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The University of Southern Mississippi

EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF A YEAR OF SERVICE IN AMERICORPS ON
MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ATTENDING COLLEGE

by

Jessica Lucky Roberts

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2010

ABSTRACT

EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF A YEAR OF SERVICE IN AMERICORPS ON MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ATTENDING COLLEGE

by Jessica Lucky Roberts

December 2010

This study had two purposes. First, this study sought to determine how a year of service in the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) AmeriCorps program impacted members' perceptions and attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on members' motivation to attend college. Second, this study sought to determine if a year of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program impacted members' decisions to use the Segal Education Award they earn upon the successful completion of their year of service. Through the use of a survey instrument, pre-data were collected from the ARM members near the beginning of their program year in August 2009, and post-data were collected from the same ARM members near the end of their program year in May 2010. The data collected from the two survey administrations were compared to determine if there were any significant differences for the variables measured. The largest percentage of respondents were African American (79.6%) or Caucasian (18.4%), and the majority of the participants were female (93.5%). The majority of the respondents indicated they were first-year members (61.3%).

The results of the study indicated that members' intentions to use the Segal Education Award were statistically significantly higher at the end of the program year when compared to their intentions to use it at the beginning of the program year. The study also revealed that first-year members' attitudes toward the non-monetary value of a college degree were statistically significantly higher at the end of the program year. The study also revealed that pre-scores for all of the constructs measured for both first- and second-year members were already high at the beginning of the program year. Although there were increases in post-scores, the high pre-scores decreased the likelihood of finding statistically significant differences between pre- and post-scores.

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A Dissertation

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Susan A. Siltanen

December 2010

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my brother and best friend, Jason, who left this Earth unexpectedly on April 6, 1995—a day that forever altered the course of my life. Words cannot express what I would give to have you here with me to celebrate the completion of this doctoral journey. I hope that you are looking down and smiling, proud of your little sister's accomplishment, and I hope I have achieved enough for both of us. I cannot wait to see you again and say, *Je t'aime, mon frère!* As long as I am alive, your memory will live on.

It is my hope that others who read this will be inspired to go on and achieve their dreams, in spite of personal life tragedies, for my life is proof of God's immense mercy and grace!

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I would first of all like to recognize my Savior, Jesus Christ, for blessing me so tremendously on this journey, and in my life as a whole. I take none of the credit for my life's accomplishments, for without Him, I can do nothing. Finishing this process successfully is a testament to His tremendous grace and mercy.

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CHAPTER I

PROBLEM

Introduction

This chapter serves as an overview to help provide a solid framework for this study. First, background information is offered to lay the foundation for the study, followed by the statement of the problem and purpose for undertaking this study. Next, the chapter continues with the research questions that guide this study as well as definitions of terms and delimitations and assumptions regarding participants' responses to this study. The chapter concludes with a justification for the study and a brief synopsis of the pertinent information related to this research project.

Background

The value of a college degree in today's post-industrial society is undeniable. In fact, "a post-industrial society makes higher education—human capital—the foundation for position and privilege in society" (Bell, 1999, p. *lxv*). Furthermore, higher education is so highly regarded in the United States that it spends more of its education budget on post-secondary education than most other industrialized countries (Knox, Lindsay, & Kolb, 1993), and the payoff is substantial in more ways than one. For a nation, a solid national economy is highly contingent upon the educational attainment of its citizens (Seidman, 2005). On an individual level, much research suggests that the typical monetary rate of return for an individual who earns a bachelor's degree ranges from 11% to 14% per year when compared to an individual with only a high school diploma (Knox

et al., 1993). This translates into lifetime earnings of more than \$700,000 when compared to the lifetime earnings of high school graduates alone (Cantu, 2003). Yet, the benefits a nation and its individuals gain from a college education are not solely monetary. On a societal level, college-educated citizens are more likely to vote, are more aware of political processes, and are more involved in community service (Nolin & Chapman, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). On an individual level, college graduates enjoy other intangible benefits such as job security and mobility, better access to job information, an increase in professional contacts, and higher job satisfaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) as well as other benefits not related to employment like quality of life, physical and emotional health, and moral development (Rowley & Hurtado, 2003). These findings reiterate the two basic reasons that most Americans pursue post-secondary degrees, according to Knox et al. (1993), which include the following:

First, they want degrees to get jobs, opportunities to enter professional careers, a better chance in the job market, higher incomes—utilitarian outcomes. Second, they want the kinds of individual changes the graduation speakers talk about—intellectual growth and change, skills and attitudes and values reflecting the “educated” person, commitment to helping others and improving the community. (p. xviii)

Therefore, as a result of the aforementioned findings, it is apparent that it is indeed in the nation’s best interest to promote higher education to its citizens.

Statement of the Problem

Even with the importance placed on the value of a college education in this country, it is apparent that the United States has still fallen behind in promoting higher education to its citizens. According to a 2005 American Community Survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau, less than a third of American citizens aged 25 and over has earned a bachelor's degree. The same survey revealed that the statistics are even lower for many Southern states, such as Louisiana and Arkansas. The percentage of citizens over the age of 25 who hold a bachelor's degree in those states is 20% or less. Even more alarming, Mississippi is nearly at the bottom of the list—ranked 49th precisely, being placed ahead of only one state—with merely 18.7% of its citizens aged 25 and over holding bachelor's degrees. Furthermore, some research reports that the number of Americans earning college degrees is expected to decrease. A 2005 report released by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education projects that for the first time in American history, post-secondary educational attainment is slated to stagnate or even decrease over the next 15 years, which will have significant implications for the U. S. economy (Kelly, 2005). The report attributes the decrease in education to shifts in demographic trends that project that the number of minorities, who are less likely to earn college degrees, will soon comprise a significant portion of the United States working population. According to the report, the problem for America, however, is that a less-educated workforce means a lessened ability to compete in a global economy, especially since post-secondary attainment is now

significantly increasing in countries like China and India. The report argues that if these trends persist, the inflation-adjusted per capita income in the United States could decrease by 2% by the year 2020—a stark contrast to the 40% increase in per capita income from 1980-2000. The report suggests that one of the remedies to increasing post-secondary educational attainment is to offer more financial aid to lower-income students. Yet, with diminishing and unpredictable state funding, most post-secondary institutions are facing bleak economic outlooks which may make increasing financial aid quite difficult. In addition, according to Zusman (2005), federal, state, and institutional financial aid has moved away from grants and need-based scholarships over the past 25 years, and loans have taken their places. This trend, Zusman argues, is problematic because it causes low-income students to bear the costs of higher education themselves—something they are reluctant to do. However, since much research concludes that financial aid does indeed increase college enrollment, especially for low-income individuals (Dynarski, 2003; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), it is necessary for higher education stakeholders to devise ways to boost post-secondary participation.

However, special initiatives do exist to help individuals expand their educational opportunities. One of these programs is AmeriCorps. Legislation passed under the Clinton Administration in 1993 established the program to allow individuals to earn scholarships by serving in areas of public need for up to two years (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). Upon successful completion of service, full-time AmeriCorps participants receive a Segal

AmeriCorps Education Award valuing \$4,725 that can be used to pay tuition at qualifying institutions or to repay existing qualified student loans, and with the 2009 passing of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, the education award has increased to \$5,350. Similar to the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, which "sent thousands of men and women to college who otherwise would not have had the opportunity" (Gladieux, King, & Corrigan, 2005, p. 174), the AmeriCorps education award is designed to expand the post-secondary education opportunities of those who participate. Yet, little research exists to determine if the AmeriCorps program is indeed meeting that goal, but the necessity for such research is growing (Astin & Sax, 1998; Griffiths, 1998). Additionally, research on usage of the education award suggests that only a little more than half of participants have used the education award (Selingo, 1998). Furthermore, according to AmeriCorps State Director Judy Stein, education award usage in Mississippi is significantly lower than the usage in other states where AmeriCorps programs exist (personal interview, February 8, 2010). Therefore, it is vital to study AmeriCorps participants so that program officials can gain an understanding of what motivates them to serve and the benefits they gain from service in order to understand how to structure service experiences to better facilitate participation in post-secondary education (Griffiths, 1998). It is also necessary for higher education administrators to understand how to attract finishers of the AmeriCorps program, who can have up to approximately \$10,000 to spend on post-secondary education, to attend their colleges and universities. According to the AmeriCorps website, many colleges

are indeed recognizing the importance of attracting AmeriCorps participants by doing things like matching the education award and/or offering some course credit for their service. This effort can often be attributed to the fact that AmeriCorps alumni often make the ideal students. According to Bruce Campbell, director of graduate admissions at St. Bonaventure University in New York, former AmeriCorps members are leaders, and they have demonstrated a commitment to their communities and finishing projects they start, making them a model population for college recruiting.

For the aforementioned reasons, stakeholders in higher education should understand how participation in an AmeriCorps program can expand post-secondary opportunities for its participants. This particular study sought to determine if a year of service in AmeriCorps influences the participants' attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college, as well as if participants' intentions to use the education award to attain a higher level of education change after a year of service in AmeriCorps. Drawing upon Ajzen's (1991, 2005) theory of planned behavior that attitude serves as an impetus for actual behavior and Miller's and Brickman's (2004) future-oriented motivation theory, this study sought to determine if attitudes and intentions toward the value of attending college change after a year of service in AmeriCorps. According to the theory of planned behavior, the origins of actual behavior begin with attitudes and intentions, and these intentions have high correlations with behavioral

performance. Future-oriented motivation theory provides an explanation for a person's motivation to undertake and complete academic endeavors. Since one of the goals of AmeriCorps is to provide participants with the opportunity and means to pursue post-secondary education, the foundation of this study sought to determine if participants' attitudes toward attending college do indeed change after a term of service in an AmeriCorps program, as indicated by pre- and post-scores on the America Reads-Mississippi College Attitudes Survey Instrument.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was primarily to determine if a year of service in AmeriCorps affects participants' attitudes toward attending college. The discovery of such information would create for AmeriCorps program officials an understanding of the need to determine how to best structure program experiences to foster participants' desires to attend college and subsequently use their earned education award. This study serves to help officials in this particular AmeriCorps program determine if and what types of programmatic changes should be implemented. In addition, results from this study serve as a springboard for discussion between AmeriCorps program officials and higher education administrators to determine the most effective ways to recruit members of this population to attend college.

Research Hypotheses

For the purposes of this study, the following research hypotheses will be tested:

H₁: A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree.

H₂: A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment.

H₃: A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members regarding the influence of service in ARM on their motivation to attend college.

H₄: A statistically significant difference exists between the scores of first-year and second-year ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree.

H₅: A statistically significant difference exists between the scores of first-year and second-year ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment.

H₆: A statistically significant difference exists between the scores of first-year and second-year ARM members regarding the influence of service in ARM AmeriCorps on their motivation to attend college.

H₇: A statistically significant difference exists between ARM members' intentions to use the education award after a year of service in the ARM program.

H₈: A statistically significant difference exists between the intentions of second-year ARM members to use the education award when compared to first-year members.

Definitions of Terms

America Reads-Mississippi (ARM)—the AmeriCorps program founded in 1998 from whence the participants in the study were derived; ARM is administered through five regions housed on five university campuses across Mississippi: Alcorn State University (ASU), Delta State University (DSU), Jackson State University (JSU), Mississippi State University (MSU), and The University of Southern Mississippi (USM). The ARM members in this study served as full-time reading tutors in kindergarten through eighth-grade schools across the state of Mississippi.

AmeriCorps—the national community service program that engages Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to address the most critical problems in the areas of education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008).

Attitudes—a person's set of beliefs that determine whether or not he or she will engage in a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2005).

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)—formerly the Corporation for National Service (CNS); the national corporation that oversees national service initiatives like AmeriCorps (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2008).

Degree Attainment—the earning of a degree beyond the high school diploma; in this study, it refers to a degree higher than the one a participant currently possesses.

Future Goals—the goals that motivate an individual's current behavior in the hopes that it will produce desired achievement in the future (Miller & Brickman, 2004).

Human Capital—an investment in a person's skills and knowledge that leads to increased productivity and higher earnings (Becker, 1964).

Intentions—the motivational factors that indicate how hard people are willing to try, of how much effort they are planning to exert in order to perform a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2005).

Members—the term used by the Corporation for National and Community Service to describe participants in AmeriCorps program; in this study, the term member is used interchangeably with the term participant (Griffiths, 1998).

National Service—“an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, and world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant” (Sherraden, 2001, p. 2).

Segal Education Award—a scholarship awarded to AmeriCorps members who successfully complete their terms of service which can be used to repay qualified student loans, pay the cost of attendance at institutions of higher education, or a combination of the two; beginning in October 2009, the value of

the Education Award for full-time AmeriCorps members increased from \$4,725 to \$5,350.

Term of Service—the amount of time a person spends serving in an AmeriCorps program; members can serve no more than two years but can serve only one year if desired.

Delimitations

This study was limited to ARM AmeriCorps members serving in the five regions: Alcorn State University (ASU), Delta State University (DSU), Jackson State University (JSU), Mississippi State University (MSU), and The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), of the ARM AmeriCorps program during the 2009–2010 program year.

Assumptions

It is the assumption of this research that participants who completed the survey instrument were honest and answered with sincerity. The researcher also assumed that they read the directions and each question carefully before responding.

Justification

In order for a nation to compete in today's global economy, it is necessary for that nation to not only make higher education available to its citizens, but it is also necessary to provide opportunities for its citizens to attain college degrees (Seidman, 2005). A nation that invests in the educational advancement of its citizens not only increases the skills and knowledge of its workforce, it also improves the conditions and standards of living for its people (Schultz, 1961).

Also, as a result of a more skilled workforce, this consequently increases that nation's competitiveness in the global economy (Schultz, 1961). Therefore, it is imperative that higher education administrators know and understand what programs and services are available to its citizens to provide opportunities to earn a college degree. Furthermore, it is even more important to understand why individuals choose to take advantage of opportunities to earn a college degree. An understanding of why individuals seek a higher level of education attainment is vital so higher education administrators can provide the right types of opportunities for people to attend college. Mortenson (2007) summarizes the importance of higher education to a society with the following statement: "The first policy imperative must be to expand higher education participation to advance our economic, social, and political interests in a globally competitive human capital economy" (p. 50).

