Validating and Culturally Responsive Pedagogies: Examining the Effects of First-Year Seminar Course Redesign at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

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VALIDATING AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGIES:
EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR COURSE REDESIGN
AT A HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION

A Dissertation
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership

by
Joanna Moore Oxendine
June 2020
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Approved by:

Dr. Edna Martinez, Committee Chair, Education
Dr. Nancy Acevedo-Gil, Committee Member
Dr. Marita Mahoney, Committee Member
ABSTRACT

A substantial amount of research exists regarding the efficacy of first-year seminar courses (FYSC); unfortunately, most existing FYSC research has been undertaken at predominantly white institutions and has tended to present college-going and the transition to college within the dominant narrative. Where addressed at all, the efficacy of FYSC’s for students of color has typically been framed via a deficit model lens and has not taken into account certain pedagogies known to better support Latinx, African-American, or other minoritized students. Led by the overarching purpose of exploring how intentionally incorporating culturally relevant and critical pedagogies in first-year seminars might be used to promote equity in higher education, this quantitative study employed ANOVA, post hoc analyses, and planned contrasts to determine if any significant correlations exist between FYSC groupings and the traditional indicators of student success (i.e., GPA, units attempted and earned, firsts-to-second year retention), as well as select indicators of engagement as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Although no correlation was found between the redesigned FYSC that incorporated caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies and traditional indicators of success or most NSSE constructs, a significant relationship between the redesigned FYSC and students' reported experiences with Effective Teaching Practices was discovered. As such, the primary recommendation for educators and educational leaders, especially those at
minority-serving institutions, is the offering of intentional professional development opportunities surrounding the incorporation of caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies within the postsecondary context.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To say this dissertation is the culmination of many, many conversations, hours upon hours of effort, and years of thought and learning would be a gross understatement, and none of it would have been possible without the steadfast support and encouragement of an incredible group of people I’m so lucky to have had in my life along the journey.

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DEDICATION

To my students, who've taught me more than they'll ever know and pushed me to be a better teacher than I ever imagined I could be.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

An abundance of research has been conducted in terms of examining the effectiveness of High Impact Practices (HIPs), including first-year seminars (Kuh, 2008; Finley & McNair, 2013; Hendel, 2001; Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Peretzadian & Credé; 2016; Pittendrigh, Borkowski, Swinford, & Plumb, 2016; Porter & Swing, 2006; Ryan & Glenn, 2004). Research surrounding equity in higher education has also proliferated, especially in recent years (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Banks & Banks, 2019; Burke, Crozier, & Misiaszek, 2016; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). However, little exists in the way of examining how carefully designed first-year seminar classes may impact minoritized students’ sense of agency or how the use of culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Rendón, 1994) can promote equity in higher education. Additionally, the existing research has primarily been undertaken at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and tends to frame college-going and the transition to college in a dominant perspective (Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 1993), in effect, marginalizing and silencing those students who do not fit the dominant discourse (Rendón, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 2002).

The review of the literature that follows in Chapter Two provides an overview of research related to High-Impact Practices (HIPs), focusing on first-
year seminars. Multiple studies and meta-analyses have been undertaken to
determine the effectiveness of first-year seminar courses on student success
(i.e., GPA, credits earned, retention rates) with mixed results. While some
researchers found correlation between participation in first-year seminars and
traditional indicators of success (see Barefoot, Warnock, Diskinson, Richardson,
& Roberts, 1998; Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini,
1991, 2005; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001), others
found little to no correlation of such (see Hendel, 2001; Permzadian & Credé,
2016). There also exists conflicting evidence regarding the effectiveness of
seminar type with regard to GPA and retention, with some researchers finding in
favor of skills-based and/or extended-orientation courses (see Ryan & Glenn,
2004; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Porter & Swing, 2006) and others, in favor of
academic-content courses (see Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013). The
contradictory nature of previous studies indicates a need for further research.

In addition to contradictions, previous studies regarding the first-year
experience and first-year seminars have been mainly undertaken at PWIs and
focus in part on the compensatory effects of participation in HIPs. Although
Kuh’s (2008) in-depth analysis of the National Survey of Student Engagement
(NSSE) demonstrates the positive effect high-impact practices appear to have on
African American and Latinx students’ success, his study, as are several seminal
works focused on college retention and completion (see Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993,
1996), is grounded in a deficit-model perspective in which students, especially
minoritized students, must separate themselves from their former communities and lives in order to gain the skills and behaviors necessary to successfully complete college (Tinto, 1993). Participation in HIPs, then, is purported as beneficial in that it aids in compensating for underrepresented students’ assumed insufficiencies when compared to their White peers (Kuh, 2008; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Theories and pedagogy that push back against this deficit model framework and instead seek to validate and legitimize the experiential knowledge of students, especially marginalized students, provide another lens through which to explore the effects of first-year seminars on traditional indicators of academic performance and students’ reported engagement and sense of belonging.

Purpose Statement

As Western Comprehensive University’s first-year seminar underwent a redesign several years ago with the intent of transforming it into a more equity-minded course with varied opportunities to incorporate culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies, it was important to assess the overall effect these changes may have had on students’ experience with the class. Given the course redesign that occurred as a result of the employment of critical race theory and validation theory, as well as the professional development trainings provided to support the use of culturally responsive and validating pedagogies in the first-year seminar classroom, the overarching purpose of this study was to explore how employing culturally relevant and critical pedagogies in first-year seminars
can be used to promote equity in higher education. It was also particularly relevant to study the potential effects these changes in the course may have had, as faculty will most certainly be making decisions regarding how—and possibly if—first-year seminar courses should be taught in the future. Additionally, given the lack of current research around how culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies can support equity in higher education for underrepresented students, it was important to explore these potential connections so as to advance the field to continue to make progress in terms of creating equitable learning environments for all.

Research Questions

Given the complexity of this topic, several questions guided the overall research. These were:

1. Does the introduction of culturally relevant and critical pedagogies into first-year seminar courses positively impact students’ college-going experience as evidenced by:
   a. First term GPA:
   b. First year cumulative GPA;
   c. Cumulative units attempted in the first year;
   d. Cumulative units earned in the first year;
   e. First-to-second year retention; and
f. Responses to selected NSSE items related to validation, care and support, culturally responsive teaching practices, and connecting to prior knowledge and experiences?

2. Are there differences between students who never enrolled in a first-year seminar course, those who participated in an extended orientation first-year seminar course, and those who participated in a redesigned first-year seminar course with regard to:
   a. First term GPA:
   b. First year cumulative GPA;
   c. Cumulative units attempted in the first year;
   d. Cumulative units earned in the first year; and
   e. First-to-second year retention rates?

3. Are there differences in students' reported experiences with validation, care and support, culturally responsive teaching practices, and connecting to prior knowledge and experiences based on their first-year seminar grouping?

   $H_1$: Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Reflective & Integrative Learning as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.
$H_2$: Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Collaborative Learning as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

$H_3$: Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Student-Faculty Interaction as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

$H_4$: Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Effective Teaching Practices as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

$H_5$: Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Quality Interactions as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

$H_6$: Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Supportive Environment as measured by the NSSE than those students
who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

Significance of the Study

With previous studies focusing primarily on quantitative measures such as GPA and retention rates and having been conducted primarily at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), little has been done to assess the overall effectiveness of first-year seminars' contribution to underrepresented students' sense of agency or equity in education at minority-serving institutions. This study sought to provide insight into the role in which culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies may play in promoting equitable education.

According to research, HIPs, including first-year seminar courses, seem to work to support the academic success and “belonging” of White students (Finley & McNair, 2013; Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Kuh, 2008; Quaye & Harper, 2014; Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014). Critical, culturally relevant, and validating pedagogies that demonstrate care and support appear vital to the success of students of color (Garza, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2002; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Noddings, 1988, 2016; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). According to Garcia (2019), Hispanic-Serving Institutions are beginning to shift and change to meet the needs of Latinx students, specifically. Given the increased prevalence of these institutions—and their proposed growth trajectory (Garcia, 2019)—it is important to study not only the effectiveness of

Theoretical Underpinnings

Although the present study employed quantitative research methodology and design, the philosophical assumptions that guided my work align most closely to those of the transformative approach (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2019; Ravn, 2016), as I was not interested in primarily proving or disproving any particular hypothesis, but rather hoped the results of this study might be utilized as a starting point for future research and by institutions and instructors to inform and transform the pedagogical approaches employed in first-year seminar courses, particularly at minority serving institutions. Because I am wholly concerned with and passionate about equitable, exceptionally good education for all students, I felt as though my research must be grounded in and connected to a worldview or position that places at the forefront the needs of those who are typically marginalized (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010) and have the ability to transform practice in order to better serve and support those who are disenfranchised by the dominant discourse and systems.
Research has demonstrated that High-Impact Practices are typically beneficial to White students (see Barefoot, Warnock, Diskinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001). Aside from the deficit model view that first-year seminars have the ability to compensate or make up for underrepresented students’ insufficiencies when compared to their White peers (Kuh, 2008; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), at the time of this study’s inception, not much had been undertaken in terms of research to try to understand how first-year seminars might support underrepresented first-year students when pedagogical strategies known to support the success of minoritized students are intentionally employed.

The transformative paradigm is often closely aligned to or associated with critical race theory (Mertens, 2010, 2019). First conceptualized by Crenshaw (1988) and then defined by Matsuda (1991) for use in the United States legal system and stemming from a framework developed by Solórzano (1997), Solórzano and Yosso (2002) have offered critical race theory in education as a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom. (p. 25)
By critiquing many of the accepted, dominant narratives of education—namely, cultural deficit models that claim “minority cultural values...are dysfunctional, and therefore the reason for low educational...attainment” (Solórzano, 1997, p. 13)—and seeking to legitimize the experiences of those who are marginalized (Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Powers, 2007; Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), this theory challenges conventional ideas of how one manages and engages in educational leadership and decision-making (Alemán, 2009). The primary tenets of critical race theory in education, as outlined by Solórzano (1997), are: (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the interdisciplinary perspective. At its core, CRT contests a Eurocentric theory of knowledge creation by acknowledging people of color as equally knowledgeable and originators of concepts that may push back against dominant ideas (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). This guiding view was essential not only to my own study of the first-year seminar course at Western Comprehensive University, but also to the intentional redesign of said course.¹

One of the ways by which students of color can be recognized and heralded as creators and holders of knowledge is through the sustained use of culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom. Framed as “a pedagogy of

¹ Citation omitted to protect identity of institution.
opposition” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160) and tied closely to the opposition theory work of Paulo Freire (1970), culturally relevant pedagogy is built on three propositions: (1) Students must experience academic success; (2) students must maintain or develop cultural competence; and (3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo. Furthermore, it is centered on the belief “that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

Connected to culturally relevant pedagogy, and again providing a conceptual framework for this study, is validation theory. Proposed by Laura Rendón in 1994, validation theory asserts “that for many low-income, first-generation students, external validation is initially needed to move students toward acknowledgement of their own internal self-capability and potentiality” (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011, p. 17). This validation can be of two, often interrelated types: (1) academic, whereby students are supported and encouraged to trust their own innate capabilities to learn and gain confidence in the college setting; and (2) interpersonal, where students’ personal and social development are supported via caring relationships (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Both are contingent upon positive faculty interactions with students and students’ perceptions of said interactions. As was the case with critical race theory and culturally responsive pedagogy, this theoretical
underpinning was essential not only to my study of the first-year seminar course at Western Comprehensive University, but also to the intentional redesign of said course.  

