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THE IMPACT OF STUDENT SUCCESS COURSES ON FIRST-TIME-IN-COLLEGE  
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY

by

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## **Dedication**

This is dedicated to my mother, Gloria Peebles, who taught me the value of education and how to be strong and kind and to my father, Tom Peebles, who modeled a life-long love of learning. They would have been incredibly proud of this accomplishment.

This is also dedicated to Rabi Islam. Thank you for your unwavering belief in me and your unconditional friendship. You have supported and empowered me every day for twenty-one years. Thank you for being my person.

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## ABSTRACT

# THE IMPACT OF STUDENT SUCCESS COURSES ON FIRST-TIME-IN-COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY

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Students entering college for the first time face a significant culture shock. They must learn to navigate a new environment often while managing other responsibilities. Students' perceptions of their own academic self-efficacy play an important role in determining whether students will complete their certificate or degree or drop out. Student success courses are designed to help students meet the challenges of college and be successful in their courses. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to measure students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy at the beginning and the end of a student success course designed specifically for developmental education students to determine if the student success course had a positive impact on the students' sense of self-efficacy. Students were also interviewed to determine specific aspects of the course that impacted their perceptions of academic self-efficacy. Three hundred forty-one students on three campuses of a large community college in Texas were surveyed using

the College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES), and twenty-six semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to determine the aspects of the student success course that students found most helpful or effective.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Students beginning their academic pursuits at a community college walk through the door on the first day with unique challenges. Many students entering community college are first-generation students, have responsibilities outside of academics, and lack sufficient academic preparation (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014). Often, students have negative beliefs about themselves as students based on difficulties they experienced in grade school (Taggart & Crisp, 2010). As these students learn the culture of college, it is our imperative as educators to assist them in overcoming their barriers (real and perceived) to completion of a degree or technical certificate.

One way that many community colleges are attempting to meet this need is by requiring first-time-in-college (FTIC) students to complete a student success course. Student success courses are designed to teach students how to successfully complete all of their college courses. Skills taught in student success courses help prepare students for college by introducing them to the college culture and preparing them academically and emotionally. Adjusting to the college culture requires practice in goal-setting, career exploration and preparation, student financial concerns, time management, and college resource exploration (Braunstein, Lesser, & Pescatrice, 2008; Cho & Karp, 2013; Wernersbach, Crowley, Bates, & Rosenthal, 2014). Academic preparation involves note-taking, study strategies, test-taking strategies, tutoring, and textbook reading skills (Cho & Karp, 2013). Emotional preparation includes topics such as motivation, persistence, grit, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving (Braunstein et al., 2008; Brooman & Darwent, 2014).

At the college in this study, Lantern Community College, all first-time-in-college students are required to take a student success course. Students who place into at least

one developmental education course based on their college entrance exam scores on the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment are required to take a student success course designed specifically for developmental education students. This course is designed to introduce developmental education students to the culture of higher education and equip the students with the academic, emotional, and social skills to succeed in college. Developmental education students have unique needs and characteristics and often require additional support in adjusting to the college environment. A detailed explanation of the student success course will follow in subsequent chapters.

Most previous studies of student success courses have focused on students who were enrolled in four-year institutions or two-year institutions who were academically prepared for college (Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Evans, 2012; Hendel, 2007; Wernersbach, Crowley, Bates, & Rosenthal, 2014; Windham, 2012). Therefore, additional insight can be gained from examining the effects of a student success course designed specifically for developmental education students.

### **Research Problem**

A majority of community college students are academically and emotionally under-prepared for college; therefore, the problem is that for students who are unsure of their abilities, as many community college students are, small setbacks or barriers can convince these students that they do not belong in college (Martin et al., 2014). These setbacks or barriers can result in students dropping out of college, and students who drop out are unlikely to return. Student attrition rates of first-year college students in the United States range from 30% to 50% (Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Barefoot, 2004b; O’Keefe, 2013). Increasing students’ sense of self-efficacy can help to ensure that students persist to completion of a certificate, associate degree, or transfer to a university.

This study will determine what students perceive as the most impactful aspects of student success courses.

In order to understand how student success courses affect students' perceptions of their own academic self-efficacy and how that relates to student attrition, an explanation must be given for factors that would cause a student to withdraw from college. Tinto (2014) stated that students often have responsibilities outside of the college environment that limit the available time students have to spend on campus; that in turn limits engagement in the college culture and access to faculty, learning activities, and learning support. Tinto also studied how student learning is impacted by active involvement and how that affects persistence (Tinto, 1997). Astin (1984) also explored the relationship between student involvement theory and retention; he defined student involvement as the amount of physical and mental effort students invest in their education. The focus of Astin's (1984) theory is on the behaviors exhibited by students who are engaged in the college experience, such as interacting with faculty and peers, participating in classroom and extracurricular activities, studying, being employed on campus, and joining student organizations. In order to more adequately predict which students will drop out, one must consider not only students' backgrounds but also their expectations and motivation (Tinto, 1975).

Students who believe that abilities are skills to be developed and that challenges are an inevitable part of learning are more likely to set higher goals and be more committed to achieving those goals (Bandura, 1993; Dweck, 2008). Bandura (1993) asserted that students' behaviors are governed by their perceptions of whether or not they have the ability to meet the goals they have set.

Wernersbach et al. (2014) showed that compared to a control group of students who were not identified as academically underprepared, participants in a student success

course initially scored their own academic self-efficacy lower than did the students in the credit level psychology course who had not been identified as academically underprepared. However, in the surveys administered at the end of the semester, the academically underprepared students scored significantly higher in academic self-efficacy than the control group in terms of academic skills and belief in their ability to successfully accomplish academic tasks (Wernersbach et al., 2014). This research showed that there is a relationship between completing the student success course and the improvement in students' self-efficacy. Students in the study were not asked to identify specific aspects of the student success course that were helpful.

Cannon (2016) suggested conducting an assessment at the beginning and the end of the student success course, including an exit interview, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the course. Another suggestion advocated assessing current barriers in the college system, such as unnecessary enrollment requirements and procedures, and strategizing ways to eliminate the barriers. Rees (2016) recommended conducting qualitative research in order to assess students' perceptions about self-efficacy. It was also stated that larger samples of students from different geographical locations would help to validate previous findings.

### **Significance of the Study**

A great deal of college and student resources are devoted to student success courses. In order to ensure that these courses are as beneficial to students as possible, more research must be conducted on the impact of student success courses on retention and attrition as well as the impact on students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy. Students' level of academic self-efficacy will determine whether they interpret real or perceived barriers to education as challenges that can be overcome or threats that are insurmountable; this interpretation affects behaviors and choices, such as whether to

persist in college or drop out (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). This study will contribute to the knowledge base by helping faculty and administrators at community colleges clearly understand the perceived helpfulness of specific aspects of student success courses in improving students' academic self-efficacy and will help faculty address shortcomings within the student success courses and adjust the courses to fit students' needs. This study will also ensure that student success courses are helpful to the students.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of a student success course on first-time-in-college students' perceptions of academic self-efficacy at a large, multi-campus community college in Texas. Additionally, this study will seek to determine what students perceive as the most impactful aspects of student success courses.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the differences in perceptions of first-time-in-college students' self-efficacy before a student success course and after completing a student success course?
2. Do gender or first-generation college student status influence students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy?
3. What aspects of the student success course do students perceive as the most impactful to their academic self-efficacy?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following definitions will apply to these terms throughout the study in order to ensure consistency:

*Attrition:* is defined as a student dropping out or withdrawing from college (Bean, 1981).

*Developmental education:* is defined by the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) as a comprehensive process designed to improve the academic, emotional, and social development of students using the following components: coursework, tutoring, learning assistance, personal counseling, career counseling, and academic advising. While all students can benefit from developmental education, developmental education programs are generally designed to assist underprepared students in successfully preparing for credit-level college classes (NADE, n.d.).

*First-generation college student:* is a student who does not have parents who graduated from a postsecondary educational institution (Gist-Mackey, Wiley, & Erba, 2018).

*First-time-in-college (FTIC) student:* is a student who enrolls in and attends college for the first time; this includes students who have previously earned college credits by examination or dual high school and college enrollment (Fredda, 2000).

*Fixed mindset:* is a belief that one's intelligence cannot be changed (Dweck, 2008).

*Grit:* is working strenuously toward long-term goals with perseverance and passion over an extended period of time despite obstacles and failure (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007).

*Growth mindset:* is a belief that exerting effort during learning can improve intelligence (Dweck, 2008).

*Perception:* is the way in which students view their own abilities in regard to intellectual ability, scholastic competence, and creativity (DaRos-Voseles, Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2008).

*Retention:* is the percentage of students who re-enroll in subsequent semesters and continue working toward completion of their program (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

*Persistence:* occurs when a student is continuously enrolled in college from matriculation all the way to completion of the program (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

*Self-efficacy:* is students' belief about their own abilities to competently master academic achievements, accomplish goals, and sustain motivation (Bandura, 1993).

*Student success courses:* are courses intended for students who have no previous college experience and are aimed at helping students build awareness of college resources, improve in academic skills, explore career options, and develop personal and emotional self-awareness skills (Cho & Karp, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

The need for student success courses due to student perceptions of real and imagined barriers was discussed. The problem was defined as students' need for a belief in their own self-efficacy in order to persist in college. Research questions were presented. Definitions of key terms were provided in order to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the study.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many community college students have jobs, have family responsibilities, have learning disabilities, have had negative experiences previously in school, are the first in their families to attend college, and suffer from a lack of self-esteem and academic self-efficacy (Cho & Karp, 2013; Hand & Payne, 2008; Martin et al., 2014; Taggart & Crisp, 2010; Wernersbach et al., 2014). Some colleges offer student success courses to help students develop the skills and acquire the strategies needed to improve their academic self-efficacy and college readiness. More research is needed to determine which aspects of student success courses are the most helpful for students' perceptions of self-efficacy. A review of the literature follows in which several topics will be addressed: a discussion of how community college students differ from university students, characteristics of developmental education students, perceptions of self-efficacy, the impact of self-efficacy on retention and persistence, an overview of student success courses, the need for student success courses as it relates to attrition and retention, effects of student success courses on retention rates, effects of student success courses on self-efficacy, specific course design of the student success course of Lantern Community College, next steps that have been suggested in previous research, and a theoretical framework of the relevant theories regarding the need for student success courses.

### **Differences in Community College and University Students**

There are studies that suggest community colleges have higher dropout rates than universities and private colleges (Astin, 1984; Cho & Karp, 2013; Martin et al., 2014; Taggart & Crisp, 2010; Tinto, 1975). Some of this may be attributed to the fact that private colleges and universities have more stringent selection processes than do community colleges, and there is also evidence that the act of paying a higher price for

college is an incentive to complete a degree (Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 1975). Other factors that may influence this difference in persistence is the socio-economic status of the students at community colleges and the likelihood that many students may be first-generation students, members of underrepresented social groups, or students who lack parental and community support (Astin & Astin 1996; Hand & Payne, 2008; Martin et al., 2014; Taggart & Crisp, 2010). Students from these situations have lower persistence rates than students who have college-educated parents who show interest in their children's education and who are supportive of their children's educational goals (Hand & Payne, 2008; O'Keefe, 2013; Taggart & Crisp, 2010; Tinto, 1975). Community college students, especially those with financial difficulties, often have jobs and other responsibilities outside of school (Martin et al., 2014; Preez, 2013; Tinto, 2014). While having a job on campus has been shown to increase student engagement and, as a result, retention, having a job outside the college community has been shown to negatively impact student persistence (Astin, 1975; Astin, 1984; Astin, 2005; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Community college students are also more likely to be part-time students, most often due to having to work while in school (Martin et al, 2014). The fact that they are part-time students puts them at an even higher risk of dropping out. The attrition rates for part-time students are upwards of 50% ("Finishing," 2010). Because of these factors, students at community colleges are in greater need of support when entering college.

### **Characteristics of Developmental Education Students**

Just as community college students have different needs than most students who attend four-year universities or private colleges, developmental education students have even greater needs. Many students who are identified as requiring developmental education courses in college have experienced difficulties in previous academic

environments, have a pronounced fear of failure, are disproportionately members of underrepresented minority groups, have significant learning disabilities, lack college cultural capital due to first-generation college student status, are non-native English speakers, exhibit behaviors such as excessive absenteeism and not turning in assignments, and may be distrustful of educators due to negative experiences with school in their past (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005). Due to differences in the demands of teaching developmental education (DE) and the unique needs of the students, researchers suggest specialized training for DE faculty, continuous research into innovations and effective practices, a specific focus on creating visible equity and supporting underserved populations, and addressing students' possible housing and food insecurity (Astin & Astin, 1996; Gardner, Barefoot, Swing, 2001; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017).

### **Perceptions of Self-Efficacy**

Tinto (1975) explained that students' differing perceptions of obstacles and barriers have definite impacts on their behaviors. Therefore, among first-time-in-college students, many will react to the same barriers or problems differently than their peers, and the most important factor is the students' perceptions of their own academic self-efficacy. Some students who, for example, fail a test or have a hold placed on their registration may simply study harder for the second test or visit an advisor to inquire about the hold while other students may believe that these problems are insurmountable and further proof of an inherent lack of suitability for the college environment.

Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) found that optimism and self-efficacy were vital in adjusting to major life changes, such as starting college. In their theoretical model of the direct and indirect effects of self-efficacy and optimism, they explained that environmental demands are perceived as either threats or challenges; this interpretation affects the behaviors exhibited, choices made, and how negative emotions are handled

(Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). Downing (2017) offers an equation to explain students' degree of willingness to exert effort to achieve a goal: value x expectation = motivation. The perceived value of the situation (how important the student deems the situation that requires effort) multiplied by the expectation that he or she will be successful equals the level of motivation for the student to want to put forth effort to try manage the situation (Downing, 2017). For example, there is a good chance that a student who does not see the long-term benefit in learning math and has had negative experiences in math classes during grade school will not be highly motivated to put forth effort in a college math course. Similarly, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) reasoned that perceptions of threat occur when an individual feels available resources (such as available outside help, support networks, and academic preparation) are not sufficient to meet the demands of a situation, and conversely, a problem may be interpreted as simply a challenge when there are adequate resources to meet a perceived need (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001).

Bandura (1993) asserted that the processes of cognition, motivation, affect, and selection are the main components of self-efficacy and that behavior is governed by self-perception of the capability of individuals to accomplish goals they have set. Individuals who see themselves as highly capable will set high goals for themselves and envision a successful result or outcome; those with low perceptions of self-efficacy will envision failure (Bandura, 1993; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Martin et al., 2014). One concept that affects self-efficacy is whether students possess a fixed or growth mindset. Students who believe learning is a process in which mistakes are part of the learning and that challenges provide learning experiences have a growth mindset and will have a high perception of self-efficacy; students who see ability as a concrete, inherent entity have a fixed mindset and will avoid effort and risk, seeing effort and risk as proof of their weaknesses (Bandura, 1993; Dweck, 2008). The tendency to view difficulties and

barriers as failures or weaknesses on their part causes students with low self-efficacy to be more likely to drop out when challenges arise.

Bandura (1993) stated that students compare themselves to other students and experience a loss of perceived self-efficacy when they compare negatively to other students, and when feedback and assessment are offered in the form of progress made or skills improved upon, students experience a gain in perceived self-efficacy. This type of formative assessment allows students to experience success, and they are more likely to expect that success to continue in the future. Higher levels of perceived self-efficacy are also seen when individuals believe they have some measure of control over their surrounding situations or other people; perceived self-efficacy directly affects motivation by influencing which goals individuals set and the level of effort they will put into those goals in the face of barriers and failures along the way (Bandura, 1993). Students who set higher goals are more likely to see those goals through to completion. Martin et al. (2014) found that when presented with similar obstacles, students who had already established clear long-term goals during their first semester were more likely to overcome barriers and persist to graduation than students who did not have clear long-term goals.

### **Impact of Self-Efficacy on Retention and Persistence**

Students who have a low perception of their self-efficacy experience academic stress and anxiety; this can be most effectively combated, not by stress-relieving techniques alone, but by activities that improve students' perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). It is not enough to control the symptoms of anxiety; students need to have the skillset to actively approach problems with a positive, rather than a defeated mindset. Professors can increase the likelihood that students will feel successful early in the semester by celebrating behaviors that will benefit students in their college courses; for example, professors may want to acknowledge students who keep track of their

assignments in a calendar or use critical thinking skills to solve a problem on their own. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that teacher behaviors such as enthusiasm, helpfulness, adequate preparation, timeliness in giving feedback, and building a rapport with students greatly impacted students' socialization, independence, academic growth, and content mastery. Providing specific praise that focuses on progress students have made has been shown to improve academic performance and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). There is also data that suggests that requiring students to reflect on past situations in which they experienced success despite difficult circumstances builds their sense of self-efficacy and can increase motivation (Preez, 2013).