Considering the significance of Mortenson's assertion, this study sought to determine if service in an AmeriCorps program (America-Reads Mississippi) influenced a person's decision to attend college and to use an education award that each member earned at the conclusion of his/her service to the program. It is imperative that studies, such as this one, be conducted so higher education administrators know and understand what influences individuals to earn college degrees.

Summary

The value of a college degree in today's society is priceless, both to individual citizens and the citizens of a nation. An educated citizenry helps to

sustain a nation in many ways, and as Seidman (2005) contends, “A nation that values and promotes the educational attainment of its citizens is a nation that is concerned with its ability to compete in the global economy” (p. xi). Although there are challenges facing the post-secondary educational attainment of American citizens in the decades to come, there are glimmers of hope in programs like AmeriCorps, whose mission is to expand post-secondary opportunities for its participants. Therefore, it is advantageous for those with a vested interest in American higher education to understand if and how that mission is being achieved. The present study sought to do just that. This chapter has served to lay the groundwork for the background of the current study as well to introduce the statement of the problem and the necessity for a study such as this one. The following chapter will present an in-depth review of the literature related to this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

A significant amount of literature exists for the purpose of illustrating the value of earning a post-secondary education in today's society, including the monetary and non-monetary benefits one can gain from pursuing such an endeavor. In addition, one can find a myriad of research that attempts to explain the factors that influence a person's decision to attend college. However, while there is a significant amount of research surrounding this topic, overall degree attainment in many states of the United States remains alarmingly low, and this is especially true for many states in the South (United States Census Bureau, 2005). Furthermore, the need for a post-secondary degree has increased and will continue to increase in the coming years (Dohm & Shniper, 2007; Zuekle, 2008). Thus, while some research exists to explain the effect of perceived benefits on one's decision to pursue a college degree, it remains a relevant issue to study because before higher education administrators can increase the number of college graduates, they must first know and understand the factors that motivate a person to pursue higher education.

This chapter opens with an overview of the factors that influence a person's decision to attain a post-secondary education. It includes a discussion on the role a person's educational aspirations can have on his or her decision to attend college. Following this discussion, two theoretical perspectives are presented to further explain how one's educational aspirations can translate into

actual behavioral performance (i.e., college attendance). Icek Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991, 2005) illustrates how one's intentions to perform or not perform a given behavior is the most important determiner of performance, while Miller's and Brickman's future-oriented motivation theory explains the effect one's future goals has on his or her motivations to undertake and complete academic endeavors. Next, a discussion of the non-monetary and monetary benefits of college-degree attainment is provided as a supplement to explain the role they play on one's decision to pursue post-secondary endeavors. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the influence participating in a national service program like AmeriCorps can have on college attendance.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories, theory of planned behavior and future-oriented motivation theory, have been selected as part of this study to aid in understanding individuals' motivations to attain a post-secondary education. Both theories are extensively researched and can provide priceless insight to college administrators to help them better understand individuals' attitudes and motivations to further their educational pursuits beyond high school. The first theory, theory of planned behavior, developed by Icek Ajzen (1991, 2005), provides a basis for understanding a model of attitudes and intentions as they relate to behavior change, while the second theory, future-oriented motivation theory, developed by Raymond Miller and Stephanie Brickman (2004), provides a basis for understanding individuals' motivations when it comes specifically to completing educational endeavors. When applied to the context of the current

research, these two theories will provide an in-depth understanding and a solid framework of the underlying principles in this study.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Icek Ajzen (1991, 2005) developed the theory of planned behavior nearly 20 years ago as an extension of a theory he and his colleague developed in the 1970's. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) developed the theory of reasoned action to explain the role an individual's intentions play in performing a given behavior. However, Ajzen (1991, 2005) felt that the original theory was limited in its ability to explain behaviors over which people do not have complete volitional control. Since its creation, the theory of planned behavior has served as the theoretical framework for hundreds of studies in a wide array of behavioral domains (Ajzen, 1991, 2005); yet, Ajzen remains the founding father of the theory and continues as the leading researcher and expert on studies involving the theory of planned behavior.

A psychological model of behavior change, the theory of planned behavior is based on the premise that one's intention to perform or not perform a given behavior is the most important determiner of the action. According to the theory, behavior can be predicted based upon three factors Ajzen (1991, 2005):

1. Whether the individual is in favor of performing the behavior, or what Ajzen calls *attitude*;
2. The amount of social pressure the individual feels to perform the behavior, referred to by Ajzen as the *subjective norm*;

3. Whether the individual believes he or she has control over the behavior in question, also called *perceived behavior control* by Ajzen.

If the aforementioned predictors can be altered, the stronger the individual's intentions become to complete the given behavior. The theory posits that a person's intentions to complete a behavior serve as the defining basis as to whether or not the behavior will be performed. According to Ajzen (1991),

A central factor in the theory of planned behavior is the individual's *intentions* to perform a given behavior. Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much effort they are planning to exert in order to perform the behavior. As a general rule, the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance. (p. 181)

Multiple studies have confirmed the accuracy of the theory of planned behavior in predicting human behavior. In fact, the predictive power of the three determinants in the theory—attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—is highly correlated with intentions, with correlations ranging from .62 to .89, with attitudes and perceived behavioral control proving to be the highest correlates of intentions and subjective norms proving to have the least amount of correlation (Ajzen, 2005). These correlations exist in a wide array of behaviors related to academic performance (Ajzen & Madden, 1986), physical exercise (Courneya, 1995), donating blood (Giles & Cairns, 1996), and many more (Ajzen, 2005).

The path that these intentions take is illustrated in the figure below.

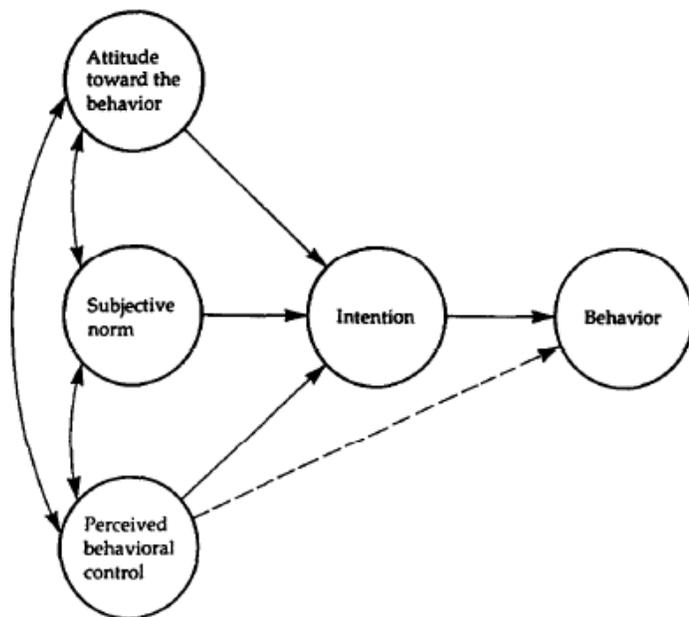


Figure 1. Theory of planned behavior diagram (Ajzen, 1991).

Two important aspects of the theory of planned behavior that must be noted (Ajzen, 2005). First, the theory presumes that perceived behavioral control holds motivational ramifications for intentions. In other words, if a person perceives that they have little behavioral control over a certain behavior due to a lack of resources or opportunities, then it is unlikely that he or she will develop the intention to perform the behavior—even if he or she holds positive attitudes toward the behavior and perceives that his or her societal norms would approve of the behavior. Second, there exists a possible direct link between perceived behavioral control and behavior, suggesting that one's perceived control over a behavior is somewhat stronger in influencing intentions than his or her attitudes toward the behavior or his or her societal influences on the behavior. However, as Ajzen notes, perceived behavior control is often unrealistic because one's

perception is often misinformed due to a lack of information or even the possession of incorrect information about the behavior. On the following pages is a detailed explanation of how the three factors in this theory influence intentions and the performance of actual behaviors.

Attitudes. The theory of planned behavior postulates that attitude toward a behavior is influenced or determined by the beliefs a person holds regarding the consequences of the behavior. Ajzen (2005) calls these behavioral beliefs, and he asserts that each behavioral belief connects a person's behavior with a particular outcome. Put simply, a person's belief regarding the outcome of performing a particular behavior can determine his or her behavioral beliefs and thus influence his or her attitude. To evaluate the outcomes associated with a particular behavior, one must determine the "strength of these associations" (Ajzen, 2005, p. 123). Basically, a person must determine if the anticipated outcomes are worth the effort of performing the behavior by using an expectancy-value model. According to Ajzen,

A person who believes that performing a given behavior will lead to mostly positive outcomes will hold a favorable attitude toward performing the behavior, while a person who believes that performing the behavior will lead to mostly negative outcomes will hold an unfavorable attitude.

(p. 124)

One of the most powerful empirical studies illustrating the effect of behavioral beliefs and attitudes on intentions and actual behavioral performance in an academic setting was conducted in 2002 by Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, and

Williams. The purpose of the study was to determine which behavioral beliefs produced strong enough evaluative outcomes for students to persist until graduation. In the study, African American students completed a theory of planned behavior questionnaire at the beginning of the second year in high school and were then tracked until their eventual graduation three years later. The results illustrated that students' attitudes related to long-term achievement outcomes, such as preparing them for college or careers and helping them achieve something positive in their lives, were the strongest predictors of whether or not the students actually graduated from high school, thus solidifying the notion that attitudes do indeed have a profound effect on one's eventual behavioral performance.

Subjective Norms. The second factor in determining intentions in the theory of planned behavior is subjective norms. Basically, these are an individual's beliefs that certain individuals or referents with whom they associate—usually a person's parents, spouse, friends, or coworkers—will either approve or disapprove of the individual engaging in a particular behavior (Ajzen, 2005). According to Ajzen (2005), these beliefs are called normative beliefs, and they have a symbiotic relationship with subjective norms in that,

People who believe that most referents with whom they are motivated to comply think they should perform the behavior will perceive social pressure to do so. Conversely, people who believe that most referents with whom they are motivated to comply would disapprove of their

performing the behavior will have a subjective norm that puts pressure on them to avoid performing the behavior. (p. 124)

The aforementioned study by Davis et al. (2002) produced strong results regarding normative beliefs and behavior. Using the same group of students, they found that students who experienced strong social pressure to graduate from high school from important referents in their lives were more likely to actually persist until graduation. This provides a strong argument that individuals who perceive that the norms to which they are subjected in their lives will be more likely to complete a desired behavior.

Perceived Behavioral Control. The final aspect of the theory of planned behavior that influences behavior is that of perceived behavioral control. This predictor encompasses a set of beliefs that a person might hold regarding the absence or presence of factors that can stimulate or inhibit the performance of a particular behavior and are referred to as control beliefs by Ajzen (2005). In other words, a person is more likely to perform a given behavior if he or she believes that it is within his or her realm of control to do so. According to the theory, several factors can influence one's perceived behavioral control:

1. Past experiences with the behavior;
2. The observation of friends' and acquaintances' experience with the behavior;
3. Any other factor that can heighten or lessen the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior.

Of course, the more resources and opportunities an individual perceives he or she has access to, the higher his or her perceived behavior control over the behavior will be (Ajzen, 2005).

A 2006 study conducted by Dalgety and Coll on first-year chemistry students' intentions to enroll in second-year chemistry courses revealed that students who consistently believed that they had control over enrolling in chemistry and who held positive normative beliefs about enrolling in chemistry were indeed more likely to enroll in chemistry courses for a second year. Positive factors included the belief that the student possessed the appropriate skills to succeed in the course while the negative factors included the belief that the student was taking other demanding courses that would impede his or her success in this particular course. This study illustrates one of the theory's underlying principles—the more perceived control a person believes he or she has over a particular behavior, the stronger his or her intentions become to perform the behavior and experience success with it.

Behavioral Interventions. While the theory of planned behavior has strong power to predict behavior, it also holds significant ramifications for behavioral interventions (Ajzen, 2005). Simply put, interventions can be put in place to alter the three aforementioned factors that influence behavior. Ajzen (2005) suggests that if one's attitudes, subjective norms, or perceptions of behavioral control can be changed, then the intention to perform a behavior can be altered as well. For example, he draws from a study with Madden to explain how interventions can increase regular attendance in college courses. Ajzen asserts, "We could devise

a persuasive campaign to make their attitudes toward this behavior more favorable, to increase the perceived societal pressure to attend lectures regularly, and/or to raise their perceived behavioral control over performing this behavior” (p. 137). Furthermore, once one decides which of the three beliefs need an intervention, an effective plan must be developed to change the belief. While the theory does not prescribe a set method of intervention, it does suggest techniques such as persuasive communication, face-to-face discussion, and observational modeling. Many studies have confirmed that interventions can indeed be an effective way to change behavior. For example, Bamberg, Ajzen, and Schmidt (2003) successfully implemented interventions to more than double bus use among college students.

When applying the theory of planned behavior to an academic setting, it stands to reason that altering people’s attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control can influence their intentions to attain a post-secondary degree. Certainly, one’s intention to attend college can increase if he or she has a favorable personal evaluation of doing so, if he or she believes that others would approve of it, and if he or she believes that the necessary resources exist to do so.

Future-Oriented Motivation Theory

Miller and Brickman (2004) developed future-oriented motivation theory to explain individuals’ motivations to undertake and complete academic endeavors. Essentially, their theory asserts that future goals spur an individual’s behavior when current actions are believed to help him or her achieve those future goals.

In other words, if someone believes that participating in a current action will produce the attainment of a future goal, then the level of commitment to the current action and the future goal will be high and will motivate that individual into action. They cite the highly-revered theorist, Albert Bandura's social-cognitive theory as a basis for their work. According to Bandura (1986), future goals play an extensive role in human motivation as he illustrates with the following quote:

Many activities are directed toward outcomes projected into the future.

People do things to gain anticipated benefits or to avert future trouble.