Assumptions

The primary assumption made in this study was that all instructors teaching the revised first-year seminar course beginning in Fall 2015: 1) participated in the professional development opportunities provided to support the use of culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies in the revised curriculum, and 2) employed these strategies with respect to text selection, assignment development, and delivery of instruction. The study also assumed that these practices were not universally employed in the university’s first year-seminars prior to the redesigned course launch in Fall 2015.

Another assumption of this study was that equitable educational environments and pedagogical methods can have a profound effect on students’ success, and it was this assumption that drove my interest in pursuing the study at hand.

Delimitations

This study examined the articulation and employment of student learning outcomes within a single first-year seminar course at a single Hispanic-Serving Institution in the western region of the United States. For the purpose of this particular study, no other courses or universities were included.

2 Citation omitted to protect identity of institution.
This study was solely reliant upon quantitative measures of students’ academic success (i.e., GPA, units attempted and earned, retention) and survey data related to their college-going experience. As such, deeper understandings of the lived, voiced experiences of students concerning critical and culturally responsive pedagogies and validation in and out of the classroom were not explored.

Given the complexities of the overall topic of the potential outcomes and effects the intentional utilization of validating and culturally responsive pedagogies in first-year seminar courses, this study sought only to identify whether or not there exists a relationship between students’ participation in first-year seminar courses and their type and traditional indicators of student success or their experiences with validation, culturally responsive teaching practices, and connecting to prior knowledge and experiences based on their first-year seminar grouping. Thus, one-way ANOVA was utilized for the analysis of most traditional indicators of success, as relationship should typically be established before more complex analyses are undertaken.

Definitions of Key Terms

Below are the definitions of key terms utilized throughout the entirety of this study.

- Hispanic: A person whose native language is Spanish or whom is descended from native Spanish-speakers, including those from Spanish-speaking Europe. Though the term “Hispanic” is language-
based, it is often used interchangeably, though erroneously, with “Latino/a/x”, which is geography-based. To allow for the variations of terminology use in various included literature, “Latino/a/x” and “Hispanic” will be used interchangeably throughout this study, reflecting the term used in the original research.

- **Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI):** An institution of higher education in the United States that has an enrollment of at least 25% Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent students, as defined by United States Code § 1101a. Hispanic-Serving Institutions are a specific type of minority-serving institutions.

- **Latino/a/x:** A person living in the United States with cultural ties or origins in any one of the Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking countries of Latin American, including Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the countries of Central and South America. Though the term “Latino/a/x” is geography-based, it is often used interchangeably, though erroneously, with “Hispanic”, which is language-based. To allow for the variations of terminology use in various included literature, “Latino/a/x” and “Hispanic” will be used interchangeably throughout this study, reflecting the term used in the original research.

- **First-generation:** Students enrolled in an institution of higher education whose parents do not hold a postsecondary degree or credential of any kind.
• Minority-serving institution (MSI): Defined by § 365(3) of the United States Higher Education Act as “an institution of higher education whose enrollment of a single minority or a combination of minorities…exceeds 50 percent of the total enrollment”.

• Retention: Continued enrollment in the fall semesters of a student’s first and second year

• Students of color: Students who are identified in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) ethnic/race categories of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian/Native American. May be used interchangeably with “minoritized students” or “underrepresented minority students” in this study.

• Underrepresented minority students: Developed by the National Association of System Heads (The Education Trust, 2009), underrepresented minority students consist of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) ethnic/race categories of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian/Native American. May be used interchangeably with “students of color” and “minoritized students” in this study.

• Minoritized students: Those students whose life experiences and knowledge are systemically marginalized or silenced by the dominant culture or narrative. For the purpose of this study, minoritized students
include those from Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian/Native American ethnic backgrounds. May be used interchangeably with “students of color” and “underrepresented minority students”.

Summary

Research has demonstrated that High-Impact Practices are typically beneficial to White students (see Barefoot, Warnock, Diskinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001). Aside from the deficit model view that first-year seminars have the ability to compensate or make up for underrepresented students’ insufficiencies when compared to their White peers (Kuh, 2008; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), not much has been undertaken in terms of research to try to understand how first-year seminars might support underrepresented first-year students when pedagogical strategies known to support the success of minority students are intentionally employed.

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore how employing culturally relevant and critical pedagogies in first-year seminars might be used to promote equity in higher education. Utilizing a nonexperimental quantitative approach, this study sought to examine the relationship between students’ participation (or non-participation) in a first-year seminar course based upon course type and the pedagogical strategies employed therein and students’
college-going experience as evidenced by GPA, units attempted, units earned, retention rates, and responses to selected NSSE items related to validation, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and connecting to prior knowledge and experiences.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a review of relevant literature relating to first-year seminars as High-Impact Practices, critical theories and pedagogies, and student validation within the educational setting. The chapter includes two sections and closes with a summary. The first section presents foundational research with regard to student success in higher education as related to High-Impact Practices. The second section explores various critical theories, including resistance theory and critical race theory, and examines the use of culturally responsive, caring, and validating pedagogical strategies in the classroom.

Foundational Research on Student Success in Higher Education

With increasing pressures to demonstrate positive results and data with regard to student success, it is to be expected that the concept itself is quite nebulous, with varying definitions dependent upon the expectations to which an institution is held. Primary indicators of student success tend to focus on grades; retention rates, especially first-to-second year; graduation rates; and time to degree (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Kuh, 2008; Swanson, Vaughan, & Wilkinson, 2017; Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, & Usdan, 2005). Although a good deal of research has been published regarding the factors that contribute to students’ success in
college (see Chickering & Gamson, 1987, 1991; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005a, 2005b; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1991, 2005), much attention in higher education over the last ten years has turned to the indemnification and implementation of what George Kuh (2008) and the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) have termed “high-impact practices” (Finley & McNair, 2013; Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Quaye & Harper, 2014; Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014).

**High-Impact Practices**

Before we can explore high-impact practices, it is important to have an understanding of the larger developmental context within which they fall, namely, student development theory. According to Patton, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016), student development theory within the context of higher education “is a body of scholarship that guides student affairs and higher education practice” (p. 5). Drawing from various theories derived from direct studies on college students, as well as those that have been adopted from other fields such as psychology and sociology, Patton, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016) define student development theory “as a collection of theories related to college students that explain how they grow and develop holistically, with increased complexity, while enrolled in a postsecondary environment” (p. 6) and posit that “Knowledge of student development theory enables higher education...professionals to identify and address student needs, design
programs, develop policies, and create healthy college environments that encourage positive growth in students” (p. 8).

Based upon the foundational studies and seminal works of expert researchers in the field of student development theory, including but not limited to Astin (1984), Chickering (1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993), King (1978, 1990), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005), Kuh (2008) identified ten high-impact practices (HIPs) that contribute to students’ success—namely, GPA, persistence, and graduation—at colleges and universities. These ten practices include: (1) first-year seminars and experiences; (2) common intellectual experiences; (3) learning communities; (4) writing-intensive courses; (5) collaborative assignments and projects; (6) undergraduate research; (7) diversity/global learning; (8) service learning/community-based learning; (9) internships; and (10) capstone courses and projects.

Kuh (2008) also offered insight into what contributes to the effectiveness of these practices with regard to student success, engagement, and persistence, outlining several common characteristics among them. Generally speaking, these practices require students dedicate both their time and energy to the activity at hand; this degree of devotion and investment often strengthens students’ commitment to their academics and increases their opportunities to work with and learn from others. As such, high-impact practices create interaction with peers and faculty members over time, allowing students to interact with those who may share similar interests while gaining mentors and advisors.
Participating in these practices also seems to afford students the increased opportunity to engage and interact with those from diverse backgrounds, exposing students to various viewpoints and perspectives.

In addition to increasing students’ connections with faculty and peers, Kuh (2008) indicated that participation in high-impact practices has the ability to provide for intellectual and personal growth where students’ development is concerned. Because of their increased connection to faculty and peers, students who are engaged in high-impact practices are apt to receive ongoing, meaningful feedback about their work and performance. Whether formal or informal, this near-continual feedback provides a clearer pathway for students regarding their continued academic improvement and growth. Also contributing to students’ intellectual growth are the increased possibilities for students to integrate, synthesize, and apply their knowledge in varying settings both on and off campus through high-impact practices; these opportunities allow students to expand and deepen their knowledge and understanding in meaningful ways. Finally, high-impact practices encourage students to reflect upon their experiences, becoming increasingly aware of their own values and perspectives and how those values and perspectives exist and co-exist with the values and perspectives of others.

Upon analysis of students’ responses to nineteen National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) items, Kuh (2008) found that students who put forth more time and effort into “educationally purposeful activities” (p. 17) have higher GPAs than their peers; this is not surprising, as one would assume those
students who spend more time focused on educational activities would earn higher grades. What may be surprising, though, is that this correlation appears stronger for those students who score lower on the ACT, meaning that these students’ appear to gain more in terms of grade increases the more involved and engaged they are (Kuh, 2008). The same effect was noted when comparing Hispanic students’ first-year grades to their White peers, whereby Hispanic students’ participation in educationally purposeful activities had a greater correlation to higher grades than White students’.

Similar correlations were also noted when Kuh (2008) analyzed the impact of these HIPs on student retention into their second year. Although all students’ probability of returning for their second year increased with engagement in HIPs, the increase was greater for African American students and surpassed White students’ likelihood of returning by roughly 5%.

Although Kuh’s (2008) in-depth analysis of the NSSE demonstrates the positive effect high-impact practices appear to have on African American and Latina/o students’ success, this study, as are several seminal works with regarding college retention and completion (see Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993, 1996), is grounded in a deficit-model perspective in which students, especially underrepresented minority students, must separate themselves from their former communities and lives in order to gain the skills and behaviors necessary to successfully complete college (Tinto, 1993). In the analysis, Kuh (2008) focused on the “compensatory effects” (p. 17) of HIPs in which underserved students are
viewed as lacking the skills or knowledge necessary to succeed in college; participation in HIPs, then, is purported as beneficial in that it aids in compensating for underrepresented students’ assumed insufficiencies when compared to their White peers (Kuh, 2008; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

First-Year Seminars and Experiences. Although Kuh (2008) and the AAC&U have identified ten distinct HIPs, the present study focuses solely on first-year seminars. As such, an in-depth review of the literature as to the efficacy of these courses was undertaken for this particular high-impact practice.

Types of first-year seminars. According to Kuh (2008), first-year seminars and experiences are those “programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis” (p. 9), with the “highest-quality first-year experiences [placing] a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies” (p. 9). Though Kuh’s definition provides a broad description of first-year seminars, it neglects to highlight the various types of seminar courses offered at institutions of higher education in the United States or to describe them at length.

Based on data collected from colleges and universities across the United States, Barefoot and Fidler (1992) identified five main types of first-year seminars offered:
1. *Extended orientation seminars.* Viewed as an extension of any summer orientation offered by institutions of higher education, this seminar course is institution-specific and primarily focused on acclimation to the campus. Campus resources are typically highlighted, as are time management, study skills, diversity, and student development. These courses are usually taught by faculty, administrators, or student affairs professionals.

