

Fall 12-2008

## Factors Related to Nonacademic Adjustment of Freshmen Students

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The University of Southern Mississippi

FACTORS RELATED TO NONACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT  
OF FRESHMEN STUDENTS

by

Nykela Horne Jackson

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

December 2008

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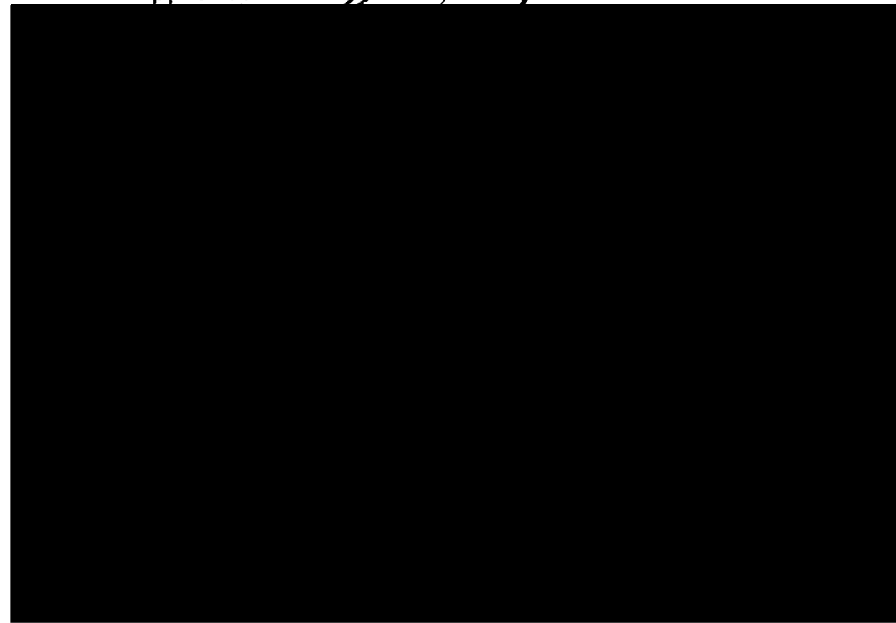
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ABSTRACT

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December 2008

Student retention remains a major concern of higher education institutions. With decreasing state funding, higher education institutions have implemented creative strategies and methods to recruit students. Once students are recruited it is critical that they be retained. Research has confirmed that student withdrawals can be attributed to the lack of successful transition and adjustment to the college environment. Numerous studies have focused on how demographic factors (socioeconomic status, race, employment, and parental education level) affect retention with the major focus on academic adjustment. Current research has shown that nonacademic adjustment (social adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment) plays a significant role in students' persistence in college but is limited to how gender and racial groups, academic status, type of living environment, amount of participation, and institution type affect nonacademic adjustment. Most studies have not investigated the relationship of remedial and nonremedial groups and institution type as they relate to nonacademic adjustment. This study helps close the gap in literature by identifying factors that affect nonacademic adjustment in order to provide a better understanding of student retention.

The study sample was comprised of 198 college freshmen from two residential and two commuter universities in Mississippi and Louisiana. Statistical descriptions were

derived from a two-way multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and a Spearman Correlation. Nonacademic adjustment was measured using the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) while students' demographic background was investigated using a demographic questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in nonacademic adjustment based on students' academic status and institution types. A slightly significant relationship was found between nonacademic adjustment and student participation levels in extracurricular activities. Based on the results, implications for educational change are discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my heavenly Father, because without Him, none of this would be possible. God, I thank you for sending your son Jesus Christ to die on the cross so I may have eternal life. You promised to never leave me nor forsake me, and I am so thankful that You did not.

I am forever grateful to my husband, Matthew, who provided me with the love and support needed for me to reach this goal. Your dedication to seeing me finish this project has been an inspiration to me. Thank you for being my quiet strength. I love you.

To my Mama, Mrs. Genail Horne: Thank you for not letting up on me. I have always looked to you as one of my role models. I can only hope that I have made you proud. I love you.

To my Daddy, Mr. Jim Horne: Thank you for being one of my role models. Your hard work and determination are values that I have instilled into my own life. I will always be “daddy’s little girl.” I love you.

I would like to express my appreciation to the chair of the dissertation committee, Dr. Willie Pierce, committee members Dr. Kyna Shelley (statistician), Dr. Debra Gentry (advisor), and Dr. Terrell Tisdale. I am thankful for the insight, guidance, and knowledge throughout the duration of this process.

To my family and friends: I appreciate your support and encouragement. You have played a role in the person I am today. Thank you.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The transition to college is a major life change for individuals. The entry to college life is often an exciting time in students' lives; however, it is also a period when individuals must adjust to a new environment filled with new obstacles. As familiar scenery and friends fade, students are challenged with the task of taking on new roles, routines, and relationships. In addition to these new challenges come more freedom, independence, and responsibility. An identity transformation occurs, requiring students to choose their own actions. Some students do an excellent job at handling these stressors. On the other hand, other students experience extreme difficulty that may lead to decreased academic performance, increased psychological distress, and eventually withdrawal from college.

Once students enroll in college, it is important for the institution to serve the needs of students so they will persist to graduation. Institutions invest large amounts of time and money into marketing campaigns to recruit students. Recently, universities and colleges have also dedicated just as much effort to develop programs to retain students (Barefoot, 2004; Moreno, 2001). These programs include first year experience and remedial programs. As a result of limited federal and state funding, tuition dollars are important. Barefoot confirmed that tuition dependent schools (private, secular, and church-affiliated institutions) dedicate great effort to retention strategies due to the fact that their operating budget depends on this funding. Institutions have begun to value increased student enrollment and the need to retain as many students as possible (Tinto, 1993).

Difficulty in making the transition to college falls under two distinct categories: nonacademic adjustment and academic adjustment. Academic adjustment includes meeting the minimum standards regarding academic performance (Tinto, 1993). Nonacademic adjustment involves the social integration, participation in extracurricular activities, faculty contact, psychological and physical state of mind, and an individual's feelings of attachment to the institution. A sense of belonging is also associated with nonacademic adjustment. A growing body of literature has indicated that nonacademic adjustment is equally as important as academic adjustment. Social integration and support/attachment are vital elements in an individual's decision to commit to and persist in an institution (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994).

Research has indicated that students who drop out of college typically withdraw during their freshmen year (Tinto, 1993). Some explanations why students leave include lack of financial support, problems with meeting academic demands, change in academic goals, personal circumstances, and lack of institutional fit (Lau, 2003). For example, a student's academic status can affect retention, with studies showing that academically at risk students (remedial students) have a harder time adjusting than nonremedial students (Tinto). This difficulty in adaptation can increase the student's chance of withdrawing from the institution. However, Tinto confirmed that less than 25% of all withdrawals from college are related to academic discharge. Many students choose to leave because of failure with integration into the social and intellectual life of the institution. Students become dissatisfied with their college experience and develop feelings of isolation. These students feel no sense of belonging in their daily college experiences (extracurricular activities, personal interactions with students and faculty/staff, and social acceptance).

Tinto concluded stating that the individuals become depressed and separate themselves from social and academic communities.

Participation in extracurricular activities is associated with positive adjustment. Developing friendships in the new college environment promotes better adjustment rather than isolation from the crowd. The individuals who form those secure attachments have an easier time transitioning. By participating in social activities, students establish a sense of community, form relationships, and increase a student's chance of remaining at the institution (Astin, 1985).

The type of environment a student lives in affects adjustment. Individuals who reside in atmospheres that encourage studying and education and offer sufficient places to study have a better transitional process than others. On campus housing provides a sense of belonging and hospitality. Living on campus gives students numerous chances to get involved in the social life of campus and provides social support (Enochs & Roland, 2006).

Furthermore, college adjustment can be impacted by the type of institution the student attends. Residential institutions provide greater opportunities for social involvement and participation than commuter institutions. Students who commute have a harder time adjusting due to external influences (jobs and families) outside the institution. As a result, commuter institutions have higher withdrawal rates. Student reports of lower levels of social and academic integration are associated with commuter colleges (Braxton, Hirshy, & McClendon, 2004). Students who commute have less contact with faculty and are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities, community service, internships, and study abroad programs (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001).

Gender plays a role in the developmental process for students. According to gender identity development research, women and men differ in interests, attitudes, and behavior (Ross-Gordon, 1999). Institutions are challenged with helping students develop into productive citizens, while shaping and supporting their identity. Enochs and Roland (2006) stated that relationships and socialization experiences are more important for women than men. Due to the many issues and problems that women encounter, social support networks and extracurricular participation are vital to positive adjustment. The authors also noted that stress and depression are handled differently between gender groups. Men are more likely to conceal depression by secluding themselves, and women are apt to criticize themselves, cry, and seek counseling services. Enochs and Roland also concluded that regardless of the differences, social opportunities and student support services are necessary for all students.

An individual's racial group can impact college adjustment. Research has indicated that minority students who have greater social involvement are less likely to leave college and tend to receive better grades (Mackay & Kuh, 1994). Minority students sometimes feel no sense of belonging in predominantly white college environments. Some institutions fail to integrate them into the social life and fall short at providing social opportunities that interest students. When the institution fails to meet students' needs, the individuals become dissatisfied with the college and are more likely to withdraw (Laird, Williams, Bridges, Holmes, & Morelon-Quainoo, 2007).

Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) conducted a study of 238 freshmen (60 men, 162 women, and 16 not reporting gender). The purpose of the study was to investigate relationships between sense of belonging and academic motivation. The

students were given the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) to measure their sense of class belonging, university belonging, professors' pedagogical caring and social acceptance (Goodenow, 1993). The participants were also given the Motivated Strategies for Learning questionnaire (Garcia & Pintrich, 1996) to evaluate their academic self efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and task value. The results indicated that a sense of belonging is associated with academic motivation for college level students as it is in younger students. The research also identified encouragement of student participation and interaction as being the most important predictors of academic motivation.

#### Statement of the Problem

The problems associated with retention are not new. In the midst of a fiscal environment of decreasing state funding, universities and colleges have invested significant resources to investigate student retention and attempt to determine ways to meet student needs. While numerous studies have identified demographic factors (socioeconomic status, minorities, employment, parental education level, first generation college students, and academic problems) that affect retention, most research has focused on how academic factors such as grades and college admissions test scores affect retention (Summers, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Tinto stated, "Though we have a sense of what sorts of actions seem to work, we are not yet able to tell administrators how and why different actions work on different campuses for different types of students" (p. 3). Limited research is available on how gender and racial groups, academic status, type of living environment, amount of participation in extracurricular activities, and institution type affect nonacademic adjustment and retention. Researchers have reported the

importance of social integration and involvement in college; however, most studies have not included remedial and nonremedial groups and institution type in relationship to nonacademic adjustment. The identification of factors that affect nonacademic adjustment may help with the delivery of intervention services prior to withdrawal, hopefully reversing the student's decision to drop out of college. Research in this area will help develop a fuller understanding of the freshmen students who persist in college and the reasons they do so.

Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) conducted a six year longitudinal study to assess college adjustment of freshmen. The sample consisted of 209 students (152 women and 57 men). The students were given the Anticipated Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (ASACQ) to evaluate expectations of college adjustment the summer prior to initial enrollment. The participants then completed the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) seven weeks later during the first semester of college. Six years later, the participants' transcripts were reviewed to determine graduation rates. The transcript evaluations indicated that 145 students (70%) had graduated and 4 (2%) were still enrolled. The remaining 59 students (28%) had withdrawn from college without completing a degree during this period. The results of the entire study indicated that good and poor standing students were influenced by different factors in their decision to stay or leave. For good academic students who persisted, interactions with faculty, satisfaction with social life, course availability, and self confidence influenced them to remain in college. Poor standing persisters reported that satisfaction with extracurricular activities played a major role in their decision to stay. Of the 25 items that were significant predictors, 13 were related to personal and social adjustment.



### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to identify factors that affect nonacademic adjustment of freshmen. Predictors of college success have often been based on academic factors such as high school grades and SAT/ACT scores (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Other research has illustrated that nonacademic variables (social and emotional adjustment and institutional attachment) predict college adjustment more accurately than academic variables. Noncognitive factors such as a sense of belonging, positive attitude toward peer relationship, interactions with faculty, and social integration influenced student persistence (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994, Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999; Petrie & Russell, 1995). Research in this area is essential to understanding the influences and predictors of student attrition. The ultimate goal was to provide data to student affairs and counseling professionals, first year experience programs, and remedial programs for predicting college adjustment and increasing retention.

Specific purposes included the following:

1. To determine the relationship between nonacademic adjustment and academic status, institution type, and extracurricular involvement.
2. To provide descriptive data related to the variables of study for student affairs and counseling professionals, first year experience programs, high school counselors, and remedial programs.
3. To identify predictors of nonacademic adjustment in order to develop strong proactive outreach programs and successful retention interventions.

### Research Hypotheses

1. There is a statistically significant difference between remedial and nonremedial students in their nonacademic adjustment.
2. There is a statistically significant difference in nonacademic adjustment based on institution types.
3. There is a statistically significant relationship between nonacademic adjustment and student participation levels in extracurricular activities.

### Research Questions

1. Are there differences in nonacademic adjustment based on gender?
2. Are there differences in nonacademic adjustment based on racial groups?
3. Are there differences in nonacademic adjustment based on students' living environment?

### Definition of Terms

The following definitions were pertinent to this study.

Academic adjustment – “a subscale that consists of 24 items that refer to various educational demands and characteristics of the college experience” (Baker & Siryk, 1989)

Academic status – a student's classification status as remedial or nonremedial.

Commuter institution – a higher education institution that offers minimal or no places to live on campus and has a large percentage of the population that travel to and from campus.

Emotional adjustment – a subscale that contains 15 items aimed at determining how the student is feeling psychologically and physically – the degree to which he or she is experiencing general psychological distress and/or any associate somatic problems” (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

Extracurricular involvement – participation in campus activities such as student organizations, sororities, fraternities, athletics, and intramural sports.

Freshman – a student in the first year of college who has taken less than 30 credit hours

Gender – distinction in sex of whether a student is a male or female.

Institution type – the classification of the institution as a residential or commuter institution.

Institutional attachment – “a subscale that is composed of 15 items designed to explore the student’s feelings about being in college, in general, and the college he or she is attending, in particular” (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

Living environment – the classification of a student’s type of housing arrangement such as on campus residential halls, off campus apartment/house, or off campus with parents.

Nonacademic adjustment – a student’s emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment to college as measured by the SACQ (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994).

Nonremedial student – a student who is not enrolled in or has never taken any remedial courses in college.

Psychosocial adjustment – the interaction between a student’s personal needs and societal and social demands (Newman & Newman, 1997).

Race – a student’s racial identity as black, white, Hispanic, American Indian, Asian, or other.

Remedial student – a student who is currently enrolled in or has taken one or more remedial courses in college.

Residential institution – a higher education institution that offers numerous residence halls and places to live on campus and has a large percentage of students in residential living.

Social adjustment – “a subscale made up of 20 items that are relevant to the interpersonal-societal demands inherent in adjustment to college” (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

Social integration – adaptation to the social opportunities and life of college (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007).

#### Delimitations

The following delimitations were applied to the study:

1. The study was delimited to nonacademic adjustment.
2. The sample was drawn from voluntary freshmen students.
3. The study was delimited to freshmen students only.
4. The study was delimited to two residential and commuter, four year institutions in two states.
5. The study was delimited to public universities only.

### Assumptions

The following assumptions applied to the study:

1. It was assumed that all information reported in the questionnaires was accurate and honest.
2. It was assumed that the instrumentation was reliable and valid.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most stressful times that students encounter is the transition to college. This change to a new atmosphere is filled with emotional, social, and academic challenges. The change involves the process of desocialization and socialization during the college experience. Desocialization entails abandoning or shifting personal values and beliefs. Socialization is the development of new ideals and perspectives. The college environment provides students with opportunities to discover and grow through cultural and educational experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that the transition was ecological, requiring adjustment to new roles and academic situations. Students examined their relationships, path in life, and self confidence. This internal confusion produced personal and emotional problems (Henton, Lamke, Murphy, & Haynes, 1980).

After completion of high school, societal expectation is for students to attend college or go to work (Bozick & Deluca, 2005). According to Hamilton and Hamilton (2006) roughly 60% of high school seniors attended college immediately after graduation. The transition to college is typically perceived as a positive step toward new opportunities and challenges. However, loss of comfortable settings and the absence of familiar people forces students to venture out into unfamiliar territory. Students are confronted with different routines and lifestyles (Bernier, Larose, & Whipple, 2005; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006). "In a short period of time these adolescents leave home, move into an apartment or dormitory without adult supervision, learn to manage their own affairs and assume adult responsibilities, in addition to having to adjust to changes in

the composition and availability of their social network” (Bernier, Larose, & Whipple, p. 173). Students are challenged with problems of instability, unsteadiness, and self discovery. Individuals are faced with adult responsibilities that involve making career decisions, forming their own identity, and relying on their personal integrity. Nontraditional students have to tackle additional roles (spouse, parent, caretaker, and job) which cause adjustment problems (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

The progression to college is essential in a student’s decision to persevere or depart from college. Whether a student leaves willingly or involuntarily, poor adjustment tends to serve as the premise for the departure (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Normal changes such as moving away to college create valuable opportunities for personal growth while possibly generating self doubt and extreme disappointment. The first year of college is considered the most difficult period of adjustment a student faces (Paul & Brier, 2001). Generally, higher education institutions lose about 25% of its freshmen before their sophomore year (ACT, 2002). According to the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (2002), only 55% of the undergraduate students who begin their education at a college will graduate from the same school. “The losses that many individuals and most institutions experience during a student’s first year reflect an unacceptable and unnecessary waste of individual, institutional, and national talent and resources” (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006, p. 150).

Medalie (1981) stated that beginning college indicated the death of childhood which in turn created social or relational problems. Many traditional freshmen cope with departure from their high school support groups and former way of life (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Students become accustomed and content with home life,

and when leaving family, feelings of homesickness emerge (Fisher & Hood, 1987).

Fisher and Hood defined homesickness as, “a complex cognitive motivational emotional state concerned with grieving for, yearning for and being preoccupied with thoughts of home” (p. 426). Homesickness includes anxiety filled thoughts of home and an extreme desire to go home. In a longitudinal study to examine the effects of transition for first year students, the authors found that students displayed an increase in depression and stress during the first two to three months of college.

Although separating from parents and home can be arduous, moving away from close friendships can also be tough. Students who were once popular and highly accepted by their peers in high school are now ordinary people in the crowd, without the security of past social relationships. During the first year of college, about 50% of high school companionships wither away (Oswald & Clark, 2003). The number and quality of intimate partners and friends decline during the transition to college, which compels college freshmen to rely on family members for assurance (Larose & Boivin, 1998). Short term longitudinal studies conducted by Larose and Boivin indicated that as feelings of loneliness and isolation strengthen, the quality of social relationships and academic adjustment during this transition diminishes. These results insinuate that college transition increases the level of social anxiety experienced by students (Paul & Brier, 2001).

In a longitudinal study of 400 freshmen, students were given questionnaires that inquired about their current relationships, previous transition periods, family background, state and trait loneliness, social skills, typical attributions following social successes and failures, and strategies for coping with loneliness. The researchers evaluated the students



over three quarters: fall, winter, and spring. Of the 166 students who completed all of the questionnaires, results indicated that students were more secluded during the fall semester as compared to the winter and spring semesters. The lack of familiar social support networks and the struggle of forming new peer groups and making new friends were taxing. Students who continued to socialize with friends from home who were not enrolled in college had trouble with adjustment (Shaver, Furman, & Burhmester, 1985).

### College Adjustment

Adjustment to college requires academic, social, and emotional adaptation. An individual's academic competence to manage educational requirements predicts student retention (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Academic adjustment includes motivation to finish course assignments, achievement of academic demands, and contentment with the academic environment (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985). Students who have a strong academic background and are committed to a college are more likely to persist (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt). However Tinto (1993) confirmed that only 12% of the variance accounted for academic preparation alone, and the largest component of retention is based on nonacademic variables. McGrath and Braunstein (1997) found that the college environment (course offerings, adequacy of financial aid, living arrangements, intercollegiate athletics, cost of tuition) were important indicators in a student's choice to remain at a university. However, Wilder (1983) reported that negative attitudes and ideas about the college environment strengthened decisions toward dropping out of college.

College success for students during the freshman year is often assessed in terms of cognitive factors, such as college entrance examination scores (ACT or SAT) and high school grade point averages. Research studies on college students have shown that

nonacademic variables (emotional and social) predict college adjustment more accurately than academic ability variables (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999; Petrie & Russell, 1995). According to Newman and Newman (1997) psychosocial (nonacademic) variables represent outcomes of the interaction between an individual's personal needs and abilities as well as societal resources, expectations, and demands. Nonacademic adjustment includes individual characteristics that affect acclimatization to new circumstances and living arrangements (Zea, Reisen, Beil, & Caplan, 1997). Programs that focus on social and emotional adjustment have increased students' academic performance and overall adjustment (Consolvo, 2002; Ray & Elliott, 2006).

A group of college student athletes were surveyed to determine predictors of college adjustment. The results illustrated that cognitive ability was an important predictor for academically capable students. On the other hand several noncognitive factors such as satisfaction with courses and extracurricular involvement, positive attitudes toward the institution, and faculty and peer support, served as better predictors of achievement for at risk students. Petrie and Russell (1995) recommended additional research to examine how nonacademic variables affected college ready students and at risk students.

Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, and Madson (1999) investigated 60 undergraduate students (31 men and 29 women) to evaluate academic, personal, and social adjustment and attachment to college. The students were given the SACQ and a demographic survey. Positive attitude toward university, academic self confidence, and faculty support made up about 62% of the variance of overall adjustment. Although no data was gathered to

measure students' academic ability, the researchers proposed that nonacademic variables predicted college adjustment more precisely than academic variables.

