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Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the First-Year Experience Edge Program at College of the Desert

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College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the First-Year Experience Edge Program at College of the

Desert

Veronica Daut

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Education Administration

Chris Jenkins, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of the effectiveness of a first-year experience program at one institution from the perspectives of the students, faculty, and staff through interviews and observations. This study was conducted at a community college located in Palm Desert, California on their first-year experience program, also referred to as EDGE. First-year experience programs were designed to focus on incoming students and their developmental education to enhance the students' academic preparedness, social integration into college, and decrease social barriers to education. Many students entering college, particularly community colleges, are underprepared in their basic skills of English, math and/or reading and are not prepared for the rigors of college. Due to community colleges open admissions, it has created a large surplus of students entering underprepared for college level course rigor and needing various levels of remedial education in English, math and/or reading prior to beginning college level coursework. This has led to lower completion rates and resulted in community colleges implementing first-year experience programs to assist students with basic skills and in navigating through college. A phenomenological research design was used to investigate the perspectives of faculty, staff, and students who have participated in a first-year program at one community college. The identified themes included *student achievement, knowledge and skills gained, students' improved confidence, motivation for participation of program, program resources, and influencing students*. Institutions of higher education may find the results of this study helpful as they examine implementing a first-year experience program at their institution or review their current practices.

Keywords: First-year experience, basic skills, underprepared students, navigating through college, EDGE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. First, I would like to thank my mother. She raised my brother and me to work hard and she always reminded me that "God didn't bring me this far to let me fall". Our countless daily phone calls encouraged me to keep going.

To my brother, thank you for being the best big brother a sister could ask for and for setting the example that you could be the first in the family to move away from your home to follow your dreams. You never let barriers detour you from pursuing your goals. Thank you for always answering my calls and allowing me to invade your house when I needed help.

To my dear husband, thank you for being supportive and taking over the house during times when I needed to study and for picking up my slack with the children during those times. You allowed me to cry and express my frustrations during this process but you told me each time that I can do it and to never give up.

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Lastly, I want to thank my beautiful angel of a grandmother. Although you are not physically here, you always told me that God had something big planned for me and I felt all of your prayers. Thank you for being a strong woman and being the foundation for our family to have the opportunities in America.

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Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Transitioning from high school to college can be difficult for many students. Often, high school students who enter college are not fully prepared for the coursework. The American College Testing [ACT] (2014) indicates that only about a third of high school students are college-ready, yet around two-thirds of them are college-bound every year. ACT (2014) reported that those who were more academically ready were more likely to enroll in 4-year institutions. Graduates who enrolled in 2-year colleges or pursued other options after high school was more likely to have met fewer college benchmarks in English and math.

The focus of this study is on a first-year experience program and its perceived effectiveness from the perception of faculty and students at a community college. Students entering community colleges are often less prepared academically, thus they have to take remedial courses to prepare them for college. According to Achieving the Dream (2016), almost two-thirds of community college students are receiving assessment scores that place them at below college-level math and English courses. Fifty percent of these students placed two or three levels below college-level. Only 28% of these students placed in below college-level courses have graduated.

Community college administrators prepare their students for transferring to a 4-year institution, and they prepare their students for skills and careers that sustain their local community. Community colleges pride themselves on providing educational marketplaces where student choices and community needs influence course offerings (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2016). Thus, it is essential to the local community, to transition students through their educational journey successful.

College officials have noticed that retention and graduation rates are low and have been attempting to close this gap and improve student success. Since community colleges have an "open door" policy, 100% of applicants are granted admission with no academic requirements which has led to students entering community college underprepared (Mullin, 2012). As a result, math and English assessment testing and remedial courses were added to the curriculum to address the needs of these students, which inadvertently created a more complex educational system for students to navigate and complete their educational goals (Fish & Romm, 2006). In the community college system, there is a high attrition rate that occurs with students between the first year of college and the second. In American higher education, the largest number of dropouts occur during the first year of college (Koch & Garder, 2014). College researchers have been investigating various ways to improve retention rates and some researchers have focused on the first year experiences of the college students. College faculty and staff want to capture their students' attention upon arrival on campus and for this reason, the First Year Experience (FYE) programs are an ideal transition and integration into the college.

Background, Context, and History for the Problem

This study was conducted at College of the Desert (COD), located in Palm Desert, California, during the Fall of 2016. EDGE is the acronym for "Engage, Develop, Grow, and [be] Empowered". College of the Desert is one of 113 community colleges located in California. College of the Desert is the only local community college in the Coachella Valley and has about 10,000 students with classes offered at four different locations, Palm Desert, Indio, Mecca, and the Western Valley (Desert Hot Springs High School and Palm Springs High School) (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2017).

College of the Desert's mission is to provide excellent educational programs and services that contribute to the success of their students and the vitality of the communities they serve (collegeofthedesert.edu, n.d.). The college was founded in 1958 and opened its doors in September of 1962. College of the Desert is a fully accredited institution by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

College of the Desert is focused on student success and in January 2014 the president of the college implemented a 2-year agenda of goals. This agenda supported the development of resources for basic skills, course programs, and support services leading to students earning their Associates Degree, career and technical certificate, or university transfer readiness (COD, n.d). College of the Desert's mission is focused on student success. This focus has led to COD concentrating on basic skills and supporting the First Year Experience EDGE program initiative.

The First Year Experience (FYE) EDGE Program was first piloted at College of the Desert in the Summer of 2011, through a grant. With the program's expansion, COD supported the program and institutionalized it throughout the college in Fall of 2015. The program continues to grow in numbers and has assisted over 800 students.

Focused on student success, College of the Desert's data has revealed a low completion rate and a high percentage of students entering college underprepared. According to the California Community Colleges Student Success Scorecard (2016), College of the Desert had a low percentage of students who completed a college-level English or math course who first began by taking a remedial course. The data collected by the institution was for the percentage of credit students earned for six years through 2014-15 who first enrolled during 2009-10 in a course of either math, English, or English as a Second Language (ESL). This data tracked

students transferring to a 4-year university or who completed a college-level course in the same discipline. Over these six years, only 32.2% of students completed remedial math, 43.3% in remedial English, and 23.8% in ESL. This number is even lower when the student is placed in the first level of remedial math that requires four additional levels of math prior to taking a college-level math course. Due to these low percentages, College of the Desert is committed to being proactive to their students' successes and focuses on basic skills and transitions into college.

College of the Desert was not the first college to implement a first-year program. In 1972, the University of South Carolina was credited with linking students to the first year experience and introduced a University 101 (first year experience seminar class) course as an educational experiment (www.sc.edu, n.d.). This course aimed to encourage students to develop more positive attitudes and behaviors towards the university, increase student retention to the sophomore year, assist student efforts to understand the multiple essential purposes of higher education, and to facilitate a major faculty development initiative (www.sc.edu, n.d.). The University of South Carolina found that students who participated in their first-year seminar between 1973 and 1996 were more likely to persist into their sophomore year than students who did not participate in the seminar (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). Other schools began to follow the University of South Carolina's model and started implementing first-year programs.

In the 1980s, the United States began to specifically focus on first-year programs due to an increase in attention to educational performance and a decrease in the direct federal funding for higher education brought forth by the administration of President Ronald Reagan (Koch & Gardner, 2014). Schools were being held accountable for their students' progress and success. Changes in federal financial aid funding policies made retaining the individual student in their

college a major focus. This focus made institutions liable for their quality of education and led to reports such as A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform (Koch & Gardner, 2014). This report drove schools to focus their energy on areas such as the students' FYE in hopes to improve retention and completion.

In 1999, as the momentum continued, John Gardner and Betsy Barefoot launched a center focused on the first year programs (now known as the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education). They focused on institutions use of assessment to improve the process of first-year programs (Koch & Gardner, 2014). This Center provided research on various institutions and provided a resource center for the FYE students.

In April 2010, the American Association of Community Colleges joined with five other national organizations and committed to assisting in producing 50% more students with high-quality degrees and certificates by 2020 (Johnson McPhail, 2011). This was an important commitment that would need a major change from the schools to improve college success. With this pledge, eight million more people will need to earn associate's and bachelor's degrees by the end of the current decade (Koch & Gardner, 2014). Colleges have their work cut out to reach this goal. College of the Desert, as a community college, is committed to assisting with this goal by connecting to their current students, and contacting students as they enter college. The goal is to improve retention and completion rates among students.

Statement of the Problem

The research on first-year programs suggests that academic and non-academic factors are co-active ingredients in supporting retention and graduation (Cory & Williams, 2012). It is important to connect with students as they're entering into college and guide them through this new transition into college life. The focus needs to begin in the students' first year, for the first

year still holds the largest percentage of dropouts as they transition into their sophomore year. Various research has demonstrated that first-year programs are successful (Achieving the Dream, 2016). Yet, the first year is still not valued on some campuses and only a small portion of schools are moving to implement some type of first year program on campus.

The study will focus on the effectiveness of the first year experience (FYE) program as a newly established program (within the past five years) based on the perceptions of the faculty and staff at one community college. I will investigate whether the implementation of this program improved the success of students based on the perceptions from students through interviews and their satisfaction with the program. The FYE program focused on developing academic skills, utilizing campus resources (tutoring, counseling, library, etc.), providing study skills, time management, academic and career planning and financial aid awareness. The FYE, for college freshmen, focuses on fostering and promoting student success and retention during the first-year with activities, which often include an orientation, semester seminars, FYE student clubs, tutoring centers, and mentoring.

FYE programs create a sense of community for the students and allow for academic and social integration. According to Cory and Williams (2012), "Active learning and group projects, when designed and implemented purposefully, can promote deep learning, fostering an engagement with course content, development of peer relationships, and enhancing responsibility and accountability on part of individual students for their learning." Students entering college are underprepared, which has created a disconnect, thus leading to an additional barrier for completion. The FYE program is designed to assist students in navigating through their first year of college all the way through to graduation. By studying the effectiveness of the FYE program through the perceptions from the students, faculty, and staff who participated in the program and

6

how it impacts academic preparedness and social integration, this study will provide insight for community college administrators as they work to increase students' retention and success.

The FYE Program at COD

College of the Desert (COD) opened its doors to its first class of students in the Fall of 1962. The college is located on 160 acres in Palm Desert, California. By the late 1960s COD had over 1200 full-time students enrolled. As of Spring 2016, the college served over 11,000 students. Thirty-one percent of the students were full-time, 56% are part-time, 13 % are non-credit, 56.2% of all students enrolled are female, and 70.3% are Hispanic. Forty-one percent students are aged 18-21 and the average age for the COD student is 28. More than 70% of all students at the college are the first in their family to attend college (COD Research Department, 2016). Due to the COD's high student enrollment, naturally, the public would believe that there would be a high student success rate. The college's success rate of course completion for the academic year of 2014-2015 was 70.4%, yet only 11.2% of students were awarded a degree in of 2015, including certificate and non-credit awards (COD Research Department, 2016).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, research was conducted on graduation rates for students who began their program in Fall 2010 or Fall 2011 and recorded the students' time of completion for COD. The methodology analyzed graduation rates of normal time, 150% of normal time, and 200% of normal time. "For example, the 'normal' amount of time for many Associates Degree programs is two years. Not all students complete within the normal time, so graduation rates are measured by other lengths of time as well, including "150% of normal time" (e.g., 3 years for a 2-year program) and "200% of normal time" (e.g., 4 years for a 2-year program) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The results were that of the students who began in the Fall of 2010, only 4% finished within "normal time." Twenty-two

percent completed within 150% of the "normal time" and 31% took twice as long as "normal time" to complete their program. These numbers had COD focusing on ways to improve their retention, persistence and graduation rates.

In 2010, COD began the Early Advantage program (Which was changed in 2011 and now known as the FYE EDGE program) that was a collaborative effort between faculty, counseling, and student support staff working together to impact student success and create positive student development. The mission of this program is to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed by providing campus leadership and advocacy for student success at COD. Secondary missions include identifying and implementing academic success programs that support students towards graduation, building awareness of resources available to students, and enriching the students' experiences (COD Early Advantage, 2010). This program was originated through the funding of the U.S. Department of Education Individual Title V Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI) Grant-Student Affairs.

In October 2010, COD received a $3.25 million dollar grant from the US Department of Education to focus on students' successes and developments. With a special emphasis on Hispanic, low-income, and first-generation college students, the Title V HSI Grant program is made up of three major components: a college readiness initiative, student and academic support services and creating a culture of evidence (collegeofthedesert.edu, n.d.). College of the Desert focused on four goals in Title V that include:

Title V Overall Goals

Goal 1: Increase the readiness of entering students to succeed in college by providing programs and services to enhance student success.

Goal 2: To improve student success with a focus on Hispanic and other low-income students as measured by increased course completion rates, improved grades, higher retention, graduation, and transfer rates.

Goal 3: To increase the percentage of students successfully receiving financial aid and improve student knowledge of financial literacy.

Goal 4: To research, track, and analyze results of new methodologies and services employed to promote the success of Hispanic and other low-income students. (COD Title V).

With these goals in mind, the Early Advantage program designed a 3-week early intervention preparatory course for students to take in the summer, prior to enrollment, in order to assist them with their academic placement. According the Student Success Scorecard (2013) for COD, only 28.7% of students transferred to a 4-year university who began with remedial math, and 41.1% for remedial English (This is based off of a percentage of credit students tracked for six years through 2013-2014 who first enrolled in a course below transfer level in English, mathematics, and/or ESL during 2008-09 and completed a college-level course in the same discipline). The 3-week course was designed to assist and prepare students with refresher courses in mathematics and English. Since a large proportion of students who took remedial courses did not graduate, it is important to assist students with refresher courses so they have ample opportunity to test into college level courses, thus reducing the length of time needed for completion.

The Early Advantage/EDGE program received its first cohort of 22 students in summer 2011. These 22 students took a 3-week (4 days per week, 3 hours per day) course in the summer to assist with remedial math and English. English and math instructors conducted refresher

9

sessions to revisit subject areas. During the three weeks, students attended workshops on the following:

- Personal responsibility: This workshop seeks to prepare students for the transition from high school to college and make them aware of the difference in expectations.

- Financial Literacy 101: This includes a variety of tools to educate and equip students with skills to help them manage their expenses, debt, and credit more effectively. Help students develop an individual plan to meet their educational costs and daily financial challenges.

- SEP (Student Educational Plan): After the student reassessed, they meet with counselors to plan out their comprehensive student education plan based on an individual student's educational goal and provide an outline of courses needed to accomplish that goal.

- Transfer: Informing students of options after COD.

The program grew to about 60 students by 2013 and jumped to 459 students in the Fall of 2015. In the Summer of 2015, COD institutionalized the FYE EDGE program. As of the Fall of 2015, the FYE EDGE program offers students priority registration (priority 3) and a scholarship of $100 for books which is funded by the COD Foundation. The COD Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is to provide financial support from the private and public sectors to help underwrite programs and facilities at the College that cannot be funded through other means (COD Foundation). Priority registrations and book vouchers are ways of assisting students in getting the courses they need and help with paying for textbooks. The EDGE program found it difficult to track students' progression and persistence in the remedial courses due to

students being unable to register for their necessary courses, resulting in a delay to take math or English courses for an additional semester or two following the EDGE program refresher training. This is why the program worked with student services to award priority registration to EDGE students.

The FYE EDGE program is still running their 3-week courses in the summer, but now students can take English and math components separately. The workshops are still in place and now students are tracked throughout their first year at COD. An "Early Alert Program" has been implemented as a component of EDGE program, which requires students to meet with their counselors with progress reports and receive a follow up from the EDGE team with resources. The EDGE team includes a director, outreach specialist, counselors, instructors, and tutors. The FYE EDGE team started off at one location at the COD Palm Desert Campus and is now serving five locations: Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Indio, Desert Hot Springs, and Mecca. The EDGE team is staffed with an assistant outreach director and four outreach specialists. The College of the Desert's first-year program EDGE is continuing to grow and this study will examine the perceptions of the program's efficiency.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perception of the effectiveness of the FYE program at the community college level in one institution from the viewpoints of students, faculty, and staff who participated in the program. First, the study will explore the initial contact with the incoming student at one community college and the efforts made by the staff to connect with the freshman students. Second, this study will examine the structure and function of the FYE in the classroom from the perspectives of the faculty and staff. Last, this study will evaluate the perceptions of the effectiveness of the EDGE program from the perspectives of the students.