2. *Academic seminars with uniform academic content across sections.* These courses may be required for first-year students or taken for elective credit. Content presented is generally consistent across all sections of the course and are either theme-oriented, interdisciplinary, or part of the general education requirements. Oftentimes academic skills such as critical thinking are incorporated into the content.

3. *Academic seminars on various topics.* These types of seminar courses are generally elective in nature and vary by section, as topics are selected solely by the faculty who teach them. Topics may be discipline-focused or include current social trends or concerns.

4. *Professional seminars.* These seminars serve to orient students to their chosen discipline and to prepare them for the expectations and demands of their field.

5. *Basic study skills seminars.* Typically offered for those students deemed underprepared for college, these courses focus on teaching
basic study skills such as notetaking, study skills, and time management.

Though the seminar types describe the main categories of first-year courses taught, it is important to note that they are not mutually exclusive, as many first-year seminars function as a hybrid of two or more of the above types (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992). In a follow-up study two years later, Barefoot and Fidler (1994) determined several institutions were intentionally linking types 2 and 3, creating seminar courses that shared an overall common theme or focus but individual instructors were able to choose their own subthemes.

Additionally, Barefoot and Fidler (1992, 1994) determined that seminar courses across colleges and universities are taught primarily by faculty; student affairs professionals; other administrators; others, including adjunct faculty, alumni, and community members (10.2%); upper-level undergraduate students; and graduate students. Those who taught at four-year institutions were more likely to be required to participate in professional development and training opportunities surrounding the course than those who taught at two-year institutions, though the majority of all institutions offered some sort of training for all first-year seminar instructors (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992).

Effects of First-Year Seminars on Student Success. Over the course of the past three decades, several quantitative studies (see Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001) have sought to determine the effectiveness of such
first-year programs with regard to student success, specifically retention into the second year and other academic measures including credits earned and GPA, most with positive results. Summarizing the results of multiple studies on the effects of first-year seminars, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested that participation in first-year seminar courses has positive outcomes with regards to students’ transition from high school to college and their retention into the second year, along with myriad other experiences positively correlated with bachelor’s degree attainment.

One study sought to determine if participation in a first-year seminar increased the probability of retention beyond that achieved by using common demographic variables of gender, ethnicity, and academic potential. Employing comparative analyses and the use of a logistic regression model on random sample survey data \(N = 1,600\) at a predominantly White Research I, urban, public university, Hendel (2001) explored the relative contribution of first-year seminars on student satisfaction with the university and second-year retention. During the period of the study, roughly 40 first-year seminar sections were offered, all with some degree of content variability though all focused primarily on academic content.

Although \(t\)-test results comparing first-year seminar participants’ survey responses with non-participants’ indicated differences for 15 of the 92 items, the groups did not differ in their overall satisfaction with their experience as first-year students; however, students who participated in a first-year seminar course
reported having experienced a greater sense of a community than those students who did not participate in the first-year seminar (Hendel, 2001). Hendel (2001) found no differences with regard to students’ GPA or the number of credits earned by the end of their first year. Additionally, the logistic regression analysis determined that participation in a first-year seminar was not a predictor of second-year retention; only high school rank was (Hendel, 2001).

By examining responses of two separate student surveys—the nationally validated College Student Inventory (CSI) and the internally-developed Knowledge and Community Seminar Survey—Pittendrigh, Borkowski, Swinford, and Plumb (2016) sought to expand understanding of the effects of an academic first-year seminar on the persistence of first-year students into their second year, especially those who are at higher risk for dropping out. Undertaken in 2009, this study was conducted in the Rocky Mountain West at a predominantly White Ph.D.-granting research university (Pittendrigh, Borkowski, Swinford, & Plumb, 2016) that requires all incoming first-year students enroll in a first-year seminar course of some type; Knowledge and Community is one such course and is open to all incoming students with more than 800 students, or one-third of the incoming class, electing to take this particular first-year course each year. Developed by a team of five faculty members from disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, this course was created to be an academically challenging space in which students and faculty could explore through various significant readings and discussion how knowledge is created,
how culture affect understanding, and the roles inquiry and dialogue play in
democratic societies; other first-year seminars at the university focus on
extended orientations or basic study skills, with one additional academic-focused
first-year course being offered to honors students only. Of those who participated
in Knowledge and Community in 2009, 54% identified as male, 85% as White,
and 7% as minority.

The data for the CSI included 1,964 students who completed the survey,
20% of whom were enrolled in the Knowledge and Community first-year seminar
(Pittendrigh et al., 2016). Analysis of survey results determined that the primary
factor predicting persistence from year 1 to year 2 was the College Motivation
factor score, regardless of which first-year seminar course was taken. The
second greatest predictor of retention was participation in the Knowledge and
Community seminar; regardless of their College Motivation factor score, those
students who participated in the seminar were more likely to be retained into their
second year than their non-participant peers. Those with higher motivation
persisted at 5.6 percentage points higher than their peers who did not take the
course. Retention of those students with lower motivation were even more
positively impacted, with the retention rate of those who participated being 11.3
percentage points higher than their lower-motivation peers who did not
(Pittendrigh et al., 2016).

After the initial analysis of the CSI, Pittendrigh, Borkowski, Swinford, and
Plumb (2016) then undertook analysis of the Knowledge and Community
Seminar Survey items regarding persistence in an effort to potentially explain what they deemed the “Knowledge and Community effect” (p. 58). Analysis of students’ responses determined that those students with lower motivation (and, therefore, those at higher risk for nonpersistence) had higher persistence rates if they more strongly agreed at the end of the semester that: (1) completing college was necessary for reaching their employment goals; (2) their preferred instruction modality was primarily discussion-based; and (3) they were likely to actively participate in said discussions. The researchers posit that, based on these analyses, those students who favor participation in active learning strategies may view themselves as capable learners with a greater sense of agency and authority over their learning, strengthening the case for the inclusion of discussion in the classroom to support students’ persistence and retention (Pittendrigh et al., 2016). This appears to support Hendel’s (2001) assertion that participation in such courses may contribute to a greater sense of community and belonging.

Moving beyond outcomes such as GPA, credits earned, and retention rates, Padgett, Keup, and Pascarella (2013) explored the effects of participation in first-year seminars on outcomes such as students’ life-long learning orientations such as their need for cognition and inquiry. The need for cognition (NFC) scale is a reliable ($\alpha = 0.90$) measure that gauges one’s need to seek out and engage in various cognitive actives. The higher one’s score, the more likely a person is to actively engage in acquiring and reflecting upon information in
order to form opinions or make sense of daily life; the lower one’s score, the more likely they are to be dependent on others’ views and ideas to make sense of life (Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013).

Drawing from a random sample of student-level data collected across 48 four-year institutions across three cohorts (fall 2006, 2007, and 2008) via the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, final data analyses included 5,251 students across 45 colleges and universities. Using a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions and standardizing all measures in order to represent effect sizes, the researchers found that students who participated in a first-year seminar were more likely than their non-participant peers to seek out and reflect upon information in order to form their own thoughts and opinions regarding their daily lives and experiences (Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013). Additionally, the researchers found that the chances of students’ synthesizing ideas, information, and personal experiences increased with participation in first-year seminars, contributing evidence to the supposition that first-year seminars grounded in academic content and that are rigorous and challenging provide greater positive effects on students’ life-long learning (Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013).

Other studies have sought to determine the extent to which first-year seminar type (i.e., extended orientation, academic, discipline-linked, basic study skills) may affect student success. In their study, Ryan and Glenn (2004) compared the impact of two seminar types, learning strategy-based and
academic discipline-linked socialization, on first-to-second year retention rates of first-time full-time students at a minority-serving comprehensive public university in the United States. The learning strategy-based course, taught by specially trained professional academic advisors, focused primarily on teaching students various learning strategies within “an overarching metacognitive framework that students [could] internalize and adapt as necessary to different course content” (Ryan & Glenn, 2004, p.13). The academic discipline-linked socialization course, taught by select faculty members, leveraged faculty expertise to explore myriad interdisciplinary topics with content varying by course section (Ryan & Glenn, 2004).

Using a natural environment quasi-experimental design and a sample of 1,457 students in three categories (no seminar course, learning strategy-based course, and academic socialization-focused course), the researchers determined that, controlling for pre-college characteristics, students who participated in the learning strategy-based first-year seminar were more likely to be retained into their second year than those students who either participated in the academic socialization-focused course or took no first-year seminar course at all regardless of pre-college characteristics, such as SAT score or presumed ability level, sex/gender, or race/ethnicity (Ryan & Glenn, 2004).

These findings are supported by a larger study undertaken by Porter and Swing (2006) using data from the fall 2001 First-Year Initiative (FYI) survey. Of the 61 U.S. institutions of higher education who participated in the survey, 45
were selected for inclusion in the study, and the final data set included 20,031 cases. Although it was collected, no descriptive statistics regarding demographic data or institution type were provided by the researchers. Employing a multilevel modeling approach to data analysis, Porter and Swing (2006) found that students who participate in first-year seminars that place emphasis on study skills and matters of health are more likely to express an intent to return for their second year than those students who participate in other types of first-year seminar courses. One major limitation of this study, however, is that it takes only into account students’ intent to persist, not students’ actual enrollment in their second year.

Citing selection bias, relatively small and institution-specific samples, and design flaws in previous research, Per mzadian and Credé (2016) undertook a large-scale inductive quantitative analytical review of existing studies in an attempt to determine if there are certain characteristics of first-year seminars that demonstrate greater positive effects in terms of students’ GPA and retention rates. Utilizing keyword searches of publication databases, including ERIC, Education Full Text, and PsycINFO, the researchers identified 682 possible primary sources for their study. Of those, 284 were determined to meet the criteria established for their study, 89 of which explored the effect of participation in first-year seminar courses on first-year GPA and 195 that looked at the effects on retention into the second year.
Meta-analytics of the overall effectiveness of first-year seminar participation on first-year GPA and retention into the second year suggested no effect on GPA and only a minimal positive effect on retention, contradicting the findings of several previous studies (see Barefoot, Warnock, Diskinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001). However, subgroup moderator analyses of the varying types of seminars and seminar conditions revealed some positive effects on first-year GPA and retention into the second year. With regard to GPA, those courses categorized as hybrid—those that include both academic content and a facilitated adjustment to the institution—proved more effective than extended orientation courses, as did those taught by faculty and/or professional staff instead of students (Permpzadian & Credé, 2016).

Analyses of moderation effects on retention into the second year revealed mixed results. Whereas hybrid seminars proved to have a greater positive effect on first-year GPA, extended orientation seminars proved more effective in terms of students’ retention. This effect is reduced, though, if the seminar is presented as part of a learning community rather than a stand-alone course (Permpzadian & Credé, 2016), again contradicting seminal works that purport the overall effectiveness and presumed best practice of learning communities for students (see Kuh, 2008; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Tinto, 1999). As is true for the aforementioned study, no descriptive statistics regarding
demographic data or institution type were provided nor were results disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, or sex, limiting the study with regard to the potential positive effects of first-year seminar courses of varying type for particular student populations.