Management of academic and social variables within the college setting is the foundation to successful adjustment (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). However, current researchers have emphasized the significance of nonacademic adjustment as a vital predictor of college satisfaction. Nonacademic variables can be interpreted in many ways: performance in the social setting, peer relationships, participation in social activities, behavior towards interpersonal experiences, and approval of social aspects of the university experience (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007).

New students must adapt to the institution's social environment. Students must learn to strike a balance between numerous social opportunities and activities and their academic responsibilities and requirements. Social adaptation is vital to positive adjustment. Lack of social adjustment can cause homesickness and loneliness, which in turn can lead to depression (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). Important aspects of social adjustment include becoming integrated into the social life of college, developing a sense of belonging, creating social systems, and managing new social liberties (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Social relationships are imperative to the college experience. Inadequate social support has been shown to predict withdrawal rates for black and white students (Mallinckrodt, 1988). The quality and extent of communication with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom can improve retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Ray and Elliott (2006) conducted a study related to social adjustment, on 27 teachers and 77 fourth and eighth grade students from diverse backgrounds. Similar to

college adjustment research, the results revealed that social adjustment was significantly different between homogeneous groups. Individuals with good academic ability and positive behavior had more self confidence than students with lower academic and behavior capability. Students who possessed proficient academic and behavior ability typically displayed higher levels of social adjustment than those individuals with learning and behavior problems. Fundamental aspects of social adjustment include social backing from family and peers, self identity and belief, and the power of socialization.

Developing new relationships is a major element of social adjustment. Positive peer relationships are connected with high levels of confidence in their ability to succeed in college (Bohnert, Aikins, & Edidin, 2007). Upcraft and Gardner (1989) confirmed that the development of peer relationships was a predictor of both student success and retention. Other researchers conveyed that good associations with people strengthened self identity and satisfaction (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Astin (1985) and Tinto (1993) highlighted the importance of peer relationships as the vehicle to understanding the process of social integration and cognitive development. Involvement in extracurricular activities (both social and academic) serves as a springboard toward positive academic adjustment (Astin, 1985; Bohnert, Aikins, & Edidin, 2007). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) stressed that no involvement in activities created social isolation. Isolation could lead to suicide (Enochs & Roland, 2006). Extracurricular participation provides an opportunity for social integration, offers emotional benefits, and allows interpersonal development (Bohnert, Aikins, Edidin).

Family and peer support are essential pieces for adjustment. Barrera, Sandler, and Ramsay (1981) explained four kinds of support: guidance and feedback (advice and

instruction), non-directive support (trust and intimacy), positive social interactions (spending time with friends and family), and tangible assistance (shelter and money). Halamandaris and Power (1999) performed a one year study, and the results concluded that perceived global social support (one composite score for the different sources of social support) predicted psychosocial adjustment (absence of loneliness and overall satisfaction with the social and academic components of university life). A cross-sectional study conducted by Holahan, Valentiner, and Moos (1995) suggested that freshmen with higher levels of perceived parental support were better adjusted and happier with their college experience.

A sample of 66 commuter and residential students were surveyed in a longitudinal study. The Cognitive Failure Questionnaire and Middlesex Hospital Questionnaire were given before students entered college. At the midpoint of the first semester, a follow-up study was performed with the preceding questionnaires and the College Adaptation Questionnaire. Results showed that both groups felt increased psychosocial stress after transition. Students suggested that homesickness was the top contributor to their depression and anxiety. Students who were homesick displayed a rise in academic failure compared to peers (Fisher & Hood, 1987).

#### Student Development Theory

Tinto (1993) recommended that the dynamics of transition for traditional freshmen are related to developmental stages. Developmental stages offer hierarchical levels of student development and illustrate how students adjust through these levels. The transition is a result of an individual's biological or psychological maturation, personal experiences and interactions, and outside environment. These stages require complex

thinking and behavior. Understanding the changes students go through is vital to gaining insight about students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

### *Field Theory*

A theory related to college student adjustment derives from Kurt Lewin. Lewin's field theory stated that behavior was caused by the person and the environment,  $B=F(P, E)$ . A person's behavior (B) was the product of interaction (F) between the person (P) and environment (E). The outcome was also associated with an individual's traits and circumstances. College students' physical environment, people and events that they experience in life, and feelings about those people and events help with overall development of individuals as well as influence their actions. Lewin thought that an individual's behavior was influenced by complete psychological factors (life space) that frequently changed (Lewin, 1936).

### *Ecological Theory*

Another theory that can help understand the transition to college life is Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) confirmed that people were drastically influenced by interactions among many overlapping ecosystems. These systems had a direct effect on human development. Interactions occurred through the mesosystem. The exosystem contained the sociopolitical and socioeconomic influences of environment. These powers were outside associations such as community, school, medical, and employment. The macrosystem, the comprehensive environment, impacted all other systems. This atmosphere consisted of cultural, political, economic, social, educational, and religious values. The macrosystem advocated using national standards to guide society, from physical attractiveness to public policy. Simultaneously these systems

encompass the social context of human development. According to Renn and Arnold (2003), the ecological model explains the immediate interactions between college students and the environment. “While the ecology model holds great promise for understanding the development of individual students, its greatest strength may lie in its ability to analyze the processes, as well as the outcomes, of peer culture” (Renn & Arnold, 2003, p. 262).

### *Theory of Psychosocial Development*

College adjustment is associated with the student’s personal and social progression throughout the college experience (Kerr, Johnson, Gans, & Krumrine, 2004). Erik Erickson’s (1950) theory of psychosocial development suggested that people’s opinions about themselves and others change throughout life. Erickson (1950) proposed that individuals continually faced trials in life that were generated when physical growth and cognitive maturation collided with environmental demands. The eight stages of the theory present a problem that influences the individual’s development. The stages of psychosocial development include: trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair. The stage that emphasized identity formation occurred during the adolescent to young adulthood years. During this stage, students were transitioning from high school to college or to the workforce. The individuals were seeking to find their niche in society. Students experimented with a variety of occupations and college majors. Eventually, the students find their place in society and pursue their goals.

### *Student Development Theory*

Furthermore, the theory of student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) was influenced by Erickson's model. The theory identified where students were at their present state and which path they intended to follow. In this model, students traveled through seven vectors. In Vector One, Development Competence, students built confidence in their own intellectual, interpersonal, and physical abilities. Vector Two, Managing Emotions, involved students learning how to handle problems and control their emotions. Vector Three, Developing Autonomy, dealt with individuals becoming more responsible and independent citizens. In Vector Four, Freeing the Interpersonal Relationships, students began to respect people's differences and became involved in intimate relationships with friends. Vector Five, Establishing Identity, involved self acceptance and self esteem. Students were comfortable with every aspect of themselves. In Vector Six, Developing Purpose, individuals envisioned their purpose in life and tried to achieve proposed goals to reach their objective. Vector Seven, Developing Integrity, students used their ethical values and principles throughout their experiences and considered others' beliefs (Chickering & Reisser). This student development theory explained the sequence of how students progressed in life and provided clarification of the causes of development that occurred in students throughout their college experiences.

### *Retention*

Adjustment to college is essential to retention. Tinto (1993) acknowledged that participation in academic and social activities was detrimental to increase college persistence. Retention of freshmen remains a high concern for higher education institutions. Tinto confirmed that almost 85% of departures were intentional and occurred



even though most students maintained adequate levels of academic performance.

According to Baker and Schultz (1992) and Kuh (2007) freshmen typically expected more from their college environment than they received. Results from the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicated that freshmen students expected to participate more in cocurricular activities; however, around 32% spent minimal time in these activities.

About 40% - 50% of first year students never used support services that focused on career planning, financial advising, or academic tutoring services (Kuh). Individuals with low adjustment and personal performance expectations were more likely to (a) have low academic performance (b) use campus psychological services more (c) withdraw at a greater rate (d) take longer to complete their degree and (e) convey less overall satisfaction with the college experience (Baker & Schultz).

Students withdraw from college for various reasons. Certain circumstances that are beyond institutional control cause students to depart. Situations such as lack of finances, poor institutional fit, change in goals, and personal problems are some reasons. Another motive for departure comes when the institution fails to create an environment to meet students' needs in and out of the classroom. Students are dissatisfied with the college atmosphere and education they are pursuing. Difficulty in completing and handling school assignments can cause students to leave. Individuals who are not academically competent to pass college level courses are forced to depart. Freshmen sometimes are not inspired to do well in college due to lack of realization of the significance of a college degree. Students need effective role models and mentors to

motivate them academically. Lastly, freshmen may be dominated by stress developed in the transition process from high school to their first year of college (Lau, 2003).

Institutional administrators can help freshmen ease into the transition the first year of college. Providing and informing students of various scholarships can financially assist students. Student services such as career services, learning centers for tutoring assistance, freshmen year programs to help with adjustment to campus life, and honors programs for academically talented students are ways to create positive adjustment. Campus physical facilities enhance student transition. Residential halls that offer a sense of community, convenient study rooms located throughout the campus, access to computers, facilities that support students with disabilities, and places that allow social and professional organizations to conduct extracurricular activities are some facilities that contribute to an effective environment (Lau, 2003). “If institutions want their students to persist, they must offer opportunities and assistance to engage them actively and often” (Bridges, Cambridge, Kuh, & Leegwater, 2005, p. 30).

Georges (1999) conducted a study on the impact of financial aid on minority retention in engineering. With limited minority enrollment in engineering programs, retention of current students is critical. Although previous research had indicated that individual factors (high school academic preparation and sense of commitment) influenced persistence, financial aid served as a significant factor in retention. The results showed that meeting the financial need of minority students was a key aspect in students’ decision to continue in the program.

Faculty play a major role in preserving a positive learning environment. The use and availability of multimedia technology in classrooms benefit student learning.

Emphasis on practical teaching helps students prepare for the workforce. Opportunities for cooperative and collaborative learning can increase student retention through active participation. Continuous academic advisement provides interactions between faculty and students. This open communication offers positive reinforcement and support (Lau, 2003).

A follow up study was conducted on the NSSE results from Boise State University. The goal of the study was determine activities that fostered students' personal growth and satisfaction with the university. Results from the 200 freshmen and 243 seniors indicated that students had more growth and were satisfied when they participated in higher level thinking activities, social experiences with other students, interactions with faculty, and combined academic and community experiences. Students stated that they enjoyed courses that required them to think critically and apply what they learned. They reported that interacting with students from other backgrounds and being involved in community based projects as a part of a course contributed to their overall satisfaction with the college. Lastly, research and discussion with faculty as well as immediate feedback on performance was also important (Belcheir, 2001).

Furthermore, students hold the responsibility to be successful and adjust to the college environment. Individuals are accountable for their active social and academic participation. Irresponsible behavior can cause negative outcomes. Students must set solid learning goals and be motivated to achieve the goals. Students are responsible for seeking available tutorial and support services as well (Lau, 2003).

