College*. The academic dean and the faculty as a whole have emphasized the student engagement results and overall engagement theory for the last five years in an attempt to improve overall results on the NSSE survey instrument. The ad-hoc committee incorporated the sesquicentennial activities and speaker series as part of the design of the pilot program. The courses that were integrated into the pilot program were then marked in the registration module as sesquicentennial courses. These sesquicentennial courses for freshmen were open only to traditional, first-semester freshmen in the Fall 2008 class.

The sesquicentennial courses combined a regular course normally taken by beginning freshmen with additional programming focused on freshman transition issues and a speaker's series. There were eight speakers in the series and students wrote reflection papers on each speaker, had class discussions based on the topic of each speaker, and had test questions that incorporated the speaker's topic. Other components of the special courses included:

- Presentations from the college's Discovery committee on opportunities for undergraduate research with faculty;
- Presentations by the Abbess and the Abbot of the sponsoring communities on Benedictine charism (the spiritual graces and abilities given to church members to perform church tasks, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, online) and the roles of the nuns at Mount St. Scholastica and the monks of St. Benedict's Abbey in the lives of students and the life of the college community;
- Special discussions in each of the classes on academic honesty, information literacy, career/vocation discernment, the nature of the liberal arts, and diversity and community in a pluralistic world.

The students enrolled in these courses received an additional one credit hour over the normal three credits assigned for the course. The sesquicentennial courses were all scheduled for the 11:00 am hour on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. This scheduling ensured that students could not be scheduled in more than one special section course, as well as allowing for participation in the speaker series, which took place at 11:00 am over the course of the semester. More information about the implementation of the courses by the faculty members teaching the sections is included later in this chapter and in the methodology section in the third chapter.

Each of the courses in the pilot program were given a time slot that extended beyond the typical 50-minute time period; the longer class period gave the instructors time for the additional programming. All faculty members who participated in the pilot study had a common section in their syllabi that included the special components of the course requirements. The Dean's office received a copy of the syllabi for each of the pilot courses along with the syllabi for the regular courses not part of the pilot program.

A sample of the course syllabi language as agreed upon by the ad-hoc committee is available in the appendix. Since the courses used in the pilot program are common for beginning freshmen, students not enrolled in the pilot program had the opportunity to take sections of the same course, with the same professor, but without the additional programming. Copies of the syllabi for the regular course offerings were also sent to the Dean's office and are available in the appendix.

Participation in the pilot program was purely voluntary by both the faculty who agreed to teach the courses and the students who enrolled in the classes as part of the initial pilot group. The additional course objectives for the sesquicentennial courses were agreed upon by the faculty participating and the Dean of the College. Beginning freshmen are regularly enrolled by

a group of faculty advisors who advise that cohort. Advising of the beginning freshman class is the same for all students, but when enrolling in the late Spring and early Summer of 2008, students were given the option of enrolling in the six special sesquicentennial sections.

Beginning freshmen advisors, who are all full-time faculty, were given highlights of the program to share with students and participation by the students was voluntary. The participation rate of beginning freshmen in the pilot program was 35% of the entire beginning freshman class.

College Retention Practices

In 2006 Benedictine College adopted a strategic plan, which includes Academic Excellence as the first goal. Along with increased graduation rates, the plan includes as one of its benchmarks increasing beginning freshman retention. Operationally, this goal led to the creation of the college's retention committee and the Student Success Center. The college has not had strong retention rates compared to its peer institutions. First year retention data since 1991 is reflected in Table 1. Peer institutions that Benedictine College has used for benchmarking purposes average a retention rate of 85% for first year retention among beginning freshmen. The goal of the college's current strategic plan is to increase beginning freshman first-year retention to exceed 80%.

Table 1.

Beginning Freshman Retention Rates

Academic Year	First Year Retention
1991	65.1%
1992	62.1%
1993	67.8%
1994	61.7%
1995	65.2%
1996	67.7%
1997	64.7%
1998	74.3%
1999	67.5%
2000	70.6%
2001	73.8%
2002	77.0%
2003	72.7%
2004	72.4%
2005	74.0%
2006	74.5%
2007	76.1%

As part of the college's strategy to increase retention, it launched a Student Success Center in Fall 2008. The center houses career development, tutoring, and academic assistance services. The Student Success Center works closely with the campus retention committee in tracking and devising retention strategies for individual students. The increase in retention (2% increases) from 2006 to 2008 has been attributed to the more deliberate approach undertaken by the Retention Committee. The primary instrument used to inform the work of the Student Success Center and the retention committee is the College Student Inventory survey (CSI) devised by Noel Levitz. The CSI survey is administered to freshmen prior to the start of the academic year and reflects on their high school experience.

The CSI survey requires students to self-identify their “cognitive and affective attrition indicators, the best predictors of student attrition” (Noel-Levitz, website). The individual student reports can be accessed by freshman advisors, the counseling center, and by the Assistant Dean of the Student Success Center. The individual reports detail each student’s areas of strength and challenge, including specific recommendations for each student. The college is heavily involved with Noel-Levitz in identifying and recruiting students to the campus. Admission recruiters are trained in Noel-Levitz programs on recruitment tools and the college uses the Noel-Levitz system of calls, emails, campus visits, and etc. to help “close the deal” with potential students.

National Survey of Student Engagement

The primary instrument used by the college for student satisfaction and to measure engagement for benchmarking purposes and continuous quality improvement is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The data from the NSSE survey is based on 42 questions that ask students about important aspects of their experience (NSSE, 2008). The survey instrument tracks both beginning freshman and senior responses in the areas of:

- Level of Academic Challenge. Defined as challenging intellectual and creative work at the collegiate level. Colleges are encouraged to emphasize academic effort and set high expectations for student performance (NSSE, 2008).
- Active and Collaborative Learning. Measures if institutions encourage collaboration with others for problems solving and mastering difficult material (NSSE, 2008).
- Student-Faculty Interaction. Measures student perception of their interaction with faculty both inside and outside the classroom (NSSE, 2008).

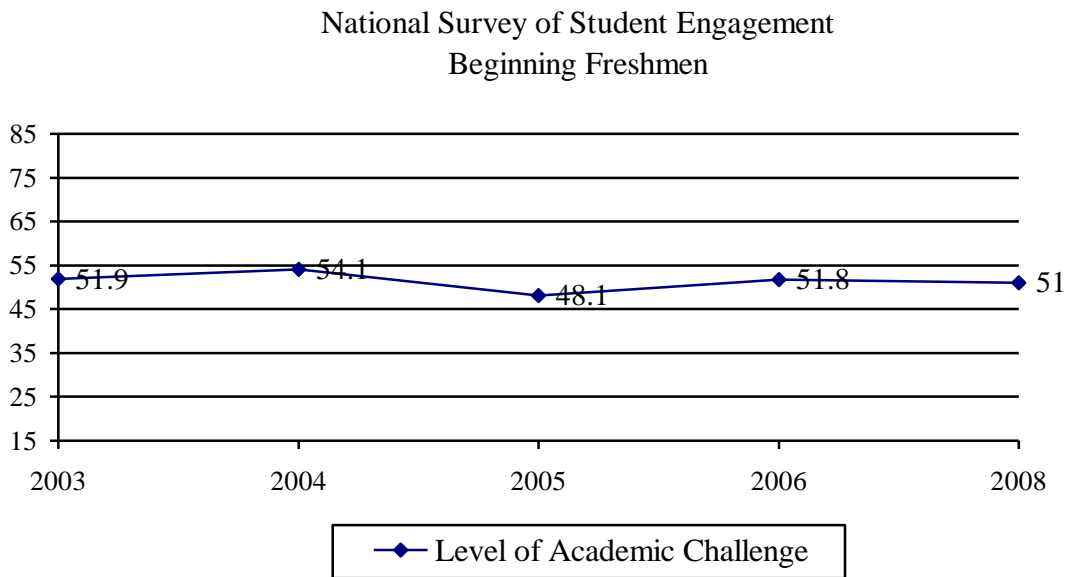
- Enriching Educational Experiences. Examines the complementary learning opportunities that support the learning environment (NSSE, 2008).
- Supportive Campus Environment. Measures student satisfaction at the college's commitment to their success and among different groups on campus (NSSE, 2008).

The NSSE data from five administrations of NSSE, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2008 surveys have consistently shown two areas (level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning) to be weaker for the beginning freshman cohort for Benedictine compared to the results for chosen peer institutions or the NSSE national dataset. Reports received from NSSE of Benedictine's results include comparison data in three categories: 1) all Plains Private institutions, 2) colleges within the same Carnegie Classification and 3) the overall NSSE group of schools that participated in the survey for that given year.

The measurement the college is striving to improve over the next several years with the beginning freshmen is the NSSE benchmark of academic challenge (LAC). The institution wishes to rank in the top 10% of highly engaged institutions as recognized by the NSSE data. To reach the benchmark the beginning freshman results need to attain a mean of 60.5 for LAC. Because the college has a relatively low transfer student body, by increasing the level of LAC for the beginning freshman class, results for the senior class should also see an increase over time in the mean results.

The chart below reflects the results for the last five administrations of the NSSE in the areas of LAC for the beginning freshmen only.

Chart 1



Faculty and administrators at Benedictine College are also interested in active and collaborative learning, or ACL, because of the emphasis on undergraduate research at the institution. Benedictine College has declared itself “America’s Discovery College” based on this emphasis on undergraduate research.

Importance of the Study

A unique aspect of this research relates to the faculty at Benedictine. Because of the rapid growth of the college following a time of reduced resources and financial exigency, nearly 50% of the faculty have been hired in the last seven years and most are on the tenure-track. The remaining faculty have long years of service ranging from twenty to forty years. When discussions of a beginning freshman program have been brought before the faculty, those faculty with long institutional memories are vehemently opposed to a beginning freshman program, citing a long string of failures of such programs in the 1970s and 1980s and early 1990s. Most of the younger faculty are in favor of a program but given their tenure status are hesitant to publicly

disagree with senior faculty in open forums. A primary use of the research from this study is to present data on the beginning freshman program that allows for discussion on the specifics of the topic, rather than institutional memory, and to hopefully alleviate the divide on this topic amongst the faculty.

In addition, the college may use the results of this project to determine the necessary budget allocations to support or alter the program. Much of the initial pilot project costs were unbudgeted and came from resources within the Dean's office pulled from multiple areas. Also, faculty in the pilot project participated without benefit of additional pay. If the results warrant an expansion of the program to all beginning freshmen a request for specific funding will be submitted to the budget office and the CFO. Finally, the results of the study will provide an impetus to drive college-wide policy decisions, programs in the Student Success Center, and curriculum in support of student engagement. This study may also be beneficial to other small colleges struggling with retention issues and seeking to determine funding priorities.

Once this dissertation is completed, the results will be reviewed by the Dean of the College, the curriculum committee, and the beginning freshman program pilot committee. A full report of the project and results will be shared with the cabinet and the entire faculty in the all faculty workshop and possibly during a faculty colloquium during the academic year.

Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the study and the research questions, and also provides basic information on the institution at which the study took place. Chapter Two presents the relevant literature on the fields of student engagement and beginning freshman programs upon which the study is based. The third chapter provides additional information about the setting of the study, Benedictine College, a restatement of the

program evaluation and research questions, a description of the survey instrument, the data collection procedures, and the study limitations. Demographics of the beginning freshman class used in the study are also presented in this chapter. Chapter four presents' descriptive statistics related to the study variables, the results of the data analysis, and quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the faculty surveys related to implementation of the pilot program. Chapter five discusses the findings of the study and implications for Benedictine College. The dissertation concludes with limitations of the study and suggestions for future research for the college.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A college degree has replaced the high school diploma as a mainstay for economic self-sufficiency and responsible citizenship. In addition, earning a bachelor's degree is linked to long-term cognitive, social and economic benefits to individuals, benefits that are passed onto future generations, enhancing the quality of life of the families of college-educated persons, the communities in which they live, and the larger society (Kuh, et.al, 2007, pg. 1)

The two central themes to the research in this dissertation revolve around the efficacy of beginning freshman programs and student engagement to improve student retention at Benedictine College. This literature review is divided along these two different bodies of literature. The first section of the literature review introduces the foundational theories along with the current practice of student engagement. In examining student engagement the literature review examines the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced "Nessie"), which is used as an instrument in this dissertation. The second section of the literature review examines the literature concerning beginning freshman programs, in the areas of research and best practice.

Definition of Terms

Retention, for the purposes of this study, is defined as students who remain enrolled from their beginning freshman year to the beginning of their sophomore year.

Beginning freshman programs include a broad variety of programming such as first-year seminars, learning communities, early alert classes, special instruction, etc. The shared feature of these varying programs is their primary focus on helping first-year students' transition to college (Feldman, 2005).

Student Engagement

Students leave college for a variety of reasons, such as lack of funding, demands of family, and lack of skills and educational preparedness, among others (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Beyond these student-driven issues what are the other factors institutions need to consider to promote student success? What can institutions themselves do to help students succeed in college?

Student engagement theory focuses in part on the learning environment created at institutions. Institutions that focus on engagement support environments in which students become active participants versus passive recipients of the educational process (Kuh, 2001, 2005, 2007). Research has shown certain institutional factors provide greater support for student development. George Kuh (2005) delineates these factors as:

- A clear, focused institutional mission
- High standards of student performance
- Support for students to explore human differences and emerging dimensions of self
- Emphasis on early months and first year of study
- Respect for diverse talents
- Integration of prior learning and experience
- Ongoing practice of learned skills
- Active learning
- Assessment and feedback
- Collaboration among students
- Adequate time on task

- Out-of-class contact with faculty (Kuh, et al. et al., 2005, pg. xv)

It is commonly accepted that student engagement is a strong contributor to student retention (Astin, 1993; Chickering and Gamson, 1987, Kuh, 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). In reviewing the literature on student engagement, Kuh's theory of engagement emerged from early works in the areas of student effort, student involvement, social and academic integration, and best practice in undergraduate education. In this portion of the literature review I give a brief review of each of these earlier theories and then a lengthier review of student engagement, specifically the National Survey of Student Engagement based on the work of George Kuh.

Early Theories

The question of how institutions keep students focused and in college has long been the subject of research in the higher education community. Early pioneers in the field have included Pace, Tinto, Astin, and others.

Pace and Astin

The work of Pace (1979, 1980) involved the quality of effort students put forth in their college experience. Pace examined the entire student experience versus looking at test scores or grades to assess student learning. Pace asked questions related to students' academic and social experiences in college and assessed how much effort they were putting forth in their educational experiences (Pace, 1979, 1980).

Astin (1980s) proposed the theory of student involvement. Student involvement theory involves the "amount of physical and psychological time and energy the student invests in the educational process" (Astin, 1993). The model also encompasses the institution's contribution to the environment that is created for students. This component of the model is known by the

initials of I-E-O. The initials stand for Input - Environment – Outcome. “Input” is what characteristics a student brought to college with them. An example of this would be high school grades and the strength of the academic program in high school, both of which are highly correlated to retention in the freshman to sophomore year (Astin 1993, Levitz and Noel, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). “Environment” in the IEO model is the college environment and the experiences of the student in the environment. Student involvement as a component of the environment of IEO of Astin’s theory addressed the amount of learning taking place directly proportional to quantity and quality of energy invested in educational activities.

In the final piece of his model, O is “Outcome” and is the impact of the environment on the student. Within his model Astin (1991) identified 146 possible inputs (precollege) and 192 environmental variables that might influence student success as well as 82 variable outcomes including satisfaction with the college environment, academic cognition, career development, retention, etc.

The models of both Pace and Astin are early precursors to the student engagement theory model developed by George Kuh. Engagement theory draws on these theories with a two prong approach, the “amount of time and effort” (Kuh, 2005, pg. 9) students put into their academic studies and other collegiate activities, and then the use of institutional resources allocated to “induce students to participate in and benefit from such activities” (Kuh, 2005, pg. 9). Like Pace and Astin, student engagement theory considers the “efforts” students put forth. The engagement model also focuses on the environment created by the institution, much like Astin’s I-E-O theory. Student retention then becomes an issue of what students bring with them to college and what institutions create to keep them there.

Tinto, Chickering and Gamsom

Some of the earliest work on student retention began with research on why students exit college. Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure focused on the interrelationships between and amongst variables, both direct and indirect, and the total effects of each factor. If a first-year student possesses the ability to make the initial transition into college, then remaining in college would need to include the assimilation of the student into the intellectual and social communities of the institution. In addition, Tinto (1975) argues that the institution shares the responsibility with students for their success. College environment, along with a particular student's characteristics and skills set, affects that student's commitment to the institution and can increase or decrease depending on the quality and quantity of social and academic experiences (Tinto, 1993). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) agree that "negative interactions and experiences tend to...distance the individual from the academic and social communities" (pg. 53). The greater the social and academic integration, both formal and informal processes at the institution, the greater increase in student satisfaction, and the more likely the student will be to stay.

Much like Tinto's integration theory, in Kuh's engagement theory the responsibility for student success is shared with the institution. College environment which is a key component to Tinto's model also has a strong role in engagement theory. The importance of providing appropriate policies, services, learning opportunities to "foster student success" (Kuh, 2005, pg 9) is a central characteristic of the model. For both these models it is the combination of student responsibility and institutional responsibility that results in a student staying enrolled.

Finally, we have Chickering and Gamson's (1987) theory which defined seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. The seven principles are geared to improve teaching and learning in the undergraduate experience. The principles are: encouraging student-

faculty contact, developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, using active learning techniques, giving prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering and Gamson, 1987).

Engagement theory holds faculty and administrators responsible for implementing Chickering and Gamson's good practices in undergraduate education as a fundamental requirement for creating appropriate environments for students to thrive (Kuh, 2005). In Kuh's book "Student Success in College" he acknowledges that the schools identified as having higher-than predicted levels of both engagement and graduation rates do so because of "something meaningful beyond what students bring to college" (pg. 13). Kuh identifies those institutions that are making a concerted effort to do "something that encourages students to take part in effective, educationally purposeful activities" (pg. 13) those institutional "good practices" that should not be accidental but determined by faculty and administration.

National Survey of Student Engagement

In 2000, George Kuh, Professor at Indiana University, with the backing of a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, established a survey instrument (NSSE) to measure an institution's level of student engagement based on five benchmarks. Based on the work of an earlier survey, College Student Experiences Questionnaire, NSSE attempts to represent the multi-dimensional nature of student engagement at the national and institution levels (Schroeder, 2003).

Developers of the NSSE survey developed five indicators or benchmarks of effective educational practice: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences and Supportive Campus Environment. NSSE strives to help colleges and universities address issues of accountability and acts as an

alternative to *US News and World Report* rankings as an indicator of academic quality (Schroeder, 2003).

In explaining the conceptual framework and psychometric properties of the survey instrument, Kuh (2000) notes that the individual items used in the construction of the five benchmarks noted above were created with a blend of theory and empirical analysis. Principal component analyses were used initially in the exploration, with theory and practice being used subsequently to inform and determine the final benchmark item groupings. Only randomly sampled cases are included in the calculation of benchmarks for standard institutional reporting. Students' scores on items within the five NSSE indicators are combined and used as an individual student-level indicator. Students' combined scores are averaged across an institution to give an institutional indicator, called a benchmark (NSSE website).

Institutions that participate in the NSSE survey sample both freshman and seniors at their institution. The survey consists of seventy items and is given in the Spring each year. The questions require students to reflect on their college experiences. Students taking the NSSE “estimate their educational and personal growth since starting college in the areas of general knowledge, intellectual skills, written and oral communications skills, personal, social and ethical development, and vocational preparation” (Kuh, website, NSSE).

NSSE was specifically designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically-derived effective educational practices and what they gain from their college experiences (Kuh, 2001, 2005). Much of the research on college student development shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development (Kuh, et al., 2007; NSSE, 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Therefore, the main content of the NSSE instrument represents student

behaviors that are highly correlated with many desirable learning and personal development outcomes of college participation (Kuh, 2001).

Since the inception of the NSSE project nearly 1,300 different colleges and universities have participated, growing from 321 institutions in 2001 to 769 in 2007 (NSSE Website). These institutions are from all fifty states, Puerto Rico and Canada. In addition to traditional colleges and universities, NSSE has also been embraced by Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving institutions, Tribal Colleges, and single-gender colleges. To date, surveys have been completed by more than 2,000,000 students (NSSE website).

For this research I focused on two of the NSSE benchmarks, Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) and Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL). I focused on these two benchmarks based on the unique characteristics of Benedictine College. The level of academic challenge benchmark was chosen because of the poor results of beginning freshmen over multiple administrations of the survey, the course was seen as a way to improve the active and collaborative learning was chosen because of the emphasis on undergraduate research at the college.

Level of Academic Challenge

Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) is based on the principle that student learning is improved when expectations for student performance are high (NSSE, 2007). The LAC research supports a positive relationship between high levels of academic challenge and retention. Institutions and faculty, both disciplinary and general education, that promote academic challenge promote higher levels of engagement in their programs (Laird, Niskode, and Kuh, 2006; Ryan, 2005; Umbach and Wawrzynski, 2004).

As more data have become available from multiple administrations of the NSSE survey, researchers have begun to examine the outcomes of the research. Interesting research on LAC indicates that women at single-sex colleges experience higher levels of LAC than women at co-educational institutions (Kinzie, et al. et al., 2007). Additionally, there is some research that seems to indicate that women students respond more positively to academic challenge than their male counterparts (Landry, 2002). Finally, research indicates that student athletes perceive that they have higher levels of academic challenge than their non-athletic counterparts (Umbach, et al. et al., 2006).

In this study, the scores on the LAC portion of the NSSE survey administered to the beginning freshmen were examined to determine if the students enrolled in the pilot program performed any differently than the beginning freshmen who did not enroll in the program. Despite an emphasis on LAC by the college, especially in the introductory courses that enroll freshmen, the college continues to perform poorly on this component of the NSSE survey. Faculty feedback from surveys and discussions in faculty workshops indicate that the faculty are aware of the problem. Since the scores of the seniors on the LAC have consistently been strong, faculty believe that the problem is in the general education program. Most of the general education requirements are loaded early into the schedule of freshmen. The additional programming and course requirements of the pilot program were examined through the LAC score to determine if a program for beginning freshmen had a positive impact on this NSSE benchmark.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Active and collaborative learning (ACL) benchmarks help institutions measure their success at employing multiple learning styles. Institutions with high levels of ACL give

“students ...opportunities to learning how to work effectively in groups and apply what they are learning to practical problems” (Kuh, 2005, pg. 193).