The intent of first-year programs is to focus on incoming students and their developmental education to enhance the students' academic preparedness, social integration into college, and decrease social barriers to education. Koch and Gardner (2014) stated, "developmental education strategies have collectively served as a method for providing opportunities to first-year students who are not totally prepared for the rigors of college". The FYE programs are improving students' basic skills in English, math, and reading and providing students with learning skills.

Research Question

This study seeks to answer the central research question, "What is the Perceived Effectiveness of the First Year Experience EDGE Program at College of the Desert?"

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

This research is intended to contribute to the existing literature on first-year programs and retention of community college students. In January 2014, College of the Desert's president released a 24-month agenda for the advancement of student success and college/community development. The college supports the "completion agenda" by placing priority on improving retention and increasing the number of certificates and degrees awarded to community college students. The college's 24-month agenda focused on supporting and continuing the development of programs that support the underprepared students. Through this agenda, the FYE EDGE program was institutionalized in 2015 and has gained the continued support of the school to continue to grow the program. The present study provides an opportunity to examine the perceptions of the students, faculty, and staff who have participated in the program and it provides insight into their experiences and opinions of the program's effectiveness. This will

allow a deeper understanding of ways to improve institutional efforts and address specific barriers. College of the Desert is proactive in addressing the barriers to the students and is on a quest to improve students' retentions and successes. This study is important to add to the literature of perceptions of first-year programs and bring awareness to other institutions on the effectiveness of the program. Colleges may use this data to either support or dispute the implementation of a FYE program on their campuses.

Definition of Terms

Attrition. According to Tinto (1975), student attrition is defined as, "a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems continually modify his goals and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of drop out" (p. 94).

College Placement Test. College of the Desert uses a college placement test through Accuplacer. This is an assessment to test the students' knowledge in math, reading, and writing. Colleges use this test to be informed on the student's preparedness for college-level courses. Depending on results, students may be required to take remedial courses.

Community college. Community colleges, sometimes called junior colleges, are two-year schools that provide affordable post-secondary education as a pathway to a 4-year degree; workforce development and skills training; and a range of noncredit programs, such as English as a second language, skills retraining, community enrichment programs and cultural activities (studyinthestates.dhs.gov, 2012).

Completion agenda. The completion agenda commits to increasing the number of community college students completing a degree or other credential by 50% to 5 million students by the year 2020. In 2009, President Obama called on community colleges to reach this goal and in 2010, this goal was established by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2011).

EDGE/First Year Experience. EDGE stands for, "Engage, Develop, Grow and be Empowered." EDGE is a form of a first-year program that provides college students with a full range of experiences that include: Math and/or Writing/Reading review, and access to textbooks and computers during their participation in EDGE (COD, n.d). This program is designed to transition students into college and promote academic and social integration to improve retention.

Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI): Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are defined in Title V of the Higher Education Act as not-for-profit institutions of higher learning with a full-time equivalent undergraduate student enrollment that is at least 25% Hispanic (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU], 2017).

Persistence. For the purpose of this study, student persistence is defined as the continual pursuit of a student in a degree program leading toward the completion of that degree (National Student Clearinghouse, 2015).

Normal time. Normal time is the typical amount of time it takes full-time students to complete their program of 2 years. Graduation rates are measured by other lengths of time as well, including "150% of normal time" (e.g., 3 years for a 2-year program) and "200% of normal time," or twice as long as the normal time (e.g., 4 years for a 2-year program) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Remedial/Developmental Courses. Remediation, also known as developmental, basic skills, or compensatory education, is generally defined as courses on fundamental skill areas that students need in order to participate in college academic programs (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Retention. Retention refers to students staying enrolled until graduation (National Student Clearinghouse, 2015).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

The scope of this study was delimited to newly enrolled students that include recent high school graduates (recently defined as those students who graduated at the end of the preceding academic year), students who have one or more years since high school graduation and never attended college, and faculty and staff at one community college in California. The participants consisted of 16 students and 8 faculty and staff members. The faculty and staff members at the study site received an email request and invited to participate in interviews to provide a more in-depth view of their perceptions of their experiences with the EDGE program. The researcher contacted the EDGE program director to invite former EDGE students to participate in the study and attend an information meeting with the researcher to discuss the study. College of the Desert was selected as the study site as it is where I am currently employed.

Limitations

The scope of this study was limited to the faculty, staff, and students' and the year that they participated in the EDGE program. The EDGE program has been established since 2011 and no participate was screened for the year that they participated in the program which may have impacted their experience in the program. As the EDGE program developed, additional services were added to accommodate and improve the program. The services that were available

or not available during the time of student's participation may have impacted their experience. The audio recordings and observations did not allow for complete documentation of the non-verbal responses to questions and comments. Limitations may have directly or indirectly reflected threats to internal credibility or validity to the study.

Summary

In the United States, there is still a first-to-second year attrition of 66.5% of students enrolled in 2-year colleges (ACT, 2014). The high attrition is leading to a shortage of qualified candidates entering the workforce. According to Achieving the Dream (2016), "By 2018, America will fall short of the demand for 22 million new college degrees and 4.7 million new workers with postsecondary degrees; the gap translates to a shortage of 300,000 college graduates, every year, between 2008-2018." First-year programs are intended to support the underprepared students and assist them through graduation. The study will investigate the perceived effectiveness of the FYE program at the community college level in one institution, and add to the knowledge of academic and social integration of student transition into college.

Through this study, I identified the successful attributes of the program, barriers that contributed to student attrition, and improvements for student success based on the perceptions of the students, faculty, and staff. In the following chapter, a detailed framework of relevant literature on FYE programs is provided as it relates to retention, student successes, and completion. The literature review highlights community colleges and the different barriers that community college students' face compared to the "traditional student" attending a 4-year institution, all of which impact student retention.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

The community college has been an avenue for returning students (students who are in the workforce either seeking career advancement, career technical education, and or new career paths) and incoming freshman students transitioning from high school, to start on their path to higher education. Community colleges have been called "open door" colleges because they accept students from diverse backgrounds and, educational levels while providing the opportunity to succeed in programs commensurate with their interests and abilities (Crockett, 1980, p. 18). Because of this "open door" policy, many community college students are underprepared for their college studies and may need remedial education (English, math, and/or reading) (Ellison, 2010). These additional remedial courses add to the student's required program courses and can create an additional barrier to their academic success. An overload of remedial courses in English, math, or reading has been a major obstacle in students' academic successes, which has led to lower completion rates. As a result of lower retention rates, community colleges have been implementing First-Year Experience (FYE) programs to raise the retention rates and assist students in navigating through college. First-Year Experience programs come with an array of implementations including but not limited to: summer bridge programs, orientations, freshman introductory courses, year-long cohort courses, and developmental instruction workshops.

This chapter will discuss the mission of community colleges with regard to student success, the problem of retention and progression toward graduation at community colleges, the strategies of the FYE programs, research on FYE programs, the FYE program at College of the Desert (COD), and COD's Office of Institutional Research on the FYE program.

Conceptual Framework

This study was of phenomenological research design, using the student development model. In this model, there are guided pathways that are redesigned as a critical part of the "on-ramp" to a college-level program of study, with the goal of helping students successfully complete the critical introductory college-level courses in their initial field of interest (Jenkins, 2014). In particular, the student development model focused on person-environment interactive theories in which the student's behavior and growth are directly affected by the educational environment (Long, 2012). Through interviewing the students, staff, and faculty and learning their perceptions of their experience with the FYE EDGE program, this study can examine some aspects of the phenomenon of COD's first-year program.

The first-year programs have been established in colleges to decrease dropout rates and assist students with their college transition. COD's mission is to provide excellent educational programs and services that contribute to the success of their students and the vitality of the communities they serve (collegeofthedesert.edu, n.d). The FYE EDGE program is just one example of COD's many efforts to achieve its mission statement. Fike (2008) stated, "understanding why students choose to leave or choose to stay is essential to those wanting to make a difference in students' lives" (p. 3). Wanting to understand the "why" factor has led me to investigate the perceptions of the EDGE program. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of COD's First Year EDGE program from the viewpoint of the students, faculty, and staff. More specifically, this study seeks to determine the EDGE program's effect on students' transition into college and the impact it has on their retention and additional remedial course work. Although the EDGE program is an example of a first-year program, it is still a newly

18

established program and does not have historical data. Due to the lack of historical data, the study will look at the phenomenon of the EDGE program and its perceived effectiveness.

Review of Research and Methodological Literature

In order to synthesize the literature, I categorized the authors' work based on their research of first-year programs, social and academic integration, and faculty and students perceptions based on their experience with a first-year program. The relevant literature revealed a large percentage of methodological approaches into academic and social integration. The methodology approaches utilized Astin's (1991) input-environment-outcomes (IEO) model and Tinto's (1992) theory of student departure (Brock, 2014; Burnett & Larmar, 2011; Gardner, 2013; Garza, 2013; Klein, 2013; Nava, 2010). In the review, I searched for indicators of similarities to first-year programs, student perceptions, improving the first-year experience, and success by participation in a first-year experience course in college. The focus was on community colleges, although I did review the similar literature of first-year programs within 4-year institutions. Other methodological approaches on faculty and student perceptions used a mixture of qualitative approaches utilizing curriculum theory, student development theory, student departure theory, and epistemological foundation (Ellison, 2010; Mayo, 2015; Murphy, 2010; O'Shea, 2013). The review of the literature allowed me to collect and understand the different approaches taken by different first-year programs.

Academic and social integration. A large amount of the research literature focused on academic and social integration. I was able to locate recent literature (within the past seven years) still pertaining to the first-year programs and the focus still was on the integration into school. Burnett and Larmar (2011) stated, "Transition is a time of reshaping and coming to terms with whether expectations about university life have been met, or need to be revised, or in fact, if

19

the mismatch between expectation and reality is too great to warrant persistence" (p. 31). Interpretation of the literature has emphasized the importance of the student experience model that investigates the integration of the student, from various categories such as the sense of academic, sense of capability, sense of purpose, sense of connectedness, and sense of resourcefulness.

Exploring the topic of student integration of academic and social, the literature proposes that inputs, environments, and outputs (IEO) from Astin's (1991) IEO theory and Tinto's (1993) student departure theory are effects on the students integration (Brock, 2014; Burnett & Larmar, 2011; Gardner, 2013; Garza, 2013; Klein, 2013; Nava, 2010). According to Gardner (2013), "Students who experience a positive integration strengthen their commitment, which in turn, results in positive outcomes. Conversely, a negative experience in the integration process may cause students to remove themselves from the environment" (p. 46). The IEO reviews various stages in the students' prior experience and characteristics during their entrances into school. This includes student demographics (gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomics), academic ability (SAT/ACT scores, placement tests), and institutional goals (degree type, enrollment status). The students' college environment of the first-year program is taken into consideration in academic and social integration. Lastly, the IEO theory reviews student outcomes (academic performance, retention, graduation).

The literature suggests that Astin's IEO model describes how background characteristics, pre-college and college experiences, and the college environment are predictors for social and academic integration outcomes (Brock, 2014; Gardner, 2013; Garza, 2013; Klein, 2013; Nava, 2010). The characteristics that entering college students bring with them upon attending college can help predict both the indirect effects of the college environment (i.e., college experiences,

20

program participation, and educational experiences) and direct effects of the student outcomes being measured (Astin, 1991). The literature explored areas of the academic and social integration in regards to student retention, student success, and the impact of participating in a first-year program. According to Brock (2014), the IEO and student departure models argue that if institutions are to challenge and support first-year students in their academic success, they must focus on both the characteristics and experiences of their student prior to college, as well as their experiences both inside and outside the classroom once they are enrolled, and how these variables interrelate.

Of the literature reviewed, including Astin's (1991) IEO model and Tinto's (1993) student departure theory, it focused solely on academic and social integration and typically measured the student success by persistence and degree completion. These researchers were either attempting to validate a successful first-year program through program evaluation, predict student success with participation through a first-year program, or improve the first-year through institutional change. The next approach that was discovered through the review of the literature was retention among first-year programs.

Retention. The second most relevant research on first-year experience programs in community college was in assessing the first-year program through retention. Retention rate is defined as the percentage of students who return to the same community college for their second year, while the persistence rate is characterized as the percentage of students who return to any institution (public 2-year or 4-year university) for their second year (National Student Clearinghouse, 2014). Research on first-year programs has based the program's successes on the students' retention and used the retention rate as a predictor of the program's effectiveness (Biermeier, 2017; Robertson, 2016; Singer, 2016).

The majority of the research on retention used the quantitative methodology and a few mixed method approaches. The quantitative studies evaluated their programs through institutional data using the number of credit hours successfully completed by students end of the first-year, first-year grades, first-year retention rates, and first-year grade point average (GPA). Looking further into the studies research design, two researchers, Biermeier (2017) and Robertson (2016), use the same research design of Mezirow's (1997) Transformational Learning Theory (MTLT). This model focuses on holistically transforming the student as they progress through and complete their college experience. The MTLT embraces strengthening the student's critical reflective thought (viewed as understanding, skills and disposition required to share learned experiences), developing self-efficacy (viewed as the students increased self-confidence, self-awareness, and commitment to the college), and adding discourse (how one understands or arrives at the best judgment regarding a belief) (Robertson, 2016). Although this theory focuses on transforming the student's learning approach and reflecting on their experiences, it does not address students' departures. According to Singer (2016), student retention was not directly correlated to participation in the program, but the smooth transition and social support were identified as key themes to students' successes. Singer's (2016) research used Tinto's (2012) student integration model and looked for possible explanations for a lack of preparedness including incoming educational level, lack of motivation to complete a degree program, little external support or lack of information regarding expectations in higher education. Singer's (2016) study considered the connection between students' integration to the school and Biermeier (2017) and Roberston (2016) used student performance and outcomes. Each of these studies assessed the first-year experience programs on the outcome of student retention.

However, these studies did not address the effect of remedial education on students' progressions in their education.

Remedial/developmental courses. Additional research focused on the impact of remedial education in community colleges and degree attainment. Remediation, also known as developmental, basic skills, or compensatory education, is generally defined as courses on fundamental skill areas that students need in order to participate in college academic programs (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Due to the community colleges "open-door" policy, students have no entrance requirements to begin school and may enter underprepared in their remedial education in English, math, or reading. This has created a need for remedial education prior to beginning college level coursework. Students may need remedial courses for a variety of reasons, including inadequate levels of academic preparation in high school or attrition of skills after a long time away from school among older returning students (Shields, 2014). Remedial courses were established to prepare students for the rigor of English, math, or reading skills so that they can succeed in their college level courses. In general, the research finds that the levels of remedial education have an impact on degree completion which, in turn, leads to such programs as the first-year experience (Doren, 2013; Granchukoff, 2016; Shields, 2014).

Remedial courses in English, math, or reading can add an additional semester or more. Granchukoff (2016) states, "not only are over half of all freshman required to take developmental mathematics classes but of even greater concern is that fewer than one in four remedial students finish their pre-college mathematics requirement in three years." College of the Desert has a sequence of up to five levels of math to degree completion or transfer for a student to take if the student assessed into the lowest level of remedial math. This sequence alone could take a student 2.5 years if the student passed each level of math with no interruptions.

Given the very large numbers of remedial students in community colleges and the high percentage who fail to ever graduate with a degree or certificate, secondary schools and community colleges both have a critical role to play in helping students along the path to a degree (Doren, 2013). The literature on remedial education has assisted with first-year programs and on preparing students to enter into college by creating pathways and basic skills refresher preparation courses for students to assist in their first-year of college.

Faculty and student perceptions. Although the majority of the literature refers to academic and social integration in first-year programs, a few studies focused on faculty and student perceptions. The research on perceptions of faculty and students concentrated on first-year program curriculum and program evaluation utilizing qualitative research through interviews, observations, case studies, and focus groups (Ellison, 2010; Mayo, 2015; O'Shea, 2013). First-year programs have been established to assist with students' college transition and persistence with their students' through graduation. However, O'Shea (2013) stated that college completion rates for community college graduates have increased only slightly, if at all, over the past 20 years. McClenney and Arnsparger (2012) argue that community college administrators have not developed the habit of truly listening to their students and therefore have not taken student voices seriously into consideration as they plan program and service intended to serve those people.