The most well known and researched retention model was created by Tinto (1975). This model defines retention as a partnership between a student and the

institutional environment. The student integration theory describes persistence as the combination between an individual's motivation and academic ability with the institution's academic and social characteristics. Student qualities and characteristics of the university produce two fundamental commitments: goal commitment (receiving a degree) and institutional commitment. If a student feels that the environment meets individual needs, the student is more likely to graduate.

Tinto (1975) suggested that "one must view dropout from college as the outcome of a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the institutions (peers, faculty, and administration) in which he is registered" (p. 103). Furthermore, specific background factors (family variables, socioeconomic status, and performance in high school) can drive the success or failure of integration. The theory implies that both student characteristics and interactions within the institution's social and academic environments are major reasons for institutional commitment. These characteristics and interactions justify the choice to continue or leave from college. On the other hand, Tinto (1993) suggested that persistence or departure is affected by two aspects of commitment, institutional and goal commitment.

According to Tinto (1993) students experience three stages during the transitional process that are important for college persistence. The first stage is the integration into the social and academic areas of college. The researcher suggested that students separate themselves from past communities to become involved in their new college community. Students should not hang out with friends who do not attend college or have negative attitudes about college because it may cause negative influences. Secondly, students must relinquish past behaviors and learn new ones that are appropriate for college. Students

who were raised in middle and upper class cultures are familiar with the norms, customs, and behaviors that encompass the college campus. Students who had different experiences from the norms and behaviors displayed in college may have a difficult time adjusting to the new environment. Lastly, students must be incorporated into the social system of the campus. Students must experience success in the previous stages in order to become incorporated or integrated into the college environment (Tinto).

Bean's (1985) student attrition model highlights the significance of how students' behaviors affect student withdrawal rates from college. The researcher stressed the importance of socializing with friends in order to reduce dropout. "Students who fit in perceive that they are competent and confident actors in their social and academic environments" (Bean, p. 57). Personal and circumstantial history such as family background, individual attributes, and precollege preparation relate to each other and have an effect on institutional commitment and degree completion. Outside influences play a major part in shaping students' attitudes and decisions. As a result, Bean argued that nonacademic variables impact dropout decisions.

Johnson (1997) conducted a six year longitudinal study of 171 undergraduate students in the northeastern region of the United States. The demographics were: 67% female, 80% traditional age students, and 30% students who took at least one remedial course. Students were surveyed throughout the years on their satisfaction with academic and social experiences, quality of faculty, courses, opportunities for interaction with faculty and other students, and general comfort level. The results indicated that 46% completed B.S., 9.4% A.A., 10% continuing, and 35% dropped out of college. The students who remained in college for the sophomore year reported that the total of

student-faculty nonclassroom contact and interaction with students had a profound effect on their retention.

Colleges and universities are compelled to retain students and aid them in their adjustment in multiple ways. Customary services such as counseling, academic and career advising, residence halls, academic support programs, campus activities, and health and wellness programs influence the positive adjustment of students. Moreover, some services are specifically intended to inspire successful adjustment such as new student orientation programs, University 101 courses, freshman interest groups, learning communities, and developmental/remedial courses. These special services usually fall under what is known as the First Year Experience (FYE). FYE programs focus on total student development. Emphasis is placed on community building, teamwork, time management, planning, avoiding peer pressure, and making sound decisions and choices (Barefoot, 2004; Moreno, 2001).

Dale and Zych (1996) conducted a study to compare freshmen who participated in the HORIZONS Student Support Program (remedial program) with a group who did not participate. The groups were matched based on enrollment, race, and academic skills. The experimental group was made up of 47 students from various majors who entered the program in the fall, and the control group included 47 students from different majors who were eligible to join, but chose not to. All students in the study were either from low socioeconomic backgrounds, first generation college students, or physically disabled. Participation in the program had a striking effect on student retention and graduation. The experimental group retained 85% of their students through 10 semesters; while the control group retained only 47%. The students enrolled in the remedial program pointed

out that having a strong support network, receiving training on effective study methods, and tutoring were the most important services offered through the program. The highest rated benefit was, “just knowing that help was available.”

### Involvement

Involvement is defined as the “quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience and may take many forms, such as absorption in academic work, participation in extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and staff” (Astin, 1984, p. 307). Research studies have demonstrated that the amount of effort students put into educational activities has proven to be the greatest predictor of their cognitive and personal development (Tinto, 1993). Both Tinto (1993) and Bean (1985) have agreed that student involvement increases adjustment to the social and academic demands of the college and encourages institutional commitment. All factors of the institution (culture, climate, and practices) establish the amount of student participation in extracurricular activities.

Research conducted by Astin (1985) and Tinto (1993) confirmed that students who involve themselves in extracurricular activities are more likely to remain at the university. Both researchers recommended that involvement is vital to social and academic integration. According to Bohnert, Aikins, and Edidin (2007) all age groups (traditional and nontraditional) benefit from student participation. Involvement prompts higher self esteem and increased civic engagement. Interpersonal skills such as teamwork and social skills are obtained through student participation. Fellowship, the formation of new friendships, and a feeling of acceptance were gained through participation in

activities. In contrast, participation can help prevent negative results such as delinquency, alcohol and drug use, and depressed mood (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001).

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory explains the benefits of involvement in campus life and how participation impacts their adjustment. An extremely involved student is a person who dedicates substantial time to studying, spends a great deal of time on campus, participates in campus activities, and frequently interacts with faculty members. Students who are involved in campus activities such as fraternities, sororities, sports, student organizations, or honors programs, have a greater potential of persistence and are more satisfied than uninvolved students.

The fundamental components of the theory are explained:

A. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).

B. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

C. Involvement has both qualitative and quantitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).

D. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with



any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

E. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (Astin, p. 298).

Martin (1993) conducted a study on 98 students in introductory psychology classes. The researcher evaluated residential and nonresidential students on their involvement on campus and social support. The results of the study confirmed that students who were heavily involved in campus life had higher college adjustment than those who were uninvolved. Martin proved that residential status and past school involvement predicted college persistence.

According to NSSE, student engagement, learning, and institutional improvement are vital to effective educational practices. The benchmarks include level of academic challenge, student – faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, active and collaborative learning, and supportive campus environment. These standards are closely related to positive adjustment, high levels of learning, and student development (Kuh, 2003).

### Living Environment

Living arrangements (location and situation) can affect the social adjustment of college students. Settings that offer adequate study space, opportunities for peer interaction, and facilities for research make adjustment much easier for students (Adams, Ryan, & Keating, 2000). Residential living provides students unlimited access to

facilities and chances to get involved in campus activities (Friedlander, 1992). Campus involvement increases the certainty of student persistence (Astin, 1985).

Involvement in campus life proposes potential problems for students who do not live in residential halls. Since commuter students spend limited time on campus, the flexibility of participating in activities is difficult. Approximately 86% of U.S. college students commute (Jacoby, 2000). The classification for commuter students is broad including: full time traditional students who live with parents, part time students who live in apartments/houses, and working adults with families. The minority population of commuter students is slightly higher than the number living in residential halls. The number of enrolled hours required to be considered a full time student varies among universities. Furthermore, the percentage of commuter students will continue to rise as more minorities and part time students enroll in college. Although the balance of part time and full time enrollment varies among institutions, part time students, virtually all of whom are commuters, make up about 40%. Commuter students will continue to increase and to become more diverse as the numbers of part time, adult, and minority students enrolled in higher education grow (Jacoby).

Outside pressures such as family, work, and other responsibilities impact the lives of commuter students. These students juggle school along with all of the other duties. External forces sometimes dominate their lives, which causes them to lose their focus. Students hustle to go to classes and rush to go home or to work. Commuter institutions are constantly busy with students traveling to and from campus. Particularly in urban areas, buses, trains, and cars commute students regularly throughout the day (Braxton, Hirshy, & McClendon, 2004).

Regardless of where students live or the type of institution they enroll in, commuting impacts their educational experience. No matter where commuter students live or what type of institution they attend, the fact that they commute to college profoundly influences the nature of their educational experience. Home and campus are the same for residential students; however, commuter students view campus as place to stop by for a short period of time. Commuting requires time and dedication. Usually commuter students schedule all their classes on the same days or back to back, allowing limited social time on campus. Students rely on convenient courses, services, and programs to meet their needs and schedule (Jacoby, 2000). Kuh, Gonyea, and Palmer (2001) stated that commuter students are just as engaged as residential students in activities that reflect academic adjustment. These students exert strong effort to activities that pertain to class assignments, discussions, and requirements.

Due to restricted time to socialize with other students and participate in activities, commuter students often lack a sense of belonging to the institution. Institutions often fall short in providing basic services such as lockers and lounges and convenient opportunities for students to form relationships with faculty, staff, and other students. Attachment to the university is low when there are no significant relationship ties to the institution. Students who do not feel a sense of connection to the institution criticize and complain about their experience (Jacoby, 2000).

#### Institution Type

Student retention can be impacted by institution type and the demographic backgrounds of the student population. Institution type (residential versus nonresidential, public versus private, two year versus four year) may influence a student's decision to

remain in college (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986). Additional variables that may alter adjustment are practical institutional strategies such as tutoring, teaching study skills, student orientation sessions (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe), the access to financial aid, and quality of instruction (Levin & Levin, 1991).

Residential living is one factor in classifying institutions. Researchers have argued that residential life can affect student departure. Students who live on campus have shown a better sense of community and higher retention rates. On the contrary, students who do not live in residence halls have a harder time adjusting. These students have problems making the psychological shifts between home and school (Braxton, Hirshy, & McClendon, 2004).

At residential institutions, students have prime opportunities for social participation. The social wellbeing of a student is associated with satisfaction of social integration. Involvement in community service, service learning activities, social functions, and academic related organizations provide students with chances to find peer groups to relate with. Proactive social adjustment includes the positive student response and social affiliation with the university (Braxton, Hirshy, & McClendon, 2004).

Commuter institutions offer minimal chances for social involvement and integration as compared to residential colleges. Therefore, commuter students have lower levels of social and academic integration (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983). Consequently, students who attend commuter universities have a higher dropout rate than residential institutions (Tinto, 1993).

Student departure from commuter institutions is influenced by outside powers. These exterior forces make a huge impact on students' personal lives off campus while

hardly affecting events that occur within the academic or social contexts on campus (Braxton, Hirshy, & McClendon, 2004). Minority students are sometimes compelled to take responsibility for family issues, which reduces the amount of time available to participate in academic and social activities. A large percentage of minorities who attend commuter colleges have economic disadvantages. Not only are these students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, they are first generation students as well. Many of the students go to school and work jobs simultaneously and meet family, school, and work demands (Tinto, 1993).

A longitudinal study was conducted to identify variables that predict academic performance and retention in an urban, commuter college. The sample consisted of 751 students with disproportionate percentages: white (75%), black (12%), Hispanic (6%), Asian (4%), and other (3%). The attrition rate for this institution ranged from 43.9% to 50% from 1995 to 1999. Comparably, the variables that affected attrition were similar to those of other commuter institutions. These significant variables included personal behavior, expectations, and attitudinal domain. Personal behavior involved the amount of extracurricular involvement, the number of hours worked, drinking, and reading for pleasure. Expectations were the perceived chance of earning a degree. Attitude was an individual's overall sense of belonging (Weissberg, Owen, Jenkins, & Harburg, 2003).