In examining the ACL research, the data indicate that ACL has a positive relationship to retention (Bruffee, 1995; Umbach and Wawrzynski, 2004). Much like LAC, women at single-sex colleges report high levels of ACL, and women faculty members are more likely to emphasize collaborative learning than their male colleagues (Kinzie, et al. et al. 2007; Laird, et.al, 2007). While female students are more likely to prefer ACL, the efficacy of the model is stronger in single-sex groups rather than co-ed groupings (Laird, et. al., 2007).

The ACL scores are of particular interest to Benedictine College because of the college’s strong emphasis on undergraduate research through a program called the Discovery Program. Discovery participation is included on student’s transcripts, and discovery scholar medals are given at graduation. Despite the emphasis on research at the college, the NSSE administrations continue to reveal lower than expected ACL scores for beginning freshmen. The programming for the pilot program includes a strong emphasis on the Discovery program and faculty/student research. The ACL scores of the students in the pilot program and the remaining beginning freshmen were examined to determine if the emphasis on Discovery in the pilot program had an impact on this NSSE benchmark. The ACL scores of the students in the pilot program and the remaining beginning freshmen were examined to determine if the emphasis on Discovery in the pilot program had an impact on this NSSE benchmark.

Beginning Freshman Programs

Student orientation has been part of the academic life since the latter part of the 19th century (Gordon, 1989). These programs began to increase following World War I and included a “variety of other credit and noncredit courses” (Gordon, 1989, pg. 185). As early as 1950, over

40% of colleges and universities were offering these types of beginning freshman courses, but by the mid-1960s these courses “became nearly obsolete” (Gordon, 1989, pg. 188). However, in the 1980s the discussion of the importance of designing programs specifically for beginning freshmen regained its status and was part of the higher education debate (Gordon, 1989; Upcraft, et al, 2005). Currently, approximately a third of beginning freshmen in the United States will not complete their first year of college (Swing & Skipper, 2007). Conferences, papers, books, and debates reemerged during the 1980s and continue to the present day on ways to ensure student success and increase student retention.

The higher education community continues to offer arguments in support of the importance of beginning freshman programs, pushing for greater resource allocation, and establishing the best practices for programs (Levitz and Noel, 1989; Upcraft, et. al, 2005; Petschauer and Wallace, 2005; Swing and Skipper, 2007). The question remains, why focus on the beginning freshmen experience? “Because of the overwhelming evidence that student success is largely determined by experiences during the freshman year” (Upcraft and Gardner, 2005, pg. 1).

Beginning freshmen programs encompass more than one type of experience aimed at transitioning new students to the college community. “While there are many variations among first-year seminars, every seminar aims to assist students in their academic and social development and in their transition to college” (Hunter and Linder, 2005, pg. 275), the rationale for these types of programs is linked to the high correlation between “student learning and a student’s involvement and engagement” (Hunter and Linder, 2005, pg. 276). It is theorized that these programs address some of the transition issues experienced by students as they move from

an environment of comfort (home) and the new environment they find themselves inhabiting (Hunter and Linder, 2005; Kolkhorst, et. al, 2010, Sandeen, 2003)

The body of research devoted to the efficacy of beginning freshman programs supports the use of beginning freshman programs as a means of increasing student retention (Davis-Underwood and Lee, 1994; Murtaugh, et al, 1999; Levitz and Noel, 1989; Petschauer and Wallace, 2005; Shanley & Whitten, 1990; Upcraft, et. al, 2005; Swing and Skipper, 2007 Williford, et.al., 2001). Longitudinal studies at the University of South Carolina, Ohio University, Oregon State University, as well as studies at the University of South Florida and University of North Carolina at Charlotte are examples of research that show higher retention rates from freshman to sophomore year for those students participating in beginning freshman programs over their counterparts who do not participate (Davis-Underwood and Lee , 1994; Murtaugh, et al, 1999; Shanley & Whitten, 1990; Williford, et.al., 2001).

Research design of the various studies varied slightly but all included standard pre-college variables and controlled for high school grade point average, ACT score or SAT scores, gender, race, and resident and international student status. Some of the studies looked only at the retention rate from freshman to sophomore year, while the longer studies also examined four-year and six-year graduation rates. In the Ohio study, which was a ten-year longitudinal study, researchers found not only were freshmen more likely to be retained if they participated in the “University Experience” course for beginning freshmen but they also had higher graduation rates than those students who did not participate in the program (Williford, et. al., 2000).

A four-year study based out of Ithaca College looked at persistence-to-graduation in a discipline-specific first year seminar in which the curriculum was embedded within an already existing freshman course (Lifton, et. al., 2007). The pilot program was within the school of

business at the college and the augmented sections of the courses offered additional pedagogy on test taking techniques, note taking approaches, and writing assignments (Lifton, et.al. 2007). The researchers found correlation with retention to sophomore year when accounting for the variable of student's declared major for those students in the pilot program, although the overall first-year seminars did not show higher retention rates to the sophomore year (Lifton, et al., 2007).

A study that tracked the incoming beginning freshman classes from 1998 through 2001 all the way through graduation at the University of South Alabama showed that those students participating in their first-year program graduated at higher rates than those students not participating (Noble, et. al., 2007). The variables tracked in this study were ACT and SAT scores, gender, race and major. This study also showed a positive correlation between participation in the first-year program and first year grade point average for minorities and men as well as for white students and women (Noble, et. al., 2007).

A researcher at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities conducted a study to determine if the institution's first year program made a difference in not only retention, but also student satisfaction (Hendel, 2007). The study results did not find any increase in student retention to the sophomore year, but students enrolled in the first-year seminar did show more positive responses than their counterparts on 15 of 92 satisfaction items (Hendel, 2007). The positive responses were along the lines of advising, campus experiences, and the student's sense of community (Hendel, 2007).

Benedictine College has struggled for several years with the concept of launching a beginning freshman program, specifically with the hope of increasing student retention. Research as cited above has been presented at faculty workshops and several different faculty

and administrator ad hoc committees have attempted to design a program that the faculty would approve. For a variety of historical and political reasons the proposals for a beginning freshman program sent to the faculty have never been approved. The pilot program launched in Fall 2008 was spearheaded by the dean without the full approval of the faculty, but with a cadre of faculty members who designed the program and offered their introductory courses as pilot courses in the program. This study examined the retention rate of those students participating in the pilot program to determine if they were retained at a higher rate than the rest of the beginning freshman population.

Conclusion

While evidence from the literature indicates that many beginning freshman programs have a positive impact on student retention from their freshman to sophomore year (Levitz and Noel, 1989; Upcraft, et al., 2005; Petschauer and Wallace, 2005; Swing and Skipper, 2007), it is in the theory of student engagement that this study seeks a framework for the types of activities that encourage students to devote time and energy to educationally purposeful activities. As previously indicated in this chapter, research supports student engagement activities as the single best predictor of student learning and personal development (Kuh, et al., 2007; NSSE, 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). The student behaviors identified in the theory are highly correlated with many desirable learning and personal development outcomes of college participation (Kuh, 2001). Establishing these activities early in the student's educational experience through a beginning freshman program seems an appropriate application of the theories and research.

In designing the pilot program for their beginning freshman program, the goals of the ad-hoc committee, the retention committee and the Academic Dean of the college were to promote

best practices for student engagement. The question remains, how successful was the program in doing so? In chapter 4 of this dissertation I explore this question using both quantitative data gathered from the Fall 2008 beginning freshman class and from surveys and conversations with the faculty who taught in the pilot program.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purposes of this study are to answer the following questions: (1) Are students participating in the beginning freshman program more likely to be retained than those students who do not participate? (2) Does participation in the beginning freshman program result in greater student engagement compared to those students who do not participate? (3) How well were the program goals implemented across disciplines/classes in the pilot program?

This study will use both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the following evaluation and research questions:

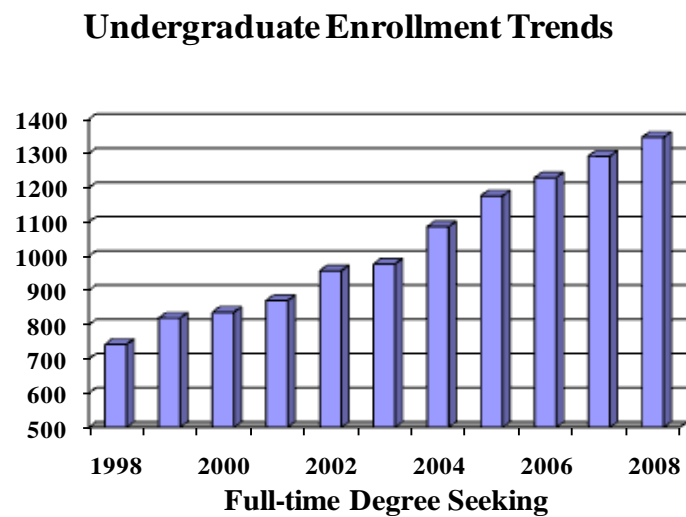
- 1) How was the beginning freshman program curriculum implemented across disciplines and faculty teaching in the pilot program?
- 2) What is the relationship between participating in the pilot program (or not) and perceived level of academic challenge and perceived level of collaborative learning as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)?
 - Controlling for relevant variables of ACT composite scores, gender, and parent's educational level how does participating in the pilot beginning freshman classes relate to perceived level of academic challenge and active and collaborative learning as measured by the NSSE scale?
 - Controlling for relevant variables, of ACT composite scores, gender, freshman year cumulative grade point average, and parent's educational level, how does participation in the freshman pilot program relate to returning to the college in Fall 2009 (Sophomore year)?

- Controlling for relevant variables of ACT composite scores and gender, how does participating in the freshman pilot program relate to cumulative grade point average?
- 3) How might the program be improved for implementation with entire beginning freshman classes in the future?

Setting and Participants

The official Fall 2008 Registrar’s report showed a total student head count of 1352 full time undergraduate students. Adding in part-time undergraduate enrollment, graduate programs and advanced college credit programs in area high schools brings total enrollment of full-time and part-time students to 1751. The freshman class of 396 full-time students represents 29.3% of the total undergraduate population. Enrollment at Benedictine College has been on a steady upward trend for the past ten years.

Chart 2



Benedictine College is predominantly white (82%) with the largest minority group on campus being Hispanic (5%). The total minority population has consistently hovered at approximately 12% for the past decade. The 2008 beginning freshman class is similar to the overall student body with 15% of the students identifying as minority, and 85% white.

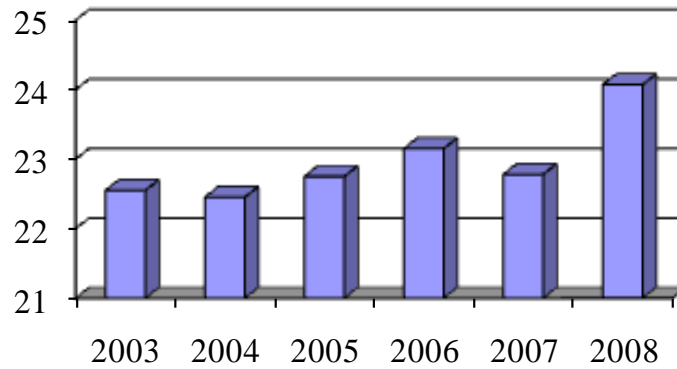
Beginning with the Fall 2008 undergraduate enrollment, the ratio of female to male is more female with 53%, compared to 47% for males. The beginning freshman class is also more dominantly female with 56% of the incoming class compared to 44% male students.