### **Overview of Student Success Courses**

As colleges devote more resources, time, and effort in the quest for equity, it is apparent that underprepared students need assistance adjusting to the culture, expectations, and rigor of college (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). Due to the need for interventions to help students prepare to be successful in college and the continued problems of high attrition and low retention rates, a common practice is to offer a course for first-time-in-college students that will help to prepare students for success and help them adjust to college. There are several iterations of how these types of programs are named and structured, such as summer bridge programs, first-year experience seminars, study skills courses, or student success courses. Courses can be offered in the summer before the freshman year or at varying lengths of time during the students' first year. Most student success courses endeavor to ensure that first-time-in-college students integrate into college academically and socially (Barefoot, 2004b).

Regardless of the structure or timing, most programs offer some combination of various skills that help students adapt to the college environment such as career exploration; help with financial issues; instruction in time management skills; and

exposure to available college resources like tutoring, student activities, and academic advising (Barefoot, 2004b; Braunstein et al., 2008; Cho & Karp, 2013; Dove, 2017; Pena, 2017; Wernersbach et al., 2014). Courses may also include academic preparation involving teaching students strategies in note-taking, studying, test-taking, and reading (Barefoot, 2004b; Cho & Karp, 2013; Pena, 2017). Emotional preparation aspects of the courses may include topics such as growth mindset, emotional intelligence, motivation, persistence, grit, self-awareness, self-management, and problem-solving (Braunstein et al., 2008; Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Cho & Karp, 2013).

Many colleges require student success courses for individuals who are labeled at-risk for varying reasons. Students may be deemed at risk in college if they are low-income students, first-generation students, students with low high school GPAs, students with low scores on college entrance testing, and students with learning disabilities (Braunstein et al., 2008). These courses may be required or optional, geared toward particular students or all freshmen, and students may or may not receive transferable college credit for completing the course. This study will focus on a course that is required for students who have been placed in at least one developmental education course and are required to take a full-semester, non-credit student success course during their first semester in college.

### **Need for Student Success Courses**

In order to understand the need for student success courses, it is necessary to discuss attrition and retention. The causes of attrition are examined in this section. This section will also provide information regarding factors that affect student retention and persistence.

## **Attrition**

Of the students who enroll in college for the first time each year, about one-third will not return for a second year, less than half will earn bachelor's degrees within five years of graduating from high school, and about 40% of those students who register will never complete college (Habley et al., 2012; Lau, 2003). Another study shows that the attrition rate for students who are in their first year of college falls between 30% and 50% in the United States (O'Keefe, 2013). Barefoot (2004b) reports that the retention rate at two-year colleges from the first year to the second year is 50%, while the rate at four-year institutions is 73%. The reasons for this attrition are many.

Tinto (1975) asserted that student dropout behaviors occur due to a lack of involvement in the college culture and a lack of shared values on the part of the students. He made a distinction between voluntary withdrawal from the college and forced withdrawal, which could occur when students are dismissed from the college due to poor academic performance (Tinto, 1975). He also discussed the need to not only consider personal characteristics such as gender, race, ability, previous academic experiences, and societal affiliations, but also to consider students' academic expectations of success and the level of motivation with which students attempt to reach their educational goals (Tinto, 1975). Lau (2003) discussed a wide range of factors that may contribute to student attrition. She cited financial problems, changes in life goals, a poor educational environment, outside student responsibilities, and low student motivation as potential causes for attrition.

It is also noteworthy that Tinto (1975) described dropping out of college or persisting in college as processes that are continually altered and influenced by a multitude of experiences and interactions as students progress through their academic careers. From this idea, it can be said that college administrators, staff, and faculty have

many opportunities to positively or negatively influence students' experiences in college. Students who are already doubtful of their academic ability or fitness as college students do not take much convincing to drop out (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Martin et al., 2014). Each barrier that students face is further proof in their mind that they were not meant to be in college (O'Banion, 2013). Students with a fixed mindset rather than a growth mindset may react to failure or difficulty by ceasing to put forth effort, avoiding future situations that are similar, and cheating on assignments similar to those they have not performed well on in the past (Dweck, 2008). Without the necessary skills to approach institutional and academic barriers with a growth mindset, students can be easily convinced that they do not belong in the college environment and may also experience feelings of rejection and an inability to meet standard academic challenges in college (Dweck, 2008; O'Keefe, 2013). Students also cite a lack of study skills and skills in self-management as primary causes of dropping out or performing poorly academically (Goldfinch & Hughes, 2007). Astin (1984) asserted that more attention should be paid to underprepared, withdrawn, and passive students because the most widely reported reason given by students who dropped out of college was boredom with their classes. Downing (2017) explains that boredom is a sign that a student is struggling in some way. Therefore, a student who appears bored requires an intervention designed to address the specific difficulty he or she is experiencing.

The student success course is designed to build students' self-awareness of these self-defeating thoughts and behaviors and offer them a framework to use to approach difficulties as simply problems to be solved in a calm, rational manner (Braunstein et al., 2008; Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Cho & Karp, 2013; Downing, 2017). Kuh (2005) found that students who were enrolled in a student success course were more likely to report more in-class participation, attendance at activities and

events on campus, increased self-understanding, higher satisfaction with their college experience, and better relationships with faculty and peers.

### **Retention**

Many factors affect retention. Students make the decision to persist until graduation, completion of a credential, or transfer many times during their years in college. One of the primary goals of colleges is to increase student retention because a low graduation rate affects institutions financially and undermines their standing and prestige in the community (Lau, 2003). College administrators, faculty, and students all have a role to play in ensuring student retention.

Administrators have a responsibility to provide academic assistance, financial support, and a diverse, welcoming physical environment (Kuh, 2005; Lau, 2003). If a student success course is offered or required at an institution, administrators and faculty should be required to continually evaluate the effectiveness of the course and ask students if their needs are being met during the course (Barefoot, 2004a; Ellis-O'Quinn, 2012; Gardner, Barefoot, & Swing, 2001). Removing institutional barriers, improving instructional support, improving teaching, and helping students overcome obstacles in their personal lives (such as finding child care or affording college) also requires constant evaluation and improvement on the part of the administration (Martin et al., 2014; Tinto, 2014).

In several studies, both formal and informal faculty interaction with students was cited as the most important influence in students' likelihood to persist in college (Astin, 1984; Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Barefoot, 2004a; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Kuh et al., 2008; Martin et al., 2014; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Faculty members have a duty to advise students about their academics and to engage students with hands-on, cooperative, and collaborative learning experiences

(Barefoot, 2004a; Lau, 2003). Faculty should also teach students how to approach their academics with a growth mindset and should offer praise for putting forth effort, taking educational risks, and responding with persistence after failure (Astin, 1984; Dweck, 2008).

One of the most important ways students can ensure their own success is to take responsibility for their learning and find their own motivation (Downing, 2017; Hand & Payne, 2008; Lau, 2003). In a qualitative study of seventeen students who persisted to graduation despite facing difficulties that typical community college students face, Martin et al. (2014) discovered positive correlations between student persistence and high levels of student motivation, the ability to handle demands outside of academics, self-empowerment, and having clear long-term goals. Goldfinch and Hughes (2007) also found a positive correlation between student confidence in long-term goal-setting skills and academic achievement. Students who have an internal locus of control, who believe that taking responsibility for their actions is important and that they are in control of their circumstances, experience more success than students who believe others control what happens to them (Downing, 2017; Hand & Payne, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Another important factor influencing student success and completion is students experiencing success in each of their classes (Tinto, 2014). Success can be measured in different ways, and different factors are important to individual students. Kinzie and Kuh (2017) define student success as recruiting students from diverse backgrounds who complete quality credentials through effective academic programs that provide future financial stability and civic involvement. Two of the most predictive elements of success in terms of student persistence are grades and intellectual development (Tinto, 1975). Another important factor affecting persistence is student perception of social or peer support; students who perceive that they fit in with their peers and are active in the social

arena of the college are more likely to persist (Barefoot, 2004b; O'Keefe, 2013; Tinto, 1975).

In a study of 36 students at a university in Arizona, the effects of study skills training (focusing on goal setting methods, effective time management, stress management, and learning styles) and career goal development were studied (Polansky, Horan, & Hanish, 1993). The findings demonstrated that the study skills training greatly improved students' GPAs and retention rates, but the career training did not show the same effect (Polansky et al., 1993). Many student success courses include a career exploration component. While the study referenced above did not show a direct link between improved retention or GPA due to the career component, additional study would be helpful to determine whether there would be other intrinsic benefits to career exploration in a student success course.

While minimizing institutional barriers and increasing the effectiveness of faculty and staff are important to retention, perhaps the greatest importance lies with the students themselves. Students have a greater chance of persisting when they possess motivation and accountability for their learning; this effectively demonstrates why emotional intelligence and self-awareness are frequently components of student success courses (Downing, 2017; Lau, 2003).

### **Effects of Student Success Courses on Retention Rates**

In a study of 23,882 students at a community college in Virginia, students who took a student success course either in their first semester or during the first 15 hours of their academic work were 6-10 percent more likely to persist to their second year of college (Cho & Karp, 2013). In a three-year study of 130 college freshman who took part in a student success course, the retention rates were the nearly the same (.2% lower) as students who did not take the student success course (Braunstein et al., 2008). This is an

important finding because the students who took the student success course had challenges that the other students did not; they were identified for the course based on low test scores, low high school GPA, learning disabilities, and low-socioeconomic status (Braunstein et al., 2008). Typically, those factors would mean that the students identified for the student success course would perform at a lower level and have a greater attrition rate; therefore, the fact that the student success course participants had an almost identical retention rate is a testament to the success of the course. Barefoot (2004b) asserts that many campus-level studies have shown a positive correlation between persistence and completion of a student success course.

### **Effects of Student Success Courses of Self-Efficacy**

Although student success courses have been studied, more research is needed to determine specifically how a student success course will affect community college students' perception of their own self-efficacy as a student (Wernersbach et al., 2014). Wernersbach et al. showed that there is a relationship between completing the student success course and improvement in students' self-efficacy; however, more studies need to be completed at different colleges in order to determine whether similar results will be shown.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that student success courses in some form and academic advising have consistently been proven effective. Hendel (2007) conducted a study of 5,166 students, 723 of which completed first-year seminars that included student success course concepts within the context of an academic course; he found that there was no significant effect on retention, but students reported feeling a greater sense of community.

## **Course Design of the Student Success Course at Lantern Community College**

Students enrolling in Lantern Community College take the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment in order to determine if they will need to complete developmental education courses or if they will begin taking credit-level courses during their first semester in college. Students who are placed into developmental education in at least one course for math, integrated reading and writing, or a learning community designed for students with the lowest scores on the TSI are required to take the college's student success course during their first semester. If they do not pass the course during the first semester, they must take it each subsequent semester until they earn an A, B, or C in the class. Several researchers have advocated making the student success course mandatory based on improvements shown in student engagement, class participation, student satisfaction with the college experience, and increased interaction with faculty and peers (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Kuh, 2005; Kuh et al., 2008). Face-to-face classes are limited to twenty students, and online classes allow twenty-five students. Barefoot (2004b) suggests a class size of 15-20 students in a student success course to promote greater interaction between students. Students who are deemed college-ready based on their TSI scores take a course with the education department or the psychology department that focuses on learning theory and includes some elements of a student success course, such as a career project and an introduction to campus resources. The academic course is a credit-bearing course taught by education and psychology department faculty, and it is not included in the training procedures described below for the developmental education student success course.

All faculty at Lantern Community College are required to complete a 16-hour training in which the participants study the course textbook and complete some of the active learning and collaborative teamwork activities that are used in the course. Some of

the student affairs professionals at the college have been trained in the course and teach it as adjunct faculty. The college also has brought the author of the textbook, Skip Downing, to conduct workshops for faculty who either teach the student success course or are simply interested in learning techniques to improve active student engagement in the classroom. Some researchers advocate for the practice of ensuring that all faculty are trained in addressing the needs of first-year students and are made aware that the first-year experience is a priority aligned with the mission of the institution (Barefoot, 2004b; Gardner, Barefoot, & Swing, 2001; Kuh et al., 2008).

The course is divided into nine units that correspond with the nine chapters in the textbook, *On Course, Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life* (Downing, 2017). The nine units focus on the following skills:

- learning about the culture of college, how to transition to the college environment, and creating a personal vision of success;
- how to accept personal responsibility and make thoughtful, analytical decisions; how to be self-motivated and set effective goals;
- strategies for managing the various demands of college and personal life;
- ways to build a support network, employ interdependence (giving and receiving help from others), and respect diversity;
- gaining self-awareness and learning to have a positive self-view;
- identifying personal learning styles, developing critical thinking skills, and becoming familiar with individual preferences during the learning process;
- developing emotional intelligence and reducing stress;
- applying the skills learned in the course to future courses and life goals (Downing, 2017).

Interwoven into the curriculum are practical skills such as note-taking formats, test-taking strategies, organization methods, tips for studying, research techniques, a writing process for college essays, and procedures for reading in a college setting. In addition to focusing on the practical skills and critical concepts that students need to prepare them for success in college, the course is also structured to ensure student engagement. A common Blackboard (learning management system) site is shared by all faculty and staff who have been through the 16-hour training. The site includes active learning activities, collaborative grouping assignments and projects, interesting videos to illustrate key concepts, sample syllabi and course schedules, quizzes, journals, and career project sample documents. Because faculty at all three campuses of Lantern Community College have been through the same training, share the same resources, and use the same textbook, the course tends to be more uniform in its delivery. The focus is on engaging students in hands-on activities, classroom discussions, cooperative learning, and building community. Active learning, peer interaction, and individualized instruction have been shown to increase student knowledge; high-level student and class discussions and problem-solving practice increase critical thinking skills (Astin, 1993; Barefoot, 2004a; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Kuh, 2005; Kuh, O'Donnell, & Schneider, 2017; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students in the student success course generally report a strong community feel in the classroom, making friends with peers, and frequent interaction with their instructor; all three of these effects have been shown to increase student engagement, satisfaction, and retention (Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Other important aspects of the course are Points of Contact sessions, a career project, and faculty advising. Three Points of Contact (POC) sessions are conducted for each class each semester. In the first session, a counselor or advisor meets with the

students in a computer lab and guides them through online career, personality, and interest testing and a discussion of available career services on campus. Based on students' results on the individual tests, each student chooses a career to research for the career project. The project involves several components, such as conducting research on their chosen career, interviewing a professional from their career field, creating a resume, and presenting their career research to their class. The second POC is conducted by a student affairs professional, typically from the First-Year Experience office, who visits the class to discuss available resources on campus, such as the food pantry, intramural sports, student government, library and tutoring services, and student groups and activities. During POC 2, students complete a collaborative grouping activity in which they propose a possible new official campus group. The goal of the activity is to encourage participation in campus activities, which has been shown to positively and significantly impact student persistence (Astin, 1984; Astin, 2003; Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Barefoot, 2004a; Kuh, 2005; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The third POC is guided registration; it is held in a computer lab and conducted by a counselor or advisor. The purpose of guided registration is for students to get one-on-one educational planning assistance from the advisor and professor and leave the session enrolled for the next semester.

The last main structural component of the student success course is faculty advising. The purpose of faculty advising is to provide students with a college employee (typically the instructor of the course) who serves as a mentor and contact person throughout the semester. Several studies have found faculty interaction to be one of the most important factors in student retention and overall satisfaction with the college experience (Astin, 1984; Astin, 1993; Astin, 2003; Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Kuh, O'Donnell, & Schneider,

2017). In many cases, students become so comfortable with their faculty advisor that the mentor relationship continues for several semesters. Higher rates of degree completion and persistence have been found among students who perceive faculty as caring and interested in their success (Astin, 1984; Barefoot, 2004b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In rare cases when the course instructor is unable to serve as faculty advisor, a member of the Distinguished Faculty program will serve as advisor, but students generally respond more positively when the course instructor fulfills this role. The faculty advisor meets with each student twice during the semester. The goal of the first meeting is to build a rapport between the faculty advisor and student, ensure that the student is acclimating to the college environment, offer support when needed, and allow the student to ask for help with any aspects of college that are difficult or confusing. The goal of the second meeting is to discuss the student's career goals and choose courses for the next semester. The student will then register for the next semester during POC 3. Before teaching the student success course, an instructor must complete a four-hour faculty advising training in which they learn how to: navigate the online advising system, view student records, and use student TSI score levels to recommend appropriate courses prior to guided registration. Each year, faculty advisors complete a two-hour refresher training during in-service week prior to the fall or spring semester.