The anticipation of distal outcomes provides general direction for choosing activities, and it raises the level of involvement in them. (p. 336)

When applying Bandura's reasoning to an academic setting, the assumption is that if an individual believes that he or she will gain anticipated benefits by earning a post-secondary degree, then he or she will be more likely to participate in that action. Several prerequisites exist, however, when one develops schooling-related future goals. These future goals to which Miller and Brickman (2004) refer must be relevant to the individual's life. They must also be defined specifically by the individual and must provide enough incentive to warrant action to achieve them. Additionally, these goals are typically personal, such as furthering one's education, having a specific career, and making a societal contribution.

According to Miller and Brickman (2004), the development of future goals commences when an individual participates in the goal-identifying process. The two authors maintain that this process is shaped by previous socio-cultural

experiences, such as home, peers, and the media. As a result of these experiences, an individual's values and knowledge about what is possible for them to achieve in the present and future are heavily influenced. Essentially, individuals must assign a reasonable amount of value to a future goal if they plan to attain it, and they must possess adequate knowledge about the feasibility of achieving the goal as well. As Miller and Brickman (2004) assert, "The greater the personal value of the anticipated outcomes and the stronger belief that one is capable of generating the behaviors needed to obtain the outcomes (self-efficacy beliefs), the greater the likelihood that action will be taken to obtain them" (p. 11) and conversely, "If either self-efficacy or outcome expectations are low for a perceived task, the likelihood of that task being selected as the target goal in the present situation decreases" (p. 18). Certainly, if career attainment is the target goal, then many may view college attendance as the behavior or action necessary to facilitate the desired outcome, and the stronger the individual's desire is to reach the target goal, the more intense will be the desire to attend college.

Barriers do exist, however, for individuals when they begin to develop their academic-related future goals. These goals must be viewed as attainable before people try to achieve them, and there are several reasons why people may view them as unattainable. First, Miller and Brickman (2004) echo Bandura's assertion that if an individual views his or her target goals as too far off in the future or too general, then he or she may believe those goals are unattainable. Therefore, in order to achieve future goals, "People have to create for

themselves proximal guides and self-motivators for courses of actions that lead to distal attainments” (Bandura, 1986, p. 336). In other words, individuals must scaffold their broader future goals into more palatable, achievable, and immediate subgoals because the subgoals act as a catalyst for action in that as subgoals are accomplished, the greater the commitment to their future goals (Marcus & Ruvolo 1989 as cited in Miller & Brickman, 2004). Furthermore, immediate subgoals are pragmatic because they provide individuals with a solid plan, or pathway, to achieve their desired future goals (Bandura, 1986). Furthermore, when an individual achieves an immediate subgoal, Miller and Brickman suggest that there is an increased incentive value to achieve the future goal, especially when that subgoal is viewed as instrumental to attaining the future goal. Referring to this concept as instrumentality, Miller and Brickman maintain that an individual must view his or her current action related to achieving the subgoal as valuable or instrumental in the quest to accomplish the future goal.

However, if outcome expectations of the future goals are not perceived as desirable, then individuals will not participate in the actions necessary to achieve them (Miller & Brickman, 2004). For example, in the academic setting, individuals who perceive inequalities in education and employment can be deterred from attempting educational endeavors because they view them as unattainable. In the literature, this is called the glass ceiling effect. This phenomenon occurs when a person believes his or her chance of achieving career or educational success is hindered or minimized because of societal

influences; as a result, the glass ceiling effect is largely an occurrence with minority populations (Harris & Halpin, 2002). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that many minorities perceive that their opportunities for career attainment do not equal those of Caucasians; thus, minorities believe that they will not receive occupational rewards proportionate with their educational credentials. As a result, Harris and Halpin (2002) attribute the glass ceiling effect as a factor that often prevents some minorities from pursuing higher education.

Another barrier to the development of schooling-related future goals is simply a lack of knowledge about what future goals might be possible for individuals to achieve (Miller & Brickman, 2004). Researchers attribute this lack of knowledge to the mere unavailability of related information due to an individual's socio-cultural context, and they assert that it is highly unlikely that individuals from certain socio-cultural contexts have ever encountered information about educational attainment. In an academic setting, this can especially be true for individuals who come from socio-cultural backgrounds that have no prior experience with higher education.

Individuals can also fail to develop academic-related future goals when they experience conflicting value systems that may occur in their socio-cultural contexts (Miller & Brickman, 2004). They assert that some gender-related and ethnic-based stereotypes exist in certain cultures regarding the prescribed roles that certain individuals should play in society. For example, some females may be reared in families that believe the female's societal role is solely to be a

homemaker and caretaker of children. If an individual succumbs to these types of stereotypes, his or her educational aspirations can be limited (Steele, 1997).

In addition, individuals may not develop academic-related future goals because of doubts in their own abilities to achieve the desired goals. Much research suggests that one's beliefs about his or her lack of ability heavily influences career and educational aspirations (Miller & Brickman, 2004). Termed as self-efficacy by Bandura (1986), research has determined that it is highly predictive of academic performance and persistence, achievement motivation, and the extent of career possibilities that one contemplates (Harris & Halpin, 2002). For example, Hackett's research found that female self-efficacy in mathematics is an important predictor of college majors and career choices (as cited in Miller & Brickman, 2004). If an individual lacks confidence in his or her abilities, then academic-related future goals are certainly likely to suffer or diminish altogether.

Finally, much empirical research exists to corroborate future-oriented motivation theory as it pertains to individuals' education-related goals. A brief summary of these studies and their findings is presented below:

- DeBacker and Nelson (1999) found that the more valuable that students viewed their academic tasks in helping them to achieve their future goals, the higher their instrumentality scores were.
- Brickman (1998), Brickman and Miller (2001), and Miller, Debacker, and Greene (1999), found similar positive correlations when they studied the relationship between perceived instrumentality and

students' valuing of academic tasks. The more that students perceived their current academic tasks as instrumental in achieving their future goals, the more they valued them.

- Schutz and Lanehart (1994) found that students' long-term educational goals were positively correlated with achievement.

In summary, an individual's failure to develop an academic-related future goal derives from three basic sources: the values he or she learns from his or her socio-cultural background, a lack of knowledge about what is possible to achieve in the future, and doubts of one's abilities to achieve the goal. According to Miller and Brickman (2004),

To initially commit to any future goal, an individual must know that such a goal exists, believe that it has some value, and believe that he or she is sufficiently competent to have a reasonable chance of reaching the goal and overcoming any perceived obstacles. (p. 27)

Given the evidence, future-oriented motivation theory provides a solid theoretical framework for explaining an individual's decision to develop academic-related future goals. According to Miller and Brickman (2004), if one's immediate actions (e.g., attending college) are aligned with future goals (e.g., career attainment), the more motivated he or she will be to participate in the immediate action. In reference to higher education, when individuals view college attendance as a necessary means of achieving future career goals and increasing socioeconomic status, their motivation to attain a post-secondary degree can greatly increase. Furthermore, the more familiar a person is with a

particular college or university, the more likely he or she will be motivated to attend college there (Kinzie et al., 2004).

Overview of the Factors That Influence College Attendance

No one can deny the value of earning a college degree. The pervading perception in American society is that a college degree is decidedly the chief “nonascribed or noninherited determinant of middle- and upper-middle class occupational and economic status in our society” (Pascarella, 1993, p. xii). In fact, higher education is so revered in the United States that it allocates more of its education budget to post-secondary education than most other industrialized countries (Knox et al., 1993).

A person’s decision to pursue a post-secondary degree is one of the most profound commitments one will make in a lifetime, and it is a multifaceted topic with many factors to consider. It is certainly a decision that not only increases a person’s earning potential, but it also can transform one’s view of the world by promoting intellectual, social, and academic growth (Coy-Ogan, 2009). However, Knox et al. (1993) posit that there are two basic reasons that most Americans pursue post-secondary degrees, and according to them, those reasons include the following:

First, they want degrees to get jobs, opportunities to enter professional careers, a better chance in the job market, higher incomes—utilitarian outcomes. Second, they want the kinds of individual changes the graduation speakers talk about—intellectual growth and change, skills and

attitudes and values reflecting the “educated” person, commitment to helping others and improving the community. (p. xviii)

While a review of research explicitly illustrates the many benefits of a college education (Baum & Payea, 2005), is simply knowing the benefits that can be gained from a post-secondary education enough to cause a person to attend college? Much research suggests that there are a multitude of background factors that influence a person’s intentions to attend college (Coy-Ogen, 2009). Many assert that race, gender, and socioeconomic background are all important factors in educational attainment (Knox et al., 1993). They suggest that socioeconomic status is the strongest of these factors; yet, early status and educational attainment research by Blau and Duncan (1967) suggests that achieved characteristics, such as educational attainment, can supersede ascribed characteristics, such as family background, and that “the chances of upward mobility are directly related to education” (p. 156). In addition, the Wisconsin model of status attainment further corroborates this contention with the conclusion that one’s educational aspirations can most certainly lessen the effects of family background on educational attainment (Sewell & Hauser, 1975). In general, the higher one’s educational aspirations, the higher the probability of college attendance and completion (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). In other words, although background characteristics can influence a person’s intent to attend college, one can certainly overcome those obstacles if the desire to attend college is strong, and that desire is heightened if an individual perceives the personal benefits to be great enough (Bandura, 1986; Miller & Brickman, 2004).

For these reasons, the influence of personal background characteristics on a person's intent to attend college is not a primary focus of the current study, although it is addressed somewhat in the review of literature due to its symbiotic relationship to educational aspirations. Instead, the research in the current study will focus on the influence a person's perceptions of the benefits of a college degree has on one's decision to attend college.

The Non-Monetary Benefits of a College Degree

Although the economic benefits of earning a college degree are undeniable, most Americans view it in terms of its intrinsic rewards in addition to the monetary and status attainment benefits (Knox et al., 1993). Some of the most comprehensive work completed on the individual and societal benefits of post-secondary education was completed over 30 years ago in 1977 by Howard Bowen. While he acknowledged the monetary benefits of higher education, he mostly examined the benefits of higher education that cannot be given a dollar value, a process more difficult to calculate than the monetary benefits. Bowen (1977) claimed the following:

Higher education is concerned with matters of intellect, personality, and value that cannot be rigorously quantified or aggregated by adding up dollar amounts or computing rates of return. To evaluate the diverse outcomes of American higher education presents enormous conceptual and methodological difficulties. (p. 22)

Despite the difficulties in measuring the non-monetary benefits of higher education Rowley and Hurtado (2003) have crafted a definition based on a careful review of the literature. They summarize the definition as follows:

We define the non-monetary benefits of higher education as those individual and social enhancements that can be empirically observed and attributed to the various facets of the collegiate experience not directly attributable to traditional gains associated with human capital...In short, outside of wealth, the non-monetary benefits of higher education constitute a rich quality of life that most of us seek and value in a stable, democratic society. (p. 209)

Responsible Citizens

One of the primary goals of the American higher education system is developing citizens (Knox et al., 1993). Throughout history, educational theorists from Plato to Dewey have encouraged this particular mindset. Ernest Boyer, a modern-day educator, exclaimed that “In the end, the quality of the undergraduate experience is to be measured by the willingness of graduates to be socially and civically engaged” (1987, pp. 278-279). The American higher education system has been instrumental in shaping student attitudes, values, and beliefs (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and this is especially true regarding sociopolitical attitudes and values and civic engagement. According to Robert Putnam (1995), “Education is by far the strongest correlate that I have discovered of civic engagement in all its forms” (p. 672).

One of the most basic roles in responsible citizenship is voting, and the research regarding education and this role is conclusive. The higher the level of education an individual attains, the greater the chances are that that individual will be registered to vote (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to a 1996 National Center for Education Statistics National Household Education Survey, nine of ten Americans with a bachelor's degree or higher reported voting in a national or state election within the past five years, while only half of those with less than a high school diploma reported doing so (Nolin & Chapman, 1997). Yet as fundamental as voting is to responsible citizenship, it is not the lone role of it. Much research confirms that participation in activities beyond voting, such as communicating with public figures and attending public meetings, increases with post-secondary educational attainment (Mortenson, 1999). In addition, individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher are 34% more likely than those with only a high school diploma to be more knowledgeable about how government works (Nolin & Chapman, 1997). They are also more likely to believe they have influence over government and to follow politics in the news (Nolin & Chapman, 1997). These effects extend far beyond college. A study cited in Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that "the sociopolitical attitudes that had changed so strikingly during college and then appeared to stabilize in the adult years persisted into old age" (p. 329).

Another aspect of responsible citizenry is community involvement. Community service has been an important part of preserving the American way of life, especially since it was highlighted in 1836 by Alexis de Tocqueville's

Democracy in America. There is much research to indicate that level of educational attainment influences participation in civic engagement and that the influence is “positive, linear, and consistent” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 278). Ingels, Curtin, Kaufman, Alt, and Chen (2002) found that individuals possessing bachelor’s degrees or higher were two to three times more likely to volunteer with youth, civic, or other community organizations than individuals with no college experience. Additionally, a fourteen-year study conducted by Knox et al. (1993) found that those with bachelor’s degrees were 82% more likely to participate in community groups when compared to those with only a high school diploma. One of the reasons that can be attributed to this phenomenon is the fact that “educational attainment may be related to community involvement in both the short term and long term as the college experience increases understanding of social and economic inequities and thereby interest in action to redress those inequities” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 331).

Well-Roundedness

Higher education has been traditionally viewed as a place to broaden students’ horizons in terms of the activities in which they choose to participate. One of these activities is typically a greater appreciation for the arts, and many studies corroborate this notion. Knox et al. (1993) found that individuals’ participation in literary, art, or musical groups increased with educational attainment. A report published by the Carnegie Foundation concluded that college produces individuals who are more open-minded, cultured, and rational as well as less authoritarian (Rowley & Hurtado, 2003). The report also found

that the aforementioned benefits are far-reaching and impact subsequent generations.

Respect

An additional non-monetary benefit of earning a higher education degree is to gain respect in society. While little research exists in the literature on this topic, it can be a motivating reason to engage in academic pursuits beyond high school. The concept of a college education as a means to enhance social respect and prestige is certainly not new and can be traced as far back as Max Weber, who acknowledged in his writing on the rationalization of education that, for the “cultivated man,” education was a way to sustain a secure position of social respect, while the “specialist type of man” had to earn a college credential in order to be accepted into a position of respect in society (Goyette, 2008), and that principle still pervades today. A modern-day study on first-generation college students found that gaining respect/status and bringing honor to their family ranked among the most important reasons they had decided to attend college (Bui, 2002).