Intentionally the study's focus was on investigating the first-year program through program evaluation based on retention and graduation rates. However, the more that I researched current literature, the further interest was directed towards investigating the perceptions of the first-year program by faculty and students. O'Shea (2013) sums up the importance of retrieving faculty and student perspectives:

24

Individuals involved in the creation of the curriculum for these courses (first-year

programs) must seek input from administrators, faculty who teach the course, and most

importantly, the students who take the course. Often it is the students' voices that go

unheard when the curriculum is created for FYE course. Data must be collected, more in

depth than traditional course surveys, and in a more strategic and deliberate way from

students, to gain insight as to what they believe works best to help them transition into

college and what leads to academic, social, and personal success during their first

semester on campus. The most productive way to find out what course content will

benefit the students the most and what works is to go directly to the course, the college

students taking the course.

The studies conducted interviews, observations, and case studies to gather research. The

qualitative approaches incorporated research designs in interpretive and phenomenological

models. Interpretive approaches are appropriate when a researcher is interested in understanding

how participants make meaning of a situation, experience, or phenomenon (Merriam, 2002).

Phenomenological approaches emphasize a focus on people's subjective experiences and

interpretations of the world (Creswell, 2013). Ellison (2010), Mayo (2015), and O'Shea (2013)

provide insight into new perspectives on how first-year programs can be analyzed as successful.

Reviewing the research literature on first-year programs provided me with an understanding of

different approaches that have been used and provided the direction in which I wanted to take the

study.

Review of Methodological Issues

Search strategy. The literature search was conducted using the online databases

available through Concordia University's Library: ERIC (ProQuest), Dissertations & Theses

Global (ProQuest), Sage, JSTOR, and interlibrary loan services. In the initial search, the database ProQuest produced 12,047 articles, and it was refined using the keywords "first-year experience" and "community college." The articles were refined by full-text, publication date, and abstracts. Each was read to identify literature related to the research topic and subtopics. Numerous internet resources were also utilized such as *GoogleScholar*, which accessed books, and research articles on related literature.

Data collection. I analyzed the literature based on relevance, publication date, and quality of data. Originally the data collection focused on first-year programs in higher education and I narrowed down the relevance to community colleges. However, I did review first-year programs within a 4-year university to determine similarities and differences in the implementation of the programs. I also explored the reference lists to identify any relationships between authors used in repeated studies and this cross reference assisted in identifying trends amidst the literature.

Noticing a trend in references from Astin's (1991) IEO model and Tinto's (1993) student departure model, I conducted research on their work to gain an understanding of their methods and how it related to first-year college programs, particularly in community colleges. The methodologies used in previous studies consisted of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Once I discovered the direction of my research to be qualitative, I intensified my research to the various methodological methods available. I cross referenced these methodological methods to the past and current literature and was able to identify that a phenomenological methodology was suitable for my research.

Synthesis of Research Findings

In completing the review of the literature, there was a significant focus on first-year programs utilizing Astin's (1991) input-environment-output model and Tinto's (1993) student departure theory (Brock, 2014; Burnett & Larmar, 2011; Gardner, 2013; Garza, 2013; Klein, 2013; Nava, 2010). Additional studies referenced Astin's and Tinto's models, but I narrowed the literature down to more current dissertations within the past seven years. I found that literature review findings concentrated on longitudinal models of student departure which were based on the following: pre-entry attributes, initial student goals and commitments; the institutional environment, including the academic and social systems of the institution; and subsequent goals and commitments leading to student outcomes (Gardner, 2013). Although there are various studies on first-year programs, the success of the program or the student was determined by retention and graduation rates.

It was more difficult to find current or past literature on the perceptions of faculty and students on the first-year experience. Of the most recent literature, I was able to locate three solid studies that pertained to first-year programs on the perceptions of faculty and students. These studies consisted of qualitative research using focus groups, interviews, observations and case studies (Ellison, 2010; Mayo, 2015; O'Shea, 2013). The focus was not on the persistence to graduation, but understanding the perspective from the faculty and students who have participated in these programs and how to improve the students' first-year in college. O'Shea (2013) discussed curriculum theory and how it blends a historical view of curriculum with current trends in educational delivery that produces the desired outcome based on expectations that have been established. The way to establish a successful first-year program is to set a curriculum that is beneficial to the students and to determine this is to not only discuss the

curriculum with the faculty, but also with the students involved. Institutions may have established desired outcomes for first-year programs but they have not heard the perspectives of the students on how to reach the desired outcome that students can appreciate and benefit from on their path to educational success.

Critique of Previous Research

The primary critique concerning previous research is the focus on persistence through graduation rates. The literature advocates that first-year programs are only beneficial if the student persists through graduation (Brock, 2014; Gardner, 2013; Garza, 2013; Klein, 2013). These studies have determined this factor based on institutional data over a period of time (i.e., Brock (2014) analyzed data over a 6-year period through graduation), student GPA, and continuous enrollment. The literature does not have sufficient evidence from student perspectives to determine if the first-year program is considered successful or beneficial from their point of view. Besides using institutional data, the literature has provided traditional surveys from students that do not provide an in-depth detail of the students' experiences within the first-year programs.

As mentioned earlier, data must be collected through a more in-depth process than traditional course surveys. There needs to be a more strategic and deliberate way to gain an insight from students as to what they believe works best to help them transition into college and what leads to academic, social, and personal successes during their first semester on campus (O'Shea, 2013). The literature suggests that students' inputs of their pre-existing characteristics have a major influence on their successes in college. This may be a potential influence in the student's departure. However, these factors cannot be determined as a basis for a student's departure without further investigation. Although, there was some data on students' perceptions

of the first-year programs the literature was limited and did not have enough research to determine first-year programs successes.

The Problem of Retention and Progression toward Graduation at Community Colleges

Educators in community colleges are not blind to the educational gap and lack of preparation that our students face. Tinto (2012) stated, "Despite our nation's success in increasing access to college and reducing the gap in access between high- and low-income students, we have not yet been successful in translating the opportunity that access provides into college completion" (p. 4). Some institutions are investigating the causes of low rates of retention and graduation rates among their community college students. Tinto (2012) acknowledged that external events have an impact upon a student's departure from college. More specifically, he posited that 2-year colleges are nonresidential in character and are frequently located in settings where the influence of external communities may be substantial. Community colleges are located in the community and not necessarily surrounded by universities or other colleges. Consequently, community colleges do not create a "college town" environment. Students at community colleges are still typically living in their home towns which can lead to distractions with family and friends who may not support education.

There are many contributing factors that interfere with a student's success. Tinto (2012) stated, "First-generation and low-income college students, for instance, typically lack the sorts of shared knowledge, or cultural capital, that more affluent students and those from college-educated families commonly possess about the nature of the college experience and what it takes to succeed" (p. 11). In addition to these social factors, there may also be financial factors. For example, 75% of COD students receive some form of a grant or scholarship aid from the federal government, state or local government, the institution itself, and other sources in 2013-2014

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Additionally, more than 70% of all students are the first in their family to attend college (codfoundation.org). Students who are the first to attend college in their family typically do not have the guidance or knowledge to navigate through college. Boulanger (2009) reported that all college students face new challenges and transitions, but for the first-generation adult community college students, those challenges are more pervasive than those of their second-generation peers and they are at greater risk of dropping out of college within the first year (p. 4). "Without role models within the family, the first-generation college student may not have been raised with realistic expectations regarding the college experience" (Boulanger, 2009, p. 19). Other factors that students face with retention and progression include financial concerns, distractions of work and family, illness, transportation, child care, appearance at court cases, lack of maturity, or self-motivation, along with many other practical circumstances of everyday life (Boulanger, 2009, p. 17). Over 40% of students at COD are 25 years or older (scorecard.cccco.edu, 2015) and have numerous responsibilities outside of school. Additionally, according to Kasworm (2005), "adult students report that they are anxious about their competence and their ability to learn, especially when compared with their traditional-aged classmates, and not self-consciousness about their ability to perform as undergraduate students". Students that have been away from schooling for some time may feel that their extended time away from school can have a negative impact on their education and that their advanced age is an impediment to completing their education.

Tinto (2012) suggested two reasons for a student's departure from college. The first reason is the individual circumstances of the student, as previously listed above, and the second is the institution's expectations. Student retention is influenced by the expectations the institution establishes and what is required for students' successes. The institution established the standards

for what is required from students and created an environment conducive to achieving those standards. Tinto (2012) stated, "high expectations are a condition for student success, low expectations a recipe for failure" (p. 12). Not having a set of clear expectations of requirements of college coursework and knowledge of the student support resources available, may negatively impact students' retention and progression towards graduation. Institutions have a responsibility to make every attempt to assist their student population to succeed and progress toward their academic goals, but the students must be willing to acknowledge that they will need to make the effort and do the work to be successful. This combination enhances the likelihood that students who are willing to expend the effort will succeed (Tinto, 2012).

Upon entering a college, students are required to take a college placement test to determine their level of academic competence and are placed in courses accordingly. "Many students entering their first year of college, or those returning to college, often must take remedial level courses before entering college-level courses" (Bement, 2010, p. 24). Seidman (2012) reported, "the majority of community college students are either advised or required to enroll in at least one developmental (also known as remedial) class" (p. 155). It has been estimated that nearly 60% of community college students enroll in developmental or remedial courses (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005). According to the Student Success Scorecard (2015), 73.9% of students enrolled at COD are unprepared for college-level work. Since there is such a high percentage of students enrolling in college unprepared for college-level work, this can be an important reason as to why students are not progressing toward graduation. "These students are urged to take the first year experience course to help them with this transition to college" (Bement, 2010, p. 24).

Fike (2008) stated, "knowing that completing developmental education courses is one of the stronger predictors of student retention, indicates that institutions should place developmental education as a high priority" (p. 17). Colleges are acknowledging this need by focusing their efforts on the first-year experience. Institutional efforts need to be clear, have the intention, be mandatory and be impactful. "If institutions of higher education are going to take the issue of student retention seriously, they must establish programs or services that are more than just an add-on. These programs must assist in the retention of all students" (Ellison, 2010, p. 11). The goal is to be proactive and connect with students immediately as they arrive instead of waiting until they are at risk of failing.

First Year Programs as a Strategy for Retention and Progression toward Graduation at Community Colleges. Higher education has expended enormous energy on understanding why students decide to withdrawal from college and on devising ways to influence them to stay in college (Adams, 2008, p. 18). There have been various strategies to increase student retention and more schools are focusing on a student's first arrival to the institution; hoping to identify the factors that lead to a student's departure. Students enter with a variety of background characteristics, such as family socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and quality of high school, which indirectly influence departure decisions or influences their commitment to graduating (Adams, 2008).

One of the many reasons to implement FYE programs is to work with the students and address each characteristic with the goal of retaining the student for the following semester and years to come. Students are unaware of the pathway for success and this is just one of the many obstacles that students face. According to Tinto (2012), "the inability to obtain needed advice during the first year or at the point of changing majors can undermine motivation, increase the

32

likelihood of departure, and, for those who continue, lengthen the time to degree completion as students transfer to other degree programs" (p. 11). Therefore, colleges are implementing FYE programs to ease the students' transitions into college and to provide guidance during their first year.

Colleges are beginning to adopt first-year programs as the starting point for new students in which they are welcomed, supported, and integrated into the college community (Gardner & Barefoot, 2013). The course content for first-year programs is typically designed to help students connect with the institution by providing information on campus services and activities, student organizations, and resources for skill development related to student success including time management and fiscal responsibility (Brock, 2014, p. 12). Colleges have implemented FYE programs in multiple practices. FYE programs have been implemented as introduction orientations, FYE 101 semester-long courses, partial three-week study courses, or a yearlong experience group cohort.

Perceptions of Effectiveness for Improving the FYE at COD

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been used to research the student experience at community colleges, and to explore the effect of FYE courses on retention, persistence, and academic outcomes (Ellison, 2010, p. 43). Researching FYE programs for effectiveness allows institutions to modify programs and make needed changes. A qualitative approach was determined to be helpful as a way of understanding the perceptions of faculty and students about curriculum in a FYE course, and utilizing qualitative methods allowed for discerning perceptions more clearly (Ellison, 2010). Faculty, staff, and students who participated in the FYE EDGE program were interviewed to investigate the perceptions of the FYE EDGE

program. I observed the instruction of the FYE program and witnessed the interactions between the students and staff.

FYE programs are intended to help incoming students with their transition into college at the start of their college experience, rather than waiting until they fall behind in order to give them assistance. COD conducted an evaluation of their student population, prior to starting the FYE program, and found that students had a need for a tailored FYE program. The program first started with 22 students over a 3-week course that assisted students with a refresher course for remedial English and mathematics. As the program began to increase in size, COD also began to increase the number of services offered and made faculty participation an integral part of the program.

Office of Institutional Research from COD

The following information is derived from data reports directly from the Office of Institutional Research at College of the Desert. The research was conducted in February 2015, September 2016, March 2016, and December 2016. An analysis was conducted for summer sessions of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Summer 2016 is not included since students were in progress at the time of this analysis. This research is used to evaluate students' retention and student successes in the courses who participated in the FYE EDGE program compared to non-FYE EDGE students.

The summer of 2012 consisted of 22 students in which 0% of the students completed college level math and 10% successfully completed college level English. Out of 22 students, their enrollment pattern was: 100% enrolled, 95% retained, and 76% persisted to the next course level. Due to the size of the group, the institution chose not to conduct an analysis to verify the effectiveness of the program.

In the summer of 2013, the program consisted of 93 students and this group was compared to non-EDGE students. The comparison was made in English, math, and reading for success and retention rates. For all three disciplines, no differences were found on any of these measures. EDGE students performed as well as non-EDGE students in their respective courses (Office of Institutional Research, 2016).

The program continued to grow the following summer with 112 participating students. The Office of Institutional Research (2015) compared First-Time College Students (FTCS) in both the areas of English and math. There were 1,126 FTCS enrolled in an English course for Fall 2014 term in which 63 of those students participated in the English (ENG) review session for EDGE. There were 418 FTCS enrolled in a math course for Fall 2014 term in which 49 participated in the math EDGE session review. The following table compares EDGE and Non-EDGE students.

Table 1.

EDGE vs Non-EDGE completion in English and Math

Overall	Characteristic	EDGE (n=63)	Non-EDGE (n=1,063)	*p*-value
ENG	Success	76.2%	74.5%	0.77
	Retention	92.1%	90.3%	0.65
	Degree-Applicable Credits Earned	6.65	5.70	0.09
	COD Cumulative GPA	2.22	2.23	0.94
Overall	Characteristic	EDGE (n=49)	Non-EDGE (n=369)	*p*-value
MATH	Success	42.9%	64.5%	< 0.01*
	Retention	71.4%	84.8%	0.05
	Degree-Applicable Credits Earned	6.96	6.71	0.71
	COD Cumulative GPA	2.22	2.47	0.21

* = statistically significant at *p*=0.05 level.

In ENG overall, the success and retention rates are slightly higher for EDGE FTCS in comparison to non-EDGE FTCS. In MATH overall, the success and retention rates are lower for EDGE FTCS in comparison to non-EDGE FTCS. In the Summer of 2015, there were 1,163 FTCS enrolled in an ENG course for the Fall 2015 term. Of these, 140 students participated in an English review session for EDGE. For Math, there were 513 FTCS enrolled in a MATH course for the Fall 2015 term. Of these, 145 students participated in a math review session for EDGE.

At every level of English and regardless of how many levels of English a student moved up the course level sequence, students who participated in EDGE were as successful as students who did not participate in EDGE. Furthermore, students who participated in EDGE remained in the class at a higher rate that non-EDGE students for English (Office of Institutional Research, 20At 16). At every level of math and regardless of how many levels of math a student moved up the course sequence, students who participated in EDGE were as successful as students who did not participate in EDGE. However, students who participated in EDGE and moved to the next class level remained in the class at a lower rate than non-EDGE students.