### **Next Steps Suggested in Previous Research**

Cannon (2016) advocated conducting an assessment at the beginning and the end of a student success course, including an exit interview, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the course and advocated for assessing current barriers in the college system in order to find ways to eliminate the barriers. Rees (2016) suggested conducting qualitative research in order to assess students' perceptions about self-efficacy. Rees (2016) also suggested studying larger samples of students from different geographical

locations in order to validate previous findings. Barefoot (2004b) discusses students' reports of boredom in their classes, failing to see the real-world relevance of many first-year courses, and their desire for more personal instruction from professors who build relationships with them and provide timely, formative feedback as the basis for the need to study the link between pedagogy and retention.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Tinto (1975) asserted that student involvement and social integration in the college culture is critical to student persistence and retention. Expanding on his initial student involvement theory, he later advocated for linking instructional support more closely to the classroom because of the characteristics of modern students whose work and family responsibilities outside of the classroom reduce the amount of time the students spend on campus (Tinto, 2014). Tinto (2014) further argued that teachers should carefully construct learning environments based on evidence of student results and effective teaching practices such as problem-based learning and cooperative learning.

In his self-efficacy theory, Bandura (1993) stated that students' perceptions of their own academic self-efficacy affect the levels of the students' goals, motivation, and academic achievement. Bandura (1989) asserted that individuals who have a low opinion of their self-efficacy in a given situation, such as a college course, will envision failure and negative outcomes, respond with fear and avoidance, experience depression and anxiety, set lower goals and have inadequate commitment to them, and be more likely to give up when faced with failure or barriers. People who believe in their self-efficacy tend to think analytically to solve problems, envision successful outcomes to difficult situations, set higher goals and put more effort into achieving them, persist through difficulties, bounce back quickly after failure, have a stronger belief in their locus of control, and view their cognitive abilities as skills that can be improved through effort

(Bandura, 1989). When considering students with the same levels of ability, the level at which the student will perform depends on their perception of their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). In his later theory of human agency, he proposes four components of human agency: *intentionality* in creating and enacting action plans, *forethought* as a motivator for behaviors that will help individuals achieve future goals, *self-reactiveness* in which people adjust to situations on the course to goal-fulfillment, and *self-reflectiveness* in which people use metacognition to evaluate their self-efficacy in order to adapt to changing circumstances and evaluate their responses (Bandura, 2006).

John Gardner's theories about engaging first-year students and preparing them for success focused on the need for a student-centered approach to learning that is built on faculty innovation and a concentration on effective educational practices like problem-based learning, peer mentoring, and learning communities (Gardner, 2016). He advocated for an intensive faculty training course in active learning strategies and specific methods for helping first-year students as instructors of a student success course (Gardner, 1980). In the textbooks he has co-authored for student success courses, he focused on using practical approaches to teach students effective time management, strategies to maintain wellness and overall health, ideas for campus and community involvement, and methods for celebrating diversity (Gardner, Jeweler, & Barefoot, 2008). Other student success skills featured in later volumes include ways to increase self-awareness, set effective goals, become a peer leader, learn reading strategies and test-taking skills, research effectively, and search for career guidance; he also reiterated his suggestion that development in high-impact faculty instructional practices should be a priority (Gardner & Barefoot, 2016).

In Dweck's (2008) growth mindset theory, she explained that students who see failure and difficulty as a challenge rather than proof of their inability to learn are more

likely to persist academically and have a positive view of their own self-efficacy. She also stated that students who have a growth mindset are more likely to seek out challenging learning opportunities, navigate school transitions effectively, and be more resilient after experiencing negative outcomes (Dweck, 2016). Examining how student success courses affect students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy will help to ensure that student success courses are designed to meet the needs of the students.

### **Conclusion**

Many studies have been completed on self-efficacy, student success courses, retention, and attrition. Because there is a need to address significant problems in student retention rates and to stop attrition, student success courses were created. These courses attempt to address the main issues that cause attrition and improve students' self-efficacy. What needs further study is whether or not the student success course has an impact on students' perception of their own academic self-efficacy. As that is being studied, it would also be helpful to identify specific aspects of the student success course that students find the most helpful in building their sense of self-efficacy.

CHAPTER III:  
METHODOLOGY

**Overview of the Research Problem**

Community college students face unique challenges and experience real and perceived barriers to college success differently than other students. Many colleges have designed student success courses to help first-time-in-college students adapt to the culture, the new expectations, and the rigors of college. This research will examine the effects of student success courses on students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy.

This chapter will provide an explanation of the methodology used in the study by explaining the operationalization of theoretical constructs, research purpose and questions, research design, population and sample, participant selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, validity, privacy and ethical considerations, and research design limitations.

**Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs**

The researcher is defining student success course as a full-semester, non-college-credit course that is meant to prepare students who have been placed into at least one developmental education course how to successfully navigate the culture, rigor, expectations, and requirements of college; it is delivered in face-to-face, online, and hybrid settings. Academic self-efficacy is defined as students' beliefs about their own abilities to competently master academic achievements, accomplish goals, and sustain motivation (Bandura, 1993). The construct of the students' academic self-efficacy was measured using the College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES) survey, initially created by Owen and Froman in 1988 (Owen & Froman, 2015).

## **Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a student success course on first-time-in-college students' perceptions of academic self-efficacy at a large, multi-campus community college in Texas. The researcher also examined the role of gender or first-generation college student status on students' perceptions of academic self-efficacy. Additionally, this researcher sought to determine what students perceived as the most impactful aspects of the student success course on their academic self-efficacy.

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the differences in perceptions of first-time-in-college students' self-efficacy before a student success course and after completing a student success course?
2. Do gender or first-generation college student status influence students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy?
3. What aspects of the student success course do students perceive as the most impactful to their academic self-efficacy?

## **Research Design**

This was a concurrent mixed-methods study that used quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative first phase, the College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale survey (CASES: Owen & Froman, 2015) was administered to first-time-in-college students who were registered for a student success course and who volunteered for the study. The CASES survey uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure how confident students are in 33 behaviors that show students' academic self-efficacy levels (Choi, 2005). A post-then-pre design (Colosi & Dunifon, 2006; Coulter, 2012; Rockwell & Kohn, 1989) was used to administer the CASES survey; this design allowed both sections of the survey to be completed during one session at the end of the semester by asking

participants to first reflect on their perceptions of their confidence levels in completing the college-level CASES skills and behaviors at the beginning of the semester and then asking them to consider their current confidence levels at the end of the semester when repeating the questions a second time. While this design has the limitation of asking students to reflect back on their beginning-of-semester perceptions at the end of the semester, unlike a standard pre-test and post-test given at two separate times, the design was chosen because it allows a minimization of students' time spent completing the survey and lessens the chance of losing participants between the first administration of the test and the second (Colosi & Dunifon, 2006; Coulter, 2012; Rockwell & Kohn, 1989).

The qualitative phase of this study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with twenty-six students who were currently enrolled in the student success course in order to determine student-perceived barriers to success, the impact of the course on their perceptions of self-efficacy, and helpful aspects of the student success course.

### **Population and Sample**

The study was conducted at a large community college system in Texas that is comprised of three main campuses. Approximately 1,800 students who were taking the non-credit, full-semester student success course required for developmental education students received an invitation to participate in the study during the spring 2018 and fall 2018 semesters. Ten of the interviews were conducted in the fall 2017 semester. Students were required to take the student success course during the first semester they enrolled in the college. Students who did not pass the course by earning an A, B, or C for the semester were required to re-enroll each subsequent semester until they passed the course. Enrollment numbers in the student success course in the spring were generally

lower because most first-year students completed the course during the fall semester. The sample size consisted of 341 students who voluntarily completed the survey and filled it out completely.

The ages of the students at the college range from 17 – 60. The population of the college is 58.5% female and 41.5% male. Students at the college are: 9.9% African-American, .6% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 5.7% Asian, 21.7% Caucasian, 59.5% Hispanic, 1.4% International, and .2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander .

The demographics of the participants who completed the survey are shown in Table 1. Of the 341 participants, it is interesting to note that less than one-third, 29% (n = 99), were male. Five students (1.5%) chose not to identify a gender. Also notable is that Hispanic or Latino/a students make up the largest group 63% (n = 215) in terms of ethnicity. Most of the other groups mimic the overall percentages of ethnicity and race at the college; the exception is that although 21.7% of the students at the college are Caucasian, 14.4% (n = 49) were enrolled in the student success course in the two semesters being studied. There was a relatively even distribution of participation between all three campuses.

Table 1

*Gender, Ethnicity/Race, and Campus of Survey Participants*

	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	99	29.5
Female	237	70.5
Missing	5	1.5
Total	341	100.0
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>		
Native American or Alaska Native	1	.3
Asian	31	9.1
Black or African American	39	11.4
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	.6
White	48	14.1
Hispanic, Latina(o)	215	63.0
Other	4	1.2
Total	341	100.0
<b>Campus</b>		
Campus 1	130	38.1
Campus 2	100	29.3
Campus 3	108	31.7
Missing	3	.9
Total	341	100

**Participant Selection**

Twenty-six students who were enrolled in the non-credit, developmental education student success course participated in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. The researcher selected participants by asking for volunteers on the last question in the quantitative survey and the researcher's other classes other than the SSC courses and by visiting SSC classes at campuses two and three. A detailed explanation can be found in the data collection procedures section. Demographic data were collected during the interviews and are shown in Table 2 below. The distribution of ethnicity/race and gender

of the interview subjects was similar to the overall college demographics. In terms of the campus distribution, however, even though campus two is the campus with the smallest enrollment, more participants volunteered at that campus due to a high level of encouragement from their professors to participate in the study.

Table 2

*Gender, Ethnicity/Race, and Campus of Interview Participants*

	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	10	38.5
Female	16	61.5
Total	26	100.0
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>		
Asian	1	3.8
Black or African American	3	11.5
White	4	15.4
Hispanic, Latina(o)	18	69.2
Total	26	100.0
<b>Campus</b>		
Campus 1	10	38.5
Campus 2	11	42.3
Campus 3	5	19.2
Total	26	100

**Instrumentation**

The College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale survey (CASES: Owen & Froman, 2015) completed the remainder of the survey. The CASES survey was created by three education and psychology professors and further evaluated and revised by seven graduate teaching assistants and 93 undergraduate educational psychology students in order to measure students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy based on college students' common academic behaviors (Owen & Froman, 1988).

The 33 survey questions used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (*Quite a lot of confidence*) to 1 (*Very little confidence*) and required students to evaluate their confidence levels in performing tasks, skills, and behaviors that are typically related to success in college (Owen & Froman, 2015). In a test-retest reliability study, Owen and Froman (1988) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 for the first administration and .92 for the second administration. Choi (2004) reported an alpha coefficient of .93 in a study using CASES to evaluate college students' self-efficacy.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher obtained CPHS approval from the University of Houston-Clear Lake after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Lantern Community College prior to conducting this study.

### **Quantitative**

The researcher selected students to complete the CASES survey based on their enrollment in the non-credit developmental education student success course. An administrative assistant in the researcher's department compiled a list of the email addresses of all students who were registered for the student success course at the time; the list was grouped by instructor and campus. Students who were enrolled in the researcher's student success course sections were eliminated from the list in order to reduce the opportunity for undue influence ("Conducting research," 2015). During week thirteen of both sixteen-week semesters, the researcher sent an email to all remaining students on the list that included the informed consent letter explaining the research study and requesting that they fill out the CASES survey. The email contained a link to the online survey which was completed in Qualtrics through the University of Houston-Clear Lake online system. The survey began with an informed consent letter and moved on to demographic and background data; for example, students were asked to identify their

gender, age, race, previous education level, first-generation college student status, native language, employment status, and course load. A request to participate in a semi-structured interview was included as the last question in the survey.

The researcher sent a separate email to the developmental education department chairs on all three campuses describing the study and requesting their help in recruiting instructors to encourage their students to complete the survey. Two department chairs sent an email to all developmental education faculty on their campus requesting their help in recruiting students. After the emails from the department chairs were sent, the researcher sent a follow-up email to all student success course instructors explaining the study and requesting help in recruiting students. The email contained the informed consent letter, a link to the online survey, an appeal for the opportunity to visit the instructor's class to discuss the study with the students, and a request for the instructors to post the letter and survey link as an announcement in their course site in the college's learning management system (LMS). Announcements are automatically sent as emails to all students in the course when posted in the LMS course site. The researcher talked to many instructors in person on her home campus to request help with recruitment. During the visits to campus two and three for the purpose of interviewing students, the researcher visited all of the student success classes that met during the time of the visit in order to distribute flyers that contained a link to the survey and information about the interviews.

### **Qualitative**

During the fall 2017 semester, the researcher interviewed students who volunteered to be part of the study. The students interviewed were the researcher's students but were not enrolled in her SSC; all of the interviewed students had the student success course with another instructor. Minimizing power issues with the participants enrolled in the researcher's other classes will be addressed in the section regarding

validity. Ten students signed up, and three did not show for their scheduled time. Three additional students were recruited using the same method and interviewed during the spring 2018 semester. The researcher sent an Outlook calendar meeting request so the participants could add the appointment to their calendar. Interviews were conducted during week twelve and thirteen of the sixteen-week semester.

To recruit interviewees from the other two campuses, the researcher visited campus two and campus three during week thirteen of the fall 2018 semester to conduct student interviews, pass out flyers about the survey and interviews, and recruit students to fill out the online CASES survey. For campus two and three, the instructor spoke to the developmental education department chairs to request temporary use of a space to conduct interviews on their campuses for a half day at campus two and two separate half days at campus three. During the visits to campuses two and three, the researcher visited each student success course that met during the time frame of the visit. Some instructors allowed the researcher to talk to the students about the study and solicit volunteers for the one-on-one semi-structured qualitative interviews. Some instructors did not have available class time for the presentation. All instructors were given flyers to distribute to their students that contained a tiny URL link (TinyURL.com, 2019) for the online survey, which shortened the web address to make it easier to type in by hand, and the location and timings of the interviews. Some instructors mentioned the possibility of offering extra credit to encourage students to complete the survey; however, the nature of the extra credit or if it was actually given was not shared with the researcher. Between visits to the classrooms, the researcher returned to the temporary space to interview students; sixteen students came voluntarily to be interviewed.

The ten interview questions for the semi-structured interviews were written by the researcher and designed to elicit specific feedback regarding students' perceptions of the

most helpful aspects of the student success course, the impact the course had on their perceptions of academic self-efficacy, their initial opinions about the course, suggestions for improvement to the course, and important skills they learned in the course. The semi-structured interviews used open-ended questions so students would feel comfortable sharing their experiences and would not be influenced by the researcher (Giddens, 2016). The questions were piloted in the fall 2017 semester and were used throughout the remainder of the study because they provided the necessary data. The interviews varied in length from approximately 10 – 45 minutes depending on the amount of information the students felt willing to share.

### **Data Analysis**

First, the CASES survey was analyzed using a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine differences in student perceptions of their academic self-efficacy by demographic characteristics. Second, the interview data were coded and analyzed using NVivo to discover patterns and themes that emerged from the students' responses.

### **Quantitative**

The survey responses were imported from Qualtrics to SPSS. The total mean of the CASES survey questions was calculated for students' reflections of their level of confidence completing student success behaviors at the beginning of the semester, and a total mean was calculated for the same questions as they evaluated their levels of confidence in their ability to complete the same behaviors at the end of the semester. A paired-samples t-test was used to compare the total mean of the beginning of the semester reflections and the total mean of the end of the semester questions. A repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the influence of gender and first-generation college student status on students' perceptions of academic self-efficacy.

## **Qualitative**

The semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded and sent to Rev.com to be transcribed. The transcripts were uploaded into NVivo and read several times during the coding process so that themes and patterns could be recorded. A constant-comparative method, in which the categories were continually re-evaluated based on the participants' responses, was used to analyze the responses. Open coding was used to ensure that themes that emerged from the data were identified (Giddens, 2016). The initial open coding of the interviews revealed twenty original codes based on the participants' responses. During the axial coding process, themes began to emerge, and some of the initial codes were combined due to the similarity and relatedness of information in the responses. An Excel spreadsheet page was created for each theme, and individuals' responses on each page were grouped according to subcategories of each theme.

## **Validity**

In order to ensure validity, triangulation was used (Lichtman, 2013). Similar ideas such as students' sense of academic self-efficacy were assessed in both the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews. Similarly, ideas that were discussed by more than one student were emphasized more heavily in the data analysis results. The idea that was mentioned by the most students in the interviews (negative, confused initial opinion of the SSC due to lack of communication during advising and registration processes) was discussed at length.