In summary, multiple studies and meta-analyses have been undertaken to determine the effectiveness of first-year seminar courses on student success (i.e., GPA, credits earned, retention rates) with mixed results. While some researchers found correlation between participation in first-year seminars and traditional indicators of success (see Barefoot, Warnock, Diskinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001), others found little to no correlation of such (see Hendel, 2001; Permzadian & Credé, 2016). There also exists conflicting evidence regarding the effectiveness of seminar type with regard to GPA and retention, with some studies finding in favor of skills-based and/or extended-orientation courses (see Ryan & Glenn, 2004; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Porter & Swing, 2006) and others, in favor of academic-content courses (see Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013). The contradictory nature of previous studies indicates a need for further research.

Critical Theories and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Although popularized in the decades following the initial work of Paulo Freire (1970), critical pedagogy and the various theories that have informed or stem from it may not be common knowledge to all educators, especially those
who neither engaged with college coursework surrounding educational theory or those who have not participated in related professional development. A generalized understanding of these theories is beneficial when working with and supporting students of various backgrounds, as are they critical to the conceptual framework of the present study, as intentionally (re)designed first-year seminar courses based upon and incorporating various elements of critical race theory, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, the ethic of care, and validation theory have the potential to support student success.

**Resistance Theory**

Grounded in the early works of Paulo Freire (1970, 1973), resistance theory posits that schools are complex institutions involved in constant struggle between dominant and subordinate cultures and competing ideologies. Rather than positioning teachers and students as unconscious pawns in the process of schooling, as is in the case of neoliberalism and Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction, resistance theory acknowledges the agency of those who are a part of and in opposition to the panoply of cultures, conflicts, and ideologies represented in schools (Giroux, 1981, 2006). According to resistance theory, teachers and students possess the ability to shape and transform experiences, using language and discourse to critically evaluate and question that which is being discussed or taught and why (Giroux, 1981, 2006; Tutak, Bondy, & Adams, 2011). This is no less true for those first-year seminar courses in which
instructors have the freedom to operate from a critical race theory stance and employ culturally relevant and/or culturally sustaining pedagogies.

**Critical Race Theory**

First utilized in the U.S. legal system in an attempt to explain why equality under the law following the Civil Rights movement had little positive impact on the day-to-day lives of people of color (Crenshaw, 1988), critical race theory (CRT) has been defined by Mari Matsuda (1991) as

> the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination. (p. 1331)

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) expanded upon Matsuda’s definition and offered critical race theory in education, specifically, as a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom (p. 25).

By critiquing many of the accepted, dominant narratives of education—namely, cultural deficit models that claim “minority cultural values...are dysfunctional, and therefore the reason for low educational...attainment” (Solórzano, 1997, p. 13)—and seeking to legitimize the experiences of those who are marginalized (Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Powers, 2007; Solórzano, 1997,
1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), this theory challenges conventional ideas of how one manages and engages in educational leadership and decision-making (Alemán, 2009). The primary tenets of critical race theory in education, as outlined by Solórzano (1997), are: (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the interdisciplinary perspective. At its core, CRT contests a Eurocentric theory of knowledge creation by acknowledging people of color as equally knowledgeable and originators of concepts that may push back against dominant ideas (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). As Yosso (2005) sees it, in the field of education, CRT “challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses…[and] refutes dominant ideology and White privilege while validating and centering the experiences of People of Color” (p. 74).

Applying a CRT lens to the research, Solórzano (1998) sought to understand the effect of ongoing microaggressions experienced by Chicana/o scholars who received academic fellowships as part of the Ford Foundation Fellows program. Microaggressions, as defined by Chester Pierce (1969, 1970), are the subtle “offensive mechanisms” by which the dominant culture seeks “to reduce, dilute, atomize, and encase the hapless into his ‘place’ (Pierce, 1969, p.303). Drawing from the responses of Chicana/o scholars across the United States gathered through 66 surveys and 12 interviews, Solórzano (1998)
identified three patterns of racial and/or gender microaggressions experienced by the participants. First, many of the respondents reported feeling out of place in their colleges and universities, as most attended elite predominantly White institutions (PWIs) for their graduate and postdoctoral work. This was often compounded by the fact that the scholars rarely, if ever, were taught by Mexican American professors. Second, respondents shared feelings of having been stigmatized and held to lower expectations than their White peers. Additionally, some graduate scholars revealed they had been held to lower expectations because of the status or ranking of the undergraduate institutions they attended. Finally, most male and female students reported having experienced some kind of racist or sexist attitudes and behaviors on campus, either from their professors and/or classmates in the classroom environment or from peers within the larger campus community (Solórzano, 1998).

The findings of the above study were supported and expounded upon by Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009), who challenged Tinto’s (1993) stages of student engagement in and with higher education as they do not take into consideration the experiences of students of color regarding racial climate on campus (Yosso et al., 2009). Utilizing focus groups at three PWIs classified as Carnegie Doctoral/Research Universities–Extensive, the researchers sought to understand the experiences of 37 Latina/o (19 females, 18 males) students who had completed at least one year at their respective institutions with regard to racial climate on their campuses. Employing CRT as a conceptual lens for data
analysis, the researchers identified three types of microaggressions experienced by students: (1) interpersonal racial microaggressions, such as lowered expectations from faculty in the classroom and social/academic rejection by peers leading to feelings of being out of place or unwelcome; (2) racial jokes, of which the respondents were either witness to or the target of and, again, leading to a decreased sense of belonging; and (3) institutional microaggressions, whereby students of color are further marginalized by the structures, practices, and discourse accepted or promoted by the university.

As a result of these microaggressions, students experience increased stress, both as a function of simply enduring the microaggressions and confronting their microaggressor(s). Because so much of their energies and efforts go towards countering their experiences with microaggressions, many Latina/o students are made to feel like outsiders and left with depleted enthusiasm for their campus or educational experience (Yosso et al., 2009), which may negatively affect both persistence and academic achievement. One way in which to counter these negative effects is the intentional creation of belonging and community. Due to their typically smaller class sizes, first-year seminar courses can act as a vehicle through which incoming students feel supported, heard, and welcomed into the campus community.

Similar experiences have also been reported by African American students in higher education. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) employed a qualitative, focus-group design set at three elite, Research I PWIs to examine the
college racial climate experiences of 34 African American students (18 females, 16 males).

As was the case with the Latina/o students in the above study, many of the students shared they felt “invisible” (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000, p. 65) in their classes, having their experiences either distorted or omitted completely from the curriculum or conversation. Students also shared instances of having lower expectations from faculty; others mentioned ongoing negative interactions with faculty that produced feelings of self-doubt. Negative interactions with their peers included racially-divided study groups and being stereotyped by their White classmates. Outside of the classroom, students experienced a generalized feeling of not belonging. When entering non-classroom spaces (i.e., library), students noted they often drew looks and stares from both White students and faculty members, as if they somehow were not allowed in or did not belong in those areas. The combined effects of these experiences left most participants feeling tired and worn down (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), which, again, may negatively impact students’ success in college.

To examine the effects of such microaggressions and experiences with racism on underrepresented students’ academic success, Reynolds, Sneva, and Beehler (2010) surveyed 151 Black (n = 76) and Latina/o (n = 75) undergraduate students at two different PWIs in the northeastern United States using established scales and questionnaires to measure students’ motivation, resilience, self-efficacy, and levels of stress regarding racism-related events.
While many of the variables studied showed little to no correlation among each other, race-related stress created by institutional factors, such policies or procedures, was negatively correlated with extrinsic motivation ($r = -0.22; p < .01$) and positively correlated with amotivation ($r = 0.40; p < .01$) (Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010). This lack of motivation, often sparked by racism-related events, undoubtedly affects students’ grades and persistence.

Based on these findings, it is evident that racism, discrimination, and racial inequities exist in higher education. Research not only documents the subtle forms of racism that continue, but also the strength and determination students possess in overcoming such. It also provides insight and direction as to how to combat such both in the classroom and the larger campus community.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Grounded in resistance theory and tied to various critical theories, including critical race theory, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is “a pedagogy of opposition” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160) built on three propositions: (1) Students must experience academic success; (2) students must maintain or develop cultural competence; and (3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo. Furthermore, it is centered on the belief “that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (Gay, 2002, p. 106).
In her foundational work, Ladson-Billings (1990) sought to understand the thinking and pedagogy of successful teachers of Black students in the hopes of learning more about what these teachers do in the classroom to support their students. The participants, who engaged in ethnographic, partially-structured interviews, were comprised of eight teachers, all of whom were female and five of whom identified as Black (three as White). Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed several common themes amongst the successful teachers of Black students, all of which revolved around the teachers’ thoughts about themselves and others, the way social relationships and interactions are framed in their classrooms, and their understandings of school. They all demonstrated what Ladson-Billings (1990) terms “culturally relevant teaching” (p. 339). These behaviors include but are not limited to: seeing themselves as members of the community and teaching as a way of giving back; believing that all students are capable of success; helping students make connections between school content and their outside worlds; subscribing to the idea of “mining” (p. 340) teaching; feeling a connectedness to students; holding equitable relationships between students and teachers; encouraging a community of learners; subscribing to the idea that knowledge is continuously created and that it should be viewed critically; a passion for learning and content; deploying scaffolding; and viewing excellence and success as complex and taking students’ diversity and individuality into account.
Ladson-Billings (1992) extended this body of research when she focused efforts on two of the female teachers (one African American and one Italian American) who participated in the previous study. Qualitative data were collected through ethnographic interviews, classroom observations, and videotaped lessons, which then were viewed by the teachers who shared insights as to their choices and pedagogical reasoning. Although the women used different approaches to teaching literacy, they both valued and commended their students individually and as members of a certain culture. Additionally, neither of them backed away from conversations regarding race and culture, and both encouraged their students to view everything they read through a critical lens and to compare their own experiences to those in the text.

As was the case in the earlier study, Ladson-Billings (1992) found that the two teachers demonstrated behaviors consistent with broad categories of culturally relevant teaching. Both teachers were proud of their chosen career and of who they are as people and their strong, deep connections to the Black community in which they lived. They saw classroom peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher interactions as positive learning experiences and worked to build and encourage a “community of learners” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 318). Both also went beyond the mandated district and state curriculum, often bringing in materials and designing their own curricula to include the experiences of African Americans.
Though Ladson-Billings’ work (see Ladson-Billings 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998) provided insight into culturally responsive teaching and the behaviors of successful teachers of Black students, it did not delve into how teachers might be taught to employ or embody these skills and behaviors. In an effort to inform and improve teacher education/preparation programs to better prepare teachers to effectively teach students from various cultural backgrounds, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) engaged in a qualitative review of existing literature regarding culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition to attempting to pull the existing literature surrounding CRP into a coherent theoretical model, the authors also explored CRP through a critical race theory lens. Literature for the review included articles focused on culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy and critical race theory. The earliest included research was published in 1981; the most recent, in 2008. An initial 35 themes were developed using the literature (primarily Gay, 1994, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; and Nieto, 1999). Similar themes were then grouped into larger categories, ultimately leading to the development of five themes, which were utilized to create a conceptual framework of CRP. These themes include: (1) identity and achievement; (2) equity and excellence; (3) developmental appropriateness; (4) teaching the whole child; and (5) student-teacher relationships. In order for CRP to be realized to its fullest potential, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) stressed that all five areas must be engaged in in the classroom, a sentiment also expressed, at least in part, by Barefoot (2000) with regard to improving first-year seminar
classes. Drawing from students’ experiences during their first year of college, Barefoot concluded that first-year seminars ought: 1) provide for opportunities for students to interact with successful peers, thereby helping to build an identity of achievement; 2) increase opportunities for intentional student-faculty interaction; and 3) raising the bar for student expectations.