#### Remedial Education

Roughly half of American institutions of higher education maintain "liberal" or "open" admissions policies; approximately one-third admit over 90% of applicants. Based on test results and high school preparation, students are identified as either academically prepared (nonremedial) or academically underprepared (remedial).

Nonremedial students may enroll directly in college level courses, while remedial students are placed in special courses. In colleges that admit all comers, students are woefully underprepared to do college level work. These students are placed in remedial education programs (Moreno, 2001). According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Statistics (1996) remedial education students, sometimes referred to as developmental students, are those individuals who lack the essential skills required by the institution to function successfully in higher education classes. The academically unprepared students are placed in remedial reading, writing, or mathematics courses which are taught at a lower level. These classes are noncredit courses that do not count toward a degree.

Students from all backgrounds are represented; however, ethnic and linguistic minorities encompass the largest groups of students. Almost 42% of freshmen at public two year institutions and approximately one out of five (20%) of students entering at public four year colleges and universities in the United States must take at least one developmental course and roughly half of all community college students require remediation (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Practically all two year institutions and 80% of four year universities offered at least one remedial course in fall 2000 (U.S. Department of Education). Educational leaders and state legislators constantly debate how to respond to this rising concern. Many states have begun to place limitations on the number of developmental classes offered at institutions, while some universities have eliminated their remedial education programs. Some four year institutions deny college entrance to students who fail placement tests and refer the students to community colleges (Abraham & Creech, 2000; Jenkins & Boswell, 2002; Mazzeo, 2002).

The better equipped a student is when entering college the less remediation is required. A rigorous college preparatory curriculum is what students need to gain the skills they need to be ready for college coursework. Students who obtain the required preparation by taking this academic core are less likely to need remedial courses than other students. Abraham and Creech (2000) stated that nearly 80% of Georgia's high school graduates who did not complete a college preparatory curriculum took at least one remedial course; whereas, only 20% of the students who completed the college preparatory curriculum needed developmental courses.

Mandatory college placement exams vary from state to state. Some states give individual institutions the freedom to enforce their own score requirements. For example, many colleges use the Accuplacer Placement Exam to determine students' level of proficiency. A student may attain one score on the assessment and be placed in remedial classes; however, that same score may be considered sufficient for regular courses in another college. Twenty one states mandate that students who fail to meet college level performance take remedial classes, while other states simply advise students to enroll. At some institutions, students who attend part time, or are enrolled in less than 12 hours, are not required to take remedial courses (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002).

The number of students with learning disabilities attending college has increased significantly. The boost in the percentage of students with learning disabilities is related to the impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA) improvements with transition services. New amendments to IDEA include assessment and transition planning. Specifically, transition planning should begin at an early age. Students should understand the coursework requirements for different career majors to

help them make a decision of which route to take when it comes to declaring a major. At the secondary level, students must be aware of the documentation required in the admissions process as well as the student services offered to help them succeed (Madaus & Shaw, 2006).

The chance of withdrawing from college increases when institutions require students to enroll in remedial courses. First year students are already confronted with the typical transitional issues as other students, but also have to overcome the emotional problems that surface when asked to take courses that do not count toward their degree. Perrin (2004) emphasized that sometimes remedial students feel isolated since their developmental classes are not included in the mainstream course curriculum. Institutions send negative messages when remedial education offices and student support services are located in remote areas away from the center of the campus environment. Perrin also pointed out that some institutions will not even allow students to enroll in regular classes until all developmental courses are completed. Furthermore, a student could be enrolled an entire semester in just remedial courses (Perrin).

Regardless of the importance of receiving a college degree and the mandates of IDEA, the vocational education opportunities, and the amount of student services available for struggling students, a large number of students with learning disabilities do not attend college (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). The results from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 confirmed that 76.7% of high school students with disabilities desired to attend college. Two years after high school, only 19% of those same students were enrolled in college. The results indicated that around 77% of the students were interested in going to college in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but by their senior year only 47% intended to go.



Although there has been a momentous increase with students with disabilities aspiring to attend college, the amount of students who actually attend is contradictory. The progress can be affected if students are not prepared for the transition and do not know how to access services available to help them (Newman, 2005).

Thomas (2000) conveyed that more than 35% of freshmen reported having a learning disability. Research from the Learning Disability Association of Canada (1994) indicated that 1,000 out of every 10,000 students in Canadian colleges have some kind of learning disability. Between 1986 and 1996, the amount of students with learning disabilities in the United States doubled (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Social competency was rated the biggest problem by students with learning disabilities (Elias, 2004). Students had poorly developed social skills, which created uncomfortable situations with peers. These students experienced social isolation, low self esteem, and feelings of rejection. More emotional problems and fewer social affiliations were reported, creating the need for additional counseling services (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992).

Many factors influence students' decision to persist regardless if they are academically competent or at risk. Academically capable students reported that informal personal contact with faculty, satisfaction with course offerings, self confidence, motivation, and an overall sense of purpose were significant features that motivated them. At risk students stated that limited opportunities for extracurricular activities and dissatisfaction with extracurricular activities stifled their adjustment. Students in good standing anticipated greater expectations and satisfaction with nonacademic adjustment variables (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994).

Roueche and Roueche (1993) stated, “The variety and magnitude of academic, social, and economic circumstances makes (p. 41). Ray and Elliott (2006) conducted a longitudinal study on students with learning and behavior problems. The results indicated that students with learning disabilities illustrated lower levels of social adjustment than academically capable students. Perceived social support, self concept, and social skills contributed to social adjustment.

Researchers also found that integration into social activities at an early age predicted later academic achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000). Problems with social adjustment could lead to social isolation. Seidel and Vaughn (1991) investigated primary and secondary school students to evaluate their perceived isolation and negative attitudes toward peers. The results concluded that students with learning disabilities were more vulnerable to dropout than academically competent students.

Phillips (2002) performed a study to examine the persistence of black students in ACT 101 programs. The ACT 101 programs were remedial programs for minorities that offered help to students who did not score the minimal requirement on the ACT. These students were required to take remedial courses. The program was implemented to help at risk students at majority white institutions overcome academic, career, personal/social, and financial issues. The study consisted of 159 participants (100 women and 59 males) from ages 18 to 25 (49% black and 51% white). At the conclusion of the study, the results showed that classroom climate, faculty interaction, administrative climate, peer interaction, and student services were significant factors for the persistence of black students in this remedial program.

### *College Bridge Programs*

College bridge programs are outreach programs that assist high school students with the transition into the college environment. The programs give junior and senior students a taste of college life by inviting them during the summers to take courses and experience college life. Bridge programs can target high achieving high school students or those at risk. The funding for these programs can come from existing state education dollars (ADA), Pell Grant, or Title I funds (Alssid, Gruber, & Mazzeo, 2000).

Historically, bridge programs were for advanced students called dual or concurrent enrollment. Dual enrollment allows students who have scored in the top scores on the SAT, ACT, college placement exams, or high grade point averages take college courses and receive credit while they are still in high school. This method provides a more rigorous curriculum for students than what the high school offers. Advantages include early transition into the college curriculum, increased college access, and credit toward a degree (Alssid, Gruber, & Mazzeo, 2000).

Many colleges now offer bridge programs for at risk and disadvantaged students. The programs targeted to these students address the educational needs as well as the social/emotional needs. Summer programs provide an alternative path for this population into higher education. Some programs offer: basic instruction in reading, math, and writing, introduction to career and educational opportunities, strategies to help students be successful, introduction to the student support services on campus, and first hand campus experience. The overall goal is to help students adjust to college and increase retention (Alssid, Gruber, & Mazzeo, 2000).

## Race

Social involvement is a key aspect to the success of black students at predominantly white institutions. High grade point averages in high school are related to higher grades in college, but for black students, grades do not always predict college G.P.A. as well. Mackay and Kuh (1994) suggested that when black students at majority white institutions experience a warm inviting atmosphere (activity involving and supportive) they are more satisfied and experience better adjustment. Participation in programs and activities also broadens the chance to make new friendships and opens the door to support networks (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999).

Studies have confirmed that minority students at predominantly white institutions undergo problems such as an unpleasant campus environment with limited social opportunities that interest them. Institutions that specifically serve minorities tend to provide more social opportunities that appeal to these students. These barriers can create a feeling of detachment and diminished collegiate success (Laird, Williams, Bridges, Holmes, & Morelon-Quainoo, 2007).

Student retention is affected by the degree of social integration as well as academic adaptation and support. Students who feel unaccepted struggle with adjustment. At majority white colleges and universities, minorities (international students, students with disabilities, adult students, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual students) experience feelings of marginalization and isolation (Levey, Blanco, & Jones, 1998). Mayo, Murguia, and Padilla (1995) conducted research to compare college experience of black and white students at majority white institutions. The researchers found that social integration had a higher impact on academic performance for black students. Black

students who reported satisfaction with the social life on campus reported higher grades than students who did not.

Allen (1992) compared black students who attended predominantly white colleges to those who attended predominantly black colleges. The researcher investigated students' academic achievement, social involvement, and occupational aspirations. The findings revealed that black students who attended historically black colleges had higher grades than the students who attended predominantly white colleges. Students attending predominantly white colleges conveyed lower levels of social involvement. Social involvement and students connection to the institution was reported as the greatest difference between the two types of institutions.

Furthermore, Freeman (1997) researched black high school students' views of factors that hindered their participation in higher education. The results concluded that some students were frightened when they visited a campus that was predominantly white. These students developed an emotional stumbling block about being successful in a college environment. The culture of the institutions did not appeal to them. The author recommended that black students needed encouragement from family, counselors, and teachers to attend college regardless of the type of culture and education on the importance of receiving a college degree.

Many studies have been dedicated to assessing adjustment of international students. The research showed that this population had difficulty adjusting to living conditions (food, climate, financial problems, and health concerns), academic issues (lack of English proficiency and understanding of educational system), and social and cultural adjustment (racial discrimination and conflict with values of Americans). Psychosocial

issues such as loneliness, depression, isolation, and loss of status and identity were identified (Selvadurai, 1998).

### Gender

Gender differences can influence an individual's commitment to completion of a college degree (Johnson, 1997). Earlier research suggested that men received college degrees at a much higher rate than women (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 1975). According to the U. S. Department of Education National Center for Statistics (1996) women now encompass the largest percentage of enrollment at higher education institutions and graduate with bachelor's degrees at a higher proportion than men. Bauer and Liang (2003) found that women were more involved in personal and social activities than men.

The retention of black male undergraduates is a critical problem for many institutions. Statistics show that more than 67% of black males who begin college never graduate (U. S. Department of Education National Center for Statistics, 2005). Black males have the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006). Identity clashes are essentially responsible for a large amount of departures from college (Harper & Quaye, 2007). The value of feeling a sense of identity contributes to psychosocial wellness among black males.