Because some of the interview participants were enrolled in other classes the researcher taught but not the SSC, steps were taken to minimize any influence of power. Greene (2014) suggested addressing the influence of a power relationship by specifically stating the different dynamics of the interview relationship. The researcher stated before each interview that all the participant's comments would be confidential and would not

affect the student's grade or standing in either the SSC or the researcher's course. The researcher also explained the importance of the participant fully sharing their opinions and perceptions whether positive or negative and requested that the student not share the name of their SSC instructor.

Member-checking was also used to ensure validity; interviewees were presented with the opportunity to read their interview transcripts and add to or clarify information. They were also presented with emerging themes and patterns to gain additional feedback.

### **Privacy and Ethical Considerations**

In order to protect student privacy, the students' college ID numbers were collected rather than the students' names. During data analysis, the college ID number was replaced with a number assigned based on the order in which the surveys were generated by Qualtrics. A separate file was created to record the college ID number and the matching number used to identify students in the survey; it was kept in a password-protected cloud-based storage system. Pseudonyms were used for interview participants. All files used for the study were kept on a password-protected flash drive and backed up on a password-protected cloud storage system. As per the requirements of the college being studied, physical documents were scanned to a password-protected digital folder, and the originals were shredded. All participants signed informed consent forms. The forms were scanned to a password-protected storage system, and the originals were shredded. After three years, the digital files will be deleted. Permission to conduct the study was acquired at the researcher's university from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS), and the Department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness office at the observed college approved the study through the campus's Institutional Review Board.

### **Research Design Limitations**

An internal research design limitation of this study was that all the students involved in the study had tested into Developmental Education in at least one of the following categories: reading, writing, or mathematics; therefore, students who tested as “college-ready” in all subject areas were not included in the study. Students self-selected whether or not they completed the survey. Results of this study show data pertaining to students who are required to take a student success course. An external limitation of the study is generalizability; results are representative of students at one community college. For the interviews, due to time constraints, access to students at campus two and campus three was limited to short windows of time in which not all students were available. A purposeful sample was used; therefore, the results of the study will not be generalizable to all students everywhere.

### **Conclusion**

This research study is a mixed-methods study conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of administering the CASES survey to a large sample of first-time-in-college students who were enrolled in a student success course at any of the three campuses at a large community college in southeast Texas. The second part of the study consisted of 26 qualitative student interviews that addressed students’ perceptions of how the student success course affected their sense of academic self-efficacy.

## CHAPTER IV:

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to compare students' sense of academic self-efficacy at the beginning of their first semester in college and after they completed a student success course. The student success course (SSC) was designed to prepare students who have tested below college-ready on their college entrance exam to be successful in college. This study consisted of a quantitative survey named the College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES) (Owen & Froman, 2015), and semi-structured qualitative one-on-one interviews with 26 students. This chapter is comprised of a description of the demographics of the participants in the study, analysis of the quantitative data from research questions one and two and qualitative data from research question three, a summary of the findings from the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study, and a conclusion.

#### **Participant Demographics**

The participants of this study were students who were enrolled in a student success course during the semesters being studied. During week thirteen of the spring 2018 and fall 2018 semesters, the researcher sent an email to instructors of the student success course at all three campuses asking the professors to help recruit students by posting the informed consent letter, an explanation of the survey, and the online College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES) survey link in the college's learning management system (LMS), which would also cause an email to be sent to each student. The researcher also emailed each student directly with the same items posted in their

LMS course site. During the spring 2018 semester, 120 students completed the survey, and 30 surveys were omitted because they were incomplete. During the fall 2018 semester, 380 students filled out the survey, and 119 incomplete surveys were excluded from the study. The survey from the spring 2018 and fall 2018 semesters were combined for analysis; the combined sample size consisted of 341 students. The gender, race, and campus of enrollment are shown in Table 1 in chapter 3.

Many community college students face difficulty in college because of factors such as working full- or part-time, being the first in their family to attend college, and being unaware of college-level expectations due to inexperience or lack of preparation for the culture of college and the rigors of college (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014). Other demographic factors that could affect students' persistence and success in college are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Age, Course Load, Length of Time in College, First Generation, Employment Status*

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age</b>		
Under 18	11	3.2
18-24 years old	277	81.2
25-34 years old	33	9.7
35-44 years old	16	4.7
45-54 years old	3	.9
Over 55 years old	1	.3
Total	341	100
<b>Number of classes in current semester</b>		
One	18	5.3
Two	69	20.2
Three	145	42.5
Four	93	27.3
Five or more classes	14	4.1
Missing	2	.6
Total	341	100
<b>Length of time in college</b>		
First semester in college	295	86.5
Second semester in college	23	6.7
One year in college	16	4.7
Two years in college	6	1.8
Three or more years	1	.3
Total	341	100
<b>First in family to attend college</b>		
Yes	146	42.8
No	195	57.2
Total	341	100
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed full time (40 or more hours per week)	50	14.7
Employed part time (up to 39 hours per week)	128	37.5
Not currently employed	141	41.3
Self-employed	2	.6
Unable to work	12	3.5
Total	341	100

It is notable that 81.2% ( $n = 277$ ) of the students who responded to the survey are between 18 and 24 years old, most likely due to the requirement that developmental education students take the student success course during their first semester of college and, if they drop the course or do not pass, they must take it each subsequent semester until it is passed with an A, B, or C. The number of students 52.8% ( $n = 180$ ) who reported working while in school does fit with recent research regarding community college students often having outside responsibilities to contend with while attending school (Martin et al., 2014; Preez, 2013; Tinto, 2014). This is possibly a related factor to the 68% ( $n = 232$ ) of students who are enrolled part-time. Part-time enrollment has been shown to be a risk factor related to attrition (Astin, 1975; Astin, 1984; Astin, 2005; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; “Finishing,” 2010; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

A high number of students 42.8% ( $n = 146$ ) were first-generation students (they are the first person in their family to attend college), while 57.2% ( $n = 195$ ) had at least one immediate family member who had previously attended college. First-generation students have been found to have lower persistence rates, often have inaccurate expectations of the rigors of college, may lack a personal support network, and need assistance acquiring the cultural capital that prepares them for success in college (Astin & Astin 1996; Hand & Payne, 2008; Martin et al., 2014; O’Keefe, 2013; Taggart & Crisp, 2010; Tinto, 1975).

### Research Question One

To answer question one regarding the differences in perceptions of first-time-in-college students' self-efficacy before a student success course and after completing a student success course, a paired samples t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in their perceptions. Table 4 displays the means of students' academic self-efficacy at the beginning and end of the semester. Results of the paired samples t-test show that there was a significant difference between the students' perceptions at the end of the semester and their reflections back to their perceptions at the beginning of the semester  $t(339) = 14.0, p < .05$ ; Cohen's  $d = .84$ .

Table 4

#### *Total Mean Comparison*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Perceived Beginning of Semester Mean	2.7	.66	341
End of Semester Mean	2.2	.69	341

### Research Question Two

The second research question regarding whether gender or first-generation college student status influence students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy was answered using results from the repeated-measures ANOVA.

Table 5 shows the total mean of perceived academic self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester; the results are grouped to show the total means for gender and first-generation college student status. It is notable that in every

category there is a decline in academic self-efficacy from students' reflection back to the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester. Male first-generation students overall scored themselves higher than non-first-generation males, but the reverse was true for female students.

Table 5

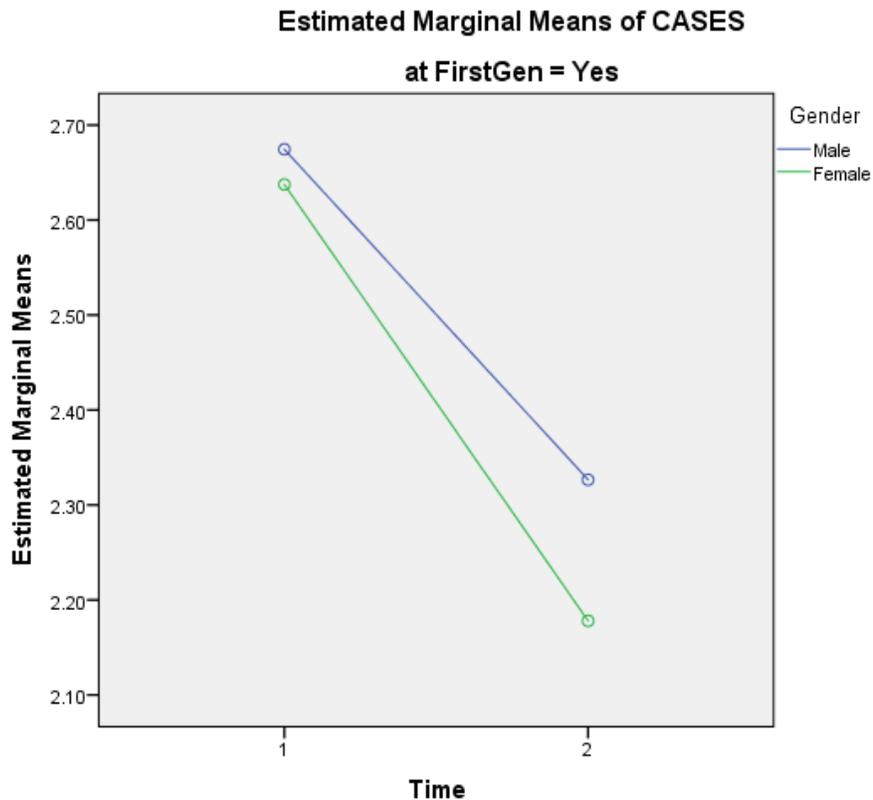
*Mean by Gender and First-Generation Status*

	Gender	First Generation	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Perceived Beginning of Semester Mean	Male	Yes	2.7	.64	29
		No	2.5	.60	70
		Total	2.5	.61	99
	Female	Yes	2.6	.69	115
		No	2.7	.65	122
		Total	2.6	.67	237
	Total	Yes	2.6	.68	144
		No	2.6	.64	192
		Total	2.6	.66	336
End of Semester Mean	Male	Yes	2.3	.73	29
		No	2.1	.63	70
		Total	2.2	.66	99
	Female	Yes	2.1	.70	115
		No	2.2	.69	122
		Total	2.1	.70	237
	Total	Yes	2.2	.71	144
		No	2.1	.67	192
		Total	2.2	.68	336

The quantitative survey responses were imported from Qualtrics into SPSS; a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was completed in SPSS. Repeated measures ANOVA is necessary when testing one group of participants at two or more different times who have all experienced the same treatment (Gravetter & Wallnau,

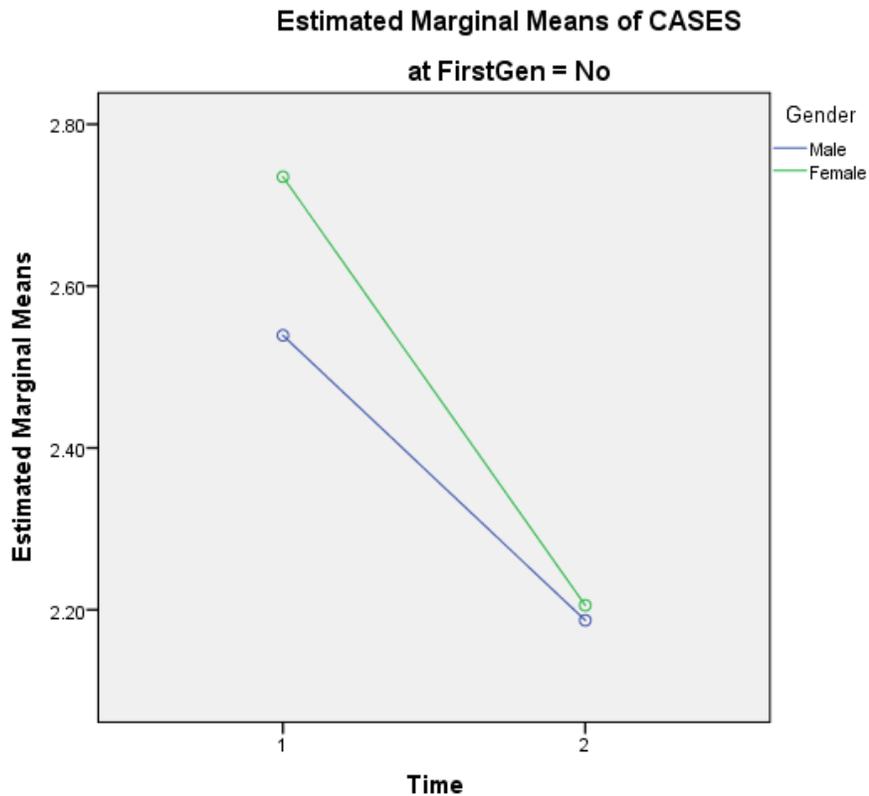
2013). The measurement of the dependent variable is repeated; in this study, the total mean was calculated for students' responses to the CASES survey questions. Due to the post-then-pre design, the total mean for the beginning of semester was based on students' reflection back to the beginning of the semester, and a separate total mean was calculated for the participants' end of semester responses. The assumptions of equality of variance and covariance and the assumption of sphericity were met. The repeated-measures ANOVA results showed significant differences in time with a within-subjects factor,  $F(1,1) = 123.1, p < .05$ , Partial Eta Squared = .27. A statistically significant difference was not found for the interaction of time, gender, and first-generation status.

Partial plots (see Figure 1) indicate that although both female and male first-generation college students showed a decline in reported academic self-efficacy, males rated themselves slightly higher in self-efficacy both at the beginning of the semester and the end of the semester. Males also showed slightly less of a decline; however, these differences were not statistically significant.



*Figure 1. Total Means - First Gen.* This figure illustrates the differences between male and female first-generation college students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester in which they were enrolled in a student success course.

An additional partial plot (see Figure 2) indicates that students who were not first-generation college students also showed a decline in academic self-efficacy between the beginning-of-semester assessment and the end-of-semester assessment. However, in this case, the female students initially scored themselves higher than the males and experienced a greater decline in self-efficacy than the male students. Both groups' end-of-semester scores were similar despite the larger disparity at the beginning of the semester.



*Figure 2. Total Means - Non-First Gen.* This figure illustrates the differences between non-first-generation male and female students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester in which they were enrolled in a student success course.

The results showed that although a statistically significant difference exists in time, a statistically significant difference was not shown between the interaction of time and gender  $F(1,1) = 3.602, p = .059$  or between time and first-generation status  $F(1,1) = .238, p = .626$ . These results imply that students' gender and status as a first-generation college student were not the cause of changes in their perceptions of their academic self-efficacy during the semester in which they took the student success course.

### **Research Question Three**

In order to answer research question three, regarding what students perceived as the most impactful aspects of student success courses to their academic self-efficacy, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 students who were enrolled in the

student success course (SSC) during the semester being studied. Of the 26 students, all were enrolled in the SSC during the semester in which they were interviewed. Sixteen were females, and ten were males. Ten participants were enrolled at campus one, eleven were enrolled at campus two, and five were enrolled at campus three. The dominant themes of classroom environment, development of self-awareness, changes in student success behaviors, building friendships and community, self-efficacy, and students' evolving opinions of the SSC will be discussed and illustrated using students' statements and perceptions.

### **Classroom Environment**

When students discussed the helpful aspects of the SSC, many chose to comment on the effectiveness and personality of the teacher, real-life connections they experienced, and active learning practices used in the classroom. The participants often referred to teaching style or personality of the teacher when asked about the classroom environment, and in their comments, it was evident that they felt these ideas were very closely related. Being presented with real-life examples and scenarios allowed them to connect with the concepts they were learning in a relatable way, which created a classroom environment that they connected with. The interactive, hands-on, active learning aspect of the classroom environment was another helpful factor in encouraging the students to engage with the skills and concepts they were learning.

**Teaching style.** The degree of supportiveness and friendliness of the instructor was mentioned by five of the 26 students. Student 6 described her instructor as “really kind.” Student 19 also shared this opinion and noted that, “The professors – they’re not mean or anything.” These comments show that these two students feel kindness is an important trait in a professor. Student 12 described her instructor with similar language when she commented on how her teacher encouraged her. Her teacher’s conversational

style caused student 25 to feel at ease in the classroom: “She just talks to you like you're not even a student, so she makes you feel basically like you're at home. She makes me feel that comfortable.” A teacher appearing to be happy was important to student 12 as well: “It's just that I want to see you smile. I want to see that you're happy. I want to see that you're loving what you do.” She went on to explain that she did not initially feel comfortable in the classroom, but that changed when she had a conversation with her instructor in which both parties laughed and seemingly felt comfortable.