Yet another concept related to respect that influences an individual’s decision to pursue higher education is the concept of relative functionalism. Relative functionalism is the term applied to the process in which an individual evaluates the perceived usefulness of attaining a higher education degree when weighing his or her options against alternative pursuits that are not related to education (Harris & Halpin, 2002). Traditionally, the concept of relative functionalism has been examined in the literature as a means to explain the high

academic achievement of Asian Americans. Researchers theorize that Asian Americans see few examples of success for their culture in nonacademic areas such as entertainment, politics, and sports; as a result, they view education as the only way to achieve personal success and respect (Harris & Halpin, 2002; Liu, 1991; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). In other words, they feel pressured to emphasize higher education because they perceive it as the only way that they will obtain the credentials to have a successful professional career and gain respect in society.

The Monetary Benefits of a College Degree

The effects of post-secondary education are unquestionable in terms of obtaining employment. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), "Education serves a role by mediating the influence of an individual's background resources on subsequent occupational status and income" (p. 373). In fact, much of the research on the effects of higher education rests upon monetary returns (Douglass, 1997), and earning a college degree does indeed improve one's income and occupational status (Knox et al., 1993). It is commonplace in American thought to view post-secondary education as a "ladder of opportunity" that produces monetary advantages and increased social mobility through career advantages (Beach, 2009, p. 24) with most American college students commonly citing the marked financial and occupational advantages that a college degree will offer them as their primary reasons for attending college. In fact, a 1997 UCLA Higher Education Research Institute survey found that 74.6% of college freshman cited that getting a better job was one of the most important reasons

for attending college, while 73% of the same group expressed the same sentiments about making more money (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

How exactly does higher education promote financial gain and occupational advantage? According to Knox et al. (1993), this is accomplished through one of two functions of schooling—socializing and status conferral. They maintain that through socialization, education produces individual change that generates payoffs, while through status conferral, education as an institution assigns labels or “legitimate status identities” (p. 26) to individuals, such as dropout or college graduate. More often than not, these labels automatically disqualify non-college graduates from higher-income and higher-status careers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Nonetheless, much of the research on educational attainment focuses on socialization theories and the idea that by attaining a college degree, an individual becomes more erudite by acquiring cognitive skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors, which, in turn, makes him or her a more productive and valuable worker (Knox et al., 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The basis of this school of thought can be attributed to human capital theory.

Human Capital Theory

Predicated on the field of economics, this theory asserts that education is an investment in a person’s skills and knowledge and leads to increased productivity and, thus, higher earnings in the labor market (Becker, 1964). According to Van Loo and Rocco (2004),

The development of human capital theory began with the recognition that the investment in humans can be analyzed in a similar manner as the investment in physical capital. This implies that the impact of human capital investment (education or training) can be analyzed using economic models on the costs and benefits of investment. Benefits include higher wages, increases in productivity, and a stimulus of research & development and economic growth. Examples of costs are trainees' time investments, tuition fees, and the cost of the educational system. (p. 99)

Beginning in the 1960's, Americans had become more educated and, thus, more valuable, according to Theodore W. Schultz (1961) the then president of the American Economic Association. He argued that human capital was a "form of human freedom and choice" that improved not only the quality of life for individuals, but it advanced society's economy as well (pp. 2-3). Prior to Schultz, the prevailing mindset was the Law of Diminishing Returns, or the notion that a nation's economy depended upon nonrenewable capital like land, water, and metal (McIntyre, 2003). Schultz, however, recognized the role that humans play in enhancing a nation's capital. He theorized that by improving the quality of a nation's workforce through education and training, productivity would improve, and the nation's economy would ensue. Schultz later won the 1979 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his work (McIntyre, 2003).

Later in the decade, Gary S. Becker further applied the concept of human capital in his 1964 book *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*. By examining census data from 1940 and

1950, Becker virtually coined the term “private rate of return” in reference to the payoff an individual receives when he or she invests in education and training. According to him, the payoff is an increase in skills which leads to increased productivity and eventually higher wages over one’s lifetime. His book underscored Schultz’s assertion that human capital has a far greater impact on a nation’s economic vitality than physical capital. Becker also won the 1992 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his work on this topic (McIntyre, 2003).

However, the concept of education as an investment in human capital is certainly not new. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith (1776) described the costs and benefits of acquiring an education by stating the following:

Fourthly, of the acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of the society. The acquisition of such talents, by the maintenance of the acquirer during his education, study, or apprenticeship, always costs a real expense, which is a capital fixed and realized, as it were, in his person. Those talents, as they make a part of his fortune, so do they likewise that of the society to which he belongs. The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or instrument of trade which facilitates and abridges labor, and which, though it costs a certain expense, repays that expense with a profit. (p. 368)

Therefore, Schultz’s and Becker’s assertions that investments made in education benefit individuals and society are merely underscored by Smith’s early assumptions that investing in education is a means to increase human capital.

By the 1970's, viewing education as a means of increasing human capital was the prevailing mindset, and this was particularly true for higher education (Beach, 2009). It is around this time that there was formidable evidence that the income of college graduates indeed grew while the income of high school graduates or less decreased (Mortenson, 2007). Eventually, much of the research on this topic began identifying a cost-benefit analysis of higher education, which is more commonly referred to as what Becker called individual rates of return (Beach, 2009), with the cost encompassing the direct expense of education, such as tuition and books, as well as the relinquishment of income during the process of earning the education and the benefit including the boost in earnings that the education produces (Schiller, 2008). Furthermore, individuals who choose to enroll in college must view the benefits of this endeavor as outweighing the costs (Becker, 1964; Douglass, 1997; Mortenson, 2005), and most research suggests that the typical rate of return ranges from around 11 to 14% per year (Knox et al., 1993) and that this rate has remained steady over the last two or three decades (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Yet, Boesel and Fredland (1999) argue that these rates are vastly underestimated and that when one accounts for other monetary benefits, such as fringe benefits, and non-monetary benefits, such as working conditions, the real rate of return may be more than double the aforementioned figures.

The literature also suggests that there is a significant difference between the long-term earnings of high school graduates and college graduates, and this disparity has consistently risen over the past three or four decades (Paulsen,

2001). Figures from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal that earnings increase and unemployment rates decrease with each level of higher education earned (Knox et al., 1993; Schiller, 2008). Most estimates suggest that when compared with those who only earned a high school diploma, four-year college graduates can expect a 34 percentile point increase in occupational status or prestige on the Socio-Economic Index (SEI) and a 20 to 40% rise in yearly earnings in addition to other intangible benefits such as job security and mobility, better access to job information, an increase in professional contacts, and higher job satisfaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Monetarily speaking, a person with a bachelor's degree can expect to earn \$711,280 or more in a lifetime than a person with only a high school diploma (Cantu, 2003). Even some college is better than none at all with most research finding that those who earn an associate degree can expect an approximate 20% rise in yearly earnings, or approximately \$288,480 in a lifetime, and a nine to seventeen percentile point SEI increase while those who earn occupational certificates can also expect statistically significant earnings and a five to nine percentile point SEI increase when compared to those who hold no post-secondary credentials (Cantu, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Thus, given that the average cost of tuition, room, and board is \$8,655 per year at a four-year public college, an individual's rate of return for higher education is abundant enough to produce tangible human capital to merit the cost (Porter, 2002).

An additional aspect of human capital often explored in the literature is the impact that higher education attainment has on employers and society as a

whole. Unquestionably, a solid national economy is highly contingent upon the educational attainment of its citizens (Seidman, 2005). One of the reasons for this is that as technology grows more complex and countries expand to a global realm, the necessity for skilled, knowledgeable workers increases (Seidman, 2005; Schiller, 2008). The benefits of employees' educational attainment for employers are numerous as well. Employers view those with higher levels of education as having more learning capacity and thus less expensive to train (Knox et al., 1993). For these reasons, the importance of attaining post-secondary credentials will continue to rise. According to a recent report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs that require at least some college are expected to comprise at least 57% of all available jobs by 2016 (Dohm & Shniper, 2007).

When human capital theory is applied, the value of a post-secondary education is undeniable. Mortenson (2007) suggests that the nation's and world's labor force is oversaturated with workers with a high school education or less but is under saturated with workers with a bachelor's degree or higher thus indicating the need for programs like AmeriCorps to help boost higher education attainment. In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the National and Community Trust Act of 1993 which created the Corporation for National Service (CNS) and established the AmeriCorps program (Simon & Wang, 2002). AmeriCorps is a national service program that each year, allows 75,000 individuals to engage in volunteer services to address the areas of education, environment, public safety, and other human needs in America's communities while earning a modest living allowance and a \$4,725 scholarship. In addition to satisfying unmet social

needs, AmeriCorps was created to also support its participants' attainment of post-secondary education, and this is achieved in various ways (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007, 2008). First, upon successful completion of service, full-time AmeriCorps participants receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award valuing \$4,725 that can be used to pay tuition at qualifying institutions or to repay qualified student loans, and secondly, during their term of service participants in AmeriCorps receive extensive training that is designed to provide them with the tools necessary to pursue a post-secondary degree (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). Since human capital theory posits that education is an investment in a person's skills and knowledge and leads to increased productivity and, thus, higher earnings in the labor market (Becker, 1964), participation in a program like AmeriCorps is likely to increase a participant's desire to pursue post-secondary endeavors. In fact, a few studies have verified this (Astin & Sax, 1998; Gal, Amit, Fleischer, Strichman, 2003; Perry, 1997) and, thus, leading Perry and Thomson (2004) to conclude that participation in civic service programs like AmeriCorps is a gateway for individuals to further their education.

Therefore, in order to increase the usage of the education award to maximize higher education opportunities and, consequently, increase human capital, research must identify the target population most likely to benefit from such an award. Understanding how participation in an AmeriCorps program stimulates the process of enhancing human capital is vital. Since attaining a post-secondary education is an impetus to increasing an individual's human

capital, this study seeks to determine if a year of service in AmeriCorps affects participants' attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service on the motivation to attend college.

The Influence of National Service on College Attendance

Service can typically be defined as “an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, and world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant” (Sherraden, 2001, p. 2). One of the most longstanding and recognized areas of national service in American history is participation in the United States military, and one of the most influential periods of college attainment in America resulted from legislation that provided veterans returning from World War II with the monetary means to finance their higher education pursuits. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, most commonly known as the GI Bill, revolutionized the face of higher education from an elite to a mass activity by providing individuals who could not previously afford college with the opportunity to do so (Gladieux, King, & Corrigan, 2005). According to Gladieux et al., the purpose of the GI Bill was twofold: “to reward veterans who had served their country during wartime and to help them catch up with their peers whose lives had not been interrupted by military service” (p. 174). According to Geiger (2005), the GI bill brought students to college campuses in “unprecedented and unanticipated numbers” (p. 61). Because of this legislation, 1.1 million veterans were enrolled in college in 1947, compared with only 1.5

million total students who were enrolled before the war (Geiger, 2005). Because of the federal government's reward to those men and women who had given service to their country, thousands of men and women who would not have otherwise had the opportunity were able to attend college (Gladieux et al., 2005).

A modern-day civilian program equivalent to the GI Bill, AmeriCorps provides participants with monetary means to attend college in exchange for their service. Proponents of AmeriCorps view it as a national service program that can serve multi-faceted functions, or as Steven Waldman (1995) asserts "Done properly, it [AmeriCorps] could be the public policy equivalent of a Swiss Army knife, performing numerous used functions in one affordable package" (p. 20). This corroborates former President Bill Clinton's idea of national service as one of the few remaining remedies for the fragmentation and polarization that threaten our country (Perry & Thomson, 2004). Also, supporters of AmeriCorps rely on cost benefit analysis studies that have shown that for every \$1 spent on these programs in the United States, anywhere from \$1.60 to \$2.60 is received in return (Gal et al., 2003; Neumann, Kormendi, Tamura, & Gardner, 1995). In many of these studies, the benefits were measured in terms of benefits to the individual AmeriCorps members, such as the education award, and in terms of benefits to society, such as decreased crime, less spending on welfare, and higher earnings due to educational attainment (Perry & Thomson, 2004). Opponents of AmeriCorps, however, claim that the by paying its participants, the program distorts the true meaning of volunteerism and is merely "an extension of big government" that intrudes upon areas traditionally left for the nonprofit sector

(Perry & Thomson, 2004, p. 17). Nevertheless, it appears as if the program will remain a part of our county since Congress recently passed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve Act that allocates millions of taxpayer dollars to more than triple the number of AmeriCorps members and increase the amount of the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, 2009). For this reason, it is important to understand the benefits that the AmeriCorps program offers its participants.

Thus, while one of the obvious goals of AmeriCorps is to satisfy unmet social needs, another of its often under-looked missions is that of developing its members by giving them opportunities to acquire job skills and the tools to facilitate career preparation (Perry, Thomson, Tschirhart, Mesch, & Lee, 1999). While this objective is accomplished primarily through the service itself, it is also achieved through post-service education since AmeriCorps members, upon successful completion of a term of service, receive a \$4,725 education award that can be utilized for post-secondary pursuits in the forms of tuition expenses or previously-acquired student loans. It is, however, difficult to pinpoint consistent statistics regarding usage of the AmeriCorps education award. As of 1998, one report asserted that of the approximately 62,000 education awards earned to that point, only 54% had been used (Selingo, 1998), while yet another report claimed that 70% of the first graduating class of AmeriCorps members had used the award (Wofford 1996 as cited in Perry et al., 1999). The literature regarding earning the education award as a motivation to participate in national service is largely inconclusive. Griffiths (1998) found that participants in the AmeriCorps for

Math and Literacy program ranked the opportunity to receive an educational award as the least important reason for choosing to participate in the program. However, one study found that 70% of AmeriCorps participants declared that the education award was an important factor in motivating them to join the program; yet, a longitudinal study over eight years revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in the level of education achieved between AmeriCorps participants (post AmeriCorps) and a comparison group (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008; Frumkin et al., 2009).