Derby and Watson (2006) conducted a study on women and their psychosocial adjustment to college. The researcher assessed if social, self belief, and institutional factors contributed to adjustment. The sample consisted of 352 women. Participants who had daily job and family duties, roommate problems, household responsibilities, and nonparticipation in extracurricular activities reported having poor adjustment. Positive adjustment was related to an increased drive to achieve, emotional health, and satisfaction

with institutional services. Females who were content with the overall college experience, sense of community among students, the chance to participate in community service activities, and quality of instruction expressed higher adjustment levels.

### CHAPTER III

#### RESEARCH METHOD

This study seeks to expand the existing body of knowledge of nonacademic adjustment as it relates to freshmen. The quantitative study investigated the differences in nonacademic adjustment based on remedial versus nonremedial status, institution type, and extracurricular participation. Gender, racial groups, and type of living environment were analyzed to explore differences in nonacademic adjustment. The approach to this study was unique because it investigated nonacademic adjustment of students and remedial versus nonremedial status was included.

#### Research Design

A two-way multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to accommodate the multiple dependent variables that made up nonacademic adjustment (social adjustment, emotional adjustment, and attachment). A Spearman Correlation was used to determine the relationship between student participation levels in extracurricular activities and nonacademic adjustment because student participation was categorized using ordinal data. The SACQ and a demographic questionnaire were used to measure the relationship between nonacademic adjustment and remedial versus nonremedial status, gender, racial groups, institution type, extracurricular participation, and type of living environment. The SACQ was chosen because it is widely used by institutions to assess how well a student is adjusting to the demands of the college experience. Many universities have used this questionnaire for routine freshmen screening to detect problems early in the student's college career (Baker & Siryk, 1989).



### Participants

Participants for this study included first year college students from two comprehensive residential universities and two commuter campuses that had active remedial programs. Some commuter campuses that were previously considered to be part of the study did not offer freshmen level or remedial courses. The researcher selected only the commuter campuses that offered both remedial and freshmen classes.

After receiving approval from the institutional review board, the researcher contacted professors/staff who taught freshmen level courses through email and phone correspondence from the selected schools in order to obtain permission for students to participate in the study. A copy of the email is included in Appendix A. The researcher scheduled appointments at the beginning or end of classes to solicit student volunteers. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked participants to review and sign an informed consent form. A copy of the informed consent form is included in Appendix B. A total of 217 students volunteered to participate in the study. Nineteen students were eliminated because they failed to complete the entire questionnaire or did not meet the criteria of being a freshmen student.

### Ethical Protection of Participants

Participation was voluntary and was based upon the student's consent. The students were informed through a brief description of the purpose of the study. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, questionnaires were numbered so that students did not have to include their name. The study was carried out under the ethical guidelines required by The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). A copy of the letter of IRB approval is included in Appendix C.

### Instrumentation

This study used the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and a demographic questionnaire. Each of the measures is discussed below.

#### *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)*

The SACQ is a 67 item measure (using a horizontal numeric scale) designed to evaluate how well a student is adjusting to the demands of the college experience. Participants respond to a 9 point scale from, (1) “Applies very closely to me” to (9) “Doesn’t apply to me at all.” The SACQ is divided into four subscales that focus on specific aspects of college adjustment which include: academic adjustment (was not used in this study), social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment. The academic adjustment subscale is composed of 24 items that measure how well the student manages the educational demands of the college experience. The social adjustment subscale contains 20 items that are related to the student’s interpersonal skills and the experiences the student encounters in the social environment. The personal-emotional adjustment subscale is made up of 15 items that determine the student’s psychological and physical well being. The institutional attachment subscale is comprised of 15 items designed to explore the student’s feelings about being in college and satisfaction with the particular college. A mean score is determined for each individual subtest. The mean score is associated with corresponding t scores and percentile ranks delineated by gender. Higher t scores on the subscales indicate better adjustment to college (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

The SACQ is a commonly used instrument in the study of college student adjustment and has been found to be a reliable and valid measure. The full scale

reliability is reported to range from .92 to .95. Cronbach alpha values range from .81 to .90 for Academic Adjustment, .83 to .91 for Social Adjustment, .77 to .86 for Personal-Emotional Adjustment, and .85 to .91 for Institutional Attachment.

### *Demographic Questionnaire*

The demographic questionnaire was given to participants to determine characteristics. Information obtained included responses to gender, race, remedial versus nonremedial status, institution type, amount of participation in extracurricular activities, and type of living environment (Appendix D).

### *Data Collection*

Permission to use and administer the SACQ was obtained from Western Psychological Services and IRB. The researcher contacted professors/instructors of freshmen courses to receive permission to administer the instrument at the beginning or end of their classes.

The SACQ was administered to students in 13 freshmen classes (6 from residential campuses and 7 from commuter campuses) using the standardized directions provided by the publisher. The researcher surveyed the classes and explained the procedures and the purpose of the study. Students were informed that they were being asked to participate in research that examined freshmen nonacademic adjustment to college. Individuals were informed that participation was voluntary, confidential, and involved approximately 20 minutes of their time to complete the two questionnaires. The researcher asked for participants who were classified as freshmen to participate. The numbered packets containing the SACQ and demographic questionnaire were distributed

to participants. Students signed an informed consent form, completed the questionnaires, and returned them to the researcher.

Surveys from 4 institutions (2 residential and 2 commuter campuses) were collected in stages. Data collection occurred during weeks 7 – 11 of the Spring semester.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

A two-way MANOVA was used to determine if academic status and institution type affected a student's nonacademic adjustment. A Spearman Correlation was used to determine how student participation levels and extracurricular involvement related to nonacademic adjustment. Descriptive statistics were conducted to investigate the differences between gender, racial groups, and living environment regarding nonacademic adjustment. For the purpose of this study, the social, personal-emotional, and institutional attachment subscales were combined to evaluate students' nonacademic adjustment. T scores were used, instead of mean scores for each subscale, to analyze results. The .05 alpha level was used in all tests of hypotheses. To analyze the data, SPSS 14.0 was used.

#### Descriptive Data

Descriptive statistics were conducted on the variables of the study (See Table 1). The final data set consisted of 198 participants, with the majority from residential campuses. The number of females was slightly larger than males.

Furthermore, Caucasians made up the greatest proportion of participants. African Americans comprised a third of the sample. Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and American Indians all had limited participation.

Concerning living environment, almost 2/5 of the sample lived off campus without their parents. In contrast, students who lived with their parents comprised around a quarter of the sample. Residence hall students were the second largest percentage; while students who lived in Greek Housing represented the smallest proportion.

With academic status, students who had never been enrolled in remedial courses comprised more than half of the population. Students who were enrolled in or had taken at least one remedial course represented a third of the sample. The smallest proportion included students who had taken two or more remedial courses. Three participants did not provide academic status information. A summary of the sample sizes and percentages are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Description of Demographic Variables*

Variable	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Type of College		
Residential	128	64.6
Commuter	70	35.4
Gender		
Male	89	44.9
Female	109	55.1
Race		
American Indian	6	3.0
African American	62	31.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	1.5
Hispanic	2	1.0
Caucasian	125	63.1
Local Residence		
Residence Hall	63	31.8
Greek House	4	2.0
With Parents	52	26.3
Off Campus Without Parents	79	39.9
Academic Status		
1 Remedial Course	66	33.3
2 or More Remedial Courses	19	9.6
No Remedial Courses	110	55.6
No Response	3	1.5

The SACQ has been widely used in the field of higher education. The researcher did not conduct a test of reliability for this sample because the questionnaires were hand scored. Specifically, scores for each subscale were calculated. Individual item responses were not included in the data set. Furthermore, the subscales have been used with other samples and proved to have adequate reliability (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

The higher the score is for the subscale the better the self assessed adjustment to college. All subscales are norm referenced based on gender. T scores were used because they are standard and comparative in nature. The T scores on the SACQ ranged from 25 to 75 for each subscale. The social adjustment subscale focused on how well a student was successful in handling the interpersonal challenges with the college experience. The personal/emotional adjustment scale assessed how well the students were experiencing the stressful problems during college life. Furthermore, the attachment scale measured the degree of commitment to the institution and satisfaction with the environment. Averages for all three subscales fell shortly below the median, meaning that the students reported lower levels of nonacademic adjustment. The results are presented in Table 2.



Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations Based on Nonacademic Adjustment*

<i>N</i> = 198		
<i>Subscale T scores</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social Adjustment	45.02	9.11
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	46.15	10.10
Attachment	46.85	8.59

## Research Hypotheses

1. There is a statistically significant difference between remedial and nonremedial students in their nonacademic adjustment.
2. There is a statistically significant difference in nonacademic adjustment based on institution types.

A two-way MANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a difference between the students' academic status and institution type regarding nonacademic adjustment. The two categories, students who were enrolled in or had taken 1 remedial course and students who had taken 2 or more remedial courses, were combined and recoded together to form a new category, remedial. According to the MANOVA results, the Box's Test revealed that equal variances could be assumed,  $F(18, 59587) = 1.22, p = .235$ . The multivariate model was significant; therefore, the hypotheses were supported. There was a statistically significant difference in nonacademic adjustment based on students' academic status, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .941, F(3, 189) = 3.95, p = .009, \eta^2 = .059$ . Another

statistically significant difference occurred between institution type regarding nonacademic adjustment, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .910$ ,  $F(3,189) = 6.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ . There was no interaction between academic status and institution type as it relates to nonacademic adjustment, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .997$ ,  $F(3,189) = .217$ ,  $p = .884$ ,  $\eta^2 = .003$ . Post hoc tests were not performed because the variables contained fewer than three categories.

Univariate ANOVA results were interpreted using alpha level of .05. ANOVA results indicated that there were significant differences in social adjustment based on students' academic status ( $F(1, 191) = 5.27$ ,  $p = .023$ ,  $\eta^2 = .027$ ), personal emotional adjustment ( $F(1, 191) = 8.55$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta^2 = .043$ ), and attachment ( $F(1,191) = 9.08$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = .045$ ). Descriptive statistics show that nonremedial students reported higher adjustment in all areas than remedial students. There were also significant differences between the type of institution a student attended regarding social adjustment ( $F(1, 191) = 16.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ ), personal/emotional adjustment ( $F(1, 191) = 3.89$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ ), and attachment ( $F(1, 191) = 16.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .079$ ). Students who attended residential institutions reported higher nonacademic adjustment than students at commuter campuses. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for the variables.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations Based on Academic Status and Institution Type*

Variables	Social Adjustment		Personal/Emotional Adjustment		Attachment	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Remedial						
Residential ( <i>N</i> = 48)	44.73	9.68	44.54	9.69	46.31	8.27
Commuter ( <i>N</i> = 37)	40.27	6.98	41.24	12.21	41.70	7.50
Nonremedial						
Residential ( <i>N</i> = 80)	48.63	8.80	49.26	9.92	50.38	7.93
Commuter ( <i>N</i> = 30)	42.40	7.84	46.10	12.19	45.03	8.43
Total						
Residential ( <i>N</i> = 128)	47.16	9.30	47.49	10.06	48.85	8.26
Commuter ( <i>N</i> = 67)	41.22	7.40	43.42	12.35	43.19	8.05

Hypothesis 3 - There is a statistically significant relationship between nonacademic adjustment and student participation levels in extracurricular activities.