Summary

The history of community college has shown low completion rates for students' persistence and graduation. The literature review provided an overview of the research literature and enabled the researcher to review the methodological issues, synthesize the research findings, critique the previous research, and attempt to understand the problems related to retention and progression towards graduation. It also considered the variety of strategies in first-year programs within colleges and reviewed some institutional data of College of the Desert to provide a reference for the college's progression with their student population. By researching the phenomenon of the FYE EDGE program, this provides insight into either the effectiveness of the

36

program or areas that can be improved as the program continues to grow. Therefore, the method

was used to collect, analyze, and provide descriptive data on the experiences of the students,

faculty, and staff who participated in the program. The findings from this study uncovered

patterns and themes from the students, faculty, and staff that will be explored further in the

following chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Chapter 3

As discussed in the literature review, research shows that less than one-third of community college students earn an Associate's Degree or certificate from their initial institution over a 6-year period (Tinto, 2012). My goal of this study is to evaluate the perceptions of the students, faculty, and staff on the program's effectiveness for students and what can be done to improve or develop these areas.

There are a number of initiatives at the state level focused on accountability and student success. In California, the state education code (requires each state and local government agency to adopt and promulgate a conflict of interest code) has been revised to require that all community colleges provide audits of student enrollment in the interest of maximizing persistence, improving skills, and assisting students in attaining their goals (Tinto, 2006). A qualitative methodology approach was used with interviews and observations. A phenomenological research design was used to engage the subjects through interviews to acquire the perspectives of the students, faculty, and staff participating in the FYE EDGE program. The goal of the qualitative phenomenological research is to describe the "lived experience" of a phenomenon (Waters, 2016). Since the EDGE program is new at the institution, I wanted to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of those involved. With this type of methodology, a researcher aims to find the essence or structure of an experience. This involves temporarily putting aside or "bracketing" personal attitudes and beliefs regarding the phenomenon, thereby heightening consciousness and allowing the researcher to understand or see the phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Merriam et al., 2002). Through observations, I reviewed program materials, and I also observed the interactions between the students, faculty, and staff. An analysis was conducted to find patterns or common

themes. The themes portrayed a rich descriptive account that makes reference to the literature that helped frame the study. The following chapter will describe in detail the qualitative methodology used to explore the perceptions of the EDGE program with a goal of improving the retention, persistence, and completion of first-year students at COD.

Research Question

What is the Perceived Effectiveness of the First Year Experience EDGE Program at College of the Desert?

 Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the FYE EDGE program at COD in student success, retention, and persistence towards educational goals. The design of this study consisted of the phenomenological design, through the student developmental model. In a phenomenological study, participants are asked to describe their experience without directing or suggesting their descriptions in any way (Waters, 2016). The phenomena of this study are the perceived effectiveness of the EDGE program. By conducting interviews and observations, this allows the researcher to address the phenomenon profoundly, providing a space for the participants to express their experiences in detail, approaching reality as faithfully as possible (Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

To elaborate on the phenomenological analysis, I proceeded with the "horizontalization" of data, this refers to the process wherein the researchers list each of the relevant quotes on the studied topic and gives them equal value with regard to the expressions of the group" (Creswell, 2013). I wrote textual descriptions and included verbatim quotations and recorded themes that proceeded to identify the essence of the phenomenon.

Through this design, I was able to examine in some detail the perspectives of the students, faculty, and staff. This study seeks to understand the experiences in the FYE program from the perspectives of both those who are students of the program, those who are applying for the program, and those who are the individuals instructing in it. Understanding the student, faculty, and staff perceptions of the EDGE program provides feedback that can be used to improve, add, or change aspects of the FYE to benefit the students as the program continues to grow.

The nature of this study is guided by Padilla-Diaz's (2015) assertion that the researcher who places him or herself within the qualitative paradigm must set aside all preconceptions, judgments or prejudices towards a particular topic in order to make an objective analysis of the information participants bring to an investigation. The analysis of this data can expand the possibility for deeper description and input with the structure of the FYE experience.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The population for this study included students who completed the FYE EDGE program since the program's implementation in 2011. The participants for this study are students who completed the FYE EDGE program at COD prior to entering the Fall semester of their first year in college. The sample for the study will be drawn from participants from 2013, 2014, and 2015 because the participant size was larger during those years. My original intent was to use purposive sampling but I had to switch to snowball sampling methods to target participants in the EDGE program within the years listed. Purposive sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research that involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this case, I originally used this type of sampling by asking the Director

of the EDGE program to provide a sample of FYE students. The Director sent out emails (emails sent to faculty, staff and student participants) and made announcements in EDGE sessions and faculty meetings. With this approach, I was able to get 8 faculty and staff members to be interviewed but only two students volunteered. Out of the 8 faculty and staff interviewed, 2 were faculty members (English and math department), and 6 were staff members (4 EDGE outreach specialist, 1 tutor, and 1 EDGE secretary). Still unable to produce more student participants, I asked the two students that I had already interviewed if they could refer other students to participate and to encourage them to volunteer. As noted by Blackstone (2012), having a previous participant vouch for the trustworthiness of the researcher may help new potential participants feel more comfortable about being included in the study. In this study, this created a snowball effect in which 14 more students volunteered to be interviewed. "The researcher first relied on their own networks to identify study participants, but because members of the study's target population were not easy to find, access to the networks of initial study participants was very important for identifying additional participants" (Blackstone, 2012).

To gain access to the site, I first requested permission from the Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, Educational Services and Planning, and permission from the Dean of Counseling from COD. The researcher scheduled a meeting with the Director of Counseling, Assistant Director of FYE, Director of Institutional Research, and the Director of Education Centers. During this initial meeting, I discussed the purpose of the study. I was granted access to obtain additional research with a proper request from the Office of Institutional Research.

Instrumentation

The primary instrumentation used in this study were interviews and observations. My role as the researcher was to conduct interviews of the EDGE participants. The interviews

consisted of an open-ended questionnaire tailored to students (See Appendix A for student interview questions) and another open-ended questionnaire tailored to faculty and staff (See Appendix B for faculty and staff interviews). According to Owen (2012), a good interviewer needs the following skills: be comfortable with your questions, know your strengths and weakness, be an engaged listener, attentive to leading the interviewee, and be knowledgeable of personal bias.

Since I, the researcher, conducted the interviews and observations. I practiced the interviews ahead of time by recording it and making sure that my questions (when said out loud) were not biased or directing the answers. However, during the actual interviews, I did encourage the participants to give a full description of their experiences along with descriptions of the situations in which the experiences occurred (Waters, 2016).

By having the face-to-face connection to the faculty, staff, and students, I was able to build rapport with each individual through interviews and observations which allowed me to have a humanistic approach. "Humanistic psychologists look at human behavior not only through the eyes of the observer but through the eyes of the person doing the behaving" (McLeod, 2007). Taking part as the facilitator in the observation, this approach allowed me to experience and witness the EDGE program and gain perspectives from the students, faculty, and staff. Researchers purportedly benefit from having a humanistic orientation and are comfortable with ambiguity, analytical, and introspective and are committed to conducting qualitative research. They tend to be flexible, open-minded, and able to see things in multiple perspectives (Babchuk & Badiee, 2010). The interviews are to gather perspectives from those who participated in the program, and the observations are the perspective of the researcher.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through interviews and observations. Data triangulation, data gathered by other participants or other sources (Carter et al., 2014), will be conducted to compare the interviews and observations looking for patterns or themes. While the interviews were the main source for understanding the perceptions of the participants, observations of the FYE program in action were also used to support or question the interactions described by the interviewees.

Interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to get the perceptions from not only the students but also those who are working with the students. "Interviews can be used to explore the views, experiences, beliefs, and motivations of individual participants" (Gill, al et., 2008). So while the institutional data may show an increase in student retention, it does not necessarily reflect the satisfaction of the students and staff, nor does it provide feedback on any specific recommendations.

I used open-ended questions for the interview to discover perceptions of the effectiveness of the FYE EDGE program in student success, retention, and persistence towards educational goals. I had a set of 6 questions (See Appendix B for faculty and staff questions) for the faculty and staff that were tailored to their perspectives and involvement, and I had 8 open-ended questions (See Appendix A student interviews) tailored to the students. Students were asked a series of questions that included: knowledge and skills that they may have gained from the EDGE program, what they were able to achieve in the program that they would not be able to achieve if they did not participate, their confidence in their ability to succeed in the classes, and improvements that they would recommend for future students. Faculty and staff were asked a

43

series of questions that included: responsibilities of the program, positive and negative aspects of working with the program, student reaction to the program content, and any suggested improvements recommended for the EDGE program.

Using open-ended questions allowed for longer and more detailed dialogue in each interview. The open-ended question allowed the individual to express their viewpoint on the FYE program. Their detailed accounts of their experiences are valuable to understanding the FYE program and its effect on those who are participating and instructing.

Observations. Observation is the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through their senses (Kawulich, 2005). Observations were conducted in four different EDGE sessions. I was interested in observing the interactions between the students and faculty along with the students' reactions towards the curriculum. Two of the observations were in the English EDGE sessions and two were conducted in the math EDGE sessions. Of these four observations, three were over the traditional 3-week summer sessions and one was during a 3-day winter math session.

Typically, one major drawback to observational methods is the obtrusiveness of a stranger with a pad and pencil or a camera trying to record people's natural behavior (Thomas et al., 2015). Although I did take field notes, I sat in the EDGE sessions as if I was one of the students. The faculty and staff knew I was not a student but the students themselves did not suspect that I was observing. Students typically were taking notes themselves or working on an assignment so it was not out of the ordinary to be sitting in the classroom with a pad of paper and a pencil and to be taking notes.

The observations were conducted in a natural setting allowing the EDGE program to proceed as normal without the distractions of an observer. I took detailed field notes that

44

included the interaction between the students working with faculty and staff, and observing the interactions of the students among their peers. These observations allowed me to provide an open-ended second source of data to of the student, faculty, and staff behavior in the EDGE program and to identify any patterns that may emerge; adding understanding the phenomenon of the FYE program.

Data Analysis Procedures

After conducting all of the 24 interviews, each of the interviews was transcribed using a transcription company (Rev.com). I then read each transcription and listened to the recorded interviews to check for accuracy. All of the data was then coded by hand. Each individual transcript was read, searching for factors that provided details about perception, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, impacts, barriers, and so forth, that occurred from participation in the EDGE program. When I found a factor, I named it and gave it a color code. Whenever that same factor reappeared, I highlighted it with the same color. At the end of the coding analysis, over 15 different colored markers had been used. After reading through each transcribed interview, I wrote the name and number of every factor within that interview on the first page of the interview. Additionally, a separate spreadsheet was used to categorize each factor by interview. I used the additional visual chart to stay organized with the factors. To cross-validate these factors, I repeated the procedure again of listening and reading the transcribed notes for accuracy.

I coded my observation field notes by hand. After each observation, I reviewed my notes to make sure they were organized, to determine whether anything had been missed, or if I needed to elaborate within an area. I also included a summary of each observation on my notes after completing the process for reflection. I reviewed my observation notes to locate factors either aligning with the detailed interviews or emerging factors that were a new discovery.

45

I had developed an initial list of factors after I transcribed my first interview for the faculty, staff, and students. Quotations from the interviews were cut and then pasted onto a large poster paper. In the end, I had five large posters, two for student interviews, two for faculty and staff interviews, and the last was for my observations. The categories for the factors were refined until I came up with ten to fifteen raw factors. After reviewing all twenty-four interviews and four observations, I was prepared for my final coding. I wrote down all my factors on a spreadsheet and noted how many times each factor occurred. I then ranked the factors from highest to lowest. Those factors that were mentioned multiple times in more than one interview were considered "primary" factors. The primary factors are those that were mentioned multiple times in more than one interview. These factors would be considered primary factors and any factor that appeared only once would be considered as a secondary factor. The same was done across my four observations.

Limitations of the Research Design

One of the limitations of the research design is with the student population interviewed. The FYE program began five years ago and then developed over time in order to continue to improve the services offered in the program. The students' interviews were not screened for the year in which they participated in the EDGE program. Therefore, some students may have received additional student support services (i.e. tutoring, time management and study skills workshops, etc.) that may have affected their outcome. For example, in the early stage of the program, students were not granted priority registration which created an issue for students to enroll in a math or English course that following fall after the student received a refresher course. Students may have enrolled into a course that was not in their new placement or had to wait a semester before they could take the course they needed (allowing time to pass and losing the

46

information they just learned). The unique growth of the program allowed for the phenomenon to develop as it grew. Although students were not screened for the year they participated, they still provided valuable results of the phenomenon of the perceived effectiveness of the EDGE program. The FYE EDGE Program continues to grow and will still need additional research beyond this study to determine the effectiveness of retention, persistence, and completion of student educational goals due to the early stages of this program (5 years).

Validation

Trochim (2006) developed criteria for internal validity of a qualitative study in which credibility was established by ensuring that the results of the study were credible or believable from the perspectives of the participants in the research. He proposed that: "The purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's eyes, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results" (Trochim, 2006). Accordingly, after the interviews were conducted and the conversations transcribed, to ensure accuracy. I did a member check and informed the participants that they could read the transcripts, providing an opportunity to clarify any statements.

Additionally, I triangulated the data from different sources of interviews (students/faculty/staff) and through observation, searching for any patterns or themes. This provided more comprehensive analysis. I used this methodology in my instrumentation to prepare for the interviews. According to Thomas et al., "It is important that the interviewer appears nonjudgmental, be alert to both verbal and nonverbal messages, and be flexible in rephrasing and pursuing certain lines of questioning" (Thomas et al., 2015). I first practiced my interviews through recordings without the participant and reviewed the recording to make sure that I was consistent in my tone and annunciations or clearly read the questions appropriately

when asking the question prior to conducting the interviews. I made sure that I was not letting

any personal bias take place in the interview. I was flexible with interview locations and meeting

times to be more approachable and in return get a detailed account of the participants'

perspectives.

Expected Findings

The expected findings for the FYE EDGE program were that it is an effective route for

students preparing them for the transition into college and course rigor during their first year of

college courses. Students are predicted to perform as well as the students who originally assessed

into their course placement. I predicted that there will be a connection of successful completion

due to the EDGE program. An additional predicted finding would be that priority registration

and other resources are expected to be tied with the FYE EDGE program, and students are

predicted to have a direct pathway that will lead to the completion of a student's educational

goals.

Ethical Issues

Conflict of Interest Assessment. Conflict of interest assessment for this research could

potentially be the researcher who has a dual relationship with the students and the institution. At

the time of the study the researcher was a current employee of the institution in which the study

is being conducted. As the researcher will be also conducting the interviews, student responses

may have been affected. Students may soften their answers due to fear of judgment. The students

may want to provide positive responses during the interview because they may feel that the

researcher (also a counselor on that campus) is expecting a particular response. In order to

address this conflict, the researcher addressed the students concerns and reiterate to respond

honestly and there will be no repercussions due to their responses. Prior to conducting

interviews, students were provided a confidentiality contract stating that all the responses are confidential and will not be used against their academic standing at the college. The researcher also signed the contract with the student and is held accountable to the confidentiality standards (See Appendix C for consent form protocol).

Researcher's position. The researcher provided consent forms to the faculty, staff, and students who participated in the interviews stating that answers will not have an impact on their outcome at the institution, and their honesty will assist with the improvement of the services that COD provides. Their names and identities were protected. Since the researcher was an employee of the institution, it is important that she be consciously aware of any biases that may affect the research outcome. As an educational counselor and an advocate for the students, one of the researcher's professional roles on the college campus involves participating and as well as conducting student orientation and "My first schedule" workshops for new students. The orientation and workshop are established to create a smooth transition from high school to college. In my professional experience, campus orientation and the "My first schedule" workshops are critical for a smooth "high school to college" transition. This provides a wealth of knowledge for students on how to access a student's profile, the rules and regulations of the college, which English, math, reading course the student assessed into, what classes to take based on their major, and how to register for their classes. This transition assists the students' with understanding the college's expectations of the students in the classroom and the recommended courses the student will need to obtain their educational goals. In the students' orientation, information is presented about the institution's FYE EDGE program, and how this program is an additional resource to assist with their student success. I had to remain consistent with the promotion of all student services, including, tutoring, special programs (i.e. DSPS, EOPS,

Veterans, etc.) as well as the FYE EDGE program. I must not solely focus on the promotion of the EDGE program.