Three of the students described their professors as “funny” or “entertaining.” Student 26 described her instructor as “really nice and funny, but when it comes down to work, she really wants you to step up and be the best person that you can actually be.” Her professor’s friendly personality made the student respond positively to being held to high academic expectations. Student 23 also felt that her professor’s humor was beneficial to the classroom environment:

I like her personality when we learn the stuff. Just putting her own flavor onto making us laugh. You get into it; you know it’s serious but still can joke around with it. The way she delivers it... you actually listen to it and you don't just sit there. So I think actually the teacher is the very most important aspect to me.

Student 23 felt that her instructor’s use of humor encouraged engagement in the classroom.

Student 4 also attributed greater participation in the classroom to her professor’s personality: “Positive, entertaining, motivated, as well, for a lot of students that feel negative about their selves, or that are really shy. It helps you be more, how can I say? It makes you participate more.” This shows that she felt the instructor’s personality encouraged students, especially reluctant students, to be engaged in the classroom. Student 2 also felt the connection between achievement and a teacher’s personality: “It’s

important to be connecting with the professor and student. You know how can you overcome something that you want to achieve.” She felt supported and encouraged to achieve more academically because her professor built a rapport with her.

Three of the 26 students, like student 24, expressed an interest in more personal attention from their instructor: “I think the teachers would help a lot if they could be more helpful to their students like calling them up, like, “Hey, do your work.”” Student 3 also responded positively to having an instructor who discussed grades with the students: “She's attentive. She checks our grades, yeah. In the beginning you're like, “Really lady?” But then, “Thank you, I needed that.”” Even though initially student 3 was uncomfortable with an instructor who discussed grades with her, she eventually began to appreciate the help. Student 12 was interested in a personal connection as well:

I have to get to know you to be able to learn from you. Learn that you care about us, that we're in here reading, not that you're just giving us anything. So I'm more a hands-on relationship student, basically, person, who wants her teacher to have an understanding of where I'm coming from, and how I learn.

In the opposite situation, student 7 reacted negatively to his instructor who he felt did not encourage interaction:

My SSC class, I want to say, they don't like my teacher, because she's really hard on kids. They'll try to participate, but she'll take it to the wrong view, and then say we're trying to compare answers because we don't know why we got this wrong. She would ask us politely to either leave the classroom or stay quiet. She wouldn't let people sit next to each other if we just go along.

Student 7's response above corroborates the idea that the friendliness of the teacher has an impact on the perceptions of his or her effectiveness. The students in that particular

course assumed that the lack of encouragement of interaction was evidence of the teacher's negative opinion of the students.

**Real-life connections.** An important concept to five of the 26 students was connecting their learning to real-life situations. Two ways the students mentioned being exposed to real-life scenarios were through the instructors sharing their own experiences and through the realistic case studies included in the textbook. The five students seemed to be more interested in learning about how to approach difficult situations when they felt the examples were relatable to their own lives and something they could envision experiencing.

Student 5 stated, "I like the personal examples that she gives here and there from her, I'm guessing from her experiences." In that situation, the instructor sharing her own struggles resonated with the student and helped her visualize the content the professor was teaching. Student 3 also related to her instructor's practice of sharing personal examples: "The teacher has a one-on-one type of thing with us, and she uses her own personal experiences, which I really like. It's very relatable, and I really like that." Being able to identify with the professor seemed to cause the student to be able to relate to both the content and the instructor. Student 12 had a similar experience in her class:

We all friends now, and we confide in each other, even with the teacher. You have to have that open concept. Because she shared some of her life issues. So it opened it up for us to be open with ours.

This is one additional example of a student responding positively to personal stories of how a professor overcame an obstacle. In order to help students build self-efficacy, modeling effective behaviors in persistence and problem-solving are especially helpful.

Two of the students connected with the real-life student stories found in their textbook. Student 6 mentioned the essays in the textbook that were written by actual

students who have completed a student success course using the same book: “The stories, how there's those stories at the end of the chapters about how it's happened to somebody in real life, so you can relate to it in any way, and how you can improve yourself, your wellbeing.” Similar to the students responding positively to professors’ real-life examples, student 6 felt it was helpful to read about how other students dealt with problems she was facing.

Student 8 responded to the case studies included in each chapter: “Well I like it, it's more like a psychology class. I had taken one in high school, and it reminds me of it. It's like case studies and how people think. The situations are a lot more realistic.” In the case studies, students read stories about issues that are common in college (turning in a late paper, deciding whether or not to drop a class, etc.) and they evaluate the characters’ actions and discuss the best way for the people in the story to handle the situation. This helps them practice problem-solving and responding to difficult situations logically before contending with similar situations on their own.

**Active learning practices.** Nine of the 26 students mentioned the active learning aspect of the classroom environment and how they felt it positively influenced their academic self-efficacy. Student 1 described the active nature of his classroom in this way: “Really energetic and fun early in the morning. (Laughs) Ever since the first day we just got everybody communicating with each other. It’s just been a loud and family-friendly group, basically.” In her reference to being actively engaged in learning, student 22 mentioned enjoying “playing games” in class. Another example of an active learning exercise that is meant to build self-efficacy was mentioned by student 2 who described her favorite fun activity from the class:

My favorite one was we ended up doing a tower. It was fun. It was most likely based on the lesson that how long does it take for you to build that tower on time and not to fall; it kind of shows about life goals.

Students 22 and 2 responded positively to learning through playing games in the classroom. As part of the SSC faculty training that all faculty and staff at the college attended, including the researcher, the instructors participated in many of the interactive lessons and games that are part of the course and discussed how to explicitly relate the activities back to the broad concepts the students learn.

Student 10 connected the active nature of the class to the professor: “I actually really like my class... She's very interactive with us. She tells us what to do and she'll personally show us... She took us on a tour of the campus.” Student 12 attributed the active-learning element to her professor as well: “The teacher is encouraging, and she keeps it spunky. She keeps it entertaining. She has us active. She has us speaking out loud, if you want to.” These two comments bring together the ideas of students responding positively to friendly, engaging professors and the need for teachers to create a high-interest, active classroom environment.

Five of the 26 students mentioned that they enjoyed working in groups. Student 10 stated, “She's [the professor] showing us right now how to work in groups and communicate with people and learn to respect people as a whole instead of just not respecting them.” Student 10 responded well not only to the active cooperative learning, but also to specific instructions on how to interact with her classmates.

Student 7 asserted that he wished his professor would use more cooperative learning in the class because projects were “better for learning purposes.” Working on assignments with other students is an activity that interested student 17 as well: “I like the way they have it set up and do it because they make it where it's very interacting with

other students.” Both students were interested in interacting with the other students during class. Student 12 expressed a desire for additional group activities to help engage more reluctant students: “I guess more group activities. To understand like shy kids; if you bring them in groups, they would come out more, start talking, get rid of the shyness.” Student 12 felt that more cooperative learning would help draw out reluctant students and engage them more fully.

The words “fun” and “interesting” were used several times to describe the classroom environment. Student 9 stated, “For the most part, it's a good class. Group projects all the time. It's pretty fun.” Another participant, student 8, also felt that a fun learning environment was important: “It's really fun. It's interesting. It helps you figure out, well kind of shows you that you're not the only one struggling out there. It's very helpful.”

Overall, the ideas of active learning, playing games that enabled students to experience a concept first-hand, project-based learning, and cooperative grouping were popular student engagement techniques among the participants. Activities such as these increase the likelihood that students will be actively engaged in class. Therefore, there is more of a possibility that they will fully comprehend what they are learning and be able to apply this knowledge to their other classes, which will build self-efficacy.

### **Development of Self-Awareness and Self-Respect**

Of the 26 participants, ten reported developing a greater sense of self-awareness, which is an essential aspect of self-efficacy. Common related words the students mentioned were “self-respect,” “confidence,” “healing,” and “mindset.” For example, student 26 stated, “I understand more and more about myself.” This shows a growing sense of self-awareness. Student 23 also mentioned building self-awareness by stating, “I would describe it [self-awareness] as discovering yourself. 'Cause I feel like that's the

purpose of that course - is to discover yourself before taking regular college courses.” Self-awareness is, in fact, the focus of one of the units of the course, according to the course syllabus.

Student 12 expressed her positive response to learning about self-awareness in her comments as well: “It [the SSC] teaches you a lot about yourself so you can prepare yourself 'cause it's all mental when you go to college. It's all mental.” Student 24 agreed that in the course “you study yourself,” as he discussed the frequent self-reflection assignments that are part of the course. Although student 19 reported feeling uncomfortable initially, he stated, “Now, I’m comfortable with myself.” Some students do feel nervous about opening up about their personal thoughts and feelings at the beginning of the course before trust among their other classmates and with the instructor has been established, based on their interview comments.

Two of the students used “self-respect” almost synonymously with self-awareness. Student 17 explained, “I think the most helpful aspect of the SSC is really showing you have to gain self-awareness, respect of yourself and show you that you can do whatever you need just to succeed.” The concept that self-respect was related to self-awareness was echoed by student 21, who used similar terminology: “It [the SSC] teaches us respect - self-respect.” For these two students, learning self-awareness caused them to experience an increase in self-respect.

Two other students referred to mindset, which is a term that they are exposed to during the course. Student 15 discussed the change in her mindset:

I learned about the creator mindset and the victim mindset. I was having a victim mindset by worrying, but I know it can be creator mindset. I went to high school, finished, graduated, and now I'm here. I should be proud of myself. I have to cherish myself.

The victim mindset student 15 is referring to is a way of thinking in which an individual responds to difficulty by shifting blame to others, complaining, and avoiding taking responsibility; a creator mindset involves thinking about a situation critically and taking specific steps to solve the problem (Downing, 2017). Student 13 also described a similar period of reflection and a changing mindset:

It [the SSC] helps in a more personal mental sense. It kinda helps you create a better mindset. Certain parts, certain chapters, were kinda like bringing me back to a certain point in my life, where it was hard or tough. And I just think back to it. And now I see what's it's like. I'm hearing it. Now I'm happy.

He felt that reflecting back on previous difficulties he had experienced prepared him to identify similar situations in the future and develop a way to approach those issues.

Student 18 stated that he felt all students would benefit from the course: “I think it would help with everybody. If everybody took that class, we'd all, like, gain more self-confidence and self-awareness.” He believed that other students would have a similar experience and would also become more self-aware and confident. Student 12 described her experience as an intensive self-exploration:

Yeah, I thought it would be about learning how to study and stuff like that and to get college ready. I didn't know it was going to be deep into getting into your personal feelings and lifestyle. So, it touched a lot of inside cores that needed to be broken up, to be open to face reality of what was holding me back, so it was healthy. So I liked the SSC, I really did. It's a healing. This class is a healing. It's a healing process. A beginning of a healing process.

The core beliefs she is referring to are beliefs people have about themselves based on their previous life experiences and feedback from other people who are important in their

lives. She felt that examining these prior experiences and interactions with others was a powerful way to become more self-aware.

Being able to identify strong emotions and what causes them is one of the aspects of self-awareness that students learn in the SSC. This contributes to self-efficacy because when a strong emotion and the underlying cause can be identified, the student can then make a logical plan by considering the options available to solve the problem and evaluating the possible outcomes of each decision (Downing, 2017). Overall, despite any initial discomfort students may have felt with examining their past experiences and their feelings, most reported feeling a new sense of self-awareness and self-respect that they felt would be a benefit to them.

### **Changes in Student Success Behaviors**

Half of the participants mentioned learning a new student success behavior or further developing a skill they had previously practiced in another setting. The most commonly connected skills students reported learning in the SSC were organization and time management. The student success behaviors taught in the SSC are meant to build students' academic self-efficacy and prepare them to successfully navigate the challenging college culture.

**Organization and time management.** Five of the 26 students used the words “time,” “time management,” “organization,” or “calendar.” Student 6 stated, “I can definitely say I'm more organized than I was in the beginning [of the semester].” Most students related the ideas of organization and time management to each other and typically saw time management as a subset of an overall sense of being organized. Student 8 offered an example of this manner of thinking, “But I have improved on organizing and turning in stuff and scheduling, using my time wisely a lot more.” This reinforces the idea of the association students make between being organized and

managing time wisely. Student 10 stated that she had learned about organizing her time before but felt she went into more depth in the SSC:

Showing us how to keep organized and how to keep on track. I already had a calendar before I started college, so I already know how to keep organized. But she [the professor] showed us how to go in depth and schedule stuff, schedule appointments so you know what to do at what time so you're not over the place. Just with our calendar on our phone, or I've got one on my phone, and then I have a paper one. I keep one by my bed on my dresser, my little nightstand, so I have that calendar. I have my phone calendar, so I have two, so I know what I'm doing and what time I have work or what time I have class. I keep everything organized.

Student 21 ranked time-management as the most important thing he'd learned in the course. Due to what she learned about time management and organization, student 14 advocated for using a planner: "Always manage your time and be organized with a planner." Student 8 echoed the idea that time management was not new but was taught in more depth: "There are some kinds that we already know about - repetitive things about time management, but it's still different the way it's taught here, especially taken more seriously. People pay more attention to that since they need it." She felt that learning how time management would be applied in college was different than how she had used it in the past.

Student 2 also discussed time and being organized: "It helped me so much because... this is the stuff you need to do, you need to be on time, organized folder, asking for help." She felt that these three separate skills were all related to her potential success. Student 7 discussed specific strategies that helped him during the semester:

I thought I was pretty prepared, as long as I had a planner and I knew what was going to happen in that class. I had the syllabus, highlighted important dates for

certain projects, tests, quizzes, just be prepared for those, and just having a healthy relationship with the professor.

He connected these practices to his overall feeling of being prepared to be successful in all of his college classes.

**Responsibility.** Several students discussed aspects of responsibility that they had learned during the semester. Responsibility influenced student 24 to advocate for sitting at the front of the class:

I feel like the students who barely start at the beginning of class they should know that you should be responsible for the work and ask for help and not just talk to the students around them. That's what I did. I just got pretty lost. You need to go to the front no matter how bad you hate being in the front. I prefer being in the front because... you get more focus.

He related the idea of being responsible to asking for help; in this context, ensuring that he was able to clear up confusing aspects of the course enabled him to complete his assignments and be responsible for his learning.

Student 4 discussed taking responsibility for things that go wrong during the semester: "You're like, "It's not my fault." But, then you're like, "Yeah, it was my fault." This relates to the previously mentioned creator mindset in which students focus on solving problems that arise and dealing with barriers or difficulty with a positive attitude. Student 18 listed several student success behaviors that he became more comfortable with: "I participate way more in that class now. I actually study. I never used to study. I pay attention a lot, I participate, answer questions." These student success behaviors are motivated by taking responsibility and being proactive in engaging effectively in college.

While the goal of the SSC is for students to build academic self-efficacy that they can apply in other classes as well, that is not always the outcome that students

experience. When asked if the behaviors and skills learned in the SSC transferred to the other courses he was taking, student 19 replied, “No, not at all.” He did not want to expand on his answer, but he was not the only student who mentioned the idea of skills not always transferring to other classes. Student 4 mentioned that she felt comfortable working in groups and speaking in front of the class in her SSC but not in another course:

What was really helpful was to get into groups. To know other people and make you have self-confidence, and it helps other students so they can have self-confidence. I was really shy to go up to the front, and then, after I started getting to know all the people, I didn't get shy. I would just get up and just talk. In my math class, I don't talk to no one, so that's why I'm really shy. We're not really communicative in that class, so it's a big difference from the SSC and math.

This would seem to underscore the idea that students' comfort with interaction, involvement, and taking educational risks are affected by the established norms and expectations set for the classroom.

**Perseverance toward goals.** According to student 5, goal-setting and motivation were two of the most important skills that were discussed in the class. In his mind, these two concepts were combined into one idea:

Stay motivated, always have a goal, academic-wise or life-wise, whatever. Just stay on top of everything. Use everything out of the positive benefits that they teach us, and especially in the book, so yeah. That's the one thing I probably get out of it is never give up, and then there's always a way to succeed. Whether it's a short way or a long way. That's one thing I learned in SSC.

Perseverance emerged as an important aspect related to motivation and goal setting. Just like student 5 mentioned in the quote above, student 9 also discussed maintaining perseverance during the semester: “So the SSC teaches you that just because you're kinda

failing the class, that does not mean to drop it. You can talk to the instructor, you can work something out in their office hours.” This relates back to the earlier concept mentioned by other students regarding becoming more comfortable approaching a professor to ask for help. It should be noted that a possible link exists between attaining skills needed in college and the ability to persevere to completion of a degree. Later in student 9’s interview, she gave a concrete example of what perseverance would look like to her classmates as it pertains to attendance:

Here, you're like, "Oh I can just leave," 'cause here we have way more freedom. You can just go to your car whatever time. Like right now, I could’a just left. That's something a lot of high school kids need to know, that being absent is not really an option here, unless it's really necessary. We only see y'all two days a week, so missing one is already more than enough, so you can't really be doing that.