A Spearman Correlation was used to determine the relationship between student participation levels in extracurricular activities regarding nonacademic adjustment.

Students were asked to respond to the number of organizations and hours per week with extracurricular involvement ranging from: none, 1- 2, 3 - 4, and 5 or more. There was a statistically significant relationship between social adjustment and attachment and number of organizations and hours of extracurricular involvement. The correlations were positive but were low. Of the 198 participants, the mean of the number of organizations

that students were involved in was 1.48 with a standard deviation of .64. The mean of the hours of extracurricular involvement was 2.41 with a standard deviation of 1.45. A summary of correlations is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations Based on Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities*

<i>Subscale T scores</i>	Number of organizations		Hours of Extracurricular Involvement	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Social Adjustment	.348	< .001	.342	< .001
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	.098	.169	.137	.055
Attachment	.231	.001	.235	.001

#### Research Questions

##### 1. Are there differences in nonacademic adjustment based on gender?

Although significance testing was not used, descriptive statistics were run to investigate a difference between gender groups in their nonacademic adjustment. The scores for personal/emotional adjustment and attachment were similar for males and females. However, for social adjustment males reported somewhat higher adjustment scores than females. Results are included in Table 5.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations Based on Gender*

<i>Subscale T scores</i>	Male ( <i>N</i> = 89)		Female ( <i>N</i> = 109)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social Adjustment	46.73	9.58	43.61	8.50
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	46.65	10.70	45.74	11.27
Attachment	47.17	9.68	46.59	7.61

## 2. Are there differences in nonacademic adjustment based on racial groups?

Descriptive statistics were run to determine if there was a difference between racial groups in their nonacademic adjustment. The sample of American Indians, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics were not used due to the small number of participants. African Americans and Caucasians were the only races used to test the research question. The researcher did not combine the other races together. Although significance testing was not used, the results (Table 6) show that there was no noticeable difference between African Americans and Caucasians in their nonacademic adjustment.

Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviations Based on Race*

<i>Subscale T scores</i>	African American ( <i>N</i> = 62)		Caucasian ( <i>N</i> = 125)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social Adjustment	44.85	8.03	45.24	9.68
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	46.26	9.37	46.07	11.70
Attachment	47.58	7.97	46.59	9.01

3. Are there differences in nonacademic adjustment based on students' living environment?

To find the difference between students' living environment based on nonacademic adjustment, the researcher ran descriptive statistics. The categories, residence hall and Greek House, were combined and recoded as a new category, On Campus. Although the research questions was not tested for significance, the results indicated that social adjustment was the highest for students who lived on campus when compared to students who lived with parents and off campus. Students who lived off campus had slightly higher social adjustment than students who lived with parents. Attachment for students who lived on campus was the highest when compared with students who lived with parents and off campus. Students who lived off campus had a higher level of attachment than students who lived with parents. Personal/emotional

adjustment showed no significant relationship with nonacademic adjustment. Table 7 has a summary of the results.

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviations Based on Living Environment*

	On Campus ( <i>N</i> = 67)		With Parents ( <i>N</i> = 52)		Off Campus ( <i>N</i> = 79)	
<i>Subscale T scores</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social Adjustment	48.24	9.07	42.17	8.22	44.15	8.99
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	46.94	10.91	45.37	10.14	46	11.68
Attachment	50.23	9.27	43.62	8.01	46.08	7.34

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in research literature related to nonacademic adjustment and college freshmen. Nonacademic adjustment was measured using three subscales (social adjustment, emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment) of the SACQ and a demographic questionnaire. Although there is extensive research concerning retention of college freshmen, few studies have specifically examined academic status (remedial and nonremedial students) based on nonacademic adjustment.

The findings of the research suggest that there is a difference in nonacademic adjustment based on students' academic status and institution types. Despite that significance tests were not conducted, there were some differences in nonacademic adjustment regarding living environment and gender. For race, the scores were similar; therefore, it is assumed that race was not an important factor in this study.

#### Discussion

##### *Nonacademic Adjustment Based on Students' Academic Status and Institution Type*

Analysis of data indicated that there was a difference in nonacademic adjustment as it relates to academic status and institution types. There were significant differences for all three subscales. Regarding academic status, nonremedial students reported higher nonacademic scores than remedial students, meaning that academically at risk students had a harder time adjusting. Students who attended residential institutions had higher nonacademic adjustment compared to students who attended commuter institutions.



These results were similar to previous research studies. Residential institutions offer more opportunities for social integration than commuter institutions. Students who attend residential institutions show a better sense of community and overall sense of social well being (Braxton, Hirshy, & McClendon, 2004). Commuter institutions offer minimal chances for social involvement and integration. Commuter students tend to have lower levels of social integration and sense of belonging (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983).

Specifically, attachment was the highest for remedial students from both institution types. These results confirmed that the remedial students in this study were committed and valued their relationships with the institutions. On the other hand, personal/emotional adjustment was the lowest for remedial students from residential institutions. These students had a low sense of psychological and physical well being. They were having more difficulty adjusting to emotional demands and stresses of college life. Furthermore, social adjustment was the lowest for remedial students from commuter institutions, indicating a need for more social integration. These students had low satisfaction with the social climate of the institutional environment.

Results based on academic status indicated that remedial students reported lower levels of nonacademic adjustment from both institution types. This outcome is consistent with the research literature on remedial students. According to Perrin (2004) the probability of withdrawing from college increases when institutions require students to enroll in remedial classes. Other research confirmed that nonacademic factors are related to student withdrawal from college (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Remedial students sometimes experience negative emotional feelings such as seclusion from mainstream environment (Perrin) and low self confidence and motivation (Gerdes

& Mallinckrodt). A study conducted by Ray and Elliott (2006) showed that remedial students reported lower levels of social adjustment than nonremedial students.

Nonremedial students from residential institutions reported institutional attachment as the highest. These students had a higher degree of satisfaction with attending college in general and being at that particular institution. Personal/emotional adjustment was the highest for nonremedial students who attended commuter institutions. These results demonstrated that students were adjusting well emotionally and personally to college. Social adjustment was lowest for nonremedial students from both types of institutions, proving a need for more social opportunities for faculty and students as well as more social activities that meet all students' needs. Students demonstrated low satisfaction with the social aspects of the college campus.

*The Relationship Between Nonacademic Adjustment and Participation Levels in Extracurricular Activities*

The results indicated that there were significant relationships in social adjustment and attachment based on student participation levels in extracurricular activities. The correlations were positive but low. The higher the amount of involvement in extracurricular activities, the higher the nonacademic adjustment. The majority of students were involved in one to two organizations and participated in these activities around two to three hours per week.

Extracurricular involvement provides students with chances to develop a sense of community, form relationships, and feel accepted into the institutional environment. According to NSSE reports, student engagement is essential to effective educational practice. Active and collaborative learning is critical to get students more involved with

their education. Applying learning in different settings and situations require students to synthesize and think critically. Interacting with faculty and other students help them to integrate socially to the environment. Extracurricular activities provide students with learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom. The campus environment must also provide and support nonacademic opportunities for students such community based projects and social activities for students. These opportunities allow students to socialize with students from diverse backgrounds and encourage a sense of belonging (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001).

*Gender Differences, Race Differences, and Living Environment Differences*

Contrary to what Bauer and Liang (2003) and Kuh (2003) contend about gender, men had higher social adjustment than women. Males reported higher satisfaction with the social activities of the college environment. Personal/emotional adjustment and attachment were quite similar for both gender groups. Attachment was highest for both groups, which can be interpreted that males as well as females were somewhat content with their decision to attend their chosen college.

No substantial difference was found concerning the differences in nonacademic adjustment based on race. Although the means were similar between black and white students, both groups deemed attachment as the highest priority in their nonacademic adjustment to college. Research concerning racial differences at predominantly white institutions stated that social involvement and a sense of belonging are key aspects to success of black students (Mackay & Kuh, 1994; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). In this study, race was not an important factor in the adjustment to college. Similar

to the NSSE study, these results suggested that students from different racial groups were engaged to a comparable degree (Kuh, 2003).

Overall, students who lived on campus had the highest nonacademic adjustment to college. Although, attachment was the greatest for this group, the other subscales were slightly higher than other student groups. Students who resided on campus were in an atmosphere that offered numerous chances to get involved and a better sense of belonging. On the other hand, students who lived with parents had low nonacademic adjustment when compared to the other two groups. These students reported lower social adjustment and attachment to college. Based on the results, they had the hardest time adjusting regardless of if they attended a residential or commuter institution. Students who lived off campus reported similar scores in all three areas; therefore, there was barely any difference in students' social adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, and attachment to college.

#### Limitations

No study is perfect in design or methodology. One factor that should be considered when interpreting the findings from the study is the size and participants of the sample. A larger sample size may have yielded different outcomes toward nonacademic adjustment. More diverse racial groups may have changed the results as well.

Another limitation to this study is the timing of administration of the questionnaire packets (weeks 7 – 11 during the second semester). Administering the questionnaires late into the second semester after spring holiday break could have impacted the results. It could be argued that freshman students had overcome

nonacademic challenges by the end of the year. Students may have become accustomed to the college environment, worked through the stresses associated with transitioning to college, and made social connections with the institution and peers. Most of the studies who used the SACQ surveyed students during the first semester of their freshmen year.

The school's climate could have impacted the results of this study. One of the commuter campuses chosen for this study had recently added one residential facility and two sports teams (baseball and softball). The fact that one of the commuter campuses had a residence hall as well as team sports for students to support could have altered the social adjustment and participation on that campus. With the difference in size and climate at the residential campuses used in this study, the generalization of the results may be limited.

#### Implications for Educational Practice and Change

Despite the limitations of the study, the investigation does provide useful information for college administrators, college and high school counselors, and student services programs. The purpose of this study was to investigate adjustment to college as potential factors related to retention which included emotional and social adjustment as well as attachment. The rationale was to find items that may help identify students who are at risk of dropping out. The results of this study support the argument that personal/emotional adjustment, institutional attachment, and integration into the social structure of campus life are significant factors related to student retention.

*High School Administrators/Counselors*

A rising concern with higher education institutions is the large number of students who enroll in remedial courses. Although numerous studies have emphasized that students take the college preparatory curriculum and high schools have increased the rigor in the courses, there is still a big percentage of students who have to take remedial courses (Abraham & Creech, 2000; U. S. Department of Education, 2003). These alarming statistics show that there is a gap between K – 12 education and postsecondary institutions. One way to bridge the gap is more communication between high schools and colleges. High school students need to be more aware of the content and stakes regarding university placement. K – 12 counselors and administrators should stress to students the importance of taking college preparatory courses and explain the consequences related to college admission if they decide not to take them. Freshmen placement exams should be aligned with K – 12 state educational standards. Admission personnel should publicize and inform high school administrators/counselors of the content, standards, and consequences of placement exams. This method will seniors understand college educational expectations and prepare them for college placement exams.