The college has been somewhat successful in attracting students beyond the immediate region. The Fall 2008 full-time undergraduate student body represented 37 states and 20 countries, although the international population is quite small, with just 26 students in the undergraduate program. The dominant states that students are recruited from continue to be Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Iowa.

Benedictine College is considered moderately selective, requiring an ACT composite score of at least an 18, and a 860 or higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a “C” average in high school and graduation in the upper half of one’s high school senior class (Benedictine College Catalog). The average ACT composite score of the beginning freshman class in Fall 2008 was 23 with the overall college average ACT composite score of 23.48. The average ACT composite score has increased over the last several years from an average of 20 for the 2005 beginning freshman cohort.

Chart 3

Average ACT Composite Scores of Beginning Freshmen



The religious preference of the student body is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, with 78% of the student body self-identifying as such. The next largest protestant faith represented is Baptist at roughly 9%.

Benedictine college has participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California-Los Angeles since its inception and has forty years of data about its incoming classes. Interesting trends concerning the 2008 beginning freshman class include a higher than average population of Roman Catholic students, even higher than other Catholic colleges with 86.1 percent of the students identifying as Roman Catholic compared to 52.7% for all other Catholic colleges. This is also reflected in similar percentages for both Father's and Mother's religious preferences. The Fall 2008 beginning freshmen were also characterized as more conservative (58%) compared to their counterparts at other Catholic colleges (20.5%). This conservatism is also reflected in their

views on questions concerning abortion and homosexuality at higher rates than other Catholic colleges.

The students at Benedictine College were more likely to be attracted to the college based on its religious affiliation (61.8%) than their counterparts at other Catholic colleges (16.6%). Finally, beginning freshmen at Benedictine College are predominantly middle-class with most students, 65%, reporting parental income in the range of \$50,000-\$149,999 (CIRP, 2008).

Data on the Fall 2008 Beginning Freshman Class

The initial data for this study on the beginning freshman class at Benedictine College were exported from the college's student database, EMPOWER. Individual student data were blinded and a unique ID number was randomly assigned. The data pulled on each beginning freshman student included gender, state of residence, number of hours enrolled, race, ACT composite score, and enrollment in pilot program by teacher. Additional data added during the academic year included Fall semester grade point average, cumulative grade point average for the beginning freshman year, results of the NSSE survey, parental educational attainment, and enrollment status in Fall 2009 (See Table 2).

Table 2

Variables collected on Fall 2008 Beginning Freshmen

State of Residence

Course Hours Enrolled in Fall 2008

Race

ACT composite scores

Fall Semester grade point average

Cumulative grade point average

Enrollment in Pilot Section

Statistical Analysis

In addition to descriptive statistics of students in both the pilot beginning freshman program and those not enrolled in the program, and frequency distributions, the following statistical analysis was performed on variables between the students enrolled in the pilot program and those not enrolled in the pilot program to define any statistical differences between groups.

Table 3

Enrolled in Pilot Program and Not Enrolled in Pilot Program
Variables for Beginning Freshmen in Fall 2009

Variable	Analysis
ACT composite score	t-test
Gender	chi-square of equality
Hours Enrolled	t-test
Race (White/NonWhite)	chi-square of equality
Level of Academic Challenge	t-test
Active and Collaborative Learning	t-test
Fall Enrollment	chi-square of equality
Parental Education	t-test
Level Participation in Lecture Series	t-test

Pilot Program

The Dean of the College and an ad-hoc faculty committee designed the pilot beginning freshman program over the course of the 2008 summer semester. The ad hoc committee was composed of faculty who had previously agreed to offer introductory sections of their beginning freshman classes with additional programming as described below. The faculty teaching the pilot courses agreed upon a common syllabus for the additional course programming, a copy of which is available in the appendix. Courses included in the beginning freshman pilot program, with the exception of one course (CR 225), are part of the core or foundation requirements of the general education program at Benedictine College. All but one course included in the pilot program are 100-level courses normally populated by beginning freshman. All the courses

included in the pilot program were also available to beginning freshmen without the additional programming. The regular courses were for three credit hours, the normal load, and with the exception of the additional requirements were identical in content coverage of the discipline topic. The courses in the pilot program and their enrollments, as well as the regular course sections offered outside of the pilot program, are reflected in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Pilot Program Course Enrollment and Regular Course Section Enrollments

Course #	Course Name	BF Pilot Program Enrollment	BF Regular Enrollment
TH101	Introduction to Theology	22	110
PY100	Psychology	30	61
PS100	Introduction to American Government	20	36
PH175	Logic and Nature	26	29
BA155	Intro to Individual Leadership	28	0
CR225	Intro to Criminal Justice	11	9

The design of the pilot program scheduled all the special courses for the 11:00 am hour on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for 60 minutes versus the normal 50 minute class hour. The scheduling of the courses prevented students from enrolling in more than one class in the pilot program, and the additional time allowed faculty to plan for additional programming over the course of the semester.

NSSE Survey Instrument

In the Spring 2009 semester the researcher administered to the beginning freshmen class who were still enrolled a portion of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), specifically the 1) Level of Academic Challenge (LAC), and 2) Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL) benchmarks (see attached survey). While Benedictine College participates in the NSSE survey on a regular basis, the college is currently on a two-year participation plan and will not participate in another NSSE administration until Spring 2010. The researcher could not afford the cost of a separate administration and analysis by NSSE; however the researcher obtained permission from NSSE to administer an on-campus paper version of the survey that only includes the LAC and ACL benchmarks (see appendix). The researcher also scored the surveys.

The NSSE survey relies on self-reported data and asks students to “report on the frequency with which they engage in dozens of activities that represent good educational practice” (Kuh, 2003). In building the survey and to address concerns of validity of self-reported data, the NSSE researchers designed the survey to satisfy five conditions they determined from the literature to address concerns of self-reported data. The five conditions are:

- “the information requested is known to the respondents;
- the questions are phrased clearly and unambiguously;
- the questions refer to recent activities;
- the respondents think the questions merit a serious and thoughtful response;
- answering the questions does not threaten, embarrass, or violate the privacy of the respondent or encourage the student to respond in socially desirable ways” (Kuh, pg. 4, 2003).

In addition to using the conditions noted above in building the survey, the researchers, in support of the survey's validity and reliability, conducted psychometric analyses of the original administrations of the field tests from the inception of the instrument in 1999, and multiple administrations since then (Kuh, 2003). Results from these tests show the majority of the items on the survey instrument are valid and reliable with acceptable kurtosis and skewness indicators (Kuh, 2003). The researchers acknowledge that a shortcoming of the analysis was the inability to know if respondents are interpreting the questions as intended by the design team (Kuh, 2003).

To address the question of how respondents were interpreting the questions, the researchers conducted focus groups at eight colleges and universities that participated in the 2000 administration of the NSSE instrument (Kuh, 2003). Students in the focus groups found most of the questions to be clear and easy to complete, and a few items were identified that the team changed for additional clarity (Kuh, 2003). Based on the feedback from the student focus groups, changes were made to the 2001 version of the survey instrument.

To further test the reliability and stability of the instrument the research team did a test and retest in 2002 using 1,226 respondents using the paper version of the instrument (Twigg, 2010). The test and retest study was completed again in 2005 with 1,536 respondents who used either the paper or web version of the instrument (Twigg, 2010). Findings from both studies showed little variation in student responses from one test administration to the next (Twigg, 2010).

NSSE in the Pilot Program

The two components of NSSE that were used as part of this research were Level of Academic Challenge and Active and Collaborative Learning. In addition, a few demographic questions were added, along with questions on the student's attendance at the Fall speaker series

and parental educational attainment. The questions from the two NSSE benchmarks are listed in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5

Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) Questions

1. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations.
 2. Coursework emphasizes: Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
 3. Coursework emphasizes: Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences
 4. Coursework emphasizes: Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
 5. Coursework emphasizes: Applying theories or concepts to practical problems in new situations
 6. Number of assigned textbooks, books or book length packs of course readings
 7. Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more.
 8. Number of written papers or reports between 5-19 pages
 9. Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages
 10. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)
 11. Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work
-

Table 6

Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL) Questions

1. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions.
 2. Made a class presentation
 3. Worked with other students on projects during class
 4. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
 5. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
 6. Participated in community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course
 7. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)
-

NSSE Administration

In the Spring 2009 semester, the NSSE survey was distributed during a Wednesday “skip-a-meal” night at each of the four dorms where beginning freshmen live. On skip-a-meal night the cafeteria is closed. The researcher heavily loaded down with pizza and brownies, invited the students to participate in taking the survey instrument. The surveys were handed out in a plain envelope with only the student’s name on the front. Inside, the student’s unique ID number was coded at the top of the survey. Students from a statistics class in Business volunteered to collect the surveys from each of the floors in the dorm by the end of the evening.

At the beginning of the survey is the Human Subjects approved statement informing students of the nature of the study and their ability to refuse to participate. The survey took no more than 15-20 minutes to complete for most of the students. For those students not participating during the dorm administration, a table was set up during the dormitory room draw on a Saturday morning in April to attempt to gather any remaining student surveys.

Scoring of the surveys included several data points: score of the combined LAC questions and score of the combined ACL questions as well as the number of lectures attended in the lecture series and parental educational attainment. In addition, multicollinearity estimates were performed to determine if any of the independent variables are highly correlated.

Data Analysis

Below are the research questions and the type of analysis run for each of the research questions:

- 1) How was the beginning freshman program curriculum implemented across disciplines and faculty teaching in the pilot program? Data from the faculty surveys and interviews were analyzed to address this question.

- 2) What is the relationship between participating in the pilot program (or not) and perceived level of academic challenge and perceived level of collaborative learning as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)?
- Controlling for relevant variables of ACT composite scores, gender, and parent's educational level how does participating in the pilot beginning freshman classes related to perceived level of academic challenge and active and collaborative learning as measured by the NSSE scale? A multivariate regression was run with the dependent variable of Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) score and independent variables are membership or not in the pilot program, ACT composite scores, and parent's educational level.
 - A second analysis is run using the dependent variable of Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL) score and independent variables are membership or not in the pilot program, ACT composite scores, gender and parent's educational level.
 - Controlling for relevant variables, of ACT composite scores, gender, freshman year cumulative grade point average, and parent's educational level, how does participation in the freshman pilot program relate to returning to the college for the Fall 2009 (Sophomore year)? Logistic regression analysis was run with the dependent variable of retention to enrollment in the Fall 2009 term. Independent variables are ACT composite scores, freshman year cumulative grade point average, membership or not in pilot program, and parent's educational level.
 - Controlling for relevant variables of ACT composite scores and gender, how does participating in the freshman pilot program relate to cumulative grade point average? Multivariate regression analysis was run with the dependent variable of

cumulative grade point average. The independent variables are membership or not in the pilot program, Fall semester cumulative grade point average and ACT composite scores.