Nonetheless, much research has found that financial aid of any sort, whether in the form of grants, loans, or scholarships increases college enrollment, especially for low-income individuals (Leslie & Brinkman, 1988) while Dynarski (2003) concluded that a \$1,000 decrease in the cost of education boosts college attendance by 3% to 4% regardless of individuals' backgrounds. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) maintain that "Both theory and common sense suggest economic circumstances play an important role not only in whether and where students go to college but also in how long they remain" (p. 407).

Research conducted using data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 found that financial aid boosted individuals' chances of earning a bachelor's degree by approximately 11 percentage points (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, the type of aid one receives seems to impact degree attainment as well. DesJardins, Ahlburg, and McCall (2002) found that scholarships, or merit-based award, had more of an impact on degree completion than awards merely based on need.

Yet, with diminishing and unpredictable state funding, most post-secondary institutions are facing bleak economic outlooks which may make increasing financial aid to students quite difficult. In addition, according to Zusman (2005), federal, state, and institutional financial aid has moved away from grants and need-based scholarships over the past 25 years, and loans have taken their places. This trend, Zusman argues, is problematic because it causes low-income students to bear the costs of higher education themselves—something they are reluctant to do. However, given the research conducted by Dynarski, Leslie and Brinkman, and Pascarella and Terenzini that concludes that financial aid does indeed increase college enrollment, especially for low-income individuals, it is necessary for higher education stakeholders to devise ways to boost post-secondary participation.

As previously discussed, Human Capital Theory asserts that education is an investment in a person's skills and knowledge and leads to increased productivity and, thus, higher earnings in the labor market (Becker, 1964), and many maintain that participation in a program like AmeriCorps increases the desire to pursue post-secondary endeavors. Gal et al. (2003) found that participants claimed that their volunteer work caused them to want to pursue higher education. In an AmeriCorps specific study, Perry (1997) found that one year after their service in AmeriCorps, respondents reported considerably high levels of expectations for success later in life. Moreover, in a study conducted on participants of the Corporation for National Service's Learn and Serve America Higher Education (LSAHE) program, Astin & Sax. (1998) concluded that

participants' aspirations to earn advanced degrees increased as a result of their civic service. Overall, according to Perry & Thomson (2004), participation in civic service is a gateway for individuals to further their education. Their research found that of 12 studies conducted on the topic, 11 produced positive effects while only one yielded a negative outcome.

Therefore, in order to increase the usage of the education award and, consequently, maximize higher education opportunities, research must identify the target population most likely to benefit from such an award. Perry et al. (1999) contend that "In order to maximize the goal of expanding educational opportunities, the education awards should go to those who would not otherwise have the opportunity for higher education" (p. 235). In a multi-state study, Tschirhart (1998) discovered that intent to use the education award is greatly contingent upon age. However, with such a dearth of research on this topic, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about AmeriCorps participants' use of the educational award; thus, more research is warranted to best understand the population who could most benefit from such an award.

Summary and Conclusion

A higher education degree has become more of a necessity and less of a luxury in today's economy (Zuekle, 2008). A synthesis of the literature highlights the many benefits—both non-monetary and monetary—of earning a college degree in today's society. These benefits are far-reaching and can produce a dramatic impact throughout a person's life, as Ernest Boyer asserts (1987),

The aim of the undergraduate experience is not only to prepare the young for productive careers, but also to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose; not only to generate new knowledge, but to channel that knowledge to humane ends; not merely to study government, but to help shape a citizenry that can promote the public good. (p. 297)

Additionally, a significant amount of literature exists for the purpose of explaining the factors that influence a person's decision to pursue post-secondary endeavors. However, even with the plethora of research on this topic, post-secondary bachelor's degree attainment in the United States hovers at less than 30% and is far lower, at less than 2%, in many Southern states like Mississippi (United States Census Bureau, 2005). Yet, due to an ever-changing, complex global society, over half of the jobs in America in the coming decades will require a bachelor's degree or higher (Dohm & Shniper, 2007; Zuekle, 2008). As a result, "Once the individual and societal benefits of higher education are clear, it becomes critical to increase our understanding of the gaps we still face in patterns of participation in post-secondary education" (Baum & Payea, 2005, p. 5). Theories like Ajzen's theory of planned behavior and Miller and Brickman's future-oriented motivation theory can help higher education administrators know and understand the factors that motivate a person to pursue a post-secondary education.

One avenue often unexplored in the literature is the role of national service programs in influencing one's decision to seek a college degree. Like its predecessor in the GI Bill (Gladieux et al., 2005), federal legislation has created a

program like AmeriCorps that has the potential to offer thousands of people the opportunity to pursue a higher education, who would not otherwise have the chance to do so. Surprisingly, however, little research has been conducted to examine the role a program like AmeriCorps has on a person's decision to attend college.

The current study highlighted the importance of better understanding how a program like AmeriCorps can help influence its participants' desires to participate in the post-secondary education process. For this study, data were collected from members in the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) AmeriCorps program to measure their attitudes toward the non-monetary benefits of earning a college degree, toward the value of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on their motivation to attend college. The results of this study can provide higher education administrators and AmeriCorps program officials with a better understanding of what can be done to help participants in the program use their education awards to enhance their post-secondary educational attainment, as well as provide more knowledge to the existing body of literature regarding this topic.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter describes the data associated with the participants, instrumentation, and procedures of the study. In August 2009, AmeriCorps members serving in the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) program were asked to complete a survey instrument which quantified data measuring their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. The questionnaire also asked participants whether or not they intend to use the AmeriCorps education award to attend college. In May 2010, the ARM members were asked to complete the same survey instrument again. The purpose of collecting data at these two intervals was to collect pre- and post- data near the beginning and end of the service year to determine if serving a year in the ARM program statistically significantly impacted members' attitudes toward the non-monetary value a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. Also, the data collected was used to determine if serving in the ARM program statistically significantly impacted whether or not the participants intended to use the education award when they finished serving in the ARM program. Scores collected at both times (pre and

post) were tested to determine if there were statistically significant differences for the variables measured.

Research Design

This study employed a pre-post research design, with data being collected from participants at the beginning of the study and again at the end. The treatment was a year of service in the ARM program. The dependent variables examined in this study were participants' attitudes toward the value of the non-monetary benefits of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college, and participants' intentions to use the education award at the completion of their service in the ARM program.

Participants

The subjects in this study were members who were either in their first or second year of service in the ARM program (approximately 200 members). Specifically, the participants of this study served in one of the five following regions in the ARM program: Alcorn State University (ASU), Delta State University (DSU), Jackson State University (JSU), Mississippi State University (MSU), and The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) during the 2009-2010 program year. During the month of August 2009, the researcher used paper-based questionnaires to collect data from program members in each of the five ARM regions. Likewise, the members were surveyed again at the conclusion of the program year in May 2010. Surveying ARM members from all five regions

was done to ensure that all geographic regions in the ARM program were represented. Participation in this study was voluntary, and those who chose not to complete the questionnaire were allowed to exit the room.

Instrumentation

The questions on the survey instrument (Appendix A) were created by the researcher for the purpose of data collection in this study. When developing the survey instrument, the researcher reviewed the related literature when deciding which variables to measure in this study and how to design the questionnaire to ensure the survey questions were accurately measuring the variables. The completed instrument consisted of 26 items, six of which collected status and demographic data, four that collected information about participants' future education and career plans, and fifteen that collected data (using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) measuring participants' attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. Since this study required a pre-post design, the questionnaire included a series of five questions to which participants responded. The answers to each of these questions generated a unique identifier that was used to link each participant's pre- and post-scores together for the purpose of data analysis while maintaining each respondent's anonymity.

A pilot study was conducted in early June 2009 with a group of forty exiting second-year ARM members who were about to complete their last year of

eligibility in the ARM program. Permission to conduct the pilot study was obtained from the State Director for ARM (Appendix C). The purpose of the pilot study was to determine whether the directions, questions, and answer choices were understandable to the pilot- study participants. The pilot-study participants were asked to read the directions, questions, and answer choices very carefully, and write down any concerns they had regarding the wording, spelling, clarity, or any other issues which inhibited their understanding of the questionnaire.

The data collected from the pilot study were entered into a SPSS data file to calculate the reliability of the survey instrument. The reliability test calculated the instrument's internal consistency for each of the variables measured. The reliability statistics for Cronbach's alpha was .81 for the non-monetary value of earning a college degree construct (items 2, 6, 7, 8, and 10), .82 for the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment construct (items 1, 3, 4, 9, 12, 15), and .75 for the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college construct (items 5, 11, 13, 14). The internal consistency statistic for all of the variables measured was .91. Since all of the internal reliability statistics were greater than .70, the instrument was considered to produce reliable scores.

For the purposes of this study, a data file containing the following information for each participant was created in SPSS: Unique ID number, demographic data, future career and educational plans, and answers to items measuring the following variables: attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining

employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. This data was entered twice for each participant: the first time was for data collected at the beginning of the program year in August 2009 and the second time was for data collected at the end of the program year in May 2010. The data file was analyzed using SPSS.

Procedures

For this study, the researcher used archival data that were collected during the 2009-2010 program year by the USM region for the ARM program from all five ARM regions—ASU, DSU, JSU, MSU, and USM. Request for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Southern Mississippi to use this data for this study was submitted (Appendix B) and approved. Also, a letter was obtained from the State Director of the ARM program to use the data for the purposes of this study (Appendix C).

During the summer before the 2009–2010 program year, the researcher, working in conjunction with the State Director for the ARM program, obtained permission from each of the five regional coordinators to survey members in each region at the beginning and end of the 2009–2010 program year. Once permission was obtained, times were scheduled to survey members at regional member development meetings in August and May of the 2009–2010 program year. Members were surveyed near the end of the meetings to ensure minimal loss of development time. Near the end of the regional development meetings, ARM officials from the USM region briefly explained the following to the members: the purpose of the study, the amount of time required to complete the

questionnaire, the confidentiality of the data, and the allowing of an opportunity for members to ask questions. The ARM officials from the USM region also explained to the members that their participation would be needed again at the end of the program year. Members were told that their participation in the study was voluntary, and that they would not be penalized in any manner for not participating or discontinuing their participation at any time. Members were also given a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and informed consent (Appendix D).

Data Analysis

A repeated-measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used with an alpha level set at .05 to test the following hypotheses:

H₁: A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree.

H₂: A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment.

H₃: A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members regarding the influence of service in ARM AmeriCorps on their motivation to attend college.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used with an alpha level set at .05 to test the following hypotheses:

H₄: A statistically significant difference exists between the scores of first-year and second-year ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree.

H₅: A statistically significant difference exists between the scores of first-year and second-year ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment.

H₆: A statistically significant difference exists between the scores of first-year and second-year ARM members regarding the influence of service in ARM AmeriCorps on their motivation to attend college.

A matched-pairs chi-square test was used with an alpha level set at .05 to test the following hypothesis:

H₇: A statistically significant difference exists between ARM members' intentions to use the education award after a year of service in the ARM program.

A chi-square test was used with an alpha level set at .05 to test the following hypothesis:

H₈: A statistically significant difference exists between the intentions of second-year ARM members to use the education award when compared to first-year members.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology for this study. This research study employed a repeated measures design, collecting data from participants at the beginning and end of the 2009-2010 ARM program

year. Data collected from ARM program members during the 2009-2010 program year were used to determine if serving in the ARM AmeriCorps program statistically significantly impacted participants' attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. Data collected were also used to determine if serving in the ARM program influences members' intentions of using the education award to attend college.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purposes of this study were to: (a) determine how a year of service in the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) program impacted members' perceptions and attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college, and (b) determine if a year of service in the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) program impacted members' decisions to use the education award.

In August 2009, AmeriCorps members serving in all five regions (Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, and the University of Southern Mississippi) of the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) program were asked to complete a survey instrument which quantified data measuring their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. The questionnaire also asked participants whether or not they intend to use the AmeriCorps education award to attend college.

In May 2010, the ARM members were asked to complete the same survey instrument again. The purpose of collecting data at these two intervals was to collect pre- and post- data near the beginning and end of the service year to

determine if serving a year in the ARM AmeriCorps program statistically significantly impacted members' attitudes toward the non-monetary value a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. Also, the data collected were used to determine if serving in the ARM program statistically significantly impacted whether or not the participants intend to use the education award when they finish serving in the ARM program. Scores collected at both times (pre and post) were tested to determine if there are statistically significant differences for the variables measured.

Data collected from ARM members in August 2009 and May 2010 were entered into a data file for SPSS analysis. Members were asked a series of questions for the purpose of creating a unique ID that was used to link members' pre and post scores while maintaining anonymity. Due to attrition and absences during survey administration, pre- and post-data were collected from 199 ARM members throughout Mississippi. This is considered an adequate sample (57%) of the original population of 350 members at the beginning of the 2009-2010 program year.

Sample Characteristics

The participants in this study covered a wide variety of demographics. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 61 years, with a mean age of 31.06 years. The majority of the respondents were females, while the two most reported ethnicities were African American and Caucasian. The majority of members

reported that they are first-year members. Table 1 presents detailed information for these items.

Table 1

Gender, Ethnicity, and Member Status

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	13	6.5%
Female	222	93.5%
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	37	18.4%
African American	160	79.6%
Native American	1	0.5%
Hispanic/Latino	1	0.5%
Member Status		
First-year	122	61.3%
Second-year	77	38.7%

A majority of the participants indicated that they already had completed some college education, and a smaller percent indicated they had obtained a bachelor's degree. Most of the respondents indicated that they plan to obtain at least a bachelor's degree after completing the ARM program. However, over half of the respondents indicated that family responsibilities might impede their

progress from earning a college degree. Table 2 provides detailed information for these items.

Table 2

Education Completed, Education Plans, and Family Responsibilities

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Education Completed		
High School Diploma/GED	23	11.4%
Vocational Degree	6	3.0%
Less than 1 year college	13	6.5%
1 – 2 years college	66	33.3%
Associate's Degree	46	22.9%
Bachelor's Degree	45	22.4%
Master's Degree	1	0.5%
Education Plans		
High School Diploma/GED	3	1.5%
Vocational Degree	2	1.0%
Less than 1 year college	2	1.0%
1 – 2 years college	9	4.5%
Associate's Degree	15	7.5%
Bachelor's Degree	65	32.4%
Master's Degree	80	39.8%
Professional (J.D., etc.)	24	12.3%

Table 2 (continued).