It is also recommended that secondary schools understand the significance of nonacademic adjustment as it relates to college retention. High schools must help students in preparation for the emotional, social, and personal demands of college. According to research, satisfaction with extracurricular activities, faculty interaction, peer interaction, and integration into the college environment were important factors in adjustment to college (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Phillips, 2002). Since positive adjustment is associated with retention, several interventions can be implemented in order

to retain students. Seminars, workshops, or programs should be offered for students and their parents regarding the transition and adjustment to college. These educational workshops should offer information concerning first year experience programs, importance of social and extracurricular involvement, retention strategies, and services offered at the college level to help students adjust successfully. Information on placement exams and the consequences of not taking college preparatory curriculum should be provided for students and parents at the beginning of their freshman year in high school. Early interventions and workshops could aid in decreasing the number of students in remedial courses as well as prepare them for adjustment to college.

#### *Student Services*

The transition to college requires students to adjust to a new environment and life style. During this transitional period students may be faced with family dilemmas, personality conflicts, change in life contexts, and academic fears. Service programs such as first year experience programs, tutoring, career services, counseling, developmental advising, and student organizational support must be provided (Smith, Gauld, & Tubbs, 1997). Every student is approached with problems and will need some type of assistance throughout his or her collegiate career. The division of student affairs is charged with the duty of helping students cope with dilemmas. An effective student services program is required to guarantee that students' needs are met and aid in the process of resolving their problems (Ender, Newton, & Caple, 1996). The results of this study suggest that a mixture of emotional, social, and personal factors affect college adjustment. Therefore, successful student retention interventions must involve the coordinated efforts of student affairs and counseling professionals.

First year experience programs can aid by helping students deal with the academic, social, and emotional issues on campus. Early identification of students who may be at risk of dropping out can help establish intervention programs to help prevent from departing from the university. In order to identify students early on, surveys that address students anticipated adjustment to college could be given during the registration process and follow up surveys given during the first semester. Assigning strong academic advisors can assist students in making appropriate decisions about the courses they need and provide a means of support in coping with the academic demands of college. Workshops and seminars that address issues such as separation, conflict resolution, social involvement, study skills, time management, and anxiety management can lead to continued enrollment. Another recommendation is making students aware of the available student services programs (tutoring center, counseling, writing centers, etc.) offered to help them succeed.

Counseling services help students find resolutions to emotional, health, social, or psychological quandaries. College counselors should offer programs that help students increase their self esteem and motivation, set up clear and explicit learning goals, and understand the expectations of success. If students have a greater belief that their goals can be achieved, they may have greater motivation to try to accomplish the tasks. Other intervention programs should include how to handle death of a family member, loss of an important relationship, a home or community catastrophe; roommate or family conflicts, illness, and academic difficulties.

Extracurricular activities and peer group interactions can help students integrate smoothly into their new learning and living environments. Satisfaction with the social



fabric of the college campus can create a sense of community. Students who have positive nonacademic adjustment develop a sense of belonging which in turn leads to positive adjustment. Smith, Gauld, & Tubbs (1997) recommended activities that enrich the college venture: athletics, social activities, clubs and organizations, campus entertainment, topical seminars and speakers, active student governing bodies, and student honoraries and honor societies.

One recommendation to increase overall satisfaction with the social aspects of an institution is to offer a variety of opportunities to meet all students' needs. Students who commute are sometimes restricted to minimal opportunities for student engagement. To include these students, special programs should be presented in the evening or on weekends at times that can accommodate their needs. Information concerning these activities could be conveyed to students through emails, advertisements, and faculty communication. Students who work, go to school, and take care of their families are sometimes limited with student interaction. A resolution to this problem would be for institutions to plan activities for the whole family. These students are more likely to attend fun and creative programs that include the entire family. Programs that offer cotton candy, popcorn, and balloons for children, provide games, etc. entice students to attend. Another issue is the type of social activities of the institutions. Sometimes extracurricular opportunities do not appeal to the diverse array of students. Since each campus has a unique pool of students and the demands of local communities vary, student affairs professionals should survey students to determine which activities appeal to student groups. Implementing programs and activities that appease all students can establish a

sense of connectedness and increase student overall satisfaction with the college environment.

### *Faculty*

Faculty play an essential role in promoting educational growth among students. There are numerous ways faculty members can help maintain a positive learning experience for students. One suggestion is through unique learning opportunities for students. Cooperative learning is one method to increase active participation between students. Professors and instructors can implement cooperative learning opportunities into their curriculum through group discussions, group projects, and group presentations. Another learning strategy is collaborative learning. Collaborative learning allows students to work with faculty to investigate and understand concepts related to their field of study. Increased faculty/student interaction is also beneficial. A faculty mentoring program is an excellent way to foster a support system, interact with faculty, provide students with a sense of academic direction, and offer students a positive role model during their college experience and contribute to overall student retention. Faculty from each department could be available one evening out of the week, on a rotating schedule, to certify accessibility to all students. Lastly, academic advising should be a process that continues throughout the semester, with occasional follow up sessions.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), frequent faculty-student interactions have a great impact on student learning and adjustment. Kuh (2003) recommended occasional contact with faculty members. This contact should include “discussions of career plans, working with a faculty member outside of class on a

committee or project, doing research with a faculty member, getting prompt feedback, discussions of grades and assignments, and discussions of ideas outside of class” (p. 29).

### Recommendations for Further Research

This study shows that nonacademic adjustment is significant to students’ overall adjustment to college. As students enter college, positive adjustment both academically and nonacademically will help them transition better during their freshman year. A caring educational environment that meets students’ social, personal, and emotional needs will allow students to find their place in the institution and sense of belonging. Secondary school counselors and administrators as well as all of the higher education community and programs have the ability to enhance and impact on college student adjustment.

The results of this study pinpoint several areas that deserve attention in future research. These research areas are listed below:

1. A follow up study on the participants to determine their nonacademic adjustment during their sophomore year to examine retention rates
2. A longitudinal study on a sample to identify how the initial nonacademic adjustment affected their overall college career
3. A study on nonacademic adjustment from students from various institution types such as community colleges, historically black colleges and universities, private colleges, and public universities
4. Racial differences in nonacademic adjustment
5. A model incorporating nonacademic adjustment interventions into senior curricula at the high school level

6. Perspectives of extracurricular involvement and activities based on student types (Greeks versus Non-Greeks, commuters versus residential students, and remedial versus nonremedial students)

Although the findings from this study suggest factors related to student retention, there is no single solution to improving student retention or making certain that all admitted students persist in college. It takes coordinated efforts from both secondary schools and higher education institutions. Colleges must work with students to ensure that students are adjusting successfully. It will take an ongoing effort between secondary school leaders, institutional faculty, and student services professionals to reach out and make contact with students and integrate them into the social and institutional life of the university, in order to enhance retention.

APPENDIX A  
PROFESSORS/STAFF PERMISSION LETTER

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am Nykela Jackson, a graduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi. Currently, I am in the process of completing a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration. I plan to conduct a study to identify factors related to nonacademic adjustment of freshmen students. I plan to investigate how nonacademic adjustment (social and institutional fit) and academic status (remedial or nonremedial), gender, race, type of institution, living environment, and extracurricular activities affect a student's adjustment to college.

I am asking your permission to come to your class and administer two questionnaires to volunteer freshmen students before your class begins or at the end of one of your class periods. It will take about 15 - 20 minutes for the students to complete the questionnaires.

I appreciate your cooperation in helping me with my research. Please contact me at (601) 575-6555 or [nykela.horne@usm.edu](mailto:nykela.horne@usm.edu) at your earliest convenience so that I can schedule a date and time. I look forward to a response from you. Thank you for your time.

Thanks,

Nykela Jackson

## APPENDIX B

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI  
AUTHORIZATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Consent is hereby given to participate in the study titled:  
Factors Related to Nonacademic Adjustment of Freshmen Students**

**PURPOSE:** The present study is designed to identify factors that influence a first year student's adjustment to college. Results will be used to guide research to help understand what factors influence college adjustment.

**DESCRIPTION OF STUDY:** Participation will include completing two questionnaires: Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and a demographic questionnaire. The questionnaires will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Questions will concern your demographic background, academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment

**BENEFITS:** Participants are not expected to directly benefit from participation but will help identify factors related to nonacademic adjustment in order to develop strong proactive outreach programs and successful retention interventions. The study will also provide descriptive information for student affairs and counseling professionals, first year experience programs, high school counselors, and remedial programs.

**RISKS:** There are no known risks associated with this study. If participants become uncomfortable by completing the questionnaires, they should notify the researcher immediately.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, you will not be required to provide names or any information that can identify you other than on the informed consent form. The responses will be reported in such a fashion to maintain strict confidentiality; therefore, participants will be identified by numbers. The results obtained from your responses may be published in a dissertation or scientific journal, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be destroyed and discarded after a one year period.

**PARTICIPANT ASSURANCE:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without penalty. Questions concerning the research should be directed to Nykela H. Jackson at (601) 575-6555 (or e-mail at [nykela.horne@usm.edu](mailto:nykela.horne@usm.edu)). This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of the Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Research Participant

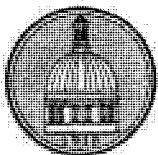
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Person Explaining the Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



# 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](http://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: **27121303**

PROJECT TITLE: **Factors Related to Nonacademic Adjustments of Freshmen Students**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **01/14/08 to 03/07/08**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Nykela Horne**

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

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & Research**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **01/17/08 to 01/16/09**

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

1-22-08  
 Date

## APPENDIX D

## DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Place an "X" beside the appropriate response.

1. Gender:

\_\_\_\_\_ Male

\_\_\_\_\_ Female

2. Race:

\_\_\_\_\_ American Indian

\_\_\_\_\_ African American

\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic

\_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian

3. Local Residence:

\_\_\_\_\_ Residence Hall

\_\_\_\_\_ Greek House

\_\_\_\_\_ Live off campus with  
parents/guardians

\_\_\_\_\_ Live off campus without  
parents/guardians

4. Describe your academic status.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am currently enrolled in or have  
taken at least one remedial/developmental  
course.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am currently enrolled in or have  
taken two or more remedial/developmental  
courses.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am not enrolled in or have never  
taken a remedial/developmental course.

5. Approximately how many student  
organizations are you a member of or  
hold an office in?

\_\_\_\_\_ None

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 – 2 organizations

\_\_\_\_\_ 3 – 4 organizations

\_\_\_\_\_ 5 or more organizations

6. Approximately how many hours per week  
are you engaged in extracurricular activities  
(attending meetings, organizing activities,  
supporting club activities, community service,  
recreational sports, etc.)?

\_\_\_\_\_ None

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 – 2 hours

\_\_\_\_\_ 3 – 4 hours

\_\_\_\_\_ 4 – 5 hours

\_\_\_\_\_ 5 or more hours



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