- 3) How might the program be improved for implementation with the entire beginning freshman classes in the future? Results of the faculty surveys and interviews were analyzed to address this question.

Faculty Surveys

Late in the Spring 2009 semester, faculty who participated in teaching the pilot program classes were invited by the researcher to participate in a survey designed to evaluate the level of implementation of the agreed upon curriculum in the pilot program classes. In addition to answering questions provided by the researcher, faculty had the opportunity to share their comments on the success of the program and ways to improve the program. A copy of the written survey that was sent to faculty teaching in the pilot program is available in the appendix.

Written surveys were used to determine differences in the implementation of the materials for the special section of the courses versus the pedagogy used in the regular sections of the same course offerings. Questions asked of the faculty participating in the pilot program were aimed at determining the type of pedagogy used in the classroom of the special section classes, as well as the faculty member's perception of the speaker series in supporting the goals of the beginning freshman program.

All six faculty members completed the written surveys. The data collection involved providing the faculty members with a set of identical survey questions. The faculty responded in writing to the researcher with responses to the set of questions. When necessary, the researcher followed-up with questions of clarification in person or over the phone after faculty members

completed and submitted the written survey. The follow-up phone or in-person discussions primarily consisted of clarification on assignments that were specific to the pilot program and how the pilot program class differed from the other sections of the same class taught in the Fall 2008 semester.

The review of faculty responses involved coding the responses for implementation and pedagogy themes. The researcher then reviewed and coded faculty responses concerning the speaker series and finally the comments concerning the overall effectiveness of the program and any recommendations from the faculty. The data gathered from the interviews was used to identify differences in pedagogy and implementation of course curriculum in the pilot program, as well as faculty perception of the overall success of the program.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. First and possibly foremost was the lack of inclusion criteria for the beginning freshman students enrolled in the pilot program. It was at the discretion of the freshman advisor or self-inclusion by the student that determined participation in the pilot program. In addition, the implementation and research design of the pilot program lacks continuity in course instruction. The program is disbursed over multiple disciplines and instructors. Although the instructors worked from an agreed upon syllabus, the actual level of implementation varied and pedagogy varied across courses and disciplines. Finally, while the faculty involved hoped to impact the level of academic challenge experienced by the beginning freshman enrolled in the pilot study, the actual design of the program does not appear suited to accomplish this goal.

Chapter 4

Initial Descriptive Statistics

The first section of this chapter contains the initial statistical analysis of the variables collected as part of the enrollment process at Benedictine College. These statistics were analyzed to determine the comparable nature of the groups – those who participated in the pilot program courses and those who did not participate. In the later parts of this chapter I will restate and analyze the research questions using the additional variables and data collected during the Spring 2009 term.

Demographic data were collected from 100% of the Benedictine College freshmen who registered in Fall 2008. The data were extracted out of the Empower database used by the college to track students. The database is based on Oracle and is used to mine data and generate reports for the college. Of the 396 beginning freshmen enrolled in the Fall of 2008, 137 were registered in the pilot Freshman Program, and 259 were not enrolled. Results are reflected in Table 7.

Table 7

Demographic Characteristics of Fall 2008 Beginning Freshmen

Group	N	Gender	N	Percent
Beginning Freshman Total	396	Male	174	44%
		Female	222	56%
Enrolled in Pilot Program	137	Male	54	39.4%
		Female	83	60.6%
Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	259	Male	120	46.3%
		Female	139	53.7%

In addition to the variable of students enrolled in the pilot program, and those not enrolled in the pilot program, student records were coded on variables in Table 8 below. Independent sample *t*-tests were performed for each of the variables to determine if there were differences between the students enrolled in the pilot program and those not enrolled. No statistical differences were discovered in the variables with the exception of State of Residence. Students from the states outside of the regional area (Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa) were more likely to be enrolled in the treatment group. These results are reflected in Table 9.

Table 8

Enrolled in Pilot Program and Not Enrolled in Pilot Program
Variables for Beginning Freshmen in Fall 2009

Variables
ACT composite score
Gender
Hours Enrolled
Race (White/NonWhite)
Level of Academic Challenge
Active and Collaborative Learning
Fall Enrollment
Parental Education
Level Participation in Lecture Series

Table 9
Students Demographics from Regional and Non-Regional Home States

Group	N	Percent
Beginning Freshmen from Regional area	259	65.4%
Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	182	70.3%
Enrolled in Pilot Program	77	29.7%
Beginning Freshman from outside Regional Area	137	34.6
Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	77	56.2%
Enrolled in Pilot Program	60	43.8

Tables 10, 11 and 12 provide summary statistics on Fall grade-point-average and ACT scores, and Fall credit hour enrollments of the overall beginning freshman population, and broken down by students enrolled in the pilot program and those not enrolled,

Table 10
Fall 2008 Semester GPA

Group	N	Semester GPA
All Beginning Freshmen	396	2.84
Beginning Freshmen Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	259	2.83
Beginning Freshmen Enrolled in the Pilot Program	137	2.84

Table 11

ACT Data of Fall 2008 Beginning Freshmen

Group	N	Mean ACT Score
All Beginning Freshmen	395*	24.6
Beginning Freshmen Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	258	24.21
Beginning Freshmen Enrolled in the Pilot Program	137	23.80

*One international student did not submit an ACT score

Table 12

Number of Credit Hours Enrolled in the Fall 2008 Semester

Group	N	Mean Credit Hour Enrollment
All Beginning Freshmen	396	15.55
Beginning Freshmen Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	259	15.49
Beginning Freshmen Enrolled in the Pilot Program	137	15.66

As noted in the charts in the Fall Semester grade-point-average, ACT scores and first semester credit enrollments, there are no statistical differences between the two groups of students, those participating in the pilot program and those not participating.

NSSE Survey Results

Additional data were collected in the Spring 2009 semester for those students participating in the NSSE survey administered on campus. Table 13 depicts the demographics

on the number of students participating in the survey administered in the Spring 2009 term by participation, or not, in the pilot program.

Table 13

2008 Beginning Freshman Participating in Spring Survey

Group	N	Completing Surveys	Percentage
Enrolled in Pilot Program	137	88	64.2%
Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	259	133	51.3%

Participation rates in taking the survey were slightly higher for those students enrolled in the pilot program over those students not enrolled. The following two tables, 14 and 15 indicate the mean scores and standard deviations for the two NSSE scales, Level of Academic Challenge and Active and Collaborative Learning. T-tests indicated there were not significant differences in mean scores for student enrolled in the pilot program, or not, for either the Level of Academic Challenge scale ($t = -.747$) or for the Active and Collaborative Learning Scale ($t = -.847$).

Table 14

Level of Academic Challenge Scale

Group	N	Mean Score	S.D.
All Students Taking Survey	221	2.52	.393
Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	133	2.51	.386
Enrolled in the Pilot Program	88	2.55	.405

Mean scores are based on a 4 point scale

Table 15

Active and Collaborative Learning Scale

Group	N	Mean Score	S.D.
All Students Taking Survey	221	2.22	.411
Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	133	2.20	.415
Enrolled in the Pilot Program	88	2.25	.405

Mean scores are based on a 4 point scale

Regression Analysis

In examining the relationship between participating in the pilot program, or not, and perceived level of academic challenge and perceived level of collaborative learning as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement the researcher ran multiple regression analysis. Controlling for the variables of ACT composite scores, gender and parent’s educational level the question of how does participation in the pilot beginning freshman classes relate to perceived level of LAC and ACL as measured by the questions on the NSSE scale? Multicollinearity tests led the researcher to combined mother and father’s educational level into a combined score to create the variable of parent’s education.

Table 16 indicates that the predictor variables do not significantly predict student’s level of LAC as measured by the NSSE survey items.

Table 16

Level of Academic Challenge

Model	df	F	Sig.
1 Regression	4	.802	.525 ^a

a. Predictors: (Constant), Parents Education, Pilot Program, Gender, ACT Composite

b. Dependent Variables: LAC Average score

The results in Table 17 below indicate that the variables are not significant predictors of student's level of ACL as measured by the NSSE survey items.

Table 17

Active and Collaborative Learning

Model	Df	F	Sig.
1 Regression	4	1.920	.108 ^a

a. Predictors: (Constant), Parents Education, Pilot Program, Gender, ACT Composite

b. Dependent Variables: LAC Average Score

In examining the effect of the pilot program on retention from freshman to sophomore year the researcher ran a binary logistic regression analysis controlling for gender, ACT, parent's education and participation in the pilot program, or not. The dependent variable was retention to enrollment in the Fall 2009 term.

Table 18
Binary Logistic Regression Results for Retention to Fall Semester

		B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Parents Education	.111	.242	.209	1	.647	1.117
	Pilot Program	.961	.420	5.241	1	.022	2.615
	Gender	1.081	.374	8.367	1	.004	2.948
	ACT	.038	.032	1.481	1	.224	1.039
	Constant	-2.694	1.337	4.060	1	.044	.068

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Parents Education, Pilot Program, Gender, ACT Composite

The logistic regression predictor variables in Table 18 indicate significance on both participation in the pilot program and gender. Participation in the pilot program increases the likelihood of being retained by 2.5 times (or 261%). Being female increases the likelihood of being retained by 3 times (or 295%). The variables of ACT scores and parents education were not significant.

From a descriptive standpoint, the overall retention of the beginning freshman class was 71.2%, down from the previous year's retention of 76.1%. However for those students enrolled in the pilot program retention to the following Fall semester was 81.8% compared with 65.6% for those students who did not participate in the pilot program. These results are noted below in Table 19 below.

Table 19

Retention to Fall 2009 Semester

Group	Number	Retention
All Beginning Freshmen	396	71.2%
Participating in Pilot Program	137	81.8%
Not Participating in Pilot Program	259	65.6%

Retention was also greater for female students enrolled in the pilot program over female students not enrolled in the pilot program. Overall retention by gender was female 80.6% and male 59.2%, but participation in the pilot program showed a retention rate of female 88.0% and male 72.2%. Retention rates by gender are reflected in Table 20 below.

Table 20

Retention to Fall 2009 Semester by Gender

Group	Number	Retention
Male Freshmen not Enrolled in Pilot Program	120	53.3%
Male Freshmen Participating in Pilot Program	54	72.2%
Female Freshman Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	139	76.3%
Female Freshmen Participating in Pilot Program	73	88.0%

As noted in the table, female students enrolled in the Pilot Program were the population most likely to be enrolled in the following Fall 2009 semester.

Effect of Pilot Program on Grade Point Average

Another question regarding the pilot program was whether participation in the pilot program had an effect on the participant’s cumulative grade point average. The researcher ran a multivariate regression analysis controlling for gender, ACT and participation in pilot program, or not. The dependent variable was cumulative grade point average as noted in Table 21 and 22.