She related the ideas of responsibility and perseverance as she explained her opinion that although students have the freedom to not attend class, it is important to attend class even when it is tempting to be absent.

As students learn about behaviors that will contribute to their success in college, different skills resonate with each student: organization, time management, responsibility, perseverance, communicating with instructors, and attending class regularly were among the skills most mentioned by the participants in this study. Learning how to successfully perform those skills and behaviors could build a students’ academic self-efficacy if applied in additional courses and situations.

### **Building Classroom Community**

Ten of the 26 participants discussed building friendships or a sense of community in the classroom. The most repeated terminology were words such as “friend,” “family,”

“friendship,” “communicate,” and “talk.” Due to the active learning construct of the course, students tend to spend more class time working in cooperative groups, having group discussions, and completing projects together. This atmosphere usually helps instructors and students build a rapport as well.

Student 2 commented on the interactive nature of the course and its effects on building friendships:

It was very fun because I ended up talking, making friends, versus not making friends. What I learned is that you can talk to anybody. It kind of brings all students all together. Whenever you are working on a project in class, anywhere else, it kind of brings you together.

She communicated the importance of learning in an environment in which interaction and fun activities were prevalent.

Student 26 had a similar experience: “I was really a shy person, but once I get to know people, then I get to communicate more. It taught me to get a study group, and get each other's numbers, and it helped me make new friends.” In her experience, forming a study group allowed her to create friendships and experience support from her classmates. Taking it a step further, student 1 felt that the skill of making friends was one that would transfer to other situations: “It’s a very useful thing to have in college to make friends and branch out because that will help you out in a lot of classes.” He planned to continue to build friendships in future courses as well.

Three of the students accredited their development of friendships to proximity to others; they felt it was easier to get to know the students they sat next to. Student 17 stated, “It actually made bonds of friendships between people that I've sat next to for the whole semester.” In addition to feeling comfortable with those around her, student 4 stated that other students had the same experience: “I started making conversation with

kids around me, and I guess they started feeling secure about themselves, as well. We all started hanging out, and going out, and all this stuff. It was really good, yeah.” Student 11 mentioned feeling more comfortable with students sitting near her as well: “I made two friends. The other people ... I talked to a few people, but usually I just sit with the girls right behind if we're doing a group work or something, talk with them.” Repeatedly sitting near the same classmates seemed to build familiarity and comfort between some of the students.

**Building a sense of community.** Three students felt that the friendships that were formed encompassed the class as a whole. Student 12 compared her class to a family: “It is, in the classroom, we build a family and friends.” The idea of relating the classroom and a family occurred to student 3 as well; however, she pointed out the differences: “It's not like its family, but everybody belongs, and if you say something, it's not like they're going to judge you. It does give us a better bond, and we have that group of people we could confide in.” Student 8 also alluded to a community environment: “That class is where I have more friends in because we joke around, and we talk about a lot of the stuff that we've been through, and I have all my friends in there that help me out.” Feeling close bonds with others and a sense of support and acceptance was important to the students.

Student 10 felt that the idea of building friendships could be taken even further, and advocated for specific instruction on how to make friends:

You can't really teach somebody to have friends, but how to start a friendship, kind of because some people just sit alone. You can see them, like, on their own, but they don't have any friends. I'm the kind of person, I'll go and talk to you, but I don't know what to talk about. Like how to broach a subject, teach people how to interact with people.

She discussed feeling unsure of herself when attempting to make new friends and assumed that other students who felt similarly would benefit from relationship-building strategies.

Making friends with their classmates, getting support and help from those friends, and being able to share their feelings and experiences was a topic that a great deal of the participants discussed. It appeared to be a meaningful experience for the students. Interaction with classmates also increases student engagement, which is one factor that has been shown to improve retention (Tinto, 1997).

**Communicating with the professors.** Students advocating for themselves and effectively communicating their needs is a part of self-efficacy because it increases the likelihood that they will get assistance when it is necessary. Asking for help and communicating effectively with their professors was an idea that three students brought up. Student 26 reported feeling intimidated initially when approaching a professor for help: “I actually went up to a professor and actually talked to him, and that actually got me to communicate more.” It was not a skill that came naturally to her, but after approaching the professor the first time, she stated that future interactions became easier.

Student 2 shared a similar view: “Always try to question your professor, not be shy and intimidated.” While student 2 offered advice to other students who might feel uncomfortable approaching a professor, student 6 explained why she felt her professor was approachable: “The teacher, he was really kind. When we walked in, I could tell it was going to be a free to speak class. The environment was, it wasn't anything that I didn't feel unsafe in.” This echoes previous sentiments students expressed regarding feeling more at ease interacting with professors who seemed friendly.

Students often are nervous to approach their professors to ask for help with concepts or skills they do not understand, so initiating a one-on-one conversation with a

professor is a necessary skill that must be taught. Often students need explicit instruction in strategies to use when speaking to a professor. For example, students may need to be encouraged to bring a list of questions with them if they feel nervous visiting an instructor during office hours.

### **Academic Self-Efficacy Perceptions**

There was a mixed result when the students were asked about their feelings of academic self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester. Three students reported feeling very confident in their ability to be successful in college, and most students mentioned feeling “scared,” “nervous,” “overwhelmed,” or “anxious” and doubting their ability to be successful. Other students reported starting the semester very confidently only to realize later that college was more difficult than they expected it to be.

**High initial self-efficacy feelings.** Three of the 26 students began the semester with a strong sense of self-efficacy. Student 11 felt confident at the beginning of the semester: “I felt like I was going to be successful. Yeah, I had no doubt.” Student 11’s confidence at the beginning of the semester was a feeling that student 5 experienced as well:

I thought I would be pretty successful. I’ve always had the same mindset every year since junior high; I’ve been motivated and all that. It carries over, and my grades show. So I think I’m doing good, and so I’m pretty successful. I think I’m successful.

Student 5’s description of his self-efficacy shows that he has held the same opinion of his ability to be academically successful for a long period of time.

Student 23 reported specifically choosing a community college because of the supportive atmosphere in spite of starting with a high level of academic self-efficacy: “Yes. I thought I was [going to be successful]. The teachers, they really care about

you...and that's a big thing that I was looking for when picking a community college... Everybody wants you to be successful. Literally everybody.” Even though she personally began with a strong sense of self-efficacy, she still had a desire to enter a supportive environment.

**Low initial self-efficacy feelings.** Eight of the 26 students, however, experienced a low perception of their self-efficacy and reported feelings of anxiety, confusion, and frustration at the beginning of the semester. Student 9 stated:

For high school students, talking about college is scary. It's just scary, period. A lot of us in high school were like, "Oh, we just talk to the teachers. She'll put in a grade, whatever." Obviously coming in here, I was like, "Quite frankly, I don't think I'll make it." Especially having a job because you have to run from here to there and do this and that. In the beginning, I wasn't sure, but now my grades are looking pretty good. I do what I can to fix them whenever I do have time.

Just as student 9 started the semester doubting her ability to be successful due to a demanding schedule, student 17 attributed his low sense of self-efficacy to being out of school for a period of time: “It's been so long since I've been out of school. That was more the feeling other than just the class itself. So, I was pretty much overwhelmed when I first started school and class and the SSC.” Being out of school for a few years before returning to college affected student 12's self-efficacy perception also:

I'm 37 and coming back to school and been probably in this bind since I dropped out of school at the age of 16. You see how much bondage I was in through those years, that's how long I was in bondage. Fearful to go back to school because I was scared of failing within the school. But the SSC opened it up for me to see it differently, because I did have the class online, but I dropped it. I must've dropped

it for a reason, because I needed to be in the class. Because at home I probably wouldn't have overcome it.

Fearing failure and avoiding the educational environment points to a lack of self-efficacy and are characteristics of some students in developmental education courses. In addition to worrying about managing busy lives and returning to school after being out of the educational environment, two students reported feeling unprepared for college.

Student 26 stated:

In all my classes I felt like I was going to kind of struggle... because, I didn't really do nothing in high school, so when I got to college I wasn't really prepared to start in college. But it really taught me to start studying more and be more active in class.

She felt that her experience in high school would affect her ability to be successful in a college environment.

Student 2 talked about not feeling supported by family as well as feeling unprepared and nervous:

I was always doubting myself because back then I didn't have the support when I was with my parents, my mom, my family, and I didn't have that much help. Since I barely started college, I didn't know what to do... I didn't know how to use a computer back then, and I didn't know how to use the printer, and what was important to have in your backpack or in your pocket. You don't know what professor you're going to get. I was nervous because I was like, probably my professor is going to be hard because my husband he has some different professor. She's very harsh. I feel like I am pressured to do something [I'm] not ready for.

She attributed not having a strong sense of self-efficacy to a lack of cultural capital related to the college environment and her fears of not having the support of her professors and family.

Student 4 reported feeling scared and not feeling comfortable interacting with others: “I was scared. I was shy. I was in the back of the class because I didn't know anyone, but when the teacher started talking to us, I started feeling more confident.” This is similar to student 2's desire for a supportive instructor; both students felt that having the professors' support would increase their self-efficacy.

Student 18 mentioned his expectations that his grades would be low: “Well, it was my first day of college... I thought it was gonna be challenging, I thought my grade was gonna be way lower than what it is now. I thought I was gonna fail.” His low self-efficacy caused his expectation that he would fail. Student 19 echoed that sentiment: “Nervous. I had a lot of doubts about myself, so I didn't really expect too much.” Doubting his ability to be successful in his classes illustrated his negative perception of his academic self-efficacy.

**Changing perceptions of self-efficacy.** Five of the students reported that they started strong but ran into trouble when they realized how difficult college can be. As a result, their academic self-efficacy perception suffered. Student 10 said:

I'm very, like, I want to get these done. I'll get them as soon as I can. I didn't think I was going to finish all my classes but as of right now, I did drop one. It was too hard. I didn't think I would pass it. I just dropped it and they wouldn't ruin my GPA. I just dropped it. It was really hard. It was a really hard class.

Even though she began the semester with determination and a belief in her ability to be successful, her perceived self-efficacy suffered as a result of her courses being more difficult than she had anticipated.

Student 1 realized as the semester progressed that college would be more difficult than high school:

Throughout all of high school, I had As, and that's all I wanted. But now in college it's just so much hard being a full-time college student, full-time working. I thought it would be more something easier to do, like being able to keep up my As and everything, but... it's kind of stressful and hard being full-time for both job and student.

Based on his high school success, he began the semester with a high sense of self-efficacy but began to struggle due to difficult courses and additional responsibilities.

Student 24 started with a strong sense of self-efficacy, but that changed when he began to struggle in class and did not feel confident asking for help:

Oh yeah. I was confident. I remember I was also asking people like, "Hey how are you doing?" But sooner or later I just felt like that I was asking for too much. I was like poking everyone, "Hey, can you do this thing?" I just felt like it was annoying. I wasn't doing really good at the beginning because I was like, "You got this. This is easy." And then I figured out that it was not that easy because they build more work. It was confusing, and I was like, "Ahhh..." I just kind of gave up. I was like, "That is too much work." It was easy but the teacher didn't tell us. We had to figure it out ourselves and be responsible for yourself. It's like life.

Just like the previous participant, student 8 had trouble with keeping track of assignments on her own, but overall her self-efficacy is generally still strong:

I'm not going to give up. It was very confusing. We didn't have reminders, and we had to look up in the calendars and computers... I do have some doubts and little insecurities about failing, but yeah. I think I can do it.

Student 9's expectations were also based on experiences in high school, and the reality of the differences in college made her consider giving up: "A lot of us come in here and this hits us 'cause we're like, "Oh my god, I did not know that." The drops or the 'be absent one day.' A lot of us are like, "Oh who cares?" These three participants had difficulty making the adjustment from the high school practice of having teachers remind them of assignments and keep them on track to being expected to be responsible for these aspects of college student life on their own.

Experiencing a shock over the difficulty level of college affected student 3's confidence in her ability to be successful also. She stated, "I thought I was going to at least pass," when questioned about her self-efficacy levels at the beginning of the semester. When asked if college was easier or more difficult than she expected, she stated, "It is a lot more difficult." Students who were surprised by the unexpected difficulty of college classes reported a drop in their expectations of success.

The findings for the subject of academic self-efficacy show that fewer students begin college with high levels of confidence, and more students reported feeling nervous, anxious, scared, or overwhelmed at the beginning of their first semester. Additionally, many students who reported feeling very confident when they began, realized over the course of their first semester that college was going to be more difficult than they had anticipated. This caused a drop in their level of academic self-efficacy.

### **Evolving Opinions of the SSC**

One important theme that began to emerge was a common experience and resulting attitude about the SSC based on students' experiences with registration and the way information was originally provided about the SSC. Twenty of the 26 students reported having negative opinions about the SSC after registering for the course and before they started the course. They reported not knowing what the course was for, why

they were required to take it, or what they would be learning. Several students mentioned being upset or angry about being required to register for the course because it wasn't a "real" class, and they would not be receiving college-level credits for it. Initial impressions of the course varied. Student 6 wondered, "What the heck is SSC?" Also confused about the purpose of the course was student 5: "At first, I didn't know what it was about, I honestly didn't know." The confusion seemed pervasive. Student 8 stated:

I thought it was overwhelming, and then I was kind of confused what the purpose was. What was it supposed to be about? I didn't know what it was. Then I asked around, and they said it's a required class. But yeah. That's all I know.

Student 13 also reported not having an understanding of the course's purpose: "Walking in, I was like, "Why am I taking this class? What's it for? Why did they give this class to us, like the students, in our first time here?" But that's how I felt." The feeling of confusion about the purpose of the course and the reasons it was required was a common theme among most of the students.

**Initial explanation of the SSC.** Most students did not feel that an adequate explanation was given to them from the advisors they met with during registration. For example, student 10 discussed her meeting with an advisor for registration: "Honestly, I didn't even know what it was. They [advising staff] were like, "Oh, you're taking the SSC." I'm like, "Okay what is that?" They were like, "You'll see when you get there." I'm like, "Oh, okay. Great." She reported not feeling reassured about taking the course because she was not given an explanation of the purpose of the class.

Three of the 26 students explained how a positive description of the course would have changed their initial opinion of the course. Student 3 stated:

She [the advisor] just told me it was a requirement and she didn't tell me anything about it. Just it was a requirement for freshmen; I was like, "Okay." I guess when

we're first coming into college, for people to actually know what the class is about. I feel like more people would be like, "Oh, that's kind of cool. Hey, I want to learn it because ..." I feel like we should be informed, "Hey, this is what this is about," so we will actually be excited to take the class or have a little enthusiastic about it... I feel like if we know that then we'll come into it with a better mind. The class itself, I love it, don't change those types of things, but coming in maybe tell us, "Hey, this is what it's about."

Her assertion that students would be more open to learning the course content if they began the class with an awareness of the benefits is an opinion that other students shared.

Student 11 also felt that the course explanation could be improved upon: "I think that whenever everybody joins the class... it should just be explained whenever they're choosing the class or something... that it is for college success, because I'm sure many people didn't know." Her desire for an overview of the course was shared by student 26, who suggested possible talking points for college staff:

"I was just really confused by why I had to take it. They didn't say anything about it. I would like the counselors to actually explain to the students what it is, because they're going to really... once they get into the class, they'll enjoy it more, instead of just looking at the paper and asking, "What is this?" because actually, if I would have known from the beginning, I would have loved this class even more.

These students' statements underscore the idea that students' initial opinions can affect the way the students approach the course and the amount of effort they are willing to put into the class.

**Negative framing of placement decisions.** While the previous participants felt confused before starting the course, nearly a third of the participants were given a different message about why they needed to take the course. Eight of the 26 students

reported being told that the SSC was required for them because of their low scores on the TSI (their college entrance exam). The students used words and phrases such as “failed,” “low score,” “not college-ready,” “TSI wasn’t high enough,” “TSI was lower than it should be,” and “didn’t pass.”

Student 20 stated, “Well, when I went to the front office the other day, they told me I needed these classes because I didn't pass a test.” It should be noted that TSI score reports list a student’s specific strengths and weaknesses in math, reading, and writing skills; the results are illustrated on a mastery scale and are not presented as passing or failing scores (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017). Student 21 was given a similar explanation: “I met with an admission office person. They said I failed the TSI, so I needed to take the class.” This is similar to the previous student’s experience in that student 21’s score was characterized as a failing score.