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Family Responsibilities		
Yes	103	51.8%
No	96	48.2%

Item Descriptives

For the purpose of analysis, the items were grouped according to the constructs they measured, and then descriptive statistics for each item were calculated. Responses could range from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The means of the items were all above 3.0. The standard deviations for each of the items indicated normal variability for the items, ranging from 0.45 to 1.16. The items measuring the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment had the highest means while the items measuring the influence of service in the ARM program on the motivation to attend college had the lowest means. Tables for each of the items measuring each construct are presented on the subsequent pages (see Tables 3 – 5).

Table 3

Non-Monetary Value of Earning a College Degree Item Statistics (N = 199)

Pre-Items	Mean	SD
Attending college plays an important role in shaping responsible citizens.	4.62	0.64
Attending college will make me a well-rounded person.	4.23	0.94
Earning a college degree will help me gain respect.	3.82	1.16
Earning a college degree is a worthwhile endeavor.	4.68	0.58
Earning a college degree will help me succeed in life.	4.44	0.83
Post-items		
Attending college plays an important role in shaping responsible citizens.	4.59	0.72
Attending college will make me a well-rounded person.	4.42	0.75
Earning a college degree will help me gain respect.	4.08	0.96
Earning a college degree is a worthwhile endeavor.	4.67	0.54
Earning a college degree will help me succeed in life.	4.62	0.65

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree...5 = Strongly Agree

Items measuring the non-monetary value of earning a college degree had pre and post means above 4.00, with the exception of one item (“Earning a college degree will help me gain respect.”), which had a pre-mean of 3.82, and increased to a post-mean of 4.08. Most items showed an increase between pre and post means while a couple showed a slight decrease.

Table 4

*Importance of Earning a College Degree in Obtaining Employment Item Statistics**(N = 199)*

Pre-Items	Mean	SD
Earning a college degree will allow me to achieve my career goals.	4.84	0.51
Completing college is important because it provides career opportunities.	4.80	0.51
Earning a college degree will help me gain skills that will make me marketable for employment.	4.82	0.47
It is important for me to go to college so I can earn a degree that will help me get a good job.	4.68	0.62
I believe that attending college will help me get a job.	4.45	0.76
Earning a college degree will prepare me for the job field.	4.59	0.70
Post-items		
Earning a college degree will allow me to achieve my career goals.	4.90	0.33
Completing college is important because it provides career opportunities.	4.83	0.42
Earning a college degree will help me gain skills that will make me marketable for employment.	4.83	0.48
It is important for me to go to college so I can earn a degree that will help me get a good job.	4.74	0.56
I believe that attending college will help me get a job.	4.52	0.71
Earning a college degree will prepare me for the job field.	4.59	0.64

Note. Scale: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*...5 = *Strongly Agree*

Items measuring the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment were the highest of the three constructs measured. Both pre and

post means were in the mid to high 4.00's. All items showed an increase or remained the same between pre- and post-means.

Table 5

Impact of Service on Motivation to Attend College Item Statistics (N = 199)

Pre-Items	Mean	SD
Serving in AmeriCorps will make me want to attend college.	4.25	0.96
The main reason I joined AmeriCorps is because I want to earn an opportunity to attend college.	3.64	1.14
The most important benefit of participating in AmeriCorps is gain the ambition to attend college.	3.75	1.15
My participation in AmeriCorps will motivate me to want to attend college.	4.01	1.08
Post-items		
Serving in AmeriCorps will make me want to attend college.	4.43	0.73
The main reason I joined AmeriCorps is because I want to earn an opportunity to attend college.	3.75	1.13
The most important benefit of participating in AmeriCorps is gain the ambition to attend college.	3.84	1.04
My participation in AmeriCorps will motivate me to want to attend college.	4.15	0.92

Note. Scale: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*...5 = *Strongly Agree*

Overall, items measuring the impact of serving in the ARM AmeriCorps program in motivating members to attend college were the lowest of the three constructs measured. Both pre- and post-means were in the high 3.00's to mid 4.00's. All items showed an increase between pre- and post-means.

Next, the data were analyzed to gain some information about the reliability of the instrument for this group of participants. A reliability coefficient was calculated for each of the constructs (the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college) using Cronbach's Alpha for the pre- and post-means. A consistent, acceptable pattern of high reliability was found with this sample, with Cronbach's Alpha values above .70 for each construct, as well as the overall instrument. This pattern of reliability was consistent for both the pre- and post-administrations. The Cronbach's Alpha values for each construct and overall instrument are given in Table 6.

Table 6

Reliability Statistics (N = 199)

Dependent Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	
	Pre	Post
Non-monetary value of college	.82	.79
Importance of college for employment	.87	.78
Influence of ARM service on college	.87	.79
Overall Instrument	.91	.87

Next, the researcher computed means for each of the pre- and post-constructs by averaging each respondent's scores corresponding to the appropriate items. To be included in this analysis, each respondent had to

answer at least three items for each construct. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics (N = 199)

Dependent Variable	Mean	SD
Pre – Items		
Non-monetary value of college	4.36	0.65
Importance of college for employment	4.70	0.47
Influence of ARM service on college	3.91	0.92
Post – Items		
Non-monetary value of college	4.48	0.54
Importance of college for employment	4.74	0.35
Influence of ARM service on college	4.04	0.76

Note. Scale: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*...5 = *Strongly Agree*

All of the constructs had overall means of 4.00 or greater, with the exception of the pre-average of the influence of ARM service on attending college, which was 3.91. All means showed increases for each construct from the pre-averages to post-averages.

Next, the researcher split the participants into two groups—one group consisted of 122 first-year ARM members and one group of 77 second-year ARM members. This allowed the researcher to view descriptive statistics for each of the constructs based on member status. To be included in this analysis, each

respondent had to answer at least three items for each construct. These means are reported in Table 8.

Table 8

Pre and Post Descriptive Statistics Based on Member Status

Dependent Variable	Mean	SD
First – Year Pre (N = 121)		
Non-monetary value of college	4.36	0.69
Importance of college for employment	4.68	0.51
Influence of ARM service on college	3.90	0.90
Second – Year Pre (N = 77)		
Non-monetary value of college	4.36	0.60
Importance of college for employment	4.72	0.40
Influence of ARM service on college	3.93	0.94
First – Year Post (N = 121)		
Non-monetary value of college	4.53	0.50
Importance of college for employment	4.74	0.33
Influence of ARM service on college	3.91	0.76
Second – Year Post (N = 77)		
Non-monetary value of college	4.39	0.59
Importance of college for employment	4.73	0.37
Influence of ARM service on college	4.05	0.76

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree...5 = Strongly Agree

Both first- and second-year members experienced increases between their pre- and post-averages for each construct. Pre-averages began relatively high and

were nearly identical for both first-and second-year members, while the post-scores varied somewhat. First-year members had a higher post-average for non-monetary value of earning a college degree, and second-year members had a higher post-average for the influence of serving in ARM on attending college.

Next, the researcher obtained frequencies to see how many of the ARM AmeriCorps members intended to use the education award at the conclusion of their service in the program. At both the beginning and end of the program year, nearly all members indicated that they intended to use the education award. These frequencies are reported in Table 9.

Table 9

Item Frequencies for Intended Education Award Usage

Item	Yes	No	Percentage Yes
Use Education Award (Pre)	185	14	93.0%
Use Education Award (Post)	186	13	93.5%

Lastly, the researcher obtained frequencies on intention to use the education award based on member status. Regardless of member status, nearly all members indicated that they intend to use the education award at the completion of their ARM AmeriCorps service. This information is presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Item Frequencies for Intended Education Award Use Based on Member Status

Item	Member Status	Yes	No	Percentage Yes
Use Education Award (Pre)	First	111	10	91.7%
Use Education Award (Pre)	Second	75	3	94.9%
Use Education Award (Post)	First	113	8	93.3%
Use Education Award (Post)	Second	75	3	96.2%

Statistical

A repeated-measure multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine if statistically significant differences existed between the pre- and post-means for any of the dependent variables (non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college). The results of the repeated-measures MANOVA indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-means, *Hotelling's Trace* = .04, $F(3, 198) = 2.50$, $p = .061$. Although not statistically significant, the means did show an increase at the end of the program year. The pre-post means are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Pre-Post Mean Comparisons (N = 199)

Dependent Variable	Pre – Mean	Post – Mean
Non-monetary value of college	4.36	4.48
Importance of college for employment	4.70	4.74
Influence of ARM service on college	3.91	4.04

The biggest increases were in the non-monetary value of college and the influence of serving in ARM on attending college, while the importance of college in obtaining employment construct only saw a very small increase.

Hypothesis 1

A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree.

The hypothesis that there will be a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree was not supported in this study, *Hotelling's Trace* = .04, $F(3, 198) = 2.50$, $p = .061$. Based on these results, members did not have statistically significant differences in pre- and post-scores during the ARM 2009-2010 program year. Although the mean for this construct was higher at the end of the program year, the increase (0.12) between the pre- and post- scores was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2

A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment.

The hypothesis that there will be a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment was not supported in this study, *Hotelling's Trace* = .04, $F(3, 198) = 2.50$, $p = .061$. Based on these results, members did not have statistically significantly difference pre- and post-scores during the 2009-2010 program year. Although the mean for this construct was higher at the end of the program year, the increase (0.04) between the pre- and post-scores was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 3

A statistically significant difference exists between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members regarding the influence of service in ARM AmeriCorps on their motivation to attend college.

The hypothesis that there will be a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members regarding the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on their motivation to attend college was not supported in this study, *Hotelling's Trace* = .04, $F(3, 198) = 2.50$, $p = .061$. Based on these results, members did not have statistically significantly differences in pre- and post-scores during the 2009-2010 program year. Although the mean for this construct was higher at the end of the program year,

the increase (0.13) between the pre- and post-scores was not statistically significant.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine if statistically significant differences existed between any of the dependent variables (non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service of the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college) based on the pre-scores of two groups—first-year and second-year ARM members. During the analysis, Box's and Bartlett's tests indicated no issues regarding the homogeneity of variances for the two groups. The results of the MANOVA indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups, *Hotelling's Trace* = .07, $F(3, 299) = 0.729$, $p = .536$. The first- and second-year member comparisons are presented in Table 12.

Table 12

First and Second Year Member Comparisons

Dependent Variable	Member Status	Means	Mean Diff.
Non-monetary value of attending college	First-year	4.36	0.04
	Second-year	4.32	
Importance of college for Employment	First-year	4.68	0.01
	Second-year	4.67	
Influence of ARM service on college	First-year	3.89	0.09
	Second-year	3.98	

Mean comparisons between first- and second-year ARM AmeriCorps members showed very little differences between the two groups for each of the constructs measured.

Hypothesis 4

A statistically significant difference exists between the pre-scores of first-year and second-year ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree.

The hypothesis that there will be a statistically significant difference between the pre-scores of first- and second-year ARM AmeriCorps members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree was not supported in this study, *Hotelling's Trace* = .07, $F(3, 299) = 0.729$, $p = .536$. Members who returned for a second year of ARM service did not have statistically significantly different means than first year members for this construct. There was very little difference between the means of the two groups for this construct.

Hypothesis 5

A statistically significant difference exists between the scores of first-year and second-year ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment.

The hypothesis that there will be a statistically significant difference between the pre-scores of first- and second-year ARM AmeriCorps members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment was not supported in this study, *Hotelling's Trace* = .07, $F(3, 299) =$

0.729, $p = .536$. Members who returned for a second year of ARM service did not have statistically significantly different means than first-year members for this construct. There was very little difference between the means of the two groups for this construct.

Hypothesis 6

A statistically significant difference exists between the scores of first-year and second-year ARM members regarding the influence of service in ARM AmeriCorps on their motivation to attend college.

The hypothesis that there will be a statistically significant difference between the pre-scores of first- and second-year ARM AmeriCorps members regarding the influence of service in ARM AmeriCorps on their motivation to attend college was not supported in this study, *Hotelling's Trace* = .07, $F(3, 299)$ $a = 0.729$, $p = .536$. Members who returned for a second year of ARM service did not have statistically significantly different means than first-year members for this construct. Second-year members had slightly higher means (0.09) than first-year members for this construct.

To answer the research questions about the intended education award usage, chi-square tests were used with an alpha level set at .05 to test for statistically significant differences. A matched-pairs chi-square test was used to test for a statistically significant difference between ARM AmeriCorps members' intentions to use the education award after a year of service in the ARM program. The results of this matched-pairs chi-square test were statistically significant, χ^2

($N = 199, df = 1$) = 7.13, $p = .008$. The frequencies for the pre- and post-intended use of education award results are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Pre and Post Frequencies for Intended Education Award Usage

	Post-Scores		
	Yes	No	Total
Pre-Scores			
Yes	177	9	186
No	10	3	13
Total	187	12	199

Nearly all of the members who initially said that they intended to use the education award at the beginning of the program year also said they plan to at the end of the program year. Of the 13 members who said they did not intend to use the education award at the beginning of the program year, ten of them indicated that they intended to use the education award at the conclusion of the program year.

A chi-square test was used with an alpha level set at .05 to determine if a statistically significant difference exists between the pre-score intentions of second-year ARM members to use the education award when compared to the pre-score intentions of first-year members. The results of the chi-square test were not significant, $\chi^2 (N = 199, df = 1) = 2.29, p = .131$. The frequencies for the

pre scores of the intended use of education award based on member status results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Pre-Scores for Intended Education Award Usage Based on Member Status

	Pre-Scores		
	Yes	No	Total
Member Status			
First-year	115	6	121
Second-year	70	8	78
Total	185	14	199

Hypothesis 7

A statistically significant difference exists between ARM members' intentions to use the education award after a year of service in the ARM program.

After analyzing data collected, the results of this study indicated that the ARM AmeriCorps program does statistically significantly impact education award usage intent, $\chi^2 (N = 199, df = 1) = 7.13, p = .008$. While most of the members indicated that they intended to use the education award at the beginning of the program year, nearly all of those who said they did not intend to use the education award at the beginning of the program year had changed their minds at the conclusion of the program year.