Although the creation of a conceptual framework for CRP is helpful in preparing teachers, it does not provide an entire explanation for the success of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. Also in an attempt to bolster teacher understanding and utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy and to support such learning in teacher preparation programs, Rychly and Graves (2012) reviewed existing research/literature regarding culturally responsive pedagogy in order to create a synthesized understanding of the various characteristics exhibited by teachers who successfully employ culturally responsive pedagogy. Articles in the study focused solely on culturally responsive pedagogy and were published after 2000.

Based on their extensive review of the literature, Rychly and Graves (2012) developed four overarching characteristics of teachers who successfully employ culturally responsive pedagogy. These practices include: (1) being caring and empathetic; (2) critically reflecting about their attitudes and beliefs about other cultures; (3) critically reflecting about their own cultural identities and how that shapes their views; and (4) seeking knowledge about the various cultures specifically represented in the classroom/community. Although research
does exist in regarding teachers who employ culturally responsive pedagogy, little has been done in terms of translating what is known about culturally responsive pedagogy into classroom practice (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Thus, though CRP theories exist and have been documented, they often lack practical application or practical suggestions for application.

Given the large and growing population of Latina/o students in the United States, Irizarry (2007) found it imperative to enhance and expand the understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy by adding the experiences of Latina/o students, specifically, to the body of existing literature. This study took place in an urban high school with the highest dropout rates and lowest state standardized test pass rates of any high school in the district located in the northeastern region of the United States. The school racial demographics included 58% Latina/o and 28% African American students. Participants in the study included Mr. Talbert, a 31-year-old African American male teacher in his fourth year of teaching, and 12 students (7 female and 5 male; 7 Puerto Rican and 5 African American or Black).

Using inductive coding procedures to analyze classroom observation field notes and participant interviews, Irizarry (2007) found three specific practices identified by Latina/o students as being culturally responsive—including community connections, the use of language, and the integration of music. Latina/o students generally appreciated that Mr. Talbert lived in their community in addition to teaching in it, a finding similar to that of Ladson-Billings (1990,
1992), and would share information about himself. He was also supportive of
their use of different languages and forms of English (i.e., Ebonics) in the
classroom; this allowed them to feel as though parts of who they are were
validated in Mr. Talbert’s class. Finally, Mr. Talbert integrated the use of rap into
his classroom activities also validating students’ outside interests and
experiences. For one assignment, students wrote and performed songs that
allowed them to share information about themselves and to address (or critically
question) some of their concerns. Mr. Talbert then used students’ critical
observations as a springboard for discussions about social justice, equity, and
change.

As Irizarry’s (2007) findings suggest, Mr. Talbert’s teaching highlights the
importance of making connections to and with students and their cultural
communities. Although teachers cannot necessarily change their own
backgrounds, they can seek to learn about and gain better understandings of
their own culture, that of their students, and the historical relationship between
the two. With a rapidly increasing number of students from Latino backgrounds,
it is important to learn more about how these students in particular might respond
to and benefit from culturally relevant pedagogies.

Cultural Capital

As highlighted by many of the aforementioned studies, underrepresented
minority students’ experiences with microaggressions and racism both in and out
of the classroom can contribute to not only negative experiences overall in higher
education, but also negative emotions and self-views related to ability and motivation (see Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2006). Conversely, those students who experience culturally relevant or culturally sustaining pedagogies in the classroom are much more likely to be engaged in learning (see Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rychly & Graves, 2012). Rather than "[portraying] people of color as deficient" (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002, p. 169), culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies hold “students’ backgrounds and living conditions as sources of valuable knowledge rather than mere impediments to college-level learning” (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017, p. 5).

Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986) introduced the concept of cultural capital in an analysis of how education works to support and maintain the status quo. In his theory of reproduction, Bourdieu (1977, 1986) posits that societies perpetually reproduce social stratification and that people tend to stay where they are or where their parents were; rather than serving to ameliorate these social disparities, the educational system serves to protect and proliferate them. In the context of Bourdieu’s theory, people draw upon economic, social, and cultural capital in order to navigate situations; these forms of capital combined create habitus, or inherent habits and beliefs people hold about the world around them and their place in it (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). One’s habitus interacts with fields, or areas and places in which people engage with one another, including schools
and institutions of higher education. Those whose habitus affords them the benefit of understanding the doxa, or hidden rules of the field, get ahead, move forward, and/or are rewarded; those who do not understand the doxa either disengage or are marginalized by others (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986).

These doxa, though, are often created or controlled by those who already know the game and are rarely, if ever, revealed or taught (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). Within our society, it is typically only the Eurocentric habitus and forms of capital that are valued, thus contributing to the reproduction of social stratification and continued marginalization and view of people of color as lacking or somehow deficient (Yosso, 2005). As noted by Dolores Delgado Bernal (2002), “Although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings” (p. 106).

Using a CRT lens to “shift the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color” (Yosso, 2005, p. 69), Yosso (2005) expanded upon Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, proposing rather community cultural wealth. Community cultural wealth, as defined by Yosso (2005), “is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). Yosso (2005) posits that this cultural wealth is cultivated and developed through at least six distinct forms of capital: (1) aspirational capital, or the ability to hold onto hopes and dreams when faced with adversities or barriers; (2) linguistic
capital, or the skills gained via communicating with others in more than one language and through storytelling traditions; (3) familial capital, or lessons learned through kin and community about connection, caring, and coping; (4) social capital, which includes social networks and community connections; (5) navigational capital, or the skills and strategies necessary to move through social institutions, especially those that are "structures of inequality permeated by racism" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80); and (6) resistant capital, or the knowledge and skills developed by pushing back against inequality.

Within this framework, people of color are regarded not as lacking or deficient in some way, but rather as holders and creators of a tremendous amount of knowledge and skill. It maintains that students of color bring with them a wealth of assets, skills, and knowledge into the classroom and that communities of color are places and sources of tremendous strength while questioning "White middle class communities as the standard by which all others are judged…[and] the racism underlying cultural deficit theorizing" (Yosso, 2005, p. 82).

Ethic of Care

One area of community cultural wealth identified by Yosso (2005) is that of familial capital. Although this certainly includes one’s family, the notion of **familia** extends far beyond blood relations; one’s **familia** includes not only family members, but also family friends and other community members with whom people have close connections. Within the **familia** and through other community...
settings, such as places of worship, people of color “model lessons of caring, coping, and providing” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79).

Grounded in the work of Nel Noddings (1988, 2016), the ethic of care is a purposeful undertaking by teachers to exhibit caring behaviors toward their students and to continually reflect critically on their actions of care, making adjustments where necessary. Similar to the interactions of familial capital and motivations of the *familia* as described by Yosso (2005), Noddings’s (1988) ethic of caring is based in the belief that the development of those who are cared for—students—is of utmost importance and is modeled when teachers consistently encourage and support students’ own reflective self-affirmation. According to Freire (1970), this support of self-affirmation is critical in pushing back against oppression, which speaks to another area of Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model, resistant capital. Noddings (2016) also posits that teachers are equally dependent upon their students as students are upon them, acknowledging at least in part the symbiotic relationship between teachers and students where students bring with them to the classroom invaluable life experiences, knowledge, and skills that, when shared, add value to their and their teachers’ and peers’ learning experiences.

Gay (2000) expands upon Noddings’s ethic of care as it relates to culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. According to Gay (2000), caring in the classroom is demonstrated through “teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students’ human value, intellectual capability, and performance
responsibilities” (p. 45). In this setting, teachers are situated in an “ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students” (p. 52) that is built upon respect. Those who teach from an ethic of care hold high expectations—academic, moral, social—for their students and work to culturally scaffold, to provide support grounded in students’ own experiences and cultures, in order to support the attainment of those expectations (Gay, 2000, 2002). In this way, teachers who operate from an ethic of care utilize culturally responsive pedagogies to “build toward [their students’] academic success from a basis of cultural validation and strength” (Gay, 2002, p. 110).

In their work, Noddings (1988, 2016) and Gay (2000, 2002) focus primarily on the beliefs, attitudes, and actions held by caring teachers; their work, however, is quite limited with regard to how these actions are perceived by students. Through a research study at a large suburban high school in Texas, Garza (2009) sought to learn more about students’ perceptions of caring teachers. The participants were comprised of 49 Latina/o and 44 White high school students, aged 14 to 18 and were from low- to middle-income socioeconomic status. A grounded theory approach, or constant comparative analysis, was utilized to allow for data-driven development of theoretical explanations. Teachers were interviewed regarding their disposition and philosophy of care for students. Field notes documented teachers’ observed interactions with their students both in and outside of the classroom. Finally, an
open-ended questionnaire made up of 10 prompts was utilized to gather information about students’ perceptions of their teachers’ caring behaviors.

Based on the data collected, Garza (2009) was able to identify five themes regarding students’ perceptions of caring teachers. According to students, caring teachers: (1) provide scaffolding, especially that which relates to students’ own cultures and/or experiences; (2) demonstrate kindness through actions; (3) are available; (4) show a personal interest in students; and (5) provide affective academic support. These themes were prevalent amongst both Latina/o and White students. Although the themes themselves were identified as important indicators of teacher caring, the priority given to each differed between the two ethnic groups. The top themes associated with caring teachers indicated by Latina/o students were, in order, providing scaffolding, providing affective academic support, showing a personal interest in students, and being available.

Because this study utilized voiced research methodology to examine students’ perceptions of teachers’ caring behaviors, it provides further information as to what behaviors, specifically, students view as caring. The comparative analysis between the two ethnic groups also suggests differences in priority between Latina/o and White students in terms of what teacher behaviors are most important to them (Garza, 2009). This finding suggests that teachers might consider the diverse ethnic backgrounds of their students when examining their own dispositions and behaviors in the classroom.
Another study sought to explore the relationships between student-faculty interactions and students’ academic self-concept, motivation, and achievement as measured by GPA. Utilizing a 98-question survey comprised of three embedded scales (Student-Professor Interaction Scale, $\alpha = .73$ to $.93$; Academic Self-Concept, $\alpha = .92$; and Academic Motivation, $\alpha = .78$ to $.92$), Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) gathered responses from 242 undergraduate students at a mid-size, public university in the American Midwest. Of the respondents, 54% were female, 67% White, 24% African American, and 62% first-year students.