Table 21

Cumulative Grade Point Average

Model	Df	F	Sig.
1 Regression	3	34.070	.0001 ^a

c. Predictors: (Constant), Pilot Program, Gender, ACT Composite

d. Dependent Variables: Cumulative Grade Point Average

Table 22

Multiple Regression Results of Cumulative Grade Point Average

Model	Standardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
	Beta			
1 (Constant)			3.348	.001
Gender	.226		4.969	.000
ACT Composite	.368		8.096	.000
Pilot Program	.013		.284	.777

a. Dependent Variable: Cumulative Grade Point Average

The pilot program participation had no relationship to cumulative grade point average; however both gender and ACT composite score exhibited a moderate relationship. ACT composite scores was the most powerful predictor (with a Beta of .37) while being female was also a significant predictor (Beta =.226). As noted in Table 23, female students had a higher cumulative grade point average. Table 24 shows ACT composite scores of students retained to Fall 2009.

Table 23

2008 Beginning Freshman 2008-2009 Academic Year
Cumulative Grade Point Average by Gender

Population	N	CUMGPA
All Freshmen Continuing Enrollment Fall 2009	282	3.19
All Female students Continuing Enrollment Fall 2009	179	3.29
All Male students Continuing Enrollment Fall 2009	103	3.03

Table 24

2008 Beginning Freshman ACT Composite Score
For those Students Continuing Enrollment in Fall 2009

Population	N	ACT Composite
All Freshmen Enrolled Fall 2009	282	24.74
All Female students Enrolled Fall 2009	179	25.06

All Male students Enrolled Fall 2009	103	24.19
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Participation in Speaker Series

A requirement of participation in the pilot program was participation in the Sesquicentennial Speaker Series in the Fall of 2008. Table 25 depicts the beginning freshman class' level of participation in the speaker series of those students' filling out the survey in the Spring 2009. As noted in the chart, students enrolled in the pilot program attended a mean average of 5.24 speakers, out of a total of 6 speakers, compared with the student's not enrolled in the pilot program who attended .95 lectures.

Table 25

2008 Beginning Freshman Attendance at Six Sessions of Speaker's Series

Students Filling Out Surveys	N	Mean Attendance
Enrolled in Pilot Program	88	5.24
Not Enrolled in Pilot Program	133	.95

While overall participation in the Speaker's Series was higher for those students enrolled in the pilot program, as noted in the next section of the chapter, neither the students nor the faculty felt the Speaker's Series was beneficial to the purpose of the pilot program.

Implementation and Teaching in the Pilot Program

In answering the research question, "How successful was the beginning freshman program curriculum implemented across disciplines and faculty teaching in the pilot program?" the researcher reviewed and categorized faculty responses to the survey questions "Did you integrate the materials into class in a way that was different from the normal section of the class you teach? If yes, how" and "Pedagogically did you teach your "S" section course differently from your normal course offerings on the same topic? If so, how were they different?" Faculty answers were coded into those faculty making pedagogical changes and those who did not. Three out of the six faculty made considerable differences to the course requirement for the pilot program courses. The research classified considerable differences as faculty adding additional requirements beyond participation in the speaker series and classroom lectures.

Three of the six faculty had little to no pedagogical differences between pilot program classes and regular course sections other than attendance at lecture series and some in class lectures.

Table 26 shows the enrollments by faculty pedagogy. More students were enrolled in the classes where faculty changed the pedagogy with additional requirements of the class from the non-pilot program section offerings. Faculty who added additional requirements and varied their pedagogy beyond participation in the lecture series and classroom lectures included assignments such as written reflections on speakers, classroom guest lecturers, additional test questions on

mid-term and final exams based on in class discussions and assignments, field trips, an additional textbook and required reading not assigned in the non-pilot sections of the course.

Table 26

Faculty Pedagogy in Pilot Program Classes		
Group	N	Percent
Enrollment in Pilot Program	137	100%
No Changes in Pedagogy	53	39%
Changes in Pedagogy	84	61%

In the class with an additional textbook assigned the professor used *The Risk of Education* by Luigi Giussani. The professor chose this text because it “integrates faith, reason, the liberal arts, and a response to skepticism into a discussion of the value of education.” The readings from the additional book were used for discussions in class and the professor also “used these discussions as occasions for the students to reflect on the point of a Catholic, liberal arts education” and incorporated the book into a writing assignments on the “same topic to coincide with the reading, and one of their major papers focused on this theme.”

In reviewing responses to the question of preparing students for the level of academic challenge expected in college, several professors felt that was one of the strengths of the curriculum in the pilot program. “The students were, despite my warnings, pretty shocked by their first paper assignment and the midterm examination. They, for the most part, answered the wake-up call very well and improved greatly during the course of the semester.” This was a common theme to faculty responses about the strength of the program, “In my particular courses,

I think they had a solid impact especially regarding introducing students to the level of demand they can expect.”

A variable for the pedagogy of the faculty member teaching the class was added to the dataset. This was coded as either a 1 for those not making pedagogical changes, and a 2 for those making changes. A t-test comparing the retention of students based on the pedagogy did not reveal any statistical differences between the pilot program participants. Additional t-tests comparing Fall cumulative grade point average and academic year cumulative grade point average also found no statistical differences between groups, even when controlling for gender. The researcher also ran a t-test comparing level of academic challenge and active and collaborative learning scales from the spring survey and found no statistical differences by enrollment in class types. Table 27 shows these results.

Table 27

Mean Score by Faculty Pedagogy in Pilot Program for Participants Completing Survey

Benchmark Scale	Number	Mean	S.D.
Level of Academic Challenge	88	2.55	.405
Increased Pedagogy in Course	50	2.52	.452
No Increase in Pedagogy in Course	38	2.58	.337
Active and Collaborative Learning	88	2.25	.405
Increased Pedagogy in Course	50	2.20	.409
No Increase in Pedagogy in Course	38	2.31	.396

Mean Score based on a Scale of 1-4

Improvements to the Pilot Program

In reviewing the faculty surveys several themes emerged from the faculty to improve the beginning freshman program. A primary problem that surfaced with the pilot program and was present in all of the faculty surveys, was the college-wide speaker series. It was expressed by the pilot program faculty, and by the students in comments and on evaluations, that the speaker series did not support the goals of the program. The lectures were heavily dominated by business leaders. Both faculty and students expressed that the speakers were “redundant and increasingly irrelevant to their success at BC.” The great majority of the students did not find the lecture series very helpful and thought it was too concerned with business issues. One student asked in class ‘Do they know that we aren’t all business majors’.”

The lecture series, which was scheduled at 11:00 am on Fridays during the Fall term, also contributed to another common complaint, lack of time. Although the classes were given additional time in each class period, the requirement for the students to attend the lecture series placed additional time constraints on the faculty trying to add additional programming to the courses. This may not have been as much of an issue if the lecture series had been more in line with the needs of the pilot program in acclimating students to academic rigor, but as previously noted this was not the case.

The faculty also identified as an area for improvement the need to decide upon a common set of expectations for the courses. Faculty noted that while they had met together as a group and outlined general course requirements there was not enough work done by the ad hoc committee on the specifics of the course and course objectives. In addition, while it was discussed that the faculty wanted to improve the scores for Level of Academic Challenge scores for beginning freshman, the faculty were uneven in their approach and in implementation. Few

faculty followed through on the actual course requirements that would support this goal. Several of the faculty also expressed that while teaching the course across disciplinary boundaries was considered a good idea at the time, they felt that some disciplines supported the inclusion of the beginning freshman materials better than other disciplines. The researcher is not sure how much of this is actually discipline based or just an implementation problem with the faculty teaching in the pilot program. Several of the faculty members have continued the pilot program in the Fall 2009 semester using introductory courses in Psychology and Sociology. Changes included specific course objectives for the beginning freshman programming and agreement on specific course assignments to support learning objectives. The researcher has had several discussions with the faculty on ways to modify the curriculum in the program to support more of the level of academic challenge benchmarks.

Overall results of the pilot beginning freshman program support the literature that these types of programs have a positive effect on retention, at least to the sophomore year. The ongoing challenge for the researcher and the administration of the college will be to translate these results into a convincing argument to encourage more faculty to support and participate in an ongoing beginning freshman program.

Chapter 5

Hell is paved with good intentions.

Few things are impossible to diligence and skill.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

The administration and faculty at Benedictine College have good intentions in seeking to implement a beginning freshman program to assist students with the transition to college. In addition, the emphasis the academic community has placed on increasing the level of academic challenge, especially in the general education courses is an important and worthy goal. The problem appears to be not in the desire, but rather in the will to accomplish the goals of the college. Good intentions alone will not help students be successful in navigating the transition into college. In the remaining chapter of this dissertation I will first highlight findings of the study and discuss the implications. In the final section I will outline some best practice research for beginning freshmen programs and student engagement and recommendations on how these best practices might benefit Benedictine College's programs and initiatives.

Summary Findings from the Study

The data analysis from the study did not find any differences between participation and non-participation in the NSSE benchmarks of Level of Academic Challenge or Active and Collaborative Learning. This was true even when accounting for pedagogical differences in the implementation of the pilot program's curriculum. There was however a significant difference between those participating in the pilot program and those not participating in the pilot program in the area of retention to the following Fall semester.

The primary finding of the research was in the area of the pilot program and retention. Students enrolled in the pilot program were more likely to be enrolled in the following Fall semester than those students not enrolled in the pilot program. Overall retention was lower than the previous academic year, but participation in the pilot program yielded a retention rate of 81.8% compared to students not participating in the pilot program whose retention rate to the follow Fall was 65.6%. As a total cohort the retention rate was 71.2% Fall to Fall.

The lowest level of retention among beginning freshman was male students not enrolled in the pilot program. Retention of male students in the freshman year has been a consistent problem for the college. The general belief is that many male students are recruited for sports and then don't make the team and leave after one or two semesters in college. Student athletes composed approximately 40% of total enrollment at the college, with college football the largest recruiter of male students, many of whom don't make the team.

Surprisingly for the researcher, the student's ACT score was not a significant predictor of retention. Also, the first year grade-point-average of the students was not affected by the student's participation or non-participation in the pilot program.

While the population of beginning freshmen who participated and who did not participate in the program were similar in composition, it is interesting to note that students who lived outside of the region (Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas) were more likely to be enrolled in the pilot program. Although students from outside the region only compose 34.6% of the general beginning freshman population, they constituted 56.2% of the pilot program enrollment. Since students self-selected, or were encouraged by their freshman faculty advisor to enroll in specific courses and sections, it is difficult to determine why the population was over-represented in the pilot program. Other variables of the population, gender, semester grade-point-average,

ACT composite score, and credit hour enrollments were comparable between the students enrolled in the pilot program and those not enrolled.

The goal of the pilot program to increase retention of beginning freshmen to their sophomore year was successful. The use of first year seminars to support initiatives of this type have been a staple in higher education for some time and the research supports the efficacy of these types of programs in increasing retention (Davis-Underwood and Lee, 1994; Murtaugh, et al, 1999; Levitz and Noel, 1989; Petschauer and Wallace, 2005; Shanley & Whitten, 1990; Upcraft, et. al, 2005; Swing and Skipper, 2007; Williford, et.al., 2001). The research on the pilot program at Benedictine contains some confounding factors to consider in interpreting the data.

The college's focus on retention in the two years leading up to the pilot program prompted the creation of the Student Success Center on campus. The primary focus of the center is to "help students meet their academic and professional goals" (Student Success Center website). At the center, students may access academic advisement, study skill enhancement, learning accommodations, interest assessments, and career development. The center was in place and fully operational in the Fall of 2008 and may have also influenced retention, although the services of the center were available to all beginning freshmen and so cannot completely explain the higher retention rates in the pilot program.