Student 23 explained that her opinion of the course changed despite a similar introduction: “They really didn't explain it in admissions, they just were like, "This is the class you gotta take when your TSI is lower than it should be.” But when I took it [the SSC], I understood what it was then.” Her report of the explanation for placing her in the SSC was framed negatively as well.

Five of the participants reported a change in their opinion of themselves or their self-confidence when they were told they were required to take the class because they had failed their TSI. Student 14 explained, “Because my TSI wasn't high enough, that's the only reason I'm taking SSC, so I felt kinda dumb being in there.” Her perception of her ability was affected by how her test results were explained to her. Student 21 described his reaction to hearing a similar explanation: “I was even crying, whenever I first failed my TSI.” Although his feelings were attributed to the TSI, this is relevant because of the framing of his results. He stated that he “failed” the TSI; however, as previously

mentioned, TSI score results are displayed on a continuum of mastery and labeled as “needs improvement,” “limited proficiency,” or “proficient” (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017).

Students reacted negatively to the phrase “not college-ready” as well; in fact, two students felt that this changed their view of themselves as well as their view of the developmental education courses. This is evident when students stated that they needed to finish their developmental courses in order to take “real” courses. Student 9 stated, “We’re all here for a reason. I knew that this semester... because they’re the prep classes. Unless I’m just really not college-ready, there’s no reason why I shouldn’t pass these before the real classes in college.” Being labeled “not college-ready” caused an increase in student 15’s anxiety:

So, those were my anxieties kicking in. I was like oh, I’m going to fail these classes. ‘Cause they told me I wasn’t college ready. I just went to high school for four years, and they want to tell me I’m not college ready. So, I hated the SSC at the beginning of the semester... I was so nervous to the point of once I had to step out of class... I came here to talk to the lady [counselor] and was like hey, I can’t do this any longer. I’d try to be strong, but I just started crying, and that’s when I started counseling.

Her perception of the designation “not college-ready” affected her academic self-efficacy. She assumed that because she was not classified as college-ready that she would not experience success in her college classes.

**Positive, informative introduction to the SSC.** Three of the participants had some exposure to a short overview of the course during registration, and they had different reactions to the course initially. Student 12 discussed her expectations for the course at the beginning of the semester:

At first, I thought I was going into class to learn how to study, and that was it, how to get through college... the SSC actually is a good thing. It reached more deeper of what I really needed to face the fears, basically, and to help me to get through it. I felt good about it, because I was going in with expectancy.

The characterization of the SSC as a helpful course that would benefit her personally caused her to approach the course differently.

Two of the main components of the course were communicated to student 4 by her advisor: “She said that freshmen have to take that course for, I guess, to be more motivated, so it could help them in the rest of their career.” Stating that the course was required for all freshmen rather than for students who had performed poorly on the TSI communicated a different expectation for the class.

Student 2 received an overview of the course and learned about some of the benefits she could expect from the course:

Why you're going to be working on the SSC; it's like showing you the steps of what students can become, like in progress and what goals do you have most likely and what students go through at the same time. It prepares you to be a better student. Something that prepares you to be ready for college.

Students who received explanations of the purpose of the course reported more positive feelings at the beginning of the semester.

**Evolving perceptions of the SSC.** Despite the negative reactions students experienced prior to beginning the SSC, ten participants reported an evolving view of the course as the semester continued. Student 7 stated:

At first I didn't know what the class stood for. I didn't know what SSC stood for, or even the syllabus and everything; at first I didn't know what was going on.

Then the teacher said she would go through the syllabus, and then she would talk

about how journals worked, outlines worked, and then essentially from there it started making more sense.

He was able to overcome his initial confusion regarding the course content and was reassured by a professor who explained the expectations of the class thoroughly.

Student 9 expressed hope that new students would persevere long enough to learn to appreciate the course:

They [students] need to know that there is a point to this, and know that when you walk in, you're like, "Why am I even here? I don't have an option... but it's actually really helpful. Know that it's a lot of work. It really is a lot of projects, a lot of journal entries, a lot of everything. But everything is gonna be worth it, 'cause there's a lot of stuff in there that we did not know about college.

Noting that the confusion at the beginning of the semester and the amount of work involved in the course could possibly be a deterrent for some students, she expressed the belief that they would benefit from remaining in the class.

Student 4 noted the change in her perception of her self-efficacy at the end of the semester:

It's really helpful. It can change you, a lot. It really can. My friend told me about the class. I was like, "I don't want to take it," because, when she told me you have to participate, you have to be outgoing, I was like, "No, I'm not going in there. I'm not. That's not my class." She's like, "You should try it. It's fun." So, I did, and I'm a lot different. I'm more outgoing, I have more friends. It's like you're a whole new person after that class.

Despite her trepidation before beginning the course, she found herself building relationships and self-awareness.

Student 3 also felt that other students would appreciate the course: “It is definitely a class to take. You're going to need it. You'll definitely take away from it in a big way most likely.” The appreciation of the course continued with student 26: “I love coming to this class.” Both students reported positive feelings regarding the class.

Student 2 felt that the class was necessary for new students and advocated for educating incoming students about the need for the course:

I think the thing is that, the students should be aware that they should take SSC. It's very important because it makes us grow. Students, teenagers coming from high school, we don't know what we're landing into, so this is kind of like to prepare, if you fixing to move out of your parents' house you have to pay rent, get a job, work, purchase books. These are very important for us, and this is just a nice way. This is just a good program, and I think every student ... I think they should never take us out because it really helps me how to ask for help, work, have a job, how to fill the resume, and how to investigate the career you want. Some of the benefits she noted were preparing students for success in their college classes, learning how to approach new experiences in college, and preparing for a future career.

Student 23 thought that the course was well-structured: “I wouldn't take anything out of the class... I feel like everything that's in there for a reason. It's well put together... I really like that.” Student 23 felt that all the concepts taught in the course were important, and student 1 pointed out specific skills that were personally meaningful:

It's actually a good way to start off your college year... because if you've taken SSC, it's gonna help you out to succeed more in your classes. Let you know about... how to pick up your grades, time management, all the essentials that you need for college.

Student 24 agreed that the course was helpful but made a suggestion that the class should be offered sooner: “If I was to have this class in high school, I would have had really good grades and liked my senior year.” He expressed the belief that earlier exposure to the concepts and skills taught in the course could have an impact on student success more quickly.

Two of the students mentioned recommending the course to others. Student 10 said, “It's very helpful, and you're not wasting your money. Like my best friend, she's going to college next semester and I'm like, "If you have choices, put the SSC. It's a great one." Student 12 also recommended the course:

I believe without this SSC class, I don't think I would've made it. To be honest, I don't think I would have. I'm about to cry now. I told my daughter, you taking that class soon as you graduate. You come into Lantern CC and take this course. I will let her start reading my book. She graduates next year.

These two students were excited to share their experience with friends and family members who they felt could also benefit from the course.

Students who reported confusion about the purpose of the course or who felt they were required to take the course due to a failure or shortcoming reported feelings of anxiety, sadness, low self-confidence, low self-efficacy, and resentment. Students who received a short overview of the course and an explanation of the benefits they could expect from the class described positive feelings when beginning the semester. Approximately one-third of the students reported an improvement in their opinion of the course and its effectiveness over the course of the semester.

### **Summary of Findings**

The CASES survey was distributed online to students who were enrolled in the student success course (SSC). The majority of the students who responded to the survey

were female 70.5% (n = 237), and the largest group in terms of ethnicity identified as Hispanic or Latina/o 63.0% (n = 215). The age range that represented the most participants, 81.2% (n = 277), was the 18 – 24-year-old group. Students enrolled in three classes made up 42.5% (n = 145) of the total group, and most of the students were in their first semester of college 86.5% (n = 295). Considering full-time, part-time, and self-employment together, 52.9% (n = 180) of the students surveyed work while attending college.

The overall means from the beginning-of-semester CASES questions were compared to the end-of-semester CASES questions using a paired samples t-test. A repeated-measures ANOVA was used to assess the influence of gender or first-generation college student status on students' perceptions of academic self-efficacy as they reflected back to the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester. The results of this test showed that a statistically significant relationship did exist between students' sense of academic self-efficacy and the SSC, but significance was not found for the effects of gender or first-generation status.

The qualitative, semi-structured interviews included 26 participants. Important themes that emerged were students' desire for an interactive, fun classroom environment and friendly, supportive teachers. Development of self-awareness, learning new student success behaviors, building friendships and a sense of community were also important to the students.

Important skills the students reported learning were time management, goal-setting, motivation, responsibility, and perseverance. Students' initial opinions about the course were mostly negative. They were unsure of the purpose of the course, resented being required to take the course before they could begin "real" courses and felt that the

advisors who helped them register were dismissive of their questions regarding the course.

At the beginning of the semester, students' opinions about their own academic self-efficacy were mixed. Some students felt confident and had success strategies in place, some were fearful and anxious about failure, and some began confidently but faded under the pressure of difficult courses and the stress of balancing school, work, and life roles. Real-life case studies and examples and a sense of increased self-awareness and confidence were aspects of the SSC that students found helpful.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter consisted of a discussion of the results of data analysis from a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. A negative significant statistical relationship between students' academic self-efficacy and the student success course was shown. Important themes students identified were preferred characteristics of classroom environment and teaching style, development of self-awareness, changes in student success behaviors, building friendships and community, self-efficacy, and evolving opinions of the SSC. In the next chapter, the researcher will compare the results of this study to results from previous studies, and the implications of this study and future recommendations for further study will be discussed.

CHAPTER V:  
SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to compare students' sense of academic self-efficacy at the beginning of their first semester in college and after they completed a student success course (SSC), to determine if gender and first-generation college student status influenced academic self-efficacy, and to ascertain which aspects of the SSC were the most impactful to students' academic self-efficacy. Community college students typically face unique challenges that can serve as barriers to their college success; for example, many community college students are the first in their family to attend college, have additional responsibilities outside of academics, and may not be sufficiently academically prepared (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014). Often, students have little confidence in their academic self-efficacy due to difficulties they experienced in earlier academic situations (Taggart & Crisp, 2010). Colleges and universities have developed student success courses as a way to prepare students academically and emotionally to be successful college students. This study focused specifically on the unique experience of students who were placed into a non-credit student success course designed specifically for developmental education students.

**Summary of Results**

Research question one regarding the differences in perceptions of first-time-in-college students' self-efficacy before a student success course and after completing a student success course was answered using a post-then-pre design in which students took the College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES) survey at the end of the semester. In the survey, students were first asked to reflect back to their level of academic self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester; they completed the CASES questions a second time to evaluate their current academic self-efficacy levels near the end of their student

success course. The total mean of the beginning-of-semester reflection responses and the total mean of the end-of-semester responses were compared using a paired samples t-test. The t-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference between students' sense of academic self-efficacy (as measured by the CASES survey) before and after completing a student success course; however, the total mean of the students' self-efficacy levels declined during the semester. This is an interesting result due to the body of research that shows student success courses to be consistently proven effective (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Barefoot, 2004b; Cuseo, 2009; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Kuh, 2005; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, most previous studies have not focused on student success courses for developmental education, and additional aspects of self-efficacy perceptions, ability-level grouping, and institutional policies and procedures contribute to the knowledge gained from the results of this study.

The second research question regarding whether gender or first-generation college student status influenced students' perceptions of their academic self-efficacy was answered using results from a repeated-measures ANOVA. The repeated-measures ANOVA results showed significant differences in time with a within-subjects factor, but a statistically significant difference was not found for the interaction of time, gender, and first-generation status.

For research question three regarding what students perceived as the most impactful aspects of student success courses on their academic self-efficacy, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 students who were enrolled in the student success course during the semester being studied. During the semi-structured interviews, the most popular themes discussed by the students were their interpretations of the ideal classroom environment and teaching style, activities and coursework that helped them develop a sense of self-awareness, student success behaviors that they learned and began

to use, aspects of the course that helped them build friendships and a sense of classroom community, evaluations of their academic self-efficacy, and the evolution of their opinions of the SSC.

### **Calibration**

Carifio & Rhodes (2002) noted that while an individual may be confident overall, he or she may not be confident in specific situations or with particular skills; conversely, people may feel less confident overall yet have high levels of self-belief in some areas. As students progress through the student success course, they come into contact with new skills and concepts that they must master in order to be successful in their college classes. They are likely to find some of these new skills more challenging than others. An important aspect of the overall decline in self-efficacy perceptions found in this study is related to students comparing their initial expectations of the difficulty level of college to their real-life experiences throughout the course of the semester.

Colosi & Dunifon (2006) noted that when using a post-then-pre design to administer a survey, a possible complication is that participants often feel they know more than they actually do at the beginning of a program, and after developing an understanding of how much they still need to learn, will score themselves lower in confidence at the end of the course. They went on to state that when measuring self-perceptions of participants, the post-then-pre design is an appropriate model (Colosi & Dunifon, 2006). Five of the 26 interview participants in this study specifically referred to having high levels of self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester only to experience a decline as they discovered how difficult college was. Bandura (2005) refers to this concept as “calibration”: If students’ expectations of success do not match their results after they apply effort to accomplish a task, they are likely to experience a decline in motivation and self-efficacy. For students who experience this difficulty with calibration,

it is important for them to build an understanding of the growth mindset. Understanding that their academic ability is not fixed and can be developed could be a source of empowerment and motivation.

### **Active Learning and Student Engagement**

Another important theme that emerged was the students' positive response to active learning. Analysis of the data from the interviews showed that students viewed the SSC favorably and considered the course helpful when they were actively engaged in activities in class, when they were given opportunities to be social and build relationships, and when they felt their teacher was friendly and enthusiastic about helping them. Tinto (2014) also argued for an increase in engaging student coursework such as cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning as a way to ensure retention of students who were at risk of dropping out. Maintaining a focus on active learning strategies in the classroom is a way to build rapport and increase student engagement. Barefoot (2004b) found that a great deal of students report boredom with their classes, fail to see the relevance of many courses required during the first year, do not like lecture-based courses, and prefer personal instruction from professors who build relationships with them and provide timely, formative feedback. The use of active learning and engagement techniques benefit the students in a multitude of ways.

### **Faculty Interaction and Teaching Style**

Students who perceive their instructors to be caring have a higher rate of degree completion and persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students prefer professors who show an interest in them personally and are friendly and engaging. Twelve of the 26 interview participants discussed the demeanor of their professors: students who described their instructor as friendly, funny, active, invested, or entertaining characterized their classroom environment in a more positive light. Kuh et al. (2008) found that important

variables that affected student success were peer and faculty interactions, students' perceptions of their educational environments, and the effort students put into their academic pursuits. Students are more likely to expend academic and emotional effort in environments where they feel supported and valued. The ability of faculty to create a rapport with students is essential. Astin (1993) concluded that the amount of one-on-one interaction between faculty and student had a strong effect on student development. Maintaining a focus on these aspects of teaching and learning can help to encourage student success and satisfaction.

### **Responding to Barriers**

According to Chemers, Hu, & Garcia (2001), students' level of self-efficacy affects whether they see barriers or difficulties as challenges or threats; students make this decision based on their interpretation of whether they have the relevant knowledge, available outside help, required personality characteristics, support networks, and academic preparation required to successfully navigate a given situation. Students who judge themselves as lacking in those categories are more likely to view difficult circumstances as a threat and respond by withdrawing or reducing the levels of academic and emotional effort they expend. Bandura (1989) also discussed the likelihood that low self-efficacy will cause individuals to give up more easily when faced with difficulties or barriers. He asserted that to build self-efficacy, students need to experience mastery of difficult tasks, be persuaded through social means of their ability to succeed, and observe people they feel are similar to them who are persistent and achieve success (Bandura, 1989). The effects of students comparing themselves to others are varied, impacted by students' experiences and perceptions of their self-efficacy, and are relevant to the discussion of how to best structure a student success course in order to effectively serve students.

## **Comparisons with Other Students**

Eleven of the 26 interview participants described comparing themselves to other students as a way to determine their own beliefs about their academic self-efficacy. Bandura (2005) noted that as students enter transitional periods (such as beginning college) they compare themselves to other students; individuals who feel they are performing at a lower level than other students typically experience a decline in their perceptions of academic ability. This common behavior of comparing oneself to others can be additionally impacted by the way in which course placement is explained by college staff and faculty.

Five of the 26 students interviewed discussed feeling a reduced sense of academic self-efficacy due to the SSC being characterized as a result of poor performance or failure on the TSI. Conversely, the students who were offered a positive explanation for the requirement of the course approached it with a positive mindset. Bandura (2005) stated that ability-level distinctions in grouping weaken students' self-efficacy in the lower-ability groups, and students who are placed into lower groups might feel demoralized and not perform as highly as is possible even if they have a healthy sense of self-efficacy. Students who feel a course they are taking will be beneficial to them personally are more likely to invest effort and have a higher level of motivation during the semester (Downing, 2017). The messaging involved in relating the benefits of the course to future students should be positive, and emphasis should be placed on how the course will help the student.