Using both correlation and regression analyses, Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) found that students who view their professors as approachable, respectful, and available outside of the classroom are more likely to be confident of their own academic skills and abilities and motivated. Conversely, those who feel alienated by faculty or perceive their faculty members as being uninterested in or uncaring towards them experience increased levels of amotivation, apathy, and discouragement (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010). Additionally, those students who felt cared for and respected by their professors reported higher levels of academic self-confidence and motivation, further supporting the idea that the demonstration of ethics of care in the classroom are integral to students’ success and achievement.
**Validation Theory**

Overlapping in many ways with both community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and the ethic of care (Noddings, 1988, 2016) is validation theory. Proposed by Laura Rendón in 1994, validation theory asserts “that for many low-income, first-generation students, external validation is initially needed to move students toward acknowledgement of their own internal self-capableness and potentiality (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011, p. 17). This validation can be of two, often interrelated types: (1) academic, whereby students are supported and encouraged to trust their own innate capabilities to learn and gain confidence in the college setting; and (2) interpersonal, where students’ personal and social development are supported via caring relationships (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Both are contingent upon positive faculty interactions with students and students’ perceptions of said interactions.

To address the dearth of research in students’ of color perceptions of their transitional and college experiences that existed at the time, Rendón and Jalomo (1993) explored how various experiences both in and out of the classroom influence students’ transition to college, their involvement on campus, and their perceptions of learning. Interviewing 49 students (19 African American, 3 Asian, 18 Hispanic, 9 White) at two community colleges, Rendón and Jalomo (1993) used an inductive approach to analyzing students’ responses, revealing four themes: (1) the nature of community college students; (2) the role of validation; (3) the influence of powerful learning experiences; and (4) negotiating
institutional life. Many students reported having set high hopes and goals for
themselves but were met with low-expectations in the classroom. They also
found that oftentimes their life experiences were discounted or invalidated though
they longed for faculty members to recognize that these experiences (and the
knowledge students’ gained through them) were valuable.

Perhaps the most substantial finding in Rendón and Jalomo’s (1993) study
was the fact that academic and interpersonal validating actions—recognizing and
encouraging students’ capabilities and feelings of self-worth and expressing a
belief that the life experiences students bring with them are beneficial and
worthwhile—seemed to have the greatest positive effect on students’ learning
and success. As noted by Rendón and Jalomo (1993),

Validation appeared to transform "at-risk" students into powerful learners--
helping students to believe in their ability to learn, become excited about
learning, become motivated to succeed against all odds, feel that they
were learning something meaningful and feel they were cared about as a
person, not as a student. (p. 9)

Adding to the body of their previous research, Rendón and Jalomo (1995)
expanded their study to three additional community colleges, interviewing 72 full-
time students who were completing their first semester of college. In total, 26
African American, 12 White, 3 Asian, and 31 Hispanic students were interviewed.
Again, a broadly-structured interview approach was used, and data were
analyzed via an inductive approach.
Based on their interviews with students, Rendón and Jalomo (1995) found that students who mentioned one or more of the following characteristics expressed more difficulty in becoming involved on campus: full-time mothers; married students; single parents; students with disabilities; those who’d been out of school for a while; those who fear failure; those who are uncomfortable with new cultures; those who did poorly in or dropped out of high school; those who are generally apprehensive; those who are immature; those who feel out of place in new situations; and those who express self-doubt. They also found that students who were in “slow classes” (Rendón & Jalomo, 1995, p. 10) while in high school or enrolled in evening classes, disliked school in general, are introverted, have unclear goals, or those who feel generally “lost” had trouble engaging both socially and academically. Those students who felt validated via interactions with faculty, staff, and peers appeared to transition to college more easily, becoming more involved both socially and academically. They also demonstrated higher excitement levels and motivation for learning.

Because validation was found to be an integral part of supporting students’ transition to college and their academic and social engagement on campus, Rendón and Jalomo (1995) posit strategies that highlight or place as central the student’s experience and validates that as important to students’ persistence in college. By employing strategies that legitimate their lived experiences, students might experience continued validation in the classroom, thereby fostering their sense of belonging on campus.
In an effort to encourage a shift in old notions of student growth and development and to effect change in classroom practices and conventions, Rendón (1994) organized six additional researchers for the Transition to College Project. As part of the project, researchers interviewed 132 first-year students in four different higher education settings: a predominantly minority community college; a predominantly White liberal arts college; a predominantly Black state university; and a predominantly White research university. Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed five pertinent findings:

1) Nontraditional students communicated fears about their ability to succeed in college more so than their traditional peers, who expressed little to no doubts.

2) Nontraditional students require more and more active support to navigate college and university life than do their traditional peers.

3) First-year students’ success seems dependent upon their ability to become involved and integrated into college and university life or others’ willingness and ability to validate them.

4) Even the most fragile and vulnerable of students can be transformed into powerful learners if they are validated both in and outside of the classroom.

5) It is difficult for nontraditional students to become involved in college or university life. Validation may be essential to fostering nontraditional student involvement.
Based on the experiences shared by students in their interviews, Rendón (1994) developed a working definition of validation, positing it as “a process that affirms, supports, enables, and reinforces their capacity to fully develop themselves as students and as individuals” (p. 45). Additionally, Rendón (1994) suggests there are six elements of validation:

1) Validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in-and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development.

2) When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable.

3) Validation is a prerequisite to student development.

4) Validation can occur both in-and out-of-class.

5) Validation suggests a developmental process.

6) Validation is most effective when offered early on in the student's college experience. (p. 44-45)

Rendón (1994) went beyond identifying these elements, though, suggesting a new model for practices and conventions to foster validation both in and outside of higher education classrooms. Two of the primary components of
the model center on fostering a validating classroom and a therapeutic learning community.

In order to fully support students in their success, Rendón (1994) asserts that faculty members must be willing to let go of the old, traditional model of teaching which insists that students assimilate to the classroom culture and become passive participants in the acquisition of knowledge, a model Freire (1970) terms “the banking concept of education” (p. 72), whereby students are but empty vessels waiting to be filled with the knowledge conferred upon them by teachers. Instead, faculty members must embrace a manner of teaching that builds trust and community, encourages students to express themselves freely, and empowers students to embrace their own ways of knowing and ways of knowledge construction as valid.

In addition to transforming the classroom environment to better support students, Rendón (1994) maintains that the entire campus climate be reshaped into that of a therapeutic learning community. For students to fully experience academic growth and development, they must also feel welcomed, accepted, and validated outside of the classroom. One way colleges can do this is to actively create and foster a campus climate and community that encourages positive relationships between students, faculty, and peers; promotes and supports cultural and/or identity pride; and believes in the ability of all students to achieve success.
An earlier study undertaken by Hurtado, Cueller, and Guillermo-Wann (2011) sought to quantitatively assess levels of students’ academic validation within the classroom setting and more general feelings of interpersonal validation amongst and between student groups, specifically, students of color and White students. Data for the study were collected using the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey pilot administration and included responses from 4,472 students (466 first-year; 1,564 sophomores; 1,413 juniors; and 1,029 seniors). Demographic composition of the final sample included 0.7% Arab/Arab American, 14.2% Asian/Asian American, 4.4% Black, 18.1% Latinx, 0.8% Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 42.2% White, and 19.2% multi-racial. Given the intent of the study and the demographic composition of the sample, the researchers divided respondents into two groups: students of color and White.

Utilizing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and cross-validation tests, Hurtado, Cueller, and Guillermo-Wann (2011) determined the selected DLE items demonstrate validation constructs across both groups. Although these constructs proved to be part of the higher order factor model for both groups, differences existed between the groups. For example, for students of color, a sense of empowerment and support from faculty to learn is directly correlated to both their reported academic validation within the classroom and their more generalized sense of validation; this correlation was not observed for White students. Additionally, results indicated students of color experience lower levels
of overall validation than their White peers, especially within the classroom environment, furthering the idea that experiences with supportive and validating faculty and learning experiences are crucial to students’ of color overall sense of belonging at university (Hurtado, Cueller, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011). Based on their findings, Hurtado, Cueller, and Guillermo-Wann (2011) posit that intentionally applying a framework of validation to course construct and teaching methodology may support the reduction of marginalization of students of color, as well as members of other underrepresented groups.

The positive impact of the inclusion of such validation factors on first-year students, especially students of color, in first-year seminar courses was confirmed in a study that sought to identify the particular attitudes and behaviors of first-year seminar faculty whose students exhibit the highest levels of thriving at the end of their first semester. Employing hermeneutic phenomenology methods, Vetter, Schreiner, and Jaworski (2019) interviewed thirteen FYS instructors (six women; three persons of color) whose students collectively demonstrated high gains in thriving as measured by the Thriving Quotient at a private doctoral research university. Based on analysis of the participants’ interview responses, the researchers were able to identify four themes that appeared to support students’ thriving: 1) engage students where they are; 2) connect with students personally; 3) welcome and embrace the diverse experiences of learners; and 4) treat students as unique individuals.
Many of the ways in which these thirteen instructors spoke about their FYS courses and students align with the primary tenants of validation theory and culturally responsive pedagogy (Vetter, Schreiner, & Jaworski, 2019). To engage with their students where they were, instructors sought to have students reflect upon their own experiences with the ideas or text presented in class. Additionally, instructors were flexible in their approach and welcomed the ability to adjust their FYS course content to better meet the needs and interests of their students based on their personal knowledge of students. As is one of the primary tenets of both culturally responsive pedagogy and validation theory, FYS instructors’ whose students demonstrated high gains in terms thriving placed immense value on the different perspectives students brought with them to class and legitimized students’ experiences and strengths, as well as the positive effects diverse perspectives and knowledge have on classroom learning (Vetter, Schreiner, & Jaworski, 2019).

Summary

A critical review of existing studies and seminal works and theories with regard to students’ success in and experience with college reveals somewhat mixed or incomplete results. Kuh’s (2008) in-depth analysis of students’ responses to the NSSE demonstrates the positive effect high-impact practices appear to have on students’ success, particularly that of African American and Latina/o students. This research is problematic, though, in that it assumes a deficit-model perspective in which underrepresented minority students must
separate themselves from their former communities and lives in order to gain the skills and behaviors necessary to successfully complete college (Tinto, 1993).

In depth studies and meta-analyses of the effective of first-year seminar courses on student success (i.e., GPA, credits earned, retention rates) have yielded mixed results. Researchers have found correlation between participation in first-year seminars and traditional indicators of success (see Barefoot, Warnock, Diskinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001); others found little to no correlation of such (see Hendel, 2001; Permzadian & Credé, 2016). Conflicting evidence concerning the effectiveness of seminar type with regard to GPA and retention also exists, with some studies finding in favor of skills-based and/or extended-orientation courses (see Ryan & Glenn, 2004; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Porter & Swing, 2006) and others, in favor of academic-content courses (see Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013). Perhaps more problematic is the fact that the majority of these studies were undertaken at predominantly White institutions; where demographic data here available, findings were not disaggregated in an attempt to delineate or determine if underrepresented minority students were more, less, or equally supported by first-year seminar courses.

In an attempt to better understand underrepresented minority students’ experiences with schooling and those pedagogies and practices that best support them in their academic endeavors, research and seminal pieces from
various critical and pedagogical theories was surveyed. Several studies, which sought to determine the effects of racism, including experienced microaggressions both in and out of the classroom, on underrepresented minority students’ academic achievement and retention. In all of the studies reviewed, underrepresented minority students reported having experienced some sort of racism, primarily microaggressions, on campus (see Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). In many cases, these experiences left students feeling devalued, invisible, defeated, and worn down (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009) and their academic success suffered (Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010).