As previously noted, the likelihood of being enrolled in the pilot program increased if students were from outside of the region of Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. Since traditionally students from outside of a 500 mile radius of the school are more likely to leave school during their freshman year, it is possible that faculty advisors, and possibly the students themselves opted into the pilot program as a way to increase the likelihood that the students would transition more smoothly into the college community. Students from outside of the

region may also have been more likely to use the Student Success Center in trying to acclimate to college life. The combination of the pilot program and the use of the Student Success Center may have influenced higher retention among this group of students.

In addition, the curriculum in the pilot program emphasized the mission and community aspects of college life at Benedictine. The curriculum focused on the Catholic and Benedictine nature of the college and included sessions with the Abbot and Abbess of the sponsoring communities. As previously noted in the data, students who come to Benedictine are predominantly Catholic and highly conservative. This focus on Catholicism and community for students from outside of the region being exposed to the college for the first time may have increased the student's academic integration and feelings of belonging and community, thereby encouraging greater retention.

A primary reason for researching the pilot program at Benedictine was to provide data to the faculty that would help bridge the divide between those faculty resistant to starting a freshman program and those faculty who support the program. Given the successful outcome in terms of retention in the pilot program, it is hoped that faculty will be more open to expanding the freshman program to all incoming first-year students. Given the nature of the divide between faculty, based on length of tenure at the college, and the ongoing number of new hires, the issue may eventually resolve itself over time. In any case, the results of the pilot program indicate that a first-year seminar at Benedictine College can be successful in helping to improve retention rates.Implementation of Program Goals

Implementation of the pilot program was inconsistent among the six faculty members involved in the pilot. Some of the faculty included additional readings and outside speakers to the pilot program course sections, while others made little changes pedagogically. There was a

high level of participation in the speaker series by students in the pilot program; however the programming of the speaker series was not supportive of the desired pilot program outcomes, and was deemed ineffective by the faculty and students.

Good freshmen programs provide students with “an introduction to academic and personal success strategies and an opportunity for self-discovery and self-realization” (Petschauer and Wallace, 2005, pg. 184). While beginning freshman programs differ across the educational landscape because educational environments differ, the most successful programs sustain an environment which supports students as they transition into and integrate into the community and seek to better understand the academic community’s expectations.

Speaker series are a regular part of many beginning freshmen programs, however they usually relate to the transition of students into the life of the college. Practitioners indicate that a key factor at the heart of good freshman programs is the acknowledgement that the academic environment is an unknown landscape for new students (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Petschauer & Wallace, 2005). Benedictine College would benefit from known best practices in beginning freshman programs that offer students an opportunity to understand and integrate into this new landscape, this was not the case with the speaker series offered in the Fall 2008 which for the most part emphasized business speakers.

Barriers to Success

While the higher education community has accepted the research on the role of beginning freshmen programs in helping beginning freshmen transition into the college environment, there remain problems with implementation of these programs as evidenced by the ongoing high attrition and low graduation rates. The problems that plague beginning freshman programs like

the pilot program at Benedictine are not simplistic and cross boundaries that include organizational, environmental, academic, and budgetary constraints.

There are several barriers that were and are an issue with the Benedictine College beginning freshman pilot program and initiatives to improve NSSE benchmarks. In the area of financial resources both the pilot program and NSSE initiatives lacked any budgetary resources. Faculty involved in the pilot program volunteered their time and were uncompensated for the additional teaching load. While the faculty are briefed on NSSE results after each administration and encouraged to find ways to increase Level of Academic Challenge and Active and Collaborative Learning for beginning freshman, resources have been nonexistent. Because the pilot program and NSSE initiatives lacked any substantial budgetary support the programs had to rely wholly on volunteers in the faculty ranks to accomplish program goals.

Academic programming, such as beginning freshman programs and NSSE initiatives must compete with other institutional priorities, especially during times of economic hardship, and often are not viewed as a priority initiative on campus (Chaskes and Anttonen, 2005; Upcraft, et al., 2005). Program support across the institution should include direct involvement by the institution's faculty, administration, and staff. In addition to budgetary support, beginning freshman programs and engagement initiatives need to be supported with appropriate academic and administrative policies as well as institutional environments (Barefoot, et al., 2005; Upcraft, et al., 1989).

In addition to budgetary constraints, programs for the beginning freshmen and NSSE initiatives on the Benedictine campus exist in separate and distinct silos and make it difficult to address the beginning freshman experience in a holistic approach. The previously existing BC Experience is housed solely in the student affairs division and does not incorporate or solicit the

needs of the academic side of the freshman experience. The BC Experience program, while mandatory for all beginning freshmen, has no credit attached to it and also relies heavily on volunteers in the faculty and student affairs office to administer the program which runs the week prior to registration. Faculty are briefed on NSSE results after each administration, but information is not regularly disseminated to student services or other support offices on campus.

The resources that need to be dedicated are both human and financial. Resource commitment should also go hand in hand with an institutional commitment to the priority of the programs within the budgeting processes of the institution (Barefoot, et al., 2005; Hrabowski, 2005). This was a problem with both the pilot program at Benedictine and the BC Experience already in place. One is wholly owned by the academic side of the institution, while the latter program is considered to be a Student Affairs initiative. Beginning freshman programs need to be supported by the entire institution rather than siloed in either the student or academic affairs office (Barefoot, et. al., 2005).

Best Practices in Beginning Freshman Programs

An approach that would benefit Benedictine College would be to incorporate both the academic and social integration components into one beginning freshman program. This would involve bringing together multiple constituencies on campus to decide on program goals and the means to accomplish them. This approach would also allow for budgeting priorities and needs to be established and appropriately funded by the college.

Institutions that strive to address barriers to successful beginning freshman programs may build stronger cultures that are student focused and integrate student success across institutional boundaries. The hoped for benefits for students will be improved retention and graduation rates. For the college this also means greater financial stability and increased prestige.

Benedictine College has struggled to incorporate both the institutional commitment through financial resources dedicated to a beginning freshman program and the necessary support of the faculty for the beginning freshman program. Because of the historic lack of budget support for freshman programs and the negative impact of programs implemented with limited resources, many long-term faculty are unwilling to support any initiatives that would seek to resurrect these types of programs. Beyond providing financial support, bridge building with faculty and staff on campus will need to be accomplished in a way that will foster a culture that views student success as a product of the entire academic community, including the administration (Barefoot, et al., 2005; Upcraft, et al., 1989).

Trying to Increase Student Engagement Results

Benedictine College has spent the last decade participating in and analyzing the results of the NSSE survey. The college was an early adopter of the instrument and has regularly scheduled cabinet agendas and faculty meetings to discuss the meaning of the campus results. Faculty and administrators have rejoiced over the results of the seniors and agonized over the lower performance of the beginning freshmen. Board meetings have included agenda items on student engagement, three-day faculty workshops, scheduled prior to the start of the academic year, have been dedicated to the principles of engagement theory and good teaching practices.

Despite this ongoing emphasis on student engagement, the pilot program results in beginning freshmen classes supports the earlier lack-luster results in the areas of level of academic challenge and active and collaborative learning. Even among those faculty members who actively increased the pedagogical requirements of the pilot program courses, no statistical differences were observed in mean scores. So why is that? What does Benedictine College need to do to increase beginning freshman performance in the area of engagement?

Some of the same issues that drive the problems of implementing an effective beginning freshman program also prevent the institution from engaging beginning freshmen effectively. In the book *Student Success in College*, George Kuh asks the reader to reflect on some questions about their institution while reading the book. Three specific questions are highly pertinent to Benedictine College's pursuit of engaging their beginning freshmen. The institution needs to consider the following:

- "How well do we promote student success?"
 - To what extent are our programs and practices complementary and synergistic, thereby having a greater impact than the sum of each individual initiative?
 - To what extent are our initiatives sustainable in terms of financial and human resources?"
- (Kuh, et al., 2005, pg. 20).

Beginning freshmen classes at Benedictine and those classes that participated in the pilot program are predominantly general education requirements at the 100 and 200 levels in the curriculum. While upper division coursework benefits from overarching departmental student learning goals and outcomes, the faculty has struggled with learning outcomes for its general education program since the launch of the revised curriculum in 2002. Ownership of the curriculum and the learning outcomes is an ongoing debate among faculty and may have stranded and stalled the appropriate learning environments that promote engagement at this level. A newly formed, faculty-elected assessment committee has been charged with shepherding the process of determining student learning outcomes, devising a general education assessment plan, and implementing the plan. The committee has been active since its election in Spring 2010 and has chosen the path of pushing the faculty to debate and decide on many of the issues with the committee acting as a decision maker of last resort when consensus cannot be reached.

Support for the general education curriculum goes beyond just student learning goals to appropriate levels of human and financial support within the institution. As Benedictine College has grown in student enrollment over the last decade, the college has also increased the number of tenured and tenure-track faculty in response to the increased credit hours generated. The current mix of full-time to part-time faculty is 78% full-time faculty teaching to 22% part-time and adjunct faculty teaching undergraduate courses. The college has added 27 full-time faculty lines since 2005, but all of the additions have been based on the needs of the majors in academic departments rather than for any consideration of the general education program. This has been of ongoing concern and debate in the curriculum committee which participates in the decision-making process of new permanent faculty lines.

Financial resources to support faculty in professional development have increased over the last five years, but continues to need more diversified options. Faculty may apply to travel for presentations or training relative to their disciplines, but have little support for developing greater pedagogy in their classes. The primary opportunity for developing pedagogy in the past several years has been a brown bag teaching circle that meets sporadically throughout the academic year and is led by any faculty member who wants to share a new technology or other teaching methodology with whoever comes to the circle.

If one of the goals of the college is to support increasing the level of academic challenge and the active and collaborative benchmark of student engagement then it needs to invest more resources in support of its instructional and academic spending. This will mean relying less on volunteers from faculty and staff for key activities like the beginning freshman program or the Discovery program.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. As previously noted, the limitations of the pilot program included the lack of inclusion criteria for the beginning freshman students enrolled in the pilot program. Enrollment in the pilot program was at the discretion of the freshman advisor or self-inclusion by the student in the pilot program. In addition, the implementation and research design of the pilot program lacked continuity in course instruction. The program was disbursed over multiple disciplines and instructors with little agreed upon pedagogy or student learning outcomes for the course materials. Finally, the pilot study design was not appropriate for the desired goals regarding engagement. Because these limitations may have changed the results of this study, they became limitations to the study itself, as well as to the pilot program being studied.

Limitations to the study include the unique nature of Benedictine College as a conservative Catholic, Benedictine institution with two sponsoring monastic communities strongly involved in the life of the college. Because of the nature of the institution, the college has attracted a more conservative student body which may have influenced the outcome of the study.

Recommendations for Further Research

Continued research on this cohort of students will indicate whether the boost in retention in the first year will result in higher graduation rates over time. As this cohort of students enters their senior year, the researcher has observed that the students enrolled in the pilot program continue to be retained at a higher rate than those students not enrolled in the pilot program; currently that rate is a little over 7% higher retention than those students not in the pilot program. The strong probability is that this boost in retention will lead to higher graduation rates as well. Exit surveys that are completed with graduating seniors will provide an excellent opportunity to

capture more information concerning this cohort of students. Additional questions are currently being considered by the researcher for administration in the Spring of 2012. The questions have not yet been finalized and will have to be vetted through the college's graduation committee.