Second, the researcher's role as a counselor has led to research of this program due to continuous interactions with the students. On a daily basis, counselors meet with students who have placed into the lowest remedial math (math 070). Students share their difficulties with math and the length of time that will be needed to reach their educational goals. As a counselor, I also meet with students who are not able to start their major prep courses until they pass a certain level of math. In other circumstances, students are unable to transfer to a 4-year university because they have not started or passed a college-level math, which postpones their transfer eligibility. The long path of remedial courses is a huge barrier for students to obtain their educational goals and this is why the researcher decided to examine the FYE EDGE program and research this subject.

Finally, as a full-time faculty member of the college, I had a responsibility to the students and their student success. I am invested in continuing my professional development that will benefit the students. Discussion of remedial courses is a concern and any way to address this concern is important to the students and their success. I understand that the FYE EDGE program is not the only means for students to obtain academic successes.

Ethical Issues in the Study. to ensure confidentiality of the student participants, all information was carefully secured and followed COD Office of Institutional Research guidelines. Permission for access to student data through the Office of Institutional Research was granted by the Dean of Counseling (See Appendix D for institutional permission to conduct research). The researcher needed permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approved the dissertation-granting Concordia (See Appendix E for IRB approval).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of the students, faculty, and staff about the effectiveness of the FYE EDGE program. Phenomenological methodologies were used to engage the subjects through interviews. This methodology allowed me to see the phenomenon from the perspectives of the students, faculty, and staff who experienced the program.

The main instrumentation used in this study was the interview instrument. The interviews allowed for in-depth discussion and analysis of any trends or themes that were discovered within the EDGE program. I conducted interviews and gathered field notes obtained from my observations. This research consisted of 24 interviews and 4 observations. All data were transcribed and coded. The following chapter will present the primary and secondary factors that were discovered in this research and it will provide an analysis of the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the effectiveness of the FYE EDGE program from the perspectives of the students, faculty, and staff. This study examined the primary and secondary factors discovered through interviews and observations. This chapter provides a description of the sample, research methodology and analysis, a summary of the findings, and a presentation of the data and results.

Description of the Sample

I attempted to understand the perceptions of the effectiveness of the FYE EDGE program, by conducting interviews and observations. My goal was to interview 20 students and 10 faculty and staff members obtained through purposeful sampling who participated in the EDGE program since Summer 2012. Due to the amount of time needed to conduct interviews and contact students, faculty and staff, I knew that time would not allow for more interview participants.

Although the program has developed over time, I did not narrow down my sample to a particular year. During the interviews, the questions did not lead to additional program services that were not originally provided with the program's first implementation. Also, having an open sample to all years would provide perceptions of various students who have experienced the program in its different stages. This allowed for a descriptive analysis and contributed to further understanding the phenomena of the FYE EDGE program. Not realizing that there would be difficulties in getting student participants (two volunteers), I had to switch my sampling technique to a snowball sampling technique in order to recruit more student participants. Through this method, I was able to get an additional 14 student participants, having a total of 16 student participants and 8 faculty and staff member participants. Of the 16 student participants, 9

were female and 7 were male. Eleven students identified as Hispanic/Latino, 3 as Caucasian, and 2 students identified as two or more races. In this sample, during the students' participation with EDGE, 13 students were an incoming freshman (19 years or younger), and 3 were returning students which consisted of 2 students ages 20-24 and 1 student ages 25-29. I did not ask the faculty or staff for their demographics.

Research Methodology and Analysis

Interviews were used to engage the subjects through open-ended questions from the students, faculty, and staff on their perceptions of the EDGE program. The questions were carefully stated to not lead the participants to a particular answer and to allow detailed descriptions of their experiences. As a reference in the literature review, I analyze institutional data from COD on the FYE students' successes and retention rates compared to the non-FYE students. I wanted to see if there was a significant difference of improvement from FYE students versus non-FYE students. Data collection from the interviews were coded by hand to find any trends and feedback that can be used to either improve, add, or change aspects of the FYE program to benefit the students. Of the responses, I categorized each one to identify elements of the responses as primary or secondary factors. I found 13 primary factors that were mentioned and these factors were distinguished as primary because they were cited by more than one respondent. Any response that was mentioned only once, and was distinctive and worth noting, was categorized as a secondary factor. The data is presented in order, with the factors that were mentioned the most listed first, and in descending order based on the frequency, each factor was mentioned by the participants. Observation notes were coded to examine any similarities that can validate the primary or secondary factors founded through the interviews. The information

presented will be used to identify the effectiveness of the FYE EDGE program through the perspective of the students, faculty, and staff.

Summary of Findings

The patterns identified by the reports from the interviews showed that the majority of those students who participated in the EDGE program moved up at least one level in math, English or both based on their college placement scores. Students also reported improvements in their general knowledge of math. Based on the student interviews there are some students reported that they applied to the program because they were not satisfied with their original college placement. Some students reported that they were more confident in math or English and felt more prepared to start the Fall session now that they had knowledge of what was expected from them in college.

The majority of faculty and staff reported an overall satisfaction working with the students and believed that the program had a positive impact on students. Common factors that were found for both the students and the faculty and staff that were interviewed were factors such as building connections (student among student, student, and staff) and reports of wanting the program to be longer in time. Most students seemed to feel the program was too short and wanted more time to improve their math skills, and faculty and staff perceived to feel that with extra time, they would be able to assist the students with more subject content.

The next section is a breakdown of the data and results from the interviews and observations. Primary and secondary factors found will be presented in detail and with direct quotes from the students, faculty, and staff. Transcription of the interviews are reported word by word directly from the interviewee and was not changed in any way. Students, faculty, and staff are not referred by name because all identities were made confidential.

Presentation of Data and Results

Interviews

      Primary factor 1: Student achievement. Student achievement was a dominant factor among the students in which their achievements referred to either improvement in the subject matter, moving of college placement, and shortening their educational courses needed for their completion of their area of interest. This factor was mentioned 12 times among the 16 students. It was the most predominant factor mentioned, with the second most mentioned factor being mentioned 8 times. During the interviews, many students refer to math courses in numbers (i.e., Math 060) and how they moved up levels. Below is a chart of the math sequence to use as a reference.
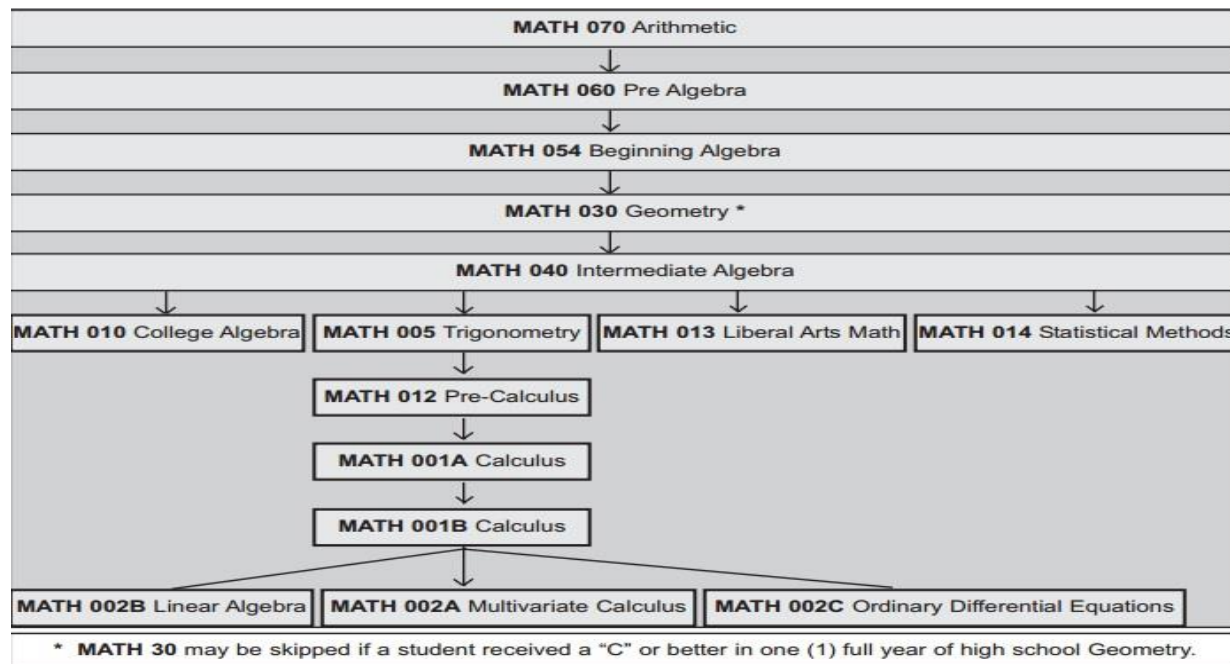
Figure 1. *Math Placement Sequence*

      The students interviewed placed into Math 070 (Arithmetic) or Math 060 (Pre-Algebra. Being placed in those two lower levels makes the student's math sequence anywhere from 3-5 math classes needed to complete an Associate's Degree or transfer to a 4-year university.

Students were questioned what they were able to achieve as a result of the EDGE program that otherwise they would not have been able to accomplish. Out of the 16 students interviewed, twelve students self-reported that were able to move up levels in math but a few students also discussed how this impacted their pathway at COD. To confirm the students' placement of levels, with student permission I was able to review the 16 students' placement scores and validate if their college placement level had changed after the participation of the FYE EDGE program. Of the 16, 12 moved up in their math placement and 14 moved up in their English placement. Some responses were similar to student 9.

Student 9:   What I was able to achieve was place higher in math. I moved up three levels. Now I'm going to transfer next fall because I placed in Math 040. Otherwise, I would have been stuck here for another year.

-and-

Student 1:   I first tested into Math 070 and after the program, I placed into Math 054.

-and-

Student 2:   I originally placed into Math 060. I was able to achieve a new placement of Math 054. I didn't place higher in English but I felt ready for my English class. It was worth saving a semester.

-and-

Student 11:   Before joining EDGE, I tested into Math 060. After EDGE, I tested into Math 040. I tested much higher and was happy with my new score. I was really sad knowing that I placed into Math 060 first. That would've taken me an extra two years just to finish my math that I need to transfer.

-and-

Student 12:   I first placed into Math 070 and English 061.

Researcher: Did you score higher in math or English?

Student 12:   Yeah, I scored into Math 054. I went two levels higher, and for English, I got a

                higher score but didn't place into English 1A yet.

      Each level of math takes up to 16 weeks in one semester. Three levels of math would

have added an additional year and a half for this student. As for the English sequence, there is

only one remedial English course prior to taking the college level English of English 001a.

Another student mentioned:

Student 10:   Well, I was able to move up two levels in math so I didn't have to say here a

                whole other year. Especially because my major is biology. So I need a lot of math.

Researcher: So what math did you test into?

Student 10:   I tested into Math 040. I will be able to catch up with my math in summer so I

                can start on my science classes.

      A biology major would have to take a minimum of a year of calculus prior to

transferring. In order for biology students to begin on their major prep biology courses, a student

will have to either pass Math 012 (Pre-calculus) or take it at the same time with their first major

prep biology course. Even from student 10, with their new placement of Math 040 (Intermediate

Algebra), the student will still have to take their current placement of math along with one

additional math course before beginning pre-calculus. If this student started with their original

math placement of Math 060 (Pre-Algebra), the student would need a total of four semesters

prior to starting pre-calculus, which would have added a total enrollment time of a year to the

student's requirements for transfer. Twelve of the 16 students interviewed self-reported that they

were able to move up anywhere from 1 to 3 levels higher in math or possibly 1 level higher in

English. Each level that a student moves up saves the student one additional semester. Numerous majors and courses have college level English or a particular math as its prerequisite to complete prior to beginning the course or major. Students may find themselves spending a semester or more just working on their math or English before they are able to begin their major requirements because they have finished all of their other general education courses and only have this barrier of math and English to finish before they can move on.

   Priority registration. Two of the respondents discussed how they were able to achieve priority registration. Incoming students get last priority registration meaning that they are not allowed to register until the end of the second week after classes have been open to register. By the time new students register, many of their desired or needed courses are already filled to capacity. Priority registration only improves by the units already completed or by being in a special program (i.e., Disabled Students Program Services, EOPS, CalWORKs, Foster Youth, MESA, etc). When students were questioned what they were able to achieve as a result that they otherwise could not have accomplished as a result of participating in the program, 2 students mentioned priority registration.

Student 3: I accomplished having priority in registration in my next semester. Otherwise, it would have been really hard for me to choose any math class or they wouldn't be any space available.

Researcher: Why is that?

Student 3: By the time you get to register, all the math courses are closed. This is my third semester and I wasn't able to get into any math courses in spring. I guess it was a good thing since I had to wait and take this program, I placed higher. So, it all worked out. Big props for that.

Another student added:

Student 5:   I got a better priority when it comes to registration so that helps a lot.

Researcher: How does it help?

Student 5:   It helps knowing that I'm going to be able to get the classes I need that work

around my work schedule. I still have to work while coming to school and even

though my work is willing to work around my schooling, it's better that I only get

classes two days a week so I can work full shifts the other days.

Priority registration is a benefit to the students participating in the EDGE program. When

the program first initiated, it did not offer students priority registration which later was found to

be an issue by the program. Students would spend the summer getting refresher courses in

English and math and were not able to register for the English or math course they needed

because the classes had been filled. Therefore, all the knowledge that was just learned over the

summer would not be beneficial if the students took a break of a semester before starting their

English or math. Realizing that this was an issue, the FYE program was able to establish priority

registration for the students for one year.

Primary factor 2: Knowledge and skills gained. *Improvement in math.* Students were

asked what knowledge and skills they have gained through the EDGE program. Eight students

self-reported that they improved in math significantly. As mentioned earlier, I was able to

confirm through the students' placement test (with student permission) that 12 of the 16 moved

up at least one level of math placement. Of these 12 students, 8 students were able to move up 2-

3 levels of math. The majority of the students that I interviewed were an incoming freshman (13

of the 16 students). This is similar to the FYE program as a whole. The majority of the students

who participate in the FYE program are just transitioning from high school to college. Even

though students may be transitioning from one institution (high school) to another (college) with no breaks, students can still be underprepared, especially in math. I learned from the local high school districts that the high school math graduation requirement is only two years. Only needing two years of math as a high school graduation requirement means that students may have a break of 1 to 2 years without taking any math. So, regardless if the students are returning back to school after a break or transitioning straight from high school, each may need the refresher course in math from a FYE program.

Student 13:   If I didn't take this, I wouldn't have remembered pretty much all of the basics of it as well because if you don't take a math course within a year or two, you tend to forget things, so it was pretty much a refreshment for me.

Two returning students (returning back to college after having a year or more off after high school) added:

Student 3:   I thought everything was useful especially math because you forget after the long years of not practicing any math.

<div align="center">-and-</div>

Student 5:   I think all of it was pretty nice, brushing up on basic arithmetic and basic English. Those are the things that I did forget or was rusty about after being out of high school because I didn't go straight here right after high school. I took a year off.

Some students discussed how they discovered the areas that they lacked in math and the strengths that they found in math as well. Based on observations, EDGE allowed uninterrupted time in the summer for students to focus on refreshing their math and English basic skills.

Improvement in English. There was a discussion of improvement with English as well. Three students reported how they improved their English skills as far as sentence skills, paragraphs, MLA formats, and grammar. However, one student stood out with their response.

Student 11:   First I was upset because I didn't move up in my English class. But then when I got to my English class, I was like, "oh my God, like, we already read this". So I already knew the background of it. It's cool. That worked out.

Students who participate in EDGE program are being exposed to the material prior to beginning their first semester. Even though the student was initially not satisfied with her reassessment of not moving up any level in English, she felt prepared in her English course.

Primary factor 3: Students' Improved Confidence. During the interviews, students were asked about their confidence in the ability to succeed before versus after participation in the EDGE program. I wanted to see if the students felt that the program prepared them to begin the coursework. It is one thing for students to study and place higher in their college placement and it is another thing for students to feel prepared for the course that they were newly placed in. Two common themes arrived from this. Fourteen students reported that they had an increase in their confidence but two phrases stood out, *prepared* and *scared*.

Prepared.

Student 1:   I probably would have been doing much worse than if I didn't take it. It's a good thing I did take it because I was doing better and was more prepared. I am doing better right now in math.