These negative effects, however, can be mitigated or ameliorated when faculty (and institutions of higher education) integrate various critical and pedagogical theories, including critical race theory, culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies, the ethic of care, and validation theory. All of these acknowledge “subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), push back against the dominant White culture and values as the ideal, and view students of color as possessing a wealth of assets and skills, as creators and holders of extraordinary knowledge gleaned from their experiences and community cultural wealth (see Gay, 2000, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995, 1998; Rendón, 1994, 2006; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Yosso, 2005).
To date, the body of research on first-year seminar courses has focused on existing programs and practices as they were originally undertaken or designed—without noted changes, modifications, or revisions necessarily being studied for their potential impacts (see Barefoot, 2000; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004). The present study sought to begin to fill this gap in the research by exploring the possible effects of a first-year seminar course redesign that purposefully centered around and drew from culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies, the ethic of care, and validation theory on traditional indicators of student success for students at a four-year public institution. The methodology for the study will be discussed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a description of the research design and methodology I employed for this study. The first section provides an overview of the purpose of the study and is followed by the questions that guided it. The next sections describe the research design, setting, and sample groupings. Methods of data collection and analyses are then discussed. Finally, study validity and my positionality as researcher are considered, followed by a summary of the chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore how employing culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies in first-year seminars can be used to promote equity in higher education. As Western Comprehensive University’s first-year seminar underwent a redesign several years ago with the intent of transforming it into a more equity-minded course with varied opportunities to incorporate culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies, it was important to assess the overall effect these changes may have had on students’ overall academic success and experiences. It was also particularly relevant to study the potential effects these changes in the course may have had, as faculty will most certainly be making decisions concerning how—and possibly if—first-year seminar courses should be taught in the future. Additionally, given the lack of current research around how culturally relevant,
critical, and validating pedagogies can support equity in higher education for underrepresented students, it was important to explore these potential connections so as to advance the field to continue to make progress in terms of creating equitable learning environments for all.

Research Questions

Given the complexity of this topic, several questions guided the overall research. These were:

1. Does the introduction of culturally relevant and critical pedagogies into first-year seminar courses positively impact students’ college-going experience as evidenced by:
   a. First term GPA:
   b. First year cumulative GPA;
   c. Cumulative units attempted in the first year;
   d. Cumulative units earned in the first year;
   e. First-to-second year retention; and
   f. Responses to selected NSSE items related to validation, care and support, culturally responsive teaching practices, and connecting to prior knowledge and experiences?

2. Are there differences between students who never enrolled in a first-year seminar course, those who participated in an extended orientation first-year seminar course, and those who participated in a redesigned first-year seminar course with regard to:
a. First term GPA:
b. First year cumulative GPA;
c. Cumulative units attempted in the first year;
d. Cumulative units earned in the first year; and
e. First-to-second year retention rates?

3. Are there differences in students’ reported experiences with validation, care and support, culturally responsive teaching practices, and connecting to prior knowledge and experiences based on their first-year seminar grouping?

\[ H_1: \] Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Reflective & Integrative Learning as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

\[ H_2: \] Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Collaborative Learning as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

\[ H_3: \] Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Student-Faculty Interaction as measured by the NSSE than those students who
participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

\( H_4 \): Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Effective Teaching Practices as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

\( H_5 \): Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Quality Interactions as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

\( H_6 \): Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC will report higher levels of engagement with regard to Supportive Environment as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

Research Design

This study used quantitative data collection and analyses to answer the guiding research questions set forth above. Because this study drew from existing, archival university data and was focused on three pre-existing groups of students—those who participated in the first-year seminar course prior to the course redesign, those who participated in the first-year seminar course following
the redesign, and those who never participated in a first-year seminar course—a nonexperimental, correlational research design was employed (Salkind, 2017; Tabachnick & Fiddell, 2007). Due to the lack of researcher control over students’ membership in one of the three first-year seminar groups (independent variable), causality would be difficult to establish (Salkind, 2017; Tabachnick & Fiddell, 2013); therefore, the study sought only to establish whether or not there is relationship between membership in one of the three groups (no first-year seminar course, previous first-year seminar course, or redesigned first-year seminar course) and various dependent variables, including GPA, units attempted and earned, retention into the second year, and responses to select NSSE survey questions.

The study utilized an approach reliant upon data collection from multiple sources, including existing data regarding students’ traditional academic success indicators such as GPA, units attempted and earned during the first year, and retention into the second year, as these are typically used to determine students’ success and programs’ efficacy in higher education and have been utilized in previous studies regarding the effectiveness of first-year seminars (see Barefoot, Warnock, Diskinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Fidler, 1991; Hendel, 2001; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Porter & Swing, 2006; Ryan & Glenn, 2004; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001) and student responses from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
Research Setting

The research took place at a regional, 4-year, public, comprehensive Hispanic-Serving Institution in a metropolitan area located in the western United States. At the time of the study, the student population was nearly 21,000, with the majority of students hailing from the local region which covers more than 27,000 square miles, seeking undergraduate degrees, and receiving some sort of financial aid or assistance. In 2018, the final year of data used for the study, the total student population was comprised of more than 12,500 students, or 60%, who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, and more than 70% of the then first-time freshmen population identified as Hispanic or Latino. Of the first-time freshmen who enter the university each fall, roughly 25% participate in the first-year seminar course annually.

Over the past few years, Western Comprehensive University has expanded its efforts to better support students through various High-Impact Practices (HIPs). Leveraging that which was learned by a team of faculty and staff at the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success in the early 2010s, the university created a working committee charged with identifying and strengthening opportunities for students to participate in HIPs. These efforts included offering additional opportunities for engaging in research with faculty, increased service learning and community engagement opportunities, creating living-learning communities within campus residence halls, widely promoting
study abroad programs, and engaging in an intentional redesign of the first-year seminar course.

**First-Year Seminar Course Redesign**

First offered in the late 1990s, the first-year seminar course (FYSC) at Western Comprehensive University began as a two-unit, non-credit class offered to first-time, full-time first-year students. Following an extended orientation model (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992), the initial course placed emphasis on students’ physical acclimation to campus and their knowledge of the location of various campus offices and resources. Time management and study skills were also heavily emphasized. Course sections were primarily taught by campus staff and rarely included input from or collaboration with faculty.

Upon their return from the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success and following some of the exploratory work done by the university HIPs committee, faculty and staff began to express concerns about whether or not the first-year seminar course was effectively supporting first-year students or aligning with evidence-based teaching strategies. As part of a larger student success initiative, a team of faculty, academic advisors, and select professional staff were tasked with researching best practices regarding first-year seminars and exploring evidence-based pedagogical strategies, including culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 1994, 2000, 2002; Ladson-Billings 1992, 1994, 1995) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994, 2006; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011), which is based in Noddings’s (1988) ethic of care.
Revised course outcomes, which focused on metacognition, cultural capital, critical information literacy, and integrative learning, were developed, and faculty and staff selected to teach the course participated in ongoing professional development surrounding culturally relevant pedagogies, critical literacy skills, metacognition, and validation theory in order to develop syllabi and ways of teaching that incorporated culturally responsive, validating, and caring practices and assignments.3

Research Sample

The initial study sample drew from students who entered Western Comprehensive University as full-time first-time first-year students between Fall 2011 and Fall 2018. Students who enrolled in the first-year seminar class, original or redesigned, and earned a final grade of “I” or “W” were excluded from the sample, as this was an indication that the students did not complete the treatment of the first-year seminar course and could potentially skew the data. The initial sample (N) included a total of 20,258 students with an average high school GPA of 3.23. Of the initial sample 62% were female; 70% were Latinx; 73% were first-generation; and 70%, low-income as determined by their Pell status. Additional descriptive statistics of the complete sample are provided in Chapter 4.

3 Citation omitted to protect identity of the institution.
Data Collection

To gauge students’ self-reported experiences on campus with concerning various culturally responsive and validating practices, selective campus-specific data from four administrations of the updated NSSE questionnaire were utilized. Originally developed in 1998 with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the survey is deployed to undergraduate students and assesses the degree to which students participate in various educational practices tied to learning and development across four themes and ten indicators (NSSE, 2019). Because this study focused specifically on culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies, composite scores from questions across six indicator constructs, or indicators, were analyzed. These engagement indicator categories were:

1) Reflective and Integrative Learning, which measures the extent to which students feel as though they have personally connected to and reflected upon course materials as they relate to students’ experiences (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018), identified by Ladson-Billings (1990, 1992) as a culturally relevant teaching practice and validating in that it honors students’ experiences and encourages them to trust their own knowledge and potential (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011);

2) Collaborative Learning, whereby students work together, “[capitalizing] on one another’s resources and skills” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018, p. 26) to solve problems and/or seek a deeper
understanding of course materials or concepts, again validating that which they know and have experienced and gained via community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) while creating opportunity for positive interpersonal interactions and relationships with peers (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011);

3) Student-Faculty Interaction, which assesses the degree to which students interact with faculty members both in and out of the classroom (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018), practices found to have an effect on students’ academic confidence, motivation, and success (Garza, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2002; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Noddings, 1988, 2016; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011);

4) Effective Teaching Practices, which gauges the extent to which students feel as though faculty engage in beneficial teaching practices such as providing feedback and using examples to make clear difficult points (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018), practices Noddings (1988, 2016), Gay (2000, 2002), and Garza (2009) posit demonstrate care in the classroom and positively affect students’ success;

5) Quality of Interactions, which measures the level of positive interpersonal relationships and interactions students experience in
college (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018), whereby students who experience positive interactions with faculty members and find faculty approachable, respectful, and available are more likely to experience confidence in their own academic abilities (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2006; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995, Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011); and

6) Supportive Environment, which focuses on the degree to which students believe their institutions support them cognitively, socially, and physically (National Survey of Student Engagement) and is integral to students’ successful transition to college (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995, Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the questions included in the composite scores for each of the indicators.
Table 1. National Survey of Student Engagement Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflective &amp; Integrative Learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the current school years, how often have you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected your learning to societal problems or issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected ideas from your courses to your prior experiences and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the current school year, how often have you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked another student to help you understand course material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained course material to one or more students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked with other students on course projects or assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student-Faculty Interaction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the current school year, how often have you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talked about career plans with a faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effective Teaching Practices</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the current school year, to what extent have your instructors done the following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly explained course goals and requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught course sessions in an organized way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided feedback on a draft or work in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of Interactions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student services staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other administrative staff and offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Environment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much does your institution emphasize the following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing support to help students succeed academically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using learning support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing opportunities to be involved socially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing support for your overall well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping you manage your nonacademic responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending campus activities and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Indicators condensed from NSSE Engagement Indicators & High-Impact Practices; retrieved from http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/EIs_and_HIPs_2015.pdf
Data Analysis

Data analyses for this study were undertaken for each of the two separate types of data collected, student academic performance data (Phase 1) and NSSE survey data (Phase 2). In each analysis, students from all three groups were matched based on several pre-college characteristics so as to minimize the chances that participation or membership in one group or the other would skew the data (Johnson, 2001; Creswell, 2014). These pre-college characteristics included high school GPA, sex, race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status as determined by Pell status.