Hypothesis 8

A statistically significant difference exists between the intentions of second-year ARM members to use the education award when compared to first-year members.

After analyzing data collected, the results of this study did not indicate a statistically significant difference between first- and second-year ARM AmeriCorps members regarding their intent to use the education award, $\chi^2 (N = 199, df = 1) = 2.29, p = .131$. The results indicated that nearly all participants intended to use the education award, regardless of member status.

Ancillary Findings

Although not a part of the original research design, the researcher conducted a repeated-measures MANOVA for both first- and second-year ARM AmeriCorps members on the following dependent variables: the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. For first-year members, the results of the repeated measures MANOVA were statistically significant, *Hotelling's Trace* = .072, $F(3, 120) = 2.90, p = .038$. Of the three dependent variables tested, the non-monetary value of earning a college degree was statistically significant for first-year members, $F(1, 121) = 8.27, p = .005$. The mean increased from a pre-average of 4.36 to 4.53. The other two dependent variables were not statistically significant for first-year members. For second-year members, the results of the repeated-measures MANOVA were not

statistically significant, *Hotelling's Trace* = .035, $F(3, 75) = 0.88$, $p = .46$. For these dependent variables, the ancillary findings indicate that the ARM AmeriCorps program significantly impacted first-year members but not second-year members.

Summary

In summary, two purposes existed for this study: (a) to determine how a year of service in the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) AmeriCorps program impacted members' perceptions and attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college, and (b) to determine if a year of service in the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) program impacted members' decisions to use the education award.

Eight hypotheses were tested in this study. Of the eight that were tested, only one was supported by this study. The hypothesis that was supported by this study indicated that the ARM AmeriCorps program does impact participants' intentions to use the education award. The remaining seven hypotheses were not supported in this study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study was conducted on the 2009-2010 participants of the America Reads-Mississippi (ARM) AmeriCorps program. Pre-test data were collected from the participants of all five university regions of the program—Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, and The University of Southern Mississippi—in August 2009 regarding their perceptions and attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on the motivation to attend college. Participants were also asked about their intentions to use the education award they earn at the conclusion of their term of service. Post-test data were collected from the same participants near the end of their term of service in May 2010, using the same survey instrument that was used to obtain pre-test data. Data from both the pre- and post- test administration were compared, and yielded the following results.

Conclusions and Discussion

The analyses of the data were presented in the previous chapter; however, a summary of the results is presented here. This study tested eight research hypotheses to determine if a year of service impacted participants' attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, and the

influence of service in the program on their motivation to attend college, as well as the influence of service on their intentions to use their education award. The research hypotheses also set out to determine if an additional year of service impacted the aforementioned constructs. All eight research hypotheses were successfully tested.

Hypothesis one investigated whether differences existed between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree. When tested using a repeated-measures MANOVA, there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores for this construct. For this study, the mean for this construct was higher at the end of the program year, but it was not high enough to produce a statistically significant difference. According to Frumkin et al. (2009), AmeriCorps members typically report statistically significant outcomes in all measures of civic engagement, and these measures are consistent with Rowley and Hurtado's definition of the non-monetary benefits of a college education as those ideals that "constitute a rich quality of life that most of us seek and value in a stable, democratic society" (2003, p. 209). The assertion in the literature that participants' attitudes towards these ideals—the ideals that constitute that non-monetary value of a college degree—will be higher after a term of service was not supported in this study. Perry and Thomson (2004) maintain that null findings for this construct could be attributed to the fact that some national service opportunities might lack the structure to influence strong civic commitment; however, they assert that no research to date has identified the

specific service attributes that are necessary to produce stronger civic commitments.

However, as part of the ancillary findings, a repeated-measures MANOVA on this dependent variable was performed on both first-year and second-year members. The test revealed that the non-monetary value of earning a college degree was statistically significant for first-year members but not for second-year members, thus corroborating the findings of Frumkin et al. (2009) that the civic engagement ideals concurrent with the non-monetary benefits of earning a college degree are indeed stronger after service in AmeriCorps. While the MANOVA revealed statistically significant results for first-year members, it did not show significance for second-year members. The results of this study could lead to the conclusion that the power of the program to influence members' attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree is exerted so strongly in the first year that significant changes in the second year are minimal; however, no other research has been conducted to substantiate this.

Hypothesis two investigated whether differences existed between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment. When tested using a repeated-measures MANOVA, there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores for this construct. For this study, the mean for this construct was higher at the end of the program year, but it was not high enough to produce a statistically significant difference. According to Frumkin et al. (2009), one would expect AmeriCorps members to have more positive

attitudes toward education and work as a result of their year-long work experience; however, although the means were higher for the post-scores, and this dependent variable did approach significance, the assertion that ARM members' attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment will be higher after a year of service was not supported in this study. According to Perry and Thomson (2004), any null or negative findings associated with attitudes or intentions regarding educational attainment can typically be attributed to the fact that many members simply choose to defer their educational aspirations while focusing on their term of service; therefore, these null findings should not reflect a negative dynamic associated with the service itself.

Hypothesis three investigated whether differences existed between the pre- and post-scores of ARM members regarding the influence of service in ARM on their motivation to attend college. When tested using a repeated-measures MANOVA, there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores for this construct. For this study, although this construct approached significance, and the mean for this construct was higher at the end of the program year, it was not high enough to produce a statistically significant difference. The findings of this study seem to uphold the findings of Frumkin et al. (2009), who found that "over both the short and the long term, AmeriCorps participation had no significant impacts on measures of education attitudes or degree attainment" (p. 411). This again reiterates the contention of Perry and Thomson (2004) that null findings regarding attitudes toward education should

not reflect negatively on the service experience because more often than not, members simply choose to postpone their educational aspirations while concentrating on their term of service.

Hypothesis four investigated whether differences existed between the pre-scores of first-year and second-year ARM members for their attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree. When tested using MANOVA, there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre-scores of first- and second-year members for this construct. The mean scores for first-year members were slightly higher (0.04) than those of second-year members for this hypothesis. While the literature suggests that those who serve in AmeriCorps programs should gain an appreciation towards the non-monetary ideals that are associated with the earning of a college degree (Frumkin et al., 2009), this study does not confirm that assertion. In fact, first-year members had slightly higher scores for this construct than those members who had already served a year in the AmeriCorps program. However, this does not mean that the ARM AmeriCorps program is not making an impact in members' attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree. One possible explanation is that the first-year members participating in this current study already had high perceptions and positive attitudes toward the non-monetary value of earning a college degree. In fact, many people do participate in AmeriCorps programs to earn the education award so they can attend college (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). So, it stands to reason that these members already have positive perceptions and attitudes toward the non-monetary value

of earning a college degree; therefore, no statistically significant differences were found in this study.

Hypothesis five investigated whether differences existed between the pre-scores of first-year members and second-year ARM members for their attitudes toward the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment. When tested using MANOVA, there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre-scores of first and second-year members for this construct. The mean scores for first-year members were nearly identical (0.01 higher) to those of second-year members for this hypothesis. While the literature suggests that those who serve in AmeriCorps programs should gain a better understanding and possess higher, more positive attitudes education and employment (Frumkin et al., 2009), this study does not confirm that assertion. However, this does not mean that the ARM AmeriCorps program is not making an impact in members' attitudes toward the value of earning a college degree in obtaining employment. One possible explanation is that the first-year members participating in this current study already understand the value of earning a college degree in obtaining employment. In fact, many people do participate in the ARM AmeriCorps program to earn the education award so they can attend college and further their educations. Many ARM AmeriCorps members are current or former teacher assistants who wish to earn a college degree in education or a related field so they can further their careers (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). So, it stands to reason that these members already had strong

attitudes toward the value of earning a college degree in obtaining employment; therefore, no statistically significant differences were found in this study.

Hypothesis six investigated whether differences existed between the pre-scores of first-year and second-year ARM members regarding the influence of service in ARM AmeriCorps on their motivation to attend college. When tested using MANOVA, there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre-scores of first and second-year members for this construct. However, the mean scores for first-year members were noticeably lower (0.09) than those of second-year members for this hypothesis. While the literature suggests that those who serve in AmeriCorps programs should become more motivated to attend college (Perry & Thomson, 2004), the results of this study do not statistically confirm this hypothesis. However, the difference in pre-scores between first and second-year members does indicate the ARM AmeriCorps program is making an impact in members' attitudes and subsequent motivation to attend college, even though not statistically significantly.

Hypothesis seven investigated whether differences existed between the pre- and post-scores of ARM AmeriCorps members' intentions to use the education award. When tested using a matched-pairs Chi Square, the results were statistically significant. While nearly all ARM AmeriCorps members indicated that they intended to use the education award at the beginning and end of the 2009–2010 program year, many of the members who did not intend to use the education award at the beginning of the program year had changed their intentions by the end of the program year. Specifically, 10 of 13 (77%) of ARM

members who indicated they did not intend to use the education at the beginning of the program year had changed their intentions to use the education award by the end of the program year. Therefore, the results of this current study confirm the literature (Perry & Thomson, 2004) that posits that serving a year in AmeriCorps programs does indeed impact members' intentions to use the education award.

Hypothesis eight investigated whether differences existed between the pre-scores of first- and second-year members' intentions to use the education award. When tested using Chi Square, there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre-scores of first and second-year ARM members' intentions to use the education award. Almost all members intended to use the education award after completing their service in the ARM AmeriCorps program, regardless of their member status. While the literature asserts that AmeriCorps programs instills the importance of using the education award to its members, many people who serve in AmeriCorps programs already understand the benefits of serving in these programs, including the education award (Perry & Thomson, 2004). Therefore, it stands to reason that many of the first-year members in the ARM AmeriCorps program agreed to serve in the program so they could earn the education award. Therefore, with such a high percentage of first-year members already intending to use the education award, there was not a statistically significant difference between first- and second-year members' intentions to use the education award.

In summary, eight hypotheses were tested in this study. Of the eight that were tested, only one was supported by this study. The hypothesis that was supported indicated that the ARM AmeriCorps program does impact participants' intentions to use the education award. The remaining seven hypotheses were not supported in this study. However, it is important to note that pre-scores for all of the constructs measured for both first- and second-year members were already high at the beginning of the program year. Although there were increases in post-scores, the high pre-scores decreased the likelihood of finding statistically significant differences between pre- and post-scores.

Limitations

This study was conducted using only one AmeriCorps program—America Reads Mississippi (ARM)—so the results should not be generalized to all AmeriCorps programs or service-oriented programs. Another limitation is attrition; it is impossible to measure attitudes and intentions for those ARM members who dropped out of the program. Had these members remained in the program and further data collected from them, the results of this study might have been different. Furthermore, only ARM members who attended the staff development meetings the day the survey was administered were able to complete it. Therefore, not all members from the target population had an opportunity to participate in this study, which might have affected the results. Another limitation is that data for this study were collected during one program year of the ARM AmeriCorps program; future research should include data collection over numerous program years to see if similar results occur. Finally,

this study measured attitudes toward college and intentions to use the education award. Future studies should collect data to see how many ARM AmeriCorps members actually use the education award and complete college.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based upon the results of this study, the researcher has developed specific recommendations appropriate for those who are currently, or will be in the future, involved in national service programs. Since first-year ARM AmeriCorps members had more positive attitudes toward the benefits of earning a college degree at the conclusion of the 2009-2010 program year than did second-year members, ARM AmeriCorps program officials should spend more time focusing on accessing higher education, the importance of a college degree, the non-monetary and monetary benefits of a post-secondary education, and using the education award, especially to second-year members. Perry and Thomson (2004) assert that any null or negative findings associated with service participants' educational aspirations after their terms of service should not reflect badly on the programs themselves; instead, it is merely a reflection of the participants' choice to defer those aspirations until the term of service is complete. Because AmeriCorps members do tend to become so focused on their terms of service, they often delay the planning of their post-secondary educational endeavors until well after they have completed their service. As a result, ARM AmeriCorps program officials should conduct workshops that call attention to the processes of accessing higher education throughout each program year. For example, panel discussions and small group sessions

conducted by admissions specialists, financial aid representatives, and academic advisors would help the members focus on their educational attainment post-service. Currently, the ARM AmeriCorps program does have a Life After AmeriCorps component in which accessing higher education is addressed; however, it would be beneficial for its program officials to assist the members with completing at least one step of the college entrance process before they finish the program year. For example, officials could require the members to complete activities such as obtaining a college catalog or setting up an appointment with an academic advisor. The activities would serve to scaffold the often overwhelming college-entrance process and to keep the idea of college attendance at the forefront of the members' minds.

Since the majority of the participants in this study indicated their intent to use the education award to attain a college degree higher than the one they currently possess, on both the pre- and post-test, this study highlights the importance of recruiting participants who could most benefit from the education award. Previous research has suggested that individuals who do not already have a college degree gain significantly more benefits from the program than those who already possess a college degree (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007). Over half of the participants in this study had less than an associate's degree, but almost all of them indicated their desire to achieve a higher level of education. It stands to reason that the more motivated a member is to achieve a higher level of education, the more likely he or she will use the education award to attend college. Furthermore, since other research

has suggested that financial aid boosts college enrollment (Dynarski, 2003; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), it would be judicious of ARM AmeriCorps program officials to recruit participants with the greatest financial need for the education award. However, doing so may be a difficult endeavor since discriminating based on financial need or the lack thereof clearly defies the spirit of volunteerism that the AmeriCorps program embodies. However, if the goal is to increase education award usage, it is certainly an idea to consider.

Although previous research has suggested that individuals without a college degree stand to benefit the most from participating in AmeriCorps (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007), people who already have a college degree should not be excluded from participating in the program. It is well established that an individual's participation in civic engagement activities and financial earning power increase with each level of attained education (Knox et al., 1993; Schiller, 2008). Therefore, ARM AmeriCorps program officials should concentrate on helping the participants who already have bachelor's degrees to take steps to enroll into programs to earn advanced degrees. As with the previously-mentioned recommendations, program officials should require members throughout the program year to take small steps to begin the enrollment process.