A related topic to students' comparisons of themselves with other students is the perception that developmental education (DE) courses are not "real" college courses and that students are placed in them because they are not as prepared for college as other students are. Gardner (2000) attributed this characterization of developmental education

courses to the fact that DE courses traditionally have served only students who experience difficulties and who are disproportionately members of marginalized groups, and he asserts that there is a negative stigma attached to developmental education courses, students, and educators. A way to avoid the negative impact of the perception of the DE student success course is to eliminate the two main aspects that contribute to these interpretations: ability grouping and the lack of transferrable college-level credit for the course. Higbee (2005) asserted that developmental education should not focus solely on students who are underprepared; she advocated for having DE faculty teach credit-level courses using their skills in active learning techniques, student engagement practices, academic skill development, instructional technology, and civic involvement in order to benefit all students. She further stated that an effective approach would be to build on the strengths of students at every level rather than assuming at-risk students have deficits. Gardner (2000) also advocated for offering DE services for students at all levels. By offering the same student success course for all students, regardless of their placement on the TSI, the two main threats to students' self-efficacy would be eliminated.

Colleges that currently separate student success courses into DE and college-ready courses may consider changes to organizational structures and policies in an attempt to address these concerns. Bandura (2005) suggested applying the knowledge of self-efficacy's impact on motivation and the external factors that affect self-efficacy to redesign classroom and campus structures, instructor training and development, and institutional policies. Innovation and evidence-based practices are tools that institutions can use to meet students' needs comprehensively and effectively.

Additional researchers have advocated for similar structures. Hunter and Linder (2005) suggested ensuring student success courses are effective by offering college-level academic credit for the SSC, requiring ongoing collaboration between faculty and staff in

designing and teaching the SSC, focusing on an active learning approach in the course, requiring initial and continuous staff development for SSC instructors, rewarding SSC instructors in some way, and frequently evaluating the effectiveness of the course and sharing the results with the college as a whole.

### **Implications for Practice**

Based on the findings from this study and related research, suggestions for adaptations of policies, procedures, and course design follow.

#### **Active Learning and Student Engagement**

A focus on promoting active learning and student engagement strategies has the potential to greatly improve retention and success rates. Students who had a positive experience in their SSC had higher achievement in GPA, attendance, in-class involvement, and interaction with faculty; they also reported more satisfaction with their college experience as a whole (Cuseo, 2009). Since students reported feeling more motivated in engaging classes, a great number of opportunities for professional development should be presented for college faculty so the faculty members can continually learn new, effective tools for active engagement in the classroom. Much research exists that argues for extensive andragogical training for higher education professors and a focus on creating educational environments which promote active student engagement (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 2014). A change in the traditional professional development format would also be effective and is described below.

Since learners learn best by participating actively and solving problems, professional development for instructors should be conducted in the same way. Offering faculty an opportunity to try active learning strategies before using them in class would foster increased buy-in from the faculty. This type of active staff development would be most effective if it was part of a college-wide plan to improve instruction and student

success and was used in an intentional and evidence-based manner for all professional development activities. Rewarding faculty members who successfully use innovative engagement techniques and active learning strategies would be an added incentive for faculty to incorporate the interactive methods they learn in their classrooms.

### **Positive Explanation of SSC**

An important modification would be to offer a staff development for advisors, counselors, admissions staff, and faculty to illustrate how the purpose, benefits, course structure, and helpful aspects of the SSC could be communicated in a positive way to students. The improved messaging may cause students to have a greater likelihood of entering the SSC with a positive attitude and an expectation of having a helpful, meaningful experience in the class.

Convertino & Graboski-Bauer (2018) assert that deficit beliefs about underrepresented or minority groups (who are typically over-represented in developmental education) can become deeply ingrained in a college culture and affect not only procedures and operations but also students, their families, and the academic options available to those students. Addressing these beliefs and affirming a system-wide message of equity, inclusion, and a celebration of diversity is essential in developing a college culture in which all students, regardless of background or college-entrance-exam score, are supported and their aspirations validated. Ongoing, required professional development focusing on avoiding negative or demoralizing characterizations of entrance testing results as “failing” or communicating a deficit model of student attributes would help to create a college environment in which students may be more likely to avoid drawing a negative conclusion about their ability to be successful in college.

### **Changes to SSC Structure**

To avoid the negative effects of ability grouping and deficit model assumptions, all entering first-time-in-college students should take the same student success course. Students should earn transferrable college credit for the course. It would also be helpful to assess the effects of offering the course before students begin college or during a more compact time period at the beginning of the first semester so that students could apply important content they learned to their complete academic experience starting earlier in the semester.

Some colleges are combining student success courses with gateway courses by offering freshman-level courses with embedded instructional support in student success strategies, thereby eliminating the separate SSC. When incorporating that particular model, it is important to retain the rigorous, ongoing training in effectively teaching student success courses, the emphasis on active learning strategies, and ensuring that the intentional focus on the student success strategies themselves remains an active goal (Higbee, 2005; Hunter & Linder, 2005). When choosing instructors for gateway courses with embedded student success instruction, it would be most effective to assign instructors with strong backgrounds in teaching student success courses as well as subject-area expertise.

### **Changing Structures in Developmental Education**

Restricting developmental education to a small subset of the student population both harms students' academic self-efficacy if they have been placed in a lower level course and excludes students from receiving additional help if they have been deemed "college-ready" (Bandura, 2005; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). Expanding developmental education opportunities and access to all students at the college would benefit students who place at lower and higher levels on initial placement assessments

(Gardner, 2000; Higbee, 2005). This involves offering courses with supplemental instruction for gateway courses; recruiting developmental education professors to conduct staff development, provide curriculum design support, and teach gateway courses; and ensuring that instructional support is offered to all students and characterized in a positive manner rather than a deficit model.

Using resources, such as faculty, strategically can contribute to achieving goals related to student success, retention, and equity. Due to the predominance of developmental educators who have degrees in education and strong backgrounds in pedagogy, active learning, curriculum design, differentiating instruction for different students, and reaching struggling students, Gardner (2000) advocates for DE faculty serving as staff development specialists and training faculty, especially those who teach gateway courses, in effective teaching methods and student learning strategies. This blends well with established research in student involvement theory and effective teaching practices.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Because this study focused on a required course at a community college, further study could be performed at institutions that offer an elective SSC. Interviewing students from other colleges regarding what they find to be the most impactful aspects of the SSC on their sense of academic self-efficacy would lend more weight to any patterns that emerge and would likely reveal additional impactful aspects of the SSC.

The course examined in this study was a 16-week course offered during the first semester of college. Studying additional semester lengths and placement within the college sequence would offer helpful information. It would be interesting to determine if a shorter semester, possibly offered before students begin their first semester would be

more beneficial by preparing students to deal with the challenges of college before they began their first semester.

The most meaningful results would likely be found by studying a student success course that was taught by developmental education faculty, was required for all entering freshmen, and was not based on college entrance exam scores. Further study would also be helpful in course pairings that combine student success courses with gateway academic courses. It would be useful to study the differences between stand-alone student success courses and academic courses that incorporate student success strategies.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine the relationship between students' sense of academic self-efficacy and completing a student success course. The influences of gender and first-generation-college-student status were tested as well. Additionally, student perceptions of the most impactful aspects of the student success course were studied using semi-structured interviews. This study focused on a required semester-length non-credit student success course for developmental education students.

In chapter 2, the need for interventions for community college students was discussed. Due to unique challenges and barriers to success, community college students typically need support meeting the rigorous challenges of college (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014; Taggart & Crisp, 2010). Students who are placed into developmental education often have unique needs (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005). They may also face additional challenges to their academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 2005; Gardner, 2000).

The data analysis for the CASES survey showed a statistically significant relationship between the student success course and students' sense of academic self-

efficacy, but the results revealed a decline in students' assessment of their academic self-efficacy. The student interviews indicated that students found the course to be helpful overall. Students reported a desire for information about the SSC during registration, engaging and active classroom environments, help with certain student success skills, and caring and friendly professors.

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APPENDIX A:  
SURVEY COVER LETTER

September 2017  
Dear SSC Student:

Hello! You are being asked to complete the College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES) survey. The purpose of this survey is to examine students' belief in their ability to do well in college. The data obtained from this study will help the researcher to improve the SSC based on students' feedback.

Please try to answer all the questions. Filling out the attached survey is entirely voluntary, but answering each question will make the survey most useful. This survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete, and all of your responses will be kept completely confidential. No obvious undue risks will be endured, and you may stop your participation at any time. In addition, you will also not benefit directly from your participation in the study.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated, and your willingness to participate in this study is implied if you proceed with completing the survey. Your completion of the College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES) survey is not only greatly appreciated, but invaluable. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact Professor Emily Peebles or Dr. Renee Lastrapes.

Thank you so much for your help and participation!

Sincerely,  
Professor Emily Peebles

## APPENDIX B:

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### Informed Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in the research project described below. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or you may decide to stop your participation at any time. Should you refuse to participate in the study or should you withdraw your consent and stop participation in the study, your decision will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be otherwise entitled. You are being asked to read the information below carefully, and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

Title: "The Impact of Student Success Courses on First-Time-in-College Students' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy"

Student Investigator: Emily Peebles, M.S.

Faculty Sponsor: Renee Lastrapes, Ph.D.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY** The purpose of this research is to investigate how the SSC course affects how students feel about how well they will do in college. We are also hoping to determine specific aspects of the SSC that students feel are helpful as well as aspects students feel would be helpful to add to the course.

**PROCEDURES** We are asking you to help us learn more about how students feel about their ability to do well in college. We are inviting you to take part in this research project. If you accept, you will be asked to take part in an interview with the researcher. This interview will be conducted by Professor Emily Peebles. The research procedures are as follows: The interview will start with Emily Peebles, the researcher, making sure that you are comfortable. She can also answer questions that you might have about the research. Then Professor Peebles will ask you questions about your perceptions of your academic abilities and goals and give you time to share your knowledge. The questions will be about how you feel about being a new college student, your impressions of the SSC and the college culture, aspects of the SSC that you find helpful, and suggestions for improvement of the SSC. You do not have to share any knowledge that you are not comfortable sharing. The interview will take place in the researcher's private office, and no one else but the participant and the researcher will be present unless you would like someone else to be there. The entire interview will be recorded, but no-one will be identified by name on the recording. The recording will be digitized and saved to a cloud-based password-protected storage system and a password-protected server. Paper copies of notes or consent forms will be digitized (scanned to PDF files) and saved to the cloud and a password-protected server, and the paper copies will be immediately shredded.

**EXPECTED DURATION** The total anticipated time commitment will be approximately one hour.

**RISKS OF PARTICIPATION** There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this project.

**BENEFITS TO THE SUBJECT** There is no direct benefit received from your participation in this study, but your participation will help the investigator better understand how to improve SSC.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS** Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. The data collected from the study will be used for educational and publication purposes; however, you will not be identified by name. Student responses will be aggregated (summarized in groups), and all identifying characteristics will be removed. Students will be asked to provide their college ID number. This information will be digitized, and along with all digitized notes and recordings will be saved to the cloud and a password-protected server. Paper copies of notes or consent forms will be digitized (scanned to PDF files) and saved to the cloud and a password-protected server, and the paper copies will be immediately shredded. For federal audit purposes, the participant's documentation for this research project will be maintained and safeguarded by the Student Investigator for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. After that time, the participant's documentation may be destroyed.

**FINANCIAL COMPENSATION** There is no financial compensation to be offered for participation in the study.

**INVESTIGATOR'S RIGHT TO WITHDRAW PARTICIPANT** The investigator has the right to withdraw you from this study at any time.

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS** The investigator has offered to answer all your questions. If you have additional questions during the course of this study about the research or any related problem, you may contact the Student Investigator, Emily Peebles, M.S., at phone number xxxxx or by email at xxxxxxx. The Faculty Sponsor, Renee Lastrapes, Ph.D., may be contacted at phone number xxx-xxx-xxx or by email at xxxxxx.

**SIGNATURES:** Your signature below acknowledges your voluntary participation in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator(s), institution(s), sponsor(s) or granting agency(ies) from their professional and ethical responsibility to you. By signing the form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, and explanation of risks or benefits have been explained to you. You have been allowed to ask questions and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You have been told who to contact if you have additional

questions. You have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the Student Researcher or Faculty Sponsor. You will be given a copy of the consent form you have signed.

Student's printed name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this project and the items listed above with the subject.

Printed name and title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE (UHCL) COMMITTEE FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS HAS REVIEWED AND APPROVED THIS PROJECT. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UHCL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (281-283-3015). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT UHCL ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. (FEDERALWIDE ASSURANCE # FWA00004068

APPENDIX C:

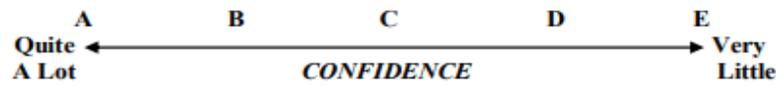
COLLEGE ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY SCALE (CASES)

**College Questionnaire**

*DIRECTIONS.* We are interested in learning more about you to help us improve our program. Your responses are strictly confidential and will not be shown to others. Do not sign your name. We hope you will answer each item, but there are no penalties for omitting an item.

Male\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_ Age\_\_\_\_  
Estimate your current grade point average\_\_\_\_\_

**How much confidence do you have about doing each of the behaviors listed below? Circle the letters that best represent your confidence.**



- | Lots      | Little |   |
|-----------|--------|---|
| A B C D E |        | 1. Taking well-organized notes during a lecture.                          |
| A B C D E |        | 2. Participating in a class discussion.                                   |
| A B C D E |        | 3. Answering a question in a large class.                                 |
| A B C D E |        | 4. Answering a question in a small class.                                 |
| A B C D E |        | 5. Taking "objective" tests (multiple-choice, T-F, matching)              |
| A B C D E |        | 6. Taking essay tests.  |
| A B C D E |        | 7. Writing a high quality term paper.                                     |
| A B C D E |        | 8. Listening carefully during a lecture on a difficult topic.             |
| A B C D E |        | 9. Tutoring another student.  |
| A B C D E |        | 10. Explaining a concept to another student.                              |
| A B C D E |        | 11. Asking a professor in class to review a concept you don't understand. |
| A B C D E |        | 12. Earning good marks in most courses.                                   |
| A B C D E |        | 13. Studying enough to understand content thoroughly.                     |
| A B C D E |        | 14. Running for student government office.                                |
| A B C D E |        | 15. Participating in extracurricular events (sports, clubs).              |
| A B C D E |        | 16. Making professors respect you.  |
| A B C D E |        | 17. Attending class regularly.  |
| A B C D E |        | 18. Attending class consistently in a dull course.                        |
| A B C D E |        | 19. Making a professor think you're paying attention in class.            |
| A B C D E |        | 20. Understanding most ideas you read in your texts.                      |
| A B C D E |        | 21. Understanding most ideas presented in class.                          |
| A B C D E |        | 22. Performing simple math computations.                                  |
| A B C D E |        | 23. Using a computer.   |
| A B C D E |        | 24. Mastering most content in a math course.                              |
| A B C D E |        | 25. Talking to a professor privately to get to know him or her.           |
| A B C D E |        | 26. Relating course content to material in other courses.                 |
| A B C D E |        | 27. Challenging a professor's opinion in class.                           |
| A B C D E |        | 28. Applying lecture content to a laboratory session.                     |
| A B C D E |        | 29. Making good use of the library.                                       |
| A B C D E |        | 30. Getting good grades.  |
| A B C D E |        | 31. Spreading out studying instead of cramming.                           |
| A B C D E |        | 32. Understanding difficult passages in textbooks.                        |
| A B C D E |        | 33. Mastering content in a course you're not interested in.               |

*Thanks for your help!*

APPENDIX D:  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*Semi-Structured Interview Questions*

1. How did you feel about taking the SSC at the beginning of the semester?
2. At the beginning of the semester, how did you feel about your potential for academic success in all of your classes?
3. How would you describe your SSC?
4. Describe the most helpful aspects of the SSC.
5. What are the most important things you have learned in the SSC?
6. How has your opinion about your potential for academic success changed since the beginning of the semester?
7. Which topics or concepts should be added to the SSC?
8. Which topics or concepts should not be taught in the SSC?
9. What suggestions do you have about how to improve the SSC?
10. What would you like others to know about the SSC?