<div align="center">-and-</div>

Student 3:   I feel more confident in math. When I take the math class I won't be completely lost. I'll just remember what I reviewed and I won't be lost in the class.

Student 4:   Well before the EDGE program, I sucked in both English and math and scored really low. Like, really, really low in both. Then right after the EDGE program, it really helped with just everything. I improved in math and English. So now, I'm at college level English and moved up levels in math. I placed higher and feel prepared to start those classes.

-and-

Student 8:   I feel more confident and prepared. I knew what to expect.

Researcher: How did you know what to expect?

Student 8:   For English, I was taught the basics of English and we had lots of practice work. The instructor taught us as if we were actually taking the class in the summer. I was able to get help from the teacher but also from the tutors walking around the room. In math, we covered the basics so I already know the formulas that were covered in class. It just prepared me because I always had extra help which was cool.

A few students talked about feeling prepared and confident but feeling ready for college.

Student 11:   I felt more confident after the EDGE program. My math instructor informed us of what we will be covering. He prepared us for that class and so did the English professor. She (the English professor) mostly prepared us for that class. She showed us how to work on examples, what a thesis looks like, how to annotate... How to really write. I felt confident to start my classes after.

-and-

Student 13:   Before I wasn't confident and now I wake up feeling confident and prepared for

college.

-and-

Student 15:   I feel way more confident and prepared. I felt ready to take on whatever college

throws at me.

Researcher: How do you feel prepared?

Student 15:   In EDGE, not only did they help me get ready for my math and English but they

helped me start school. They told me what classes to take, how to register, how to

apply for financial aid, how to use tutoring, gave me a book voucher, and just

everything that I need to know to start school.

Incoming freshman students who enter into COD are required to take an orientation

either in person or online. However, the orientation is just a quick introduction to the college and

doesn't provide full detail of every program offered on campus and how to use all the resources

available to the students. Students have to learn how to ask questions to locate all the services or

investigate these areas for themselves.

Conquering fear. In the discussion of confidence, four students mentioned how they

were scared before beginning the EDGE program and on how they have conquered that fear.

Student 10:   Before the program, I was really doubtful and real scared. I wasn't good at math.

Now, I was like, "Oh my God, I can't believe it". I use to suck at math, and now

I'm passing my math classes with A's. That never used to happen to me before.

Another student describes not just being better in a subject but not being an active participant in

class. This student goes on to state:

Student 5:   Before participating I would be nervous and scared and not participate in any

subjects. Then I did the EDGE program and I participant in class, talk a lot, do all

my homework, all my assignments in class, and I have fun in class.

Another student also discusses being scared with speaking and participating in class.

Student 16:   I was really, really scared, especially speaking. With the program, they do ice

breakers to get to know your classmates. Now I am more confident in speaking to

my classmates in other classes and I actually feel like a college student.

Students are not only underprepared in their basic skills of English, math, and reading but

they may also the lack social integration skills needed to be active participants in their classes.

Primary factor 4: Motivation to apply to EDGE. The FYE EDGE program is not

mandatory for students, but it does require for the students to commit to a minimum of three

weeks attendance during their summer. Although motivation to apply to participate in a program

is not an indicator of the program's effectiveness, I wanted to see what actually prompted the

students to participate in the program. Seven of the 16 students interviewed directly mention that

they applied to the program because they received low test scores on their college placement

tests. After the students take their college placement tests, they were either informed outside the

testing center about the EDGE program or they talked with a counselor to discuss their test

scores. Nine students reported that they heard about the program from their college counselor

and how the program provides a reassessment for college placement. Four students reported that

they heard about the program right after the test from an information table outside the testing

center and 3 students stated that they found out they could have a second chance to reassess from

an outreach team that presented the EDGE program at their high schools.

Save time. Besides wanting to improve their test scores or improve their math ability, four students directly discussed joining the program because they wanted to save time at the college.

Student 5:   I didn't want to take classes that I knew I could do better in and I wanted to save time.

-and-

Student 9:   I joined the program because I wanted to finish in two years so I could transfer. So I knew that if I didn't go I will stay longer. I knew I'd have to be here like more than three years.

-and-

Student 11:   I knew that if you scored low on the assessment test you would have to take more classes and be here a lot longer than if you placed into college-level courses. I wanted to save time and not spend two years taking extra classes that I didn't need.

-and-

Student 16:   What made me apply to the EDGE program is because I wanted to save money and time. I am paying out of pocket and I didn't want to pay for classes that I didn't need. Also, it refreshed my memory. It saved a lot of time too.

Besides needing additional time at the college to finish up the remedial courses, these remedial courses are not transferable units.

Student 10:   I didn't want to be there for so long in college, taking classes that were not for credit, so I wanted help, that little boost.

Students often misunderstand a number of credits needed to transfer and the amount of time needed at the college to complete either an Associate's Degree or to transfer to a 4-year university. Students whose goal is to complete an Associate's Degree or transfer to a 4-year university need 60 transferable credits. All the remedial courses prior to college level math or English, are all considered non-transferable credits. A student may spend their first year at the college taking remedial math, English, and reading and have a total of 24 credits earned, however, only 8 of those credits may be transferable. This leads to additional time spent at the college. Some students' motivation to participate in the EDGE program is to save time and to not take remedial non-transferable courses.

Primary factor 5: Tutoring services, one-on-one interactions. The EDGE program has instructors leading the sessions and also has tutors (known as Supplemental Instructors or SI leaders) for additional support to assist the students. I wanted to know how the tutors played a role during the program and how they contributed to the learning environment. Of the 16 students, 7 discussed how the tutors provided one-on-one additional assistance in the classroom. One student's response stood out because this student still received assistance even though she was too shy to ask for help.

Student 4:   The SI's were really good. They were just walking around the room. They would come if you needed help and if you didn't they would still come by. They would look over your shoulder to see if you were doing it right and they'd be like, "okay, you sure you got it?" Because I would sometimes be too embarrassed to ask questions and they'll like be right there like, "yeah, I need help."

Student 2 added:

The tutors are really nice. I would ask for help, and they would actually tell me

step-by-step on what to do or they would tell me examples of how to do things.

According to the student's reports, the tutor's would walk around the room and approach all the

students, one-by-one to make sure that they did not need assistance even if they were not asking

for help.

Student 5:   If we didn't have questions, they would encourage us to ask questions, and after

the participation work, they would ask us individually what we thought about in

terms of what we were learning.

Many more accounts similar to these two students were discussed. Student 10 stated that

she liked that the tutors were students themselves so they were able to relate. Having current

students or alumni students assisting with tutoring, allows the students to relate to experiences

and similar struggles that students may be facing. A few students mentioned that they were too

embarrassed during class to openly ask questions in the classroom. By the tutors walking around

the room and approaching the students, this created a different environment and allowed for the

one-on-one connection. Besides discussion of the interviews, I was able to witness the tutors in

action during my observation which will be discussed further in this chapter.

Primary factor 6: Student experience. Towards the end of the interview, I gave the

opportunity for students to share any additional comments that they had about their experience.

Of the respondents, 3 students discussed having good instructors, 2 mentioned the assistance

with school resources, and 2 students talked about meeting new people.

Instructors. Instructors in the program are there to assist students and some left an impact

on the students.

Student 16:   I think the program, in general, had a lot of strengths because of the professors, they actually generally cared. Even though they knew you for 3 weeks, they wanted to see you succeed.

Researcher: How did they do that?

Student 16:   Each class, the professor would say encouraging words throughout the class making you feel that you can learn and will be successful as long as you are willing to put in the work. If a student didn't understand something, the professor would stop and make sure he explained it in a way that we could understand. He didn't want to move on until we understood. It was great, and I felt that he took the time to care about our understanding.

During a regular semester, the instructors are having to cover an entire course in anywhere between 6-16 weeks. Having this obligation, instructors may not have the time to stop each lecture (if needed) to make sure that every student is on board before they move on to the next topic. In the EDGE program, the instructors are there to assist students with refresher content and not having a set schedule of having to cover an entire semester of work in 3-weeks.

Resources. One addition to the EDGE program is providing students with information on all the resources available on campus. Students in the program had their own EDGE counselor along with outreach specialist in which they could go to for any questions. Two students commented on how these resources assisted them.

Student 7:   The program was great; it was all great. If you had any questions, someone could always help you.

Researcher: Who was there to help and with what type of questions?

Student 7:   I had a counselor and lots of staff from the program to help. I found out about

                  financial aid, tutoring, other special programs that might be able to help me out. I

                  asked how to find my classes, what classes I take, and just get help. I think I must

                  have bugged them all with all my questions, and still do, but everyone always

                  helps.

     Meeting new people. Earlier in the interviews, students had discussed meeting new

people in the classroom and how this has assisted them with participation in the class. Two

students wanted to add more details to the importance of meeting new people in the program.

Student 6:   My experience was fun. I met new people. Learning was easy because you're just

                  engaging with other people and interacting.

                                        -and-

Student 8:   My experience with EDGE made me have friends because we're all on the same

                  program so we understood each other, and it made me practice a lot speaking

                  English.

Researcher: You English sounds great. Is English not your native language?

Student 8:   No, Spanish is. I've been in the United States for over 10 years but I still get

                  subconscious about my English. Just like I was subconscious in my scores from

                  my test, I felt that I was dumb and I was afraid that people were going to make

                  fun of me in class. In this program, I met other friends that had the same doubts as

                  me and I learned that we were all there because we all needed extra help. My new

                  friends make me feel comfortable and smart. We all help each other out.

     Based on some of the students' reports, the EDGE program was perceived to be a place

where students made connections with others.

Primary factor 7: Influencing students from the perspective of the faculty and staff.

Wanting to have insight from the perspectives of the faculty and staff running the program, I wanted to know the positive aspects of working with the program. The faculty and staff were asked to describe the positive aspects (if any) of the EDGE program. Of the 8 faculty and staff interviewed, all 8 mentioned the positive theme of helping or influencing students and preparing them for school. The following are a few comments that the faculty and staff made about helping and influencing the students.

Faculty/staff 1: When you see students grasp, understand and internalize what you're showing and teaching them… it's very self-fulfilling. I still love to see students light up, grab, buy in, and start running on their own.

-and-

Faculty/staff 2: Being able to engage with students and to be able to help them. It's a real great feeling when you feel like you are a part of their academic success, and that you've helped them achieve things that they've probably thought they wouldn't be able to achieve at the beginning of the semester or when you first met them.

-and-

Faculty/staff 3: You get to influence students that are coming from high school into college, and you're helping them transition. These students are making friends, they make a connection with instructors, and they are just overall more prepared.

-and-

Faculty/staff 6:   I love working with students. One of the nice things is that you get to build

relationships with students. I actually had a small group in EDGE, and

those students know that they can come specifically to all of us, but really

specifically to me because we have that connection. It's just nice to know

that is there and we build on those relationships and you can impact those

students.

-and-

Faculty/staff 8:   We get to influence students by our interactions with them and by their

interactions we other students. When they first come in, they're really shy

and quiet and withdrawn. By the end of their three weeks of the program,

they are just smiling and talking and happy and I love that part of it.

The positive aspects from the faculty and staff were not focused on the students' elimination of

courses but on being able to engage, assist, and influence students. The next faculty/staff

member not only discusses influencing students but also talks about his experience as a former

College of the Desert student and how this has assisted him in his position.

Faculty/staff 4:   The positive aspects of working with the EDGE program is that you get to

influence students that are coming from high school into college, helping

them with that transition.

For me, since I came to College of the Desert, I was a student here. I see

myself in the students, so I want to help them transition… We help them

especially during the summer, get prepared to come to COD. We see

students make friends through the EDGE program. They already know the

people. They are aware of the campus. They are aware of instructors. They

71

make that connection with instructors. They are more prepared in that

aspect to a student that just comes out of high school and is like, "Where

do I go?"

Primary factor 8: Responsibilities of student recruitment and outreach. Having any

type of program requires structure and each employee that is part of a program has some form of

responsibilities to assist with a smooth operational program. Besides the faculty having the

responsibilities of teaching the sessions, the outreach specialist had the responsibilities of doing

outreach to the community and recruiting the students. Four of the 8 faculty and staff interviewed

discussed their responsibilities in all shapes and forms required to get students to participate.

They start with high school and community outreach to notify the incoming students of this FYE

program offered at COD for free and the benefits of joining. The staff is also tasked with

outreach at the current institution to notify the students who are currently enrolled who have yet

to start their math and or English course sequence. All forms of recruitment and outreach have

continued to expand and grow the program. One faculty member stated that it was their

responsibility prepare students to be resilient and persistent, and to train them in life skills like

being responsible, self-motivated, and building a support network (Faculty/staff 1).

Primary factor 9: Underprepared students. The literature review discussed students

entering college underprepared, and the faculty and staff reported to have noticed the frequency

of underprepared students entering into the EDGE program. Students who enter the program are

underprepared in their basic skills, but some students lack more than just their knowledge of

basic English, math and reading skills. Some students entering college lack independence.

Faculty/staff 4:   High schools don't prepare them to be more independent. They assume

we're going to register the classes for them.

Students transitioning from high school have not been prepped on the responsibility that they will have in college. In high school, students are provided with their class schedules each semester and are told their pathway in school. Students are required to attend high school and if they miss school, the school will call and check in with the student's parents on the reason for their absence. In college, students have the responsibility of registering for their own classes and dropping their own classes. College is very independent and requires self-motivation. Students are also unaware of the time required for each class.

Faculty/staff 5:   You are able to tell who's a freshman. They don't get that college is more time commitment and more rigorous. They don't get that some classes, even though they're the same units, like a math class, can be 10 times as much effort and work.

Primary factor 10: Faculty and staff experience. I wanted to hear from the faculty and staff on their overall experience with the program from those who have participated in it. Each individual interviewed perceived to believe that the EDGE program was a good program. A few of the faculty and staff interviewed have been with the EDGE program since it was first implemented. Each of these members perceived to believe that the program still needs some type of improvement but understands that it has been a learning process. Two faculty and staff members discuss this point in the following:

Faculty/staff 1:   I think it's a great program. I think it does work. I think it could be developed a little bit better. Right now, we are currently working on more projects within the EDGE program like growing the EDGE club, the social media status, working on events, and the newsletter.

-and-

73

Faculty/staff 4:   Overall, my experience has been a good experience. Like any other

        program or anything you do, it takes the time to find what works and work

        out the bugs. The program is growing. We're learning, we are all new to

        this to as well and we're all learning how the EDGE program works, and

        how to work with each other.

Each faculty and staff member perceived the EDGE program to be beneficial and some reported

that they continue to learn from their experiences as they go. Some of the faculty and staff

acknowledge that the program is not perfect, but they are willing and open to improving their

methods in the interest of student success.

   Primary factor 11: Perceived student reaction to program content. Of the 8 faculty

and staff members interviewed, 3 made comments to the students' reaction to the subject content

and believe that students absorbed the information. One faculty member reported that he surveys

all of his students at the end of the program.

Faculty/staff 5:   I think most of them, pretty much everyone felt significantly better by the

        end. I surveyed all the students and it was overwhelmingly positive

        responses. I think they may have had more of a positive response to their

        English classes because the nature of that, and it's more conversation, and

        it'd be fun, but I think at the end, I'm hoping they realized that they got a

        lot out of the math, even if it wasn't necessarily fun.

This faculty member goes on to state:

        Students take advantage of it. I think they really realized how much it can

        help them out. I try to break it down to them on the very first day. "This is

        where you're at in the example major. This is where you need to get from

math. It's this long, six semesters, and of passing every semester". Once

they realize that math kills more dreams than anything else college-wise,

more people do, "Oh, I want to be in it." Once they realize sometimes how

far they have to go, and how much this is their one chance for help, they

do take it serious. That's cool. Yeah, students are real thankful when they

do test ahead (Faculty/staff 5).

Another faculty member describes how he learn the content of the course but also learn what will

be on the assessment test.

Faculty/staff 1:   I used to try to teach the students the course content, and I still do to a

certain extent but now I teach them how to beat the test because a lot of

the questions on the test are so strangely worded. I have to teach them that

when the test says one thing, that means…. and then I translate what it

means in plain English so that they understand what they're reading. A lot

of times they don't even understand what the questions are asking them,

so I teach them how to translate the commonly used phrases in the test.