Finally, however, ARM AmeriCorps program officials are not the only ones who can benefit from this study. Higher education administrators can gain a great deal of knowledge as well. First, since AmeriCorps completers can have

up to approximately \$10,000 to spend on post-secondary education, this is a prime group that should be targeted by higher education officials. According to the AmeriCorps website (n.d.), “Many higher education institutions recognize the advantages of recruiting AmeriCorps alumni to become students. AmeriCorps alumni have the traits and skills that colleges and universities value, such as commitment to community, problem-solving experience, and training as leaders” (n.p.), a point reiterated by Bruce Campbell, director of graduate admissions at St. Bonaventure University in New York. According to his quote on the St. Bonaventure University website (2009), “AmeriCorps volunteers are exactly the kind of people we want in our graduate programs, and the kind of people we want showing SBU on their résumés. They are active and engaged, interested in others, community builders and future leaders” (n.p.). As a result, higher education officials should seek ways to recruit those engaged AmeriCorps alumni to their colleges and universities. One of the ways to accomplish this is by matching the education award. According to the AmeriCorps website, there are many ways institutions can do this:

- Provide a one-to-one or two-to-one cash match from institutional funds;
- Match with scholarship funding;
- Waive admission and other fees;
- Offer tuition discounts;
- Offer housing scholarships or discounts; and
- Grant academic credit for service experience.

Little research, however, has been conducted to examine if matching the education award boosts the recruitment efforts of the post-secondary institutions that do so. At minimum, college administrators could work with AmeriCorps program officials to disseminate information in the form of brochures and flyers to AmeriCorps members regarding the specific programs and services the college has to offer. With the mean age of the participants in this study being 31, the majority of the AmeriCorps members qualify as non-traditional students; likewise, more than half of the participants in this study indicated that they had family responsibilities that might impede their college attendance, so it would serve higher education administrators well to promote the services they offer to assist non-traditional students like ARM AmeriCorps members not only in the enrollment process but to retain them once they are enrolled. Finally, the information gained from this study should assist higher education administrators with working closely with ARM AmeriCorps program officials to provide trainings and workshops to in-service ARM AmeriCorps participants to increase access to higher education. Becoming familiar with the faces and processes of a particular institution could help to recruit this population because many individuals use familiar experiences as a factor in their college choice (Kinzie et al., 2004).

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to collect data from ARM AmeriCorps participants to determine if participation in the program influences their attitudes toward college attendance. The next logical step in this study would be to conduct in-depth interviews with these individuals after their year of service to

help gain an understanding of their attitudes toward attending college in addition to the obstacles they face in materializing their college aspirations. Such interviews could aid higher education administrators in determining the best ways to attract these individuals to their college campuses as well as determine ways to help these individuals overcome their obstacles so they are retained once enrolled. Another step in this study should be to follow up with the participants from this program year to determine their actual progress toward college attendance. Since attitude is a precursor to actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2005), another facet of this study should be to determine if those who had the most positive attitudes toward college attendance at the end of the program year were indeed the individuals whose intentions materialized into actual college attendance. It is also important to measure participants' actual behavior longitudinally. Data, both quantitative and qualitative, should be collected at periodic intervals for at least seven years after completion of the program because the ability to use the education award expires after that length of time (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). Additionally, longitudinal data is necessary because measuring actual behavior after merely a year of service is inadequate due to the fact that many service participants dedicate their lives to the year of service and may not see their higher educational aspirations actualize until a few years after completing the program (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008; Perry & Thomson, 2004). Furthermore, data were collected for only one program year for this

study. Future studies should collect data over multiple program years to see if results hold consistent over a period of program years.

While not a focus of the current study, future research should focus on the population that would most benefit from the education award and other opportunities that AmeriCorps offers to its participants. Perry et al. (1999) contend that the opportunity should be awarded to those who would not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in higher education endeavors. Other research suggests that those who do not already possess a bachelor's degree benefit substantially more from their AmeriCorps experience in regards to post-secondary educational aspirations and attainment (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007). Additional research has suggested that intent to use the education award is high contingent upon age (Tschirhart, 1998). Since previous research has shown that financial aid does increase college enrollment (Dynarski, 2003; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), it is necessary to understand the population that would most benefit from participating in AmeriCorps and earning an education award.

Finally, this present study was conducted with participants of one AmeriCorps program in one state. It was particularly important to focus on one specific program because much research shows that participant outcomes are highly contingent upon program structure and intensity (Frumkin et al., 2009; Perry & Thomson, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to ascertain program characteristics from different AmeriCorps programs across the state and across the country as well that most heavily influence attitudes toward post-secondary

educational attainment, especially since so little research exists to identify the specific program attributes that bear the most impact (Perry & Thomson, 2004). Future studies should include participants from other AmeriCorps programs, both on a state and national level. Initially, data could be collected from each program's participants and analyzed to determine the common threads in each program's structure that most strongly influence attitudes toward college attendance. Learning these common threads could help program administrators determine how to incorporate them into all AmeriCorps programs in order to best structure service experiences and maximize professional development opportunities to more positively influence attitudes toward college attendance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sought to determine if a year of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program influences members' attitudes toward the non-monetary benefits of a college degree, the importance of earning a college degree in obtaining employment, the influence of service in the ARM AmeriCorps program on members' motivation to attend college, and intentions to use the education award to attain a level of education higher than the one they currently possess. This chapter has provided an overview of this study, along with an interpretation of findings and recommendations for future policy and research. Although few of the hypotheses yielded statistically significant results, the study did illustrate the impact of the ARM AmeriCorps program in helping to produce more positive attitudes toward the value of a college degree among its members. Since a nation's social and economic livelihood depend vastly upon the

educational attainment of its citizens (Seidman, 2005), the value of programs like the America Reads-Mississippi AmeriCorps program in helping to achieve higher education levels for its participants is invaluable to sustaining and strengthening the American way of life.

Circle whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), are neutral (N), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD) with the following statements.

1. Earning a college degree will allow me to achieve my career goals.	SA A N D SD
2. Attending college plays an important role in shaping responsible citizens.	SA A N D SD
3. Completing college is important because it provides career opportunities.	SA A N D SD
4. Earning a college degree will help me gain skills that will make me marketable for employment.	SA A N D SD
5. Serving in AmeriCorps will make me want to pursue a college degree.	SA A N D SD
6. Attending college will make me a well-rounded person.	SA A N D SD
7. Earning a college degree will help me gain respect.	SA A N D SD
8. Earning a college degree is a worthwhile endeavor.	SA A N D SD
9. It is important for me to go to college so I can earn a degree that will help me get a good job.	SA A N D SD
10. Earning a college degree will help me succeed in life.	SA A N D SD
11. The main reason I joined AmeriCorps is because I want to earn an opportunity to attend college.	SA A N D SD
12. I believe that attending college will help me get a job.	SA A N D SD
13. The most important benefit of participating in AmeriCorps is gaining the ambition to attend college.	SA A N D SD
14. My participation in AmeriCorps will motivate me to want to attend college.	SA A N D SD
15. Earning a college degree will prepare me for the job field.	SA A N D SD

Immediately after my AmeriCorps service, I plan to: (Please check all that apply)

- Go back to school (undergraduate/community college)
- Attend graduate school
- Find a permanent job
- Find a temporary job while making other plans (school, travel, etc.)
- Travel
- Serve another term with AmeriCorps
- Unsure of my immediate plans
- Other (please specify) _____

My long-term plan after my AmeriCorps service is to (please check all that apply):

- Go back to school (undergraduate, community college)
- Attend graduate school
- Find a permanent job
- Start a business
- Find a temporary job while making other plans (travel, attend school, etc.)
- Travel
- Unsure of my long-term plans
- Other (please specify) _____

I am interested in pursuing a college degree in _____
 (Write "NA" if you don't have plans to attend college.)

Please provide any additional comments or suggestions that would help us better prepare you to use your education award for college.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT (POST)

AMERICA READS—MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE ATTITUDES QUESTIONNAIRE (POST)

Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses will be used to determine how serving in America Reads-Mississippi impacts your attitude toward attending college. The next few items will create a unique ID that will allow the researcher to compare your scores at the beginning of the program year to those at the end of the program year while protecting your anonymity. It is very important that you answer these questions accurately. Be assured that throughout this process in no way will your identity be obtained.

How many siblings do you have who are older than you? _____

What is the first letter of your mother's maiden name? (if not known, enter X) _____

What is the first letter of the name of the last high school you attended? _____

What is the number of your birth month? (ex. January = 1, February = 2, etc.) _____

What is the first letter of the city where you were born? (if not known, enter Z) _____

Please answer the following questions accurately and honestly.

- Please indicate your member-status. 1st - year 2nd - year
- What is your current age? _____ years
- Please indicate your ethnicity.

<input type="checkbox"/> Asian American/Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American/American Indian
<input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino
<input type="checkbox"/> African American	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
- Please indicate your gender.

<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female
-------------------------------	---------------------------------
- What is the highest level of education you have completed?

<input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma or GED	<input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational or technical degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year of college	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 1 and 2 years of college	<input type="checkbox"/> Ph.D., M.D., J.D., or other professional degree
- What is the highest level of education you plan to complete?

<input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma or GED	<input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational or technical degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year of college	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 1 and 2 years of college	<input type="checkbox"/> Ph.D., M.D., J.D., or other professional degree

Upon your successful completion of your term of service in AmeriCorps, do you plan to use the education award toward helping you attain a post-secondary degree higher than the one you currently possess?

Yes No

If you were to attend college, do you have family responsibilities that may impact your school responsibilities? (children, elderly family members, family member(s) with special needs, etc.)

Yes No

Circle whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), are neutral (N), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD) with the following statements.

1. Earning a college degree will allow me to achieve my career goals.	SA A N D SD
2. Attending college plays an important role in shaping responsible citizens.	SA A N D SD
3. Completing college is important because it provides career opportunities.	SA A N D SD
4. Earning a college degree will help me gain skills that will make me marketable for employment.	SA A N D SD
5. Serving in AmeriCorps has made me want to pursue a college degree.	SA A N D SD
6. Attending college will make me a well-rounded person.	SA A N D SD
7. Earning a college degree will help me gain respect.	SA A N D SD
8. Earning a college degree is a worthwhile endeavor.	SA A N D SD
9. It is important for me to go to college so I can earn a degree that will help me get a good job.	SA A N D SD
10. Earning a college degree will help me succeed in life.	SA A N D SD
11. The main reason I joined AmeriCorps is because I want to earn an opportunity to attend college.	SA A N D SD
12. I believe that attending college will help me get a job.	SA A N D SD
13. The most important benefit of participating in AmeriCorps was gaining the ambition to attend college.	SA A N D SD
14. My participation in AmeriCorps has motivated me to want to attend college.	SA A N D SD
15. Earning a college degree will prepare me for the job field.	SA A N D SD

Immediately after my AmeriCorps service, I plan to: (Please check all that apply)

- Go back to school (undergraduate/community college)
- Attend graduate school
- Find a permanent job
- Find a temporary job while making other plans (school, travel, etc.)
- Travel
- Serve another term with AmeriCorps
- Unsure of my immediate plans
- Other (please specify) _____

My long-term plan after my AmeriCorps service is to (please check all that apply):

- Go back to school (undergraduate, community college)
- Attend graduate school
- Find a permanent job
- Start a business
- Find a temporary job while making other plans (travel, attend school, etc.)
- Travel
- Unsure of my long-term plans
- Other (please specify) _____

I am interested in pursuing a college degree in _____
(Write "NA" if you don't have plans to attend college.)

Please provide any additional comments or suggestions that would help us better prepare you to use your education award for college.

APPENDIX B

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Tel: 601.266.6820
 Fax: 601.266.5509
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **10062901**

PROJECT TITLE: **Examining the Effect of a Year of Service in AmeriCorps on Members' Attitudes Toward Attending College**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **07/01/2010 to 07/01/2011**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Jessica Roberts**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Studies & Research**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **07/15/2010 to 07/14/2011**

Lawrence A. Hosman
 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

7-19-2010
 Date

APPENDIX C
APPROVAL LETTER

MISSISSIPPI



INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

America Reads-Mississippi

June 4, 2010

Institutional Review Board
118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Dear Institutional Review Board,

This letter serves to notify you that Jessica L. Roberts has permission to use data from the America Reads-Mississippi College Attitudes Survey for her dissertation. The data was collected from America Reads-Mississippi AmeriCorps members during the 2009-2010 program year. If you need further information, please contact me at 601-432-6380.

Sincerely,

Ronjane Taylor
State Program Director
America Reads - Mississippi

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

America Reads-Mississippi

Dear ARM Member,

America Reads-Mississippi is conducting a study to determine if a year of service in the AmeriCorps America Reads-Mississippi program affects members' attitudes toward attending college and encouraging them to use their education awards. For the purpose of this study, you are being asked to complete the attached twenty-six item America Reads-Mississippi questionnaire, which asks questions about attending college, and the importance of a college degree in today's society, and the usefulness of earning a college degree in career preparation.

In no way are you obligated or required to participate in this study. Should you choose to participate, the America Reads-Mississippi questionnaire should take approximately fifteen minutes for you to complete, and your participation is voluntary. You may discontinue your participation at any time and for any reason without consequences. The questionnaires are anonymous, so please **do not** write your name anywhere on the questionnaire. Since this study seeks to determine if a year of service impacts your attitude, you will be asked to complete this questionnaire again at the conclusion of this service year in May. You will be asked on the questionnaire a series of questions to generate a unique ID number while maintaining your anonymity. The unique ID will allow the researcher to compare scores at the beginning of the program year to those at the end of the program year while protecting the anonymity of all participants. Be assured that throughout this process in no way will your identity be obtained. Once again, please understand that you are not obligated in any way to participate and you may quit participating at any time and for any reason without any consequences.

The aggregate findings of this research study will be presented to the State Director of the America Reads Mississippi Program in December 2010, and you are welcome to contact either her or me if you would like a copy of the results. Should you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact the State Director at 601-432-6380 or the USM Regional Office at (601) 266-4194 between the hours of 8AM and 5PM, Monday through Friday. Remember, your rights as a participant are of the utmost importance.

By returning the attached questionnaire, you are agreeing to participate in this project.

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