As this cohort completes their degrees, data on their overall academic achievements can also be added to the dataset for analysis. In previous research on beginning freshman programs the variable of major selection was considered. Since most freshmen at Benedictine do not declare a major until late in their sophomore year this is a new area to explore in the research on this cohort. Along with information on majors, graduation data and culminating grade-point-averages can be added to the dataset for consideration.

In addition, it may also be of interest to track the level of participation in student leadership among the cohort. Since the college is residential in nature, students are encouraged to assume a wide range of leadership roles throughout their careers at the college. This variable of participation can also be added in the dataset and may yield interesting results.

Finally, the campus will be doing the NSSE survey in this cohort's senior year. Results on gains in Level of Academic Challenge and Active and Collaborative Learning can also be measured against original results on the survey administered in their freshman year, and can be analyzed by participation or non-participation in the pilot program. These results along with the results on the graduation survey may yield additional areas of research on the question of retention and graduation differences between these two groups.

Recommendations for Future Beginning Freshman Programs

As previously noted, in launching the beginning freshman pilot program the college had good intentions in focusing efforts on both beginning freshman retention and student engagement as important indicators of academic excellence. It was in the implementation and coordination

of effort and resources where the college failed to accomplish its goals. Moving forward, Benedictine College needs to become more cohesive and deliberate in its approach and provide the necessary human and financial resources to accomplish its goals. This will require pulling together current silo programs across campus and engaging faculty and staff in meaningful ways on their roles in retention and engagement.

“It’s often said that to discover what an organization values, follow the money” (Kuh, 2005, pg. 306). Benedictine College needs to invest financially in programs and initiatives that show its commitment to student success and academic excellence. A positive first step was establishing the Student Success Center; building on that success and providing appropriate resources for general education and faculty support for unfunded programs are the next steps the college needs to move forward.

The success of the pilot program was in the conversation it started among a cadre of committed faculty that continued with a second iteration of the pilot program, a portion of the Fall 2009 class enrolled in the second version of the pilot program in Psychology 101 and Sociology 101 classes. Future research on this project will be to measure the impact of the revised beginning freshman program and its curricular changes on student retention and engagement benchmarks.

The current work at Benedictine on the general education curriculum and student learning goals for general education may also be part of future research to determine its impact on retention and engagement. As the campus continues with its every-other-year administration of the NSSE instrument it may be possible to see some trends as the new general education curriculum and learning goals are implemented. Assessment data will also be gathered in each of the general education classes, and questions on student engagement on the benchmarks of

level of academic challenge and active and collaborative learning may be gathered at the same time.

Conclusion

As quoted at the beginning of this chapter, “Few things are impossible to diligence and skill” (Johnson). Benedictine College has the skills and resources necessary to accomplish its educational goals and increase retention and engagement on campus. Rather than the scatter shot method currently used on campus, the college needs to apply its resources and skills with “diligence” in the places on campus that will have the maximum impact. These should include the following measures:

- Consolidate the student affairs and academic models of the currently disparate beginning freshmen programs into a cohesive, holistic approach
- Provide appropriate budgetary resources for unfunded mandates so that faculty and staff are not unpaid volunteers in key programs like the Discovery and beginning freshman programs
- Consider the budgetary needs of the general education curriculum at the college, including faculty lines and support for faculty development in areas like pedagogy
- Make engagement and retention part of the vocabulary of the campus across disciplines, offices, and administration

Benedictine College has already experienced success in multiple areas of campus life with new dorms, better facilities, growing endowment, new faculty hires, and recruiting brighter students. The college’s commitment to mission has been a key to many of these successes.

The current adopted theme of the college is a quote from one of the Benedictine monasteries’ early founders in America, Archabbot Boniface Wimmer, OSB: “Forward, always

forward, everywhere forward.” The college has the opportunity to move forward with these issues, and find greater success, by focusing the energies and resources of the institution on the issues of retention and engagement.

One of the lessons that Benedictine can take away from the results of this study is that the college has the potential to reach their goals of increasing student retention and graduation rates. Even though not all of the program goals were successfully implemented across the pilot program, students participating in the pilot program were retained at a higher rate than those students not participating. The opportunity to increase student engagement is also possible and the current work of the faculty in the area of general education curriculum is a promising start.

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Appendix A

Student Questionnaire Information Statement

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand student engagement at Benedictine College. This will entail your completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire packet is expected to take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The content of the questionnaires should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of the pedagogy involved in the “S” section beginning freshman courses. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least age eighteen. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email dhann@ku.edu.

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Approved by the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus, University of Kansas. Approval expires one year from 2/25/2009. HSCL #17861

Dear Student Participant:

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand student engagement at Benedictine College. This will entail your completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire packet is expected to take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

The content of the questionnaires should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of programs that support student engagement at Benedictine College. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least age eighteen. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email dhann@ku.edu.

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Survey on Beginning Freshman Student Engagement
Benedictine College, Spring 2009

Questions	<i>Response Options</i>
1. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	Never Sometimes Often Very often
2. Made a class presentation	Never Sometimes Often Very often
3. Worked with other students on projects during class	Never Sometimes Often Very often
4. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	Never Sometimes Often Very often
5. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	Never Sometimes Often Very often
6. Participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course	Never Sometimes Often Very often
7. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	Never Sometimes Often Very often
8. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)	Never Sometimes Often Very often
9. Coursework emphasizes: Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory	Very little Some Quite a bit

	Very much
10. Coursework emphasizes: Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences	Very little Some Quite a bit Very much
11. Coursework emphasizes: Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods	Very little Some Quite a bit Very much
12. Coursework emphasizes: Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	Very little Some Quite a bit Very much
13. Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings	None 1-4 5-10 11-20 More than 20
14. Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment	None 1-4 5-10 11-20 More than 20
15. Number of written papers or reports of <u>20 pages or more</u>	None 1-4 5-10 11-20 More than 20
16. Number of written papers or reports <u>between 5 and 19 pages</u>	None 1-4 5-10 11-20 More than 20
17. Number of written papers or reports of <u>fewer than 5 pages</u>	None 1-4 5-10 11-20 More than 20

18. Select the point on the scale that best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year challenged you to do your best work	1 Very little 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much
<hr/> 19. Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	Never Sometimes Often Very often
<hr/> 20. Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	Never Sometimes Often Very often
<hr/> 21. Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	Never Sometimes Often Very often
<hr/> 22. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)	0 hr/wk 1-5 hr/wk 6-10 hr/wk 11-15 hr/wk 16-20 hr/wk 21-25 hr/wk 26-30 hr/wk 30+ hr/wk
<hr/> 23. Working for pay <u>on campus</u>	0 hr/wk 1-5 hr/wk 6-10 hr/wk 11-15 hr/wk 16-20 hr/wk 21-25 hr/wk 26-30 hr/wk 30+ hr/wk
<hr/> 24. Working for pay <u>off campus</u>	0 hr/wk 1-5 hr/wk 6-10 hr/wk 11-15 hr/wk 16-20 hr/wk 21-25 hr/wk

26-30 hr/wk
30+ hr/wk

25. To what extent does Benedictine College emphasize each of the following:

Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work

Very little
Some
Quite a bit
Very much

Writing clearly and effectively

Very little
Some
Quite a bit
Very much

Speaking clearly and effectively

Very little
Some
Quite a bit
Very much

Thinking critically and analytically

Very little
Some
Quite a bit
Very much

Analyzing quantitative problems

Very little
Some
Quite a bit
Very much

Voting in local, state, or national elections

Very little
Some
Quite a bit
Very much

Learning effectively on your own

Very little
Some
Quite a bit
Very much

Understanding yourself

Very little
Some
Quite a bit
Very much

26. Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?

Poor
Fair
Good

Excellent

27. How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?

Poor
Fair
Good
Excellent

Thank you for taking time to share your responses!

Appendix B

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus, University of Kansas. Approval expires one year from 2/25/2009. HSCL #17861

Faculty Questionnaire Information Statement

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand student engagement at Benedictine College. This will entail your completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire packet is expected to take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The content of the questionnaires should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of the pedagogy involved in the “S” section beginning freshman courses. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least age eighteen. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email dhann@ku.edu.

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Faculty Interview Questions – Pilot Program

1. Please tell me about how you incorporated the additional beginning freshmen material into your curriculum? What were the assignments you gave relative to this material?
2. Did you integrate the materials into a class in a way that was different from the normal section of the class you teach? If yes, how?
3. Pedagogically did you teach your "S" section course differently from your normal course offerings on the same topic? If so, how were they different?
4. How did you structure the 10 extra minutes each period that you were given (30 minutes a week) to cover the additional "S" section material?
5. How do you feel students in the "S" section courses responded to the additional requirements of the course?
6. In thinking about the NSSE benchmarks that we have discussed in faculty workshops, how successful do you think this program was in preparing students for college academic expectations (Level of Academic Challenge) and active and collaborative learning?

Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance. Items from the survey used in determining our Level of Academic Challenge benchmark include the following:

- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, etc. related to academic program)
- Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more; number of written papers or reports of between 5 and 19 pages; and number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages
- Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
- Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships
- Coursework emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
- Coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations
- Campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and asked to think about what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students for the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college. Items from the survey used in determining our Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark include the following:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with other outside of class (students, family members, co-worker, etc.)

Appendix C

Freshmen, Liberal Arts and 150 Years of Benedictine Education in Atchison:

The central objectives for this course appear on the previous page. You are a member of a select group of Benedictine College incoming students in the Fall of 2008 who are enrolled in a course that intends and promises enrichment beyond the already valuable curriculum outlined here.

All of the activities and assignments in this course are required and will be part of your final grade achievement for the semester in PS 100 S. This includes all that are related to the introduction to American Government and all of the others connected to this freshman experience, an introduction to liberal arts and a celebration of 150 years of Benedictine education in Atchison, Kansas.

There is a lecture series organized for the College community and these "S" series courses in particular. You are expected to attend all of these events. Virtually all are scheduled during the regular class meeting time, 11 a.m. – 12:05 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Your absence from any of these sessions will cause a kind of double penalty. First, your absence counts as a missed class. Second, the lessons and messages from these speakers and discussions will be part of the course material on which examination questions will be based. Questions derived from these lectures will tax your analytical abilities, not merely your simple recall of facts announced by the speaker. You are advised to take notes during these sessions.

In addition, there will be bonus material injected into our class sessions. These topics both will represent the liberal arts and a set of skills to increase your likelihood for academic success and for persistence to graduation at Benedictine College. What follows is a representative set of these topics, although others may be added:

- ⊕ The imperative of academic honesty
- ⊕ Learning and library resources at Benedictine College
- ⊕ Using college as a portal to a career
- ⊕ The enriching effects of diversity of all types
- ⊕ The traditions and heritage of Benedictine Education
- ⊕ Finding your way at the Student Success Center
- ⊕ Benedictine's tradition of Discovery Learning

Your rewards will be several. You will earn an extra one hour of credit for this course, beyond its usual three hour complement. You will also enjoy the immersion into Benedictine traditions and liberal arts principles. Finally, you are likely to develop a more sophisticated view of students and professor as active learning partners.