   Primary factor 12: Curriculum. During the discussion with faculty and staff on

suggestions for the program, 3 members discussed having a set curriculum for the different areas

of the program. According to Cory (2012):

 certain elements of the course are shared across all sections to provide a common

experience and develop a collective identity in the first semester of college. Teams of

instructors from different disciplines design team-specific curriculum to all for thematic

focus that incorporates their disciplinary expertise.

Some believe that having a set curriculum can provide consistency among each area. Although the EDGE program does not have a specific curriculum, one member stated that they hope to collaborate on attempting to incorporate a curriculum.

Faculty/staff 1:   Meeting with discipline faculty to talk about goals, how we're going to get there, and what curriculum we're going to use.

-and-

Faculty/staff 3:   Having a set curriculum allows us to know exactly what the goal is.

-and-

Faculty/staff 6:   Having a set curriculum will benefit the students. If every session had the same outline and are on the same page, every student would benefit the same and have the same opportunities.

One faculty member describes his development of the curriculum and how the program tested this curriculum during one summer. During the interview, I asked the faculty member how involved are you in the planning process and his response entails the planning of the curriculum.

Faculty/staff 1:   I'm 100% involved. I designed a curriculum, was it last Summer or two Summers ago. We actually did some research on it where I and another English teacher taught the exact same thing. We both taught morning and afternoon. In the morning, I taught OnCourse (this is what he referred to as the curriculum model), he didn't. In the afternoon, he taught OnCourse, I didn't We wanted to test and see if OnCourse made any difference. I planned that whole curriculum, right down to the very last page. I'm very involved.

More discussion about the curriculum was not mentioned as far what OnCourse involved.

Primary factor 13: Extending the length of the program. The last theme that presented a pattern was brought out in the discussion of suggestions from the students, faculty, and staff. This was the suggestion of having more time. Four students and 2 faculty/staff members suggested that the EDGE program is longer in length. I expected this from the faculty and staff because having that additional time with the students allows for more content to be covered. However, I was surprised to hear the students wanting more time. I wanted to know more about this so I did follow up questions with students in regards to this suggestion.

Researcher: What changes would you suggest to improve the EDGE program?

Student 2:   More time

Researcher: Why more time?

Student 2:   I was learning so much. I just wanted more time. I feel like I could've picked up more math if I just had at least one more week.

The other 3 students wanted more time for the same reason. They each felt that they just needed at least one more week to learn more in math or English. One faculty member felt that not only did the program need to be longer in length but mentioned that the students need to be required to participate each session.

Faculty/staff 1:   Well, you know, the student uses excuses. They can't make it every day. I go, "You know, it's only 12 days. If they can't commit to 12 days, then they can't be in here." What we're doing is so important. Every day is so critical, and they got to be here.

One faculty/staff member discussed extending the length of the program but also providing students with a more detailed orientation.

Faculty/staff 4:   We have orientation on the first day of the program, so it gets rushed. It's

like boom, boom, boom. I was given a certain time like ten minutes. I have

to start right away. I quickly tell the students what the EDGE program is

about. I go over what they need to do, and then it's like, "Okay, let's go to

your classroom." I believe that orientation should be the week before.

Figure out a better way so that students come and they already know

where to go the first day.

Secondary factors. Secondary factors were those that were only mentioned once and

was distinctive and worth noting, was categorized as a secondary factor. Out of the 24 interviews

conducted, these secondary factors were unique and worth mentioning. I outlined five secondary

factors in the following section and they were cited by four faculty/staff members.

Faculty/staff 1. This Faculty member cited one factor that was very unique. The faculty

cited a message that he likes to tell his students the first day of class. This factor was brought out

in the discussion of responsibilities as a faculty/staff member.

Researcher: Describe your responsibilities and tasks in the EDGE program?

Faculty/staff 1:   Preparing the students… If you don't have the life skills, the inner

motivation, drive, persistence, and strength, you're going to fall down.

When I was a kid, my dad used to tell me, "The world is filled with highly

educated losers." I tell them, "You're going to get hit in college, You're

going to get knocked down. It's so important for you to learn how to get

up again and just keep going." That's number one.

This factor stood out because this faculty member is not just teaching a subject but teaching life lessons that will assist the students beyond the classroom. Yes, school can be difficult and it would be easier to quit, then proceed forward and keep trying again.

Faculty/staff 5. The next secondary factor that I believe was worth mentioning, came from another faculty member. In discussing the positive aspects in working with the EDGE program, this faculty member's goal is to have them practice math.

Faculty/staff 5:   My goal was to get them to do as much math as possible. If they're doing 12, 14, 16 hours of math a week, that's more than they've ever done in high school. Most of them barely open their book. Whatever they retested into, I tell them, "If you put even half this amount of time in your math class, you're going to be successful."

Next, two faculty/staff members describe how they were new to the position and how the transition of the job has been a learning experience for them. Although the EDGE program at College of the Desert has been running for a few years, it has added new staff members to accommodate the program's growth.

Faculty/staff 2:   It's kind of like starting from scratch from the beginning. We're new, and there aren't very many resources for us to go off of. I think that if it's been going on for a couple of years now and certain things haven't been developed properly.

-and-

Faculty/staff 4:   Last summer right before the program started, I was kind of thrown into it. Same with my other coworkers. We were like, "Okay, let's do it and see what happens!" Overall it was a good experience. I'm excited about next

79

summer. Now that we know what to expect. We know what we should do better, four ourselves personally what we need to focus on, what we need to work on. It's been a good experience.

Just like the beginning implementation of the EDGE program, new faculty and staff members are also learning how to grow with the program. Each are learning by experience and learning what is working for the program and what needs improvement. Lastly, when interviewing one of the faculty and staff members who was an alumnus of the college, I asked a follow-up question and wanted to know if the EDGE program existed when he was a student. His response provided insight to how this has influenced him as an employee at the college.

Faculty/staff 4:   No, this program was not here. Back when I took my assessment I wasn't really told that it was important. I just took it, and I ended up placing in the lowest classes because I didn't take it seriously. This is what I tell the students, "Okay, I just finished my Master's degree, but if this program was here when I attended, I would have already been done a year ago." That puts it into perspective for some students.

Back then, there wasn't the opportunity. It wasn't heard of that you could take your assessment again. That wasn't heard of. It was like, you take your assessment and that's what you place into. Those are the classes you have to take and that's how it is. That wasn't going on 8 years ago when I started. The EDGE program is really good because I've seen students go from Math 070 to college-level math. It's crazy. You just passed two years of math in three weeks.

Observations

Observations were conducted during two summer sessions and two mid-semester sessions that EDGE produced. As the researcher, I wanted to observe the interactions of the students, faculty, and staff during the scheduled sessions. The observations focused on the subject content, the students' reaction to the subject content, the teacher, and student interaction, and the student to student interaction. The researcher observed both an English and Math EDGE boot camp learning session. Three sessions observed were at the Palm Desert location, and one was at the Indio location. These observations were selected based on session availability along with my work schedule. I observed three regular sessions that were 3-week programs and one session that was a 3-day program. Two of these observations took place on the first day that the session began and two of them occurred during the second week of the program. The faculty and staff were aware that I was there to observe their program. However, the students were not aware and I sat with the students in the back of the room as if I were a student myself. I took observation notes to observe the students, faculty and staff interactions. After completion of the observation, I reviewed my notes to make sure that I was able to understand the observations, clarify if needed, and add a summary of the observation at the end of each page. My observation lasted between 2-3 hours per session. I believe that the students were not aware of my observation because even though I was writing notes during the session, the students also were taking notes of the lecture, or working independently with a worksheet or book in front of them.

Observation themes. After coding my interviews and finding primary and secondary factors, I went back to review my observation notes to validate, deny or add to the factors found.

Introduction. In both sessions that I observed on the first day, each instructor introduced themselves and conducted ice breakers to get the students more comfortable with being there.

One instructor had students fill out a quick questionnaire that included why they were there, what they wanted to gain from this program, and what was their favorite hobby. No names were attached to this form. The instructor went over the students' answers in front of the class to provide examples that showed they all had things in common. This observation was during a math session, and some students admitted that they never took math serious in high school and now they realize they should have paid more attention. One student mentioned they were returning after a long break from school and needed a refresher. This student even mentioned that they took a few days off from work to be able just to focus on themselves during this program. After going over a few of the students' statements, the tension in the room was eased and students started to take notes of their first day. Students' introduction to a new program sets the tone for the remainder of the course. During the interviews, students were not questioned on their first impression. However, students first impression may have been a factor of their perceptions of the program. This was not validated through my research but it was just an observation.

Questions. I wanted to observe the students' interaction with the subject content and I wanted to see if students were asking questions related to the subject being taught. During my observations, the instructors made sure, that when they were showing an example of math or demonstrating a proper paragraph. I noticed that they would stop and look around the room to observe students and see if they were following along and to check if anyone had any questions. In English, I didn't observe students asking many questions to the instructor. In math, I observed a few of the same students raise their hand to keep asking questions as the instructor went through the problem. In particular, I noticed a returning student asking questions. She did not hesitate to ask questions. When one student asked a questioned, I observed other students stop

and look up to make sure they were on the same problem. In one instance, after a student asked a question on a problem, three other students learned that they had done the same problem wrong because they accidentally lined up the numbers wrong. The instructor had to remind the students that it is extremely important to take your time writing down the numbers in the right order because if one number is not lined up correctly or the decimal is off, the entire problem will be wrong.

Tutors. During two of my observations, the tutors were not present because they were not required to show up until the later part of the first session since the beginning part of the first day is covering the basics and introduction to the program. In two other sessions, I observed that the tutors continually walked around the room and checked in with everyone to make sure they did not have questions. I observed in both math and English, that students asked questions each time the tutor stopped by. Some students did raise their hands, but I observed a few students who did not have their hands raised and still needed assistance with the tutors when they were approached. This observation was an opportunity to observe students' interactions with the staff. Some students were more reserved than others on asking for assistance. However, I observed the tutors still taking the time to approach each student to confirm with them that they were understanding the material being presented. Students appeared to be receptive to the tutor's assistance.

Independent study. One of my observations during the second week was that I saw more independent studying with the students. The instructor would provide some examples, then the students went back to working independently. I thought this was an interesting approach but in my observation, students appeared to be making progress because they were allowed to ask the instructor or tutors for additional assistance. It appeared that students were able to progress at

their own pace as the session continued. The observation of independent study displayed a glimpse of students' self-progression.

Student interactions. At the end of one observation, I stayed to say thank you to the staff for letting me participate in the program, and I was able to observe students mingling with other students. I observed one student get two other students' contact information, and another set of students were laughing amongst each other. It appeared that students were making connections with their classmates. From the perceptive of my observations, students perceived to be making social connections with not only the faculty and staff but with their fellow students.

During each observation, the students all appeared to be engaged in the course content. There were combination of self-study, review content as a class, tutors walking around session for additional assistance, and students who actively participated. During each observation, there were at least one or more students who asked the instructor questions in front of the class. By students asking questions during the session in front of the other students, it displayed engagement and participation. Plus, it allowed for all the other students to follow along and learn through that moment. Students appeared to be comfortable with the classroom environment. This was displayed by participation and working with other students on questions. Students did not seem to be afraid to ask their neighbor or raise their hand for additional assistance.

Conducting observations of the EDGE program allowed me to get a better perspective of how the program functions and how the students, faculty, and staff interact with each other. Through observations, I was able to verify that students were utilizing the tutors and instructors to ask questions and get assistance when needed. Students appeared to be engaged through active participation, listening, and interactions with their classmates. During my observations, I did not observe any new findings that were not discussed during the interviews.

Summary

This study presented many primary factors that displayed the EDGE program to be perceived as beneficial in the perspectives of the students, faculty, and staff. The EDGE program introduced the students to more than just subject content. Students were guided through a transition from high school to college or returning back to college after having a break away from school. This guided process included a pathway to their assessed placement, information about their financial aid options, student development, and becoming familiar with the campus. Students interviewed did not negatively report that this program was in any way a waste of time. Regardless if students did not skip any remedial courses, each student still spent hours per week learning.

Surprisingly, four of the few comments suggested by the students for improvement of the program was to make the program longer. Based on the researcher's experience of being a counselor, prior to beginning the EDGE program, students do not appear to be thrilled about voluntarily spending 3-weeks of their summer learning math, English or reading. However, once these students have begun the EDGE program, they are fully invested and want more time to learn more. Regardless of the student placement, through interviews, the students have reported that they feel more confident and prepared for their courses than they did prior to entering the EDGE program.

Another benefit of students participating the EDGE program is the student interaction and relationships built during their time spent. College can be a very intimidating experience, especially when students test into remedial courses. The EDGE program allows students to learn and improve their basic math, English, and reading skills in a safe environment. Here, students discover that they are not alone in their learning process and are able to relate to other students

within the program. The next chapter discusses the summary of results, along with a discussion

of the results, their relations to the literature, implications, and recommendations for further

research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the first year experience EDGE program and its effectiveness. The research question was: "What is the Perceived Effectiveness of the First Year Experience EDGE Program at College of the Desert?" Chapter 1 presented the introduction to the problem, background, statement of the problem and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 presented the review of the literature and conceptual framework. Chapter 3 explained the research methodology, research population, and sampling method. Chapter 4 presented the findings from the interviews and observations. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, discussion of the results, and limitations of the results. The findings are discussed with recommendations to College of the Desert. Lastly, recommendations will be presented for further research.

Summary of the Results

Since community colleges have an "open door" policy, 100% of applicants are granted admission and are entering school underprepared. As a result, remedial courses were added to the curriculum to address the needs of these students. As a consequence, this created a more complex educational system for students. COD's data revealed a low completion rate and a high percentage of their students entering underprepared. Thus, COD has been working to address these percentages and being proactive with the FYE EDGE program. Without any resources, students entering into remedial courses can take an additional 1-2.5 years on their time spent in college. In the past six years, only 6% of COD's incoming students assessed as college-level ready in math (Office of Institutional Research, 2016). The EDGE program provides a review of basic skills of math, English, and reading, in the attempt to lower or eliminate the remedial course sequence.

87

Since the EDGE program began in the Summer of 2012, it has reached 1,470 students and eliminates 1,907 of basic skills courses in math, English or reading. Based on the outcome of the interviews with students, some reported having improved in their knowledge in basic math and English skills. And for other students, perceived motivation to participate in the EDGE program was due to their dissatisfaction with their initial college placement scores and wanting to save time at the college. The faculty and staff members reported that they perceived the EDGE program to be beneficial and provide the students with the opportunity have a second chance to improve their basic skills in math, English or reading prior to beginning their first semester of college.

Prior to the implementation of the EDGE program at College of the Desert, students did not have the opportunity to reassess for their college placement test. The first attempt was typically the placement that the student had to follow and this led to a long sequence of remedial courses for the student. College of the Desert contributed the sequence of remedial courses to be part of the problem to students' low completion rates. Although the EDGE program is still in its early phases of development, College of the Desert has been proactive in supporting the program. With the growth of the program, faculty and staff members have been hired to accommodate the number of students. This study did not base the program's success on student completion rates. This study reviewed the EDGE program's perceived effectiveness from the perspective of the students, faculty, and staff involved.

Discussion of the Results

Interviewing the faculty, staff, and students provided me the opportunity to interact with the individuals who not only run the program but also who are the participants. In total, 24 individuals volunteered to be interviewed. This consisted of 8 interviews with faculty and staff

and 16 interviews with students. This study produced pages of data from in-depth interviews

with the 24 students, faculty, and staff. I used observations for triangulation purposes to compare

the primary and secondary factors with observations to either validate or challenge the factors

based on observation. Through triangulation, I was able to cross-check multiple data sources (24

individuals interviewed) and observation to compare the perceptions of the students, faculty,

staff and that I encountered during my observations. In reviewing the observations, I could only

validate the factors found through the interviews and I did not find any new factors that had not

been previously mentioned.

    During interviews with the faculty and staff, each was enthusiastic about their personal

interactions with the students and being a part of the students' successes. Some of the faculty and

staff included those who have been with the EDGE program since day one and some were new

to it. A few of the faculty and staff reported that they are still in a learning transition and

continue to work on improving the program. The program has definitely evolved since its initial

implementation and I found it interesting that the staff work during the year to fix any issues that

were discovered the previous year.

Faculty/staff 4 stated:

> Like any other programs or anything you do, it takes the time to find what works,
>
> work out the bugs. Even though sometimes we did wish it would be this way, it's
>
> only been one year. The program is growing. We're learning, we are all new to
>
> this to as well and we're all learning how the EDGE program works, how to work
>
> with each other.

One thing that stood out from the faculty and staff interviews was mention of the vast

growth of the program. Due to this incredible growth, the faculty and staff commented that they

wish there was "more time with students to provide details," and "more math professors." One faculty/staff member stated that it was a "double-edged sword. It's nice to know that we're able to help so many students, but the other side of that sword is you lose that connection." A primary factor that both students, faculty, and staff did discuss wanting more length of time. However, from the perspective of the students, they just wanted more time to learn. Running a program has its challenges but I found it most interesting that the students interviewed did not notice any of these suggestions from the faculty and staff. This is ideal because the faculty and staff are doing well keeping it all running and even though there may still be a need for improvement, the students are not aware of it and report to really enjoy the program.

The results of this study produced 13 primary themes such as student achievement, student experience, and student improved confidence. I was able to categorize all of the themes as primary or secondary factors that provided insight into the effectiveness of the FYE EDGE program at College of the Desert. Some of these observations reinforced my perception of the EDGE program, such as students' improvement in knowledge and skills gained and students wanting to reduce the number of remedial courses to their schedule. Two themes that emerged were completely new to me and brought perspective to the outcomes that students are having with this program. One of the themes was the level of preparedness that students gained, even if after participating in the program, their college placement remained the same. One student mentioned how she was angry at first because she did not move up in her English placement and it wasn't until she started her English course that she was amazed that she already knew the content. Therefore, feeling prepared and able to pass the course. The next theme was students wanting the program to be longer than 3-weeks. This surprised me because I work as a counselor in the community college. Each time I mention to students, that even though this program can

assist them with their basic skills, and hopefully, assist them to assess higher in their college placement, this program is 3-weeks long in the summer, and it does not count for credit. Students are not completely sold on the idea of spending that amount of time in the summer, and it not counting towards the credits they need. It was perceived that once students were engaged in the content and realize that they are actually understanding the information, they will not get enough of it and want that extra time to continue to learn.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

The results of this study can contribute to the literature in regards to incoming freshman students who are beginning their first year in college. Students begin school underprepared and need additional guidance. "A good many students begin higher education without knowing what to expect" (Tinto, 2012). Besides students being underprepared in the basic skills of math, English, and reading, some students are going to college unaware of what is expected of them. The EDGE program not only is assisting students with refresher content in their basic skills of math, English, and reading, but the EDGE program is also informing students of what to expect in college. College tours are provided to these students along with a student orientation. Students in the EDGE program are informed what is expected of them as a college student. According to Tinto (2012), student retention is influenced by the expectations the institution establishes and what is required for student success. Based on my observations of the EDGE program, students are quickly informed to the hardships of the journeys that they face with the sequence of remedial courses and what it will take to be successful students. Students were encouraged to be proactive and plan their schedules in advance. Students were also encouraged to be their own advocates in their courses. I believe this is why students in the program enjoy their learning

experience. They are invested and have been told that they can and will be able to finish their educational goals as long as they work hard for them and do not give up.

As referenced in the literature review, one of the reasons some students depart from school is not having the skills to know the pathway to success. According to Tinto (2012), "the inability to obtain needed advice during the first year or at the point of changing majors can undermine motivation, increase the likelihood of departure, and, for those who continue, lengthen the time to degree completion as students transfer to other degree programs" (p. 11). The students who participate in the EDGE program have a designated counselor that can assist them with their own custom Student Educational Plan. Students are provided with workshops on student development, financial aid, and other various informational workshops that teach the students on the ins and outs of college. Tutors are also available to the students as well as the option to join the FYE yearlong program.

Across the literature for FYE programs, there have been various implementations of the FYE that include introduction orientation, FYE 101 semester long courses, partial three-week study courses, year-long experience, or an introduction to the entire length of the students stay at college. COD's FYE EDGE program has been practicing, for the past five years, a partial three-week study session. As the EDGE program grows, it has continued to expand their services to students. As of fall of 2016, the program introduced a yearlong experience of a cohort of classes that students can participate in. This new addition is still in its early stages and was not included in this study.

Lastly, the literature suggests that the building of relationships and the establishment of a connection between the student and the institution are key components in terms of increasing persistence to graduation among students (Brock, 2014). Through interviews and observations,

students reported having met friends along the way. One student stated, "My experience was fun. I met new people. Learning was easy because you're just engaging with other people and interacting." Students begin the program as strangers, and they quickly become friends. Through my observation, the instructors introduce a few "ice breakers," and create a learning environment that encourages student interactions. A student reported that they liked the tutors because they too were students. Students are able to connect with other students in the EDGE program because they are all in similar situations. They all need assistance with their basic learning skills. The students learn that they are all on the same page and this allows for a connection to learn and grow together. One student reported that they not only made friends through the EDGE program but that they keep each other accountable with their coursework.

The connection not only was with the students but as well at the faculty and staff. According to Brock (2014), "it is the primary goal of first-year programs to offer course content that provides a support network to aid students in their transition to the collegiate environment, to encourage the development of relationships with students with peers, faculty and staff, and to create a connection between the student and the institution." In one interview a student stated, "I think the program, in general, had a lot of strengths. The professors, they actually generally cared. Even though they knew you for three weeks, they wanted to see you succeed". One faculty and staff member mentioned that the EDGE program provided the students with the introduction to various instructors on campus and to multiple campuses. This provided the students with a connection to other faculty members and allowed the students to know familiar faces on campus. Also, College of the Desert has multiple campuses across the Valley and students become familiar with campuses that were close to their home through the EDGE program. Without knowledge of what the school offers, some students are unaware of the

courses accessible across the Valley and this may end up with students not taking courses

because they believed that the course was not offered near their homes or work. Students in the

EDGE program received support from the faculty, staff, instructional support assistants, student

services, and from each other. The overall consensus from the faculty and staff interviews was

being able to be a part of the students' successes. I believe this is one of many factors that have

been making the EDGE program successful.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Community colleges have been struggling with student retention and persistence. The

colleges are becoming proactive in engaging students as they enter college and even early in high

school. First-year programs come with an array of techniques that assist students as they

transition into college and continue with them as they persist in school. FYE programs have been

shown to be successful, as supported by various research (The National Resource Center for First

Year Experience, John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education,

Achieving the Dream, and the National Survey of First-Year Practices).

The FYE EDGE program is a newly established program at COD that continues to grow

in success and the services it provides to the students. This study explored: the efforts placed

forward by the staff on connecting with entering freshman students; examined the structure of

the FYE in the classroom from the perspective of the faculty and staff; assessed the outcomes of

the students' participation in the FYE program through a reassessment of college placement, the

progression and completion of their basic skills; and it evaluated the perceived effectiveness of

the FYE program from the perspectives of the students and their satisfaction of the program.

Implications of this research demonstrated that COD's FYE EDGE program is perceived

to be effective in students' success with eliminating remedial courses, preparing students to enter

into college, setting an expectation for the students on college success, engaging academic and social integration, and promoting learning. The efforts of the FYE EDGE team are represented by the interviews of the faculty and staff. The faculty and staff members are committed to helping these students succeed. A primary factor was found that the faculty and staff perceive to enjoy assisting students and being part of their success. From the interviews with the faculty and staff, I have concluded that although the EDGE program is running well, the faculty and staff are invested in growing and improving the program. There has been a collaboration with the faculty to extend the FYE services into a yearlong course along with extensive faculty development to prepare for this service.

I observed that the FYE EDGE program perceptions to be beneficial to the underprepared students in improving their basic skills in English, math, and reading. Since the program began, 1,470 students have participated in the EDGE program removing 1,907 basic skills courses (basic skills math, English, or reading). COD's office of institutional research (2016) reported that on average, this equates to a savings of $786,875 in tuition and books, 152,015 hours of instruction, and just over 9 million dollars in administrative costs.

College of the Desert's FYE EDGE program has demonstrated perceived effectiveness through the data in success and retention among the students' interviewed. This research has added to the assertions of FYE programs are perceived to be beneficial to students. The FYE experience at COD continues to grow and use best practices to further address student success.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research was conducted on a program that has only been established for five years. Within those five years, based on my findings, this program has been proven to be beneficial to the student and the institution it serves. The FYE at COD has continued to grow and is in the

early stages of implementing a year-long cohort of students with a sequence of courses. Institutions that have implemented a FYE program in their district only expand their FYE services to typically one feature (i.e., 101 FYE seminars, 3-week study sessions, yearlong courses, FYE semester course, FYE orientation).

The FYE at COD, as it grows, is moving into multiple arrays of FYE services. It would be beneficial to expand this research onto the transition from the FYE orientation and summer 3-week study sessions, into the yearlong FYE courses. I believe that this would provide solid results to the students' outcomes. A major limitation of this research was securing a student's new course placement after the summer course. Students have had a difficult time getting into their fall math course which either delays their enrollment or causes the student to enroll in the wrong math sequence. Further research is recommended to review the graduation rates of students who participated in the FYE EDGE program compared to non-EDGE students. Five years has not been a significant amount of time to compare graduation rates.

Conclusion

In today's workforce, there is an increasing level of educational attainment needed to remain a competitive economy. Society has placed demands for higher education through either needing a degree or certification demonstrating knowledge of a trade. The community college has been an affordable opportunity for students to pursue and prepare for their educational goals needed for their desired career. Due to the community college's open door policy, the lack of underprepared individuals is high and this has created extensive remedial courses needed to prepare students to be at a college level learning. COD saw that the sequence of remedial courses was a large barrier for student completion and thus, the FYE EDGE program was introduced.

The FYE EDGE program can potentially eliminate 1-2.5 years off a student's course sequence and provide an opportunity to finish their educational goals sooner. Based on the perceptions of the students, faculty, and staff, the FYE EDGE program is perceived to be effective and has contributed to the students' successes. The program has also provided academic and social integration creating a sense of community. All the components provided in this study have demonstrated to be valuable to all students who participate. Additional assistance with learning, as provided in the EDGE program, is growing. Regardless of the students' placement, this program instills confidence, student participation, connection, and a pathway to success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

1. Can you describe how you first became aware of the EDGE program?

2. What prompted you to apply for and participate in the EDGE program?

3. What knowledge and skills have you gained in the EDGE program?

    Possible follow-up questions.

    a. Tell me your opinion about the coursework.

    b. What are the most valuable skills you learned in the program?

    c. What skills you wish you learned?

4. Please tell me your opinion about the tutoring process?

5. What have you been able to achieve as a result of the EDGE program that otherwise you would not have been able to accomplish?

6. How confident did you feel in your ability to succeed in your classes before/after participating in the EDGE program?

7. What changes would you suggest to improve the EDGE program?

8. What else would you like to share with me about your experience with the EDGE program?

Appendix B

1. Describe your responsibilities and tasks in the EDGE program?

2. Describe the positive aspects of working with the EDGE program?

3. Describe any negatives aspects of working with the EDGE program?

4. Describe how the students react to the content of the EDGE program?

5. What changes would you suggest to improve the EDGE program? Describe how your

    suggestions are received by administration?

6. What else would you like to share with me about your experience with the EDGE

    program?

CONSENT FORM

Research Study Title: What is the Effectiveness of the First Year Experience
EDGE Program at College of the Desert for Improving Retention and Persistence
toward Graduation?
Principle Investigator: Veronica Daut
Research Institution: Concordia University
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Chris Jenkins

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this interview is to get the perspective of the faculty, staff, and
students on their experience with the EDGE program. We expect approximately
35-40 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. To be in the study, you
will conduct a recorded interview with the Investigator.
Doing this should take less than 10 minutes of your time.

Risks:
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your
information. However, we will protect your information.   Any personal
information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or
identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or
locked inside in the investigator's office in a locked filing cabinet. When we or
any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or
identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We
will not identify you in any publication or report.   Your information will be kept
private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after
we conclude this study.

Benefits:
Information you provide will help determine the effectiveness of the EDGE
program and assist future students. You could benefit this by providing your
honest feedback.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept
private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or
neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a bad emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____   _____

Participant Name   Date

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____

Investigator Name   Date

_____   _____

Investigator Signature   Date

September 8, 2016
Amanda Phillips
Dean of Counseling
73-500 Monterey Ave.
Palm Desert, CA 92260

RE: Institution Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Dean Phillips,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution, College of the Desert. I am currently enrolled in the Doctorate of Education program at Concordia University, Portland, OR, and am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled, "What are the Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the First Year Experience EDGE Program at College of the Desert?"

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit 20 students and 10 faculty and staff from who have participated in the EDGE program to conduct interviews about their perceptions of the EDGE program. Interested students, faculty, and staff who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed and returned to the primary researcher at the beginning of the interview.

If approval is granted, student, faculty, and staff participants will conduct an interview in a classroom, or quiet setting on the school site (whatever place and time is convenient for the participant). The interviews will be used for the dissertation project and individual names will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only the interviewee's responses will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your school or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If this study is to be published, this approval will provide permission to Concordia University to publish the dissertation upon completion of the study. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address: ███████████████████

Sincerely,

Veronica Daut
Doctorate of Education candidate

Cc: Dr. Chris Jenkins, Research Advisor, Concordia University

Approved by:

Amanda Phillips   a. Phy.   9-8-16
Print your name and title here   Signature   Date

114

Appendix E

The following Appendix is an addition to the dissertation to clarify that upon completion of this study, Concordia University had permission to publish the dissertation using the name of the institution in which the study was conducted. This letter is an adjustment with that clarification and was added to the appendix. The original letter is still included.

September 8, 2016
Amanda Phillips
Dean of Counseling
43-500 Monterey Ave.
Palm Desert, CA 92260

RE: Institution Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Dean Phillips,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution, College of the Desert. I am currently enrolled in the Doctorate of Education program at Concordia University, Portland, OR, and am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled, "What are the Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the First Year Experience EDGE Program at College of the Desert?"

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Your approval to conduct this will be greatly appreciated. If this study is to be published, this approval will provide permission to Concordia University to publish the dissertation using your institutions name, College of the Desert, upon completion of the study. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my

email address: ████████████████████

Sincerely,

Veronica Daut
Doctorate of Education candidate

Cc: Dr. Chris Jenkins, Research Advisor, Concordia University

Approved by:

Amanda Phillips, Dean Counseling   _____   9-28-17
Print your name and title here   Signature   Date
            Services

116

Appendix F

CONCORDIA
UNIVERSITY

-PORTLAND, OREGON-

DATE: August 19, 2016

TO: Veronica Daut, EDD
FROM: Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB)

PROJECT TITLE: [939083-1] What is the Effectiveness of the First-Year Experience EDGE
                   Program at College of the Desert for Improving Retention and Persistence
                   toward Graduation?
REFERENCE #:   EDD-20160726-Jenkins-Daut
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: August 19, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: August 19, 2017
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB) has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/ benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

There is a condition of approval. Your project includes research that will be conducted within an institution that is not Concordia University. As such, you need to have that institution's approval to conduct research. You are responsible for contacting and following the procedures and policies of Concordia University and any other institution where you conduct research. You cannot begin recruitment or collection of data until you receive approval from that institution.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

Attached is a stamped copy of the approved consent form. You must use this stamped consent form.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. The form needed to request a revision is called a Modification Request Form, which is available at www.cu-portland.edu/IRB/Forms.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please email the CU IRB Director

Generated on IRBNet

directly, at obranch@cu-portland.edu, if you have an unanticipated problem or other such urgent question or report.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of August 19, 2017.

You must submit a close-out report at the expiration of your project or upon completion of your project. The Close-out Report Form is available at www.cu-portland.edu/IRB/Forms.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. OraLee Branch at 503-493-6390 or irb@cu-portland.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Appendix G: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.
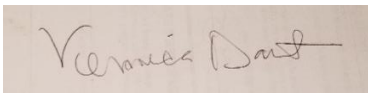
What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test

- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting

- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project

- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1.　　I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2.　　Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Digital Signature

Veronica Daut

Name (Typed)

08-07-2017

Date