Although it may be posited that the one-to-one matching of participants creates a situation where compared groups are too homogenous and, therefore, little to no between-group differences would be found using ANOVA, doing so was an intentional choice rooted in the premises of Critical Race Theory (CRT), as matching participants on pre-college characteristics not only reduces the chance that membership in one group over the other would skew the study’s overall results (Johnson, 2001; Creswell, 2014), but also shifts the narrative away from students’ race and toward the role decisions made at institutions of higher educations impact and affect students, especially those who have historically been marginalized and minoritized (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Huber, Lopez, Malagon, Vélez, & Sólorzano, 2008). By intentionally removing factors such as race from the spotlight of this study, I have shifted the paradigm away from the dominant narrative perspective employed in prior research (see, among
others, Kuh, 2008; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993, 1996), thereby reducing the chances that race might be misinterpreted as a causal variable for any between-group differences or that deficit-model thinking might be employed as a result of this study’s findings (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

**Phase 1: First-Year Seminar Courses and Traditional Indicators of Student Success**

Once matched-sample groups were created, one-way between-group analyses of variance, or ANOVA, were utilized to explore the relationship between enrollment in a first-year seminar course and academic performance. In general, ANOVA is used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of several groups (Howell, 2011). ANOVA are preferable to multiple t-tests due to the increasing probability of Type 1 errors with each t-test, as ANOVA controls for such errors, thereby increasing the confidence in any statistical differences found (Lærd, 2018). For these analyses, the independent variable was students’ membership in one of three identified groups with regard to first-year seminar enrollment: 1) never enrolled in a first-year seminar course \((n = 1,338)\); 2) enrolled in a first-year seminar course between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014 \((n = 1,338)\); and 3) enrolled in a redesigned first-year seminar course between Fall 2015 and Fall 2018 \((n = 1,338)\). Dependent, continuous variables for the analyses included: 1) first-year cumulative GPA; 2) first-year cumulative units earned; and 3) retention into the second year. Where significant differences existed, Tukey’s tests or Games-
Howell tests were employed for post hoc analysis to determine where the differences occurred.

Because of the dichotomous nature of the retention variable, ANOVA could not be utilized for data analysis regarding the relationship between FYSC group membership and first-to-second year retention. Instead, Chi Square was employed to determine differences in retention rates between groups.

Phase 2: First-Year Seminar Courses and National Survey of Student Engagement Indicators

One-way ANOVA were used to explore the relationship between enrollment in a first-year seminar course and various engagement indicators as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Again, ANOVA was selected as the preferred analysis as it is used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of several groups while controlling for Type 1 errors (Howell, 2011; Lærd, 2018). As was the case with Phase 1, the independent variable of Phase 2 was students' membership in one of three identified groups with regard to first-year seminar enrollment: 1) never enrolled in a first-year seminar course; 2) enrolled in a first-year seminar course between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014; and 3) enrolled in a redesigned first-year seminar course between Fall 2015 and Fall 2018, and students were matched one-to-one across the three groups based on pre-college characteristics. Dependent variables for the analysis included composite response data for multiple NSSE indicators, or constructs (Included items can be found in Table 4.)
Validity and Reliability

Cronbach’s alpha is often used to measure the reliability, or internal consistency, of any given scale or psychometric instrument; essentially, it estimates the degree to which each individual item is measuring the same construct (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Cronbach’s alpha is generally expressed as a number between 0 and 1, with 1 indicating higher degrees of reliability. A Cronbach’s alpha of .70 is considered good and the instrument, reliable; the maximum recommended alpha value is .90 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Previous analyses of the internal consistency of the NSSE Engagement Indicators across several administrations of the survey found relatively high levels of internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha measuring between .802 and .888 across all six of the included Engagement Indicators (NSSE, 2019). Table 2 provides the lowest and highest Cronbach’s alpha measures across various administrations of the NSSE survey for the six included constructs.
Table 2. Established Reliability of National Survey of Student Engagement Constructs by Class Year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement Indicator</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflective &amp; Integrative Learning</td>
<td>.871</td>
<td>.883</td>
<td>.853</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>.808</td>
<td>.802</td>
<td>.807</td>
<td>.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td>.853</td>
<td>.829</td>
<td>.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Teaching Practices</td>
<td>.845</td>
<td>.862</td>
<td>.843</td>
<td>.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Interactions</td>
<td>.844</td>
<td>.805</td>
<td>.845</td>
<td>.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Environment</td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>.891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data presented are from the National Survey of Student Engagement.
Positionality of the Researcher

As someone who inherently subscribes to the idea that our experiences make us who we are and provide us the myriad lenses through which we see and understand the world around us, I genuinely embrace the concepts of positionality and researcher as instrument. Often times in research, complete objectivity is considered paramount to a study’s validity and worth; anything undertaken without complete objectivity need not even be undertaken to begin with, or if it is, its findings are oft either dismissed entirely or viewed as tremendously flawed. Some scholars, however, dispute the overall achievability of objectivity in any study, as subjective interests undoubtedly guide researchers to ask the very questions they do, no matter where the studies lie on the quantitative-qualitative continuum (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2015; Peshkin, 1988). In this way, all research involves some degree of subjectivity, for without subjective influence, researchers would have no interest in studying that which they undertake.

Beyond being reflective and gaining a better sense of who I am in general, in exploring these questions and answering them truthfully, I, as a researcher, was able to better establish trustworthiness—a term developed by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Glesne, 2015) in juxtaposition to the concept of validity in empirical research—and entered into my research with a degree of reflexivity, a degree of understanding beforehand how who I am may interact with who my participants are, what I see (and don’t see), what I focus on (or don’t focus on),
and how I interpret the varied data I collected (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2015). In being reflective and attempting to clearly understand who I am and how my “subjective I’s”, as Peshkin (1988) dubbed them, may impact my research, I hoped to be able to make more deliberate, conscious decisions when I undertook my research, decisions informed by not only an understanding of that which I sought to learn, but also an understanding of who I am and what drove me to ask the questions and undertake the research I did.

I am a White woman from a working-class background. For me, making the most of educational opportunities and earning a college degree were expectations set forth by my family and the keys to moving onward and upward in my perspective. The wonderful teachers I had growing up—many of whom were Black—inspired me to teach, and I knew I needed a college education to do that. I also knew that earning my degree at a university three hours from my hometown would provide me the opportunity to experience something completely new completely on my own.

I am also a White woman who recognizes my privilege and my position as a minority. Though I am White, I am also a woman. Rather than subscribing or acquiescing to the dominant discourse, I am deeply committed to bringing to the forefront those voices which are marginalized and systemically silenced. Having grown up in a tight knit community whose demographics were quite literally 51% White and 49% Black (at the time) and being taught that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect, I simply cannot sit idly by whilst inequities
continue to persist in our society. Because I am a member of the privileged group (and know a bit of what it’s like to be a member of an oppressed group as a woman), I’m driven to use my status and privilege to open the eyes, minds, and hopefully hearts of my fellow privileged folks to the realities of the experiences, injustices, and inequities those who are marginalized oftentimes face. I know that I have a certain kind of power, if you will, that gives me some sort of un-worked-for credibility with members of the dominant group simply because I look like them; I want to use that power to disrupt the dominant discourse and to affect positive change. This undoubtedly has affected the way(s) in which I present my research and findings.

I am an educator. For me, the driving goal in education—in my classrooms and schools, at the district and university-levels—has always been to do what is best for all students so that they might all reach their fullest potential. Because of this, I’ve always worked to incorporate myriad teaching strategies and methods, including culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies, in my classes and to support other educators in doing the same. As both an undergraduate and graduate student at the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I was immersed in the theory and practical application of culturally relevant and critical pedagogies; they were paramount to both programs and, thus, became cornerstones to the way in which I taught and still teach my classes.
Finally, I was a first-year seminar course lecturer. For more than three years, I was directly involved in various professional development and course planning opportunities provided to first-year seminar instructors. I also worked to develop, evolve, and improve my own use of culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies. In this way, I was very much positioned as an invested learner, eager to learn more about the potential impact culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies might have on underrepresented students in a first-year seminar class at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how the intentional inclusion of culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies in a first-year seminar course at a Hispanic-Serving Institution might support students’ success and experiences in higher education. Analysis of existing student academic performance data using one-way ANOVA; post hoc analyses, including Tukey’s test and Games-Howell test; and Chi Square were used to explore the relationship between membership in a particular first-year seminar group (e.g., those who were enrolled in a first-year seminar course between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014; those who were enrolled in a first-year seminar course between Fall 2015 and Fall 2018; and those who were never enrolled in a first-year seminar course) and traditional academic performance indicators including GPA, units attempted, units earned, and retention into the second year. One-way ANOVA were used to determine the relationship between membership in the same first-
year seminar groups and students’ self-reported levels of engagement and belonging based on student response data from six different indicators or constructs (Cronbach’s alpha, .802 to .888) of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The overall purpose of this study was to explore how employing culturally relevant and critical pedagogies in first-year seminars might be used to promote equity in higher education. The study utilized an approach reliant upon data collection from multiple sources, including existing data regarding students’ traditional academic success indicators such as GPA, units attempted and earned during the first year, and retention into the second year, and composite score responses from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). One-way ANOVA; post hoc analyses, including Tukey’s test and Games-Howell test, and comparison of means; and Chi Square were used to analyze traditional academic success indicators. One-way ANOVA followed by planned contrasts were used to test hypotheses associated with six selected NSSE constructs.

This chapter provides an overview of the sample demographics and match participants, including information regarding the characteristics by which samples were matched; data screening and assumption test results; and findings related to both phases of the study’s data analysis. Results of Phase 1, which was exploratory in nature and employed post hoc analyses, are reported by dependent variable, followed by a comparison of means by race/ethnicity and FYSC group. Results of Phase 2, which was guided by a priori hypotheses, are presented by NSSE construct and the related hypothesis.
Sample Demographics and Matched Participants

The initial research sample \((N)\) included a total of 20,258 students with an average high school GPA of 3.23. Of the initial sample 62% were female; 70% were Latinx; 73% were first-generation; and 70%, low-income as determined by their Pell status. Additional descriptive statistics of the complete sample are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographics of Initial Sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12,505</td>
<td>61.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7,753</td>
<td>38.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,258</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1,160</td>
<td>5.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>1,061</td>
<td>5.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>14,240</td>
<td>70.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>4.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1,809</td>
<td>8.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,258</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-Generation Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non First-Generation</td>
<td>4,930</td>
<td>24.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>14,857</td>
<td>73.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,258</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pell Grant Recipient</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6,566</td>
<td>32.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13,692</td>
<td>67.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,258</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the first phase of analysis, which focused on traditional measures of student success (i.e., first term GPA, first year GPA, first year units attempted, first year units earned, retention into the second year), initial study participants were divided into one of three different groups: 1) those who were never enrolled in any first-year seminar course ($N = 15,403$); 2) those who were enrolled in a first-year seminar course between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014 and prior to the course’s redesign ($N = 2,717$); and 3) those who were enrolled in the redesigned first-year seminar course between Fall 2015 and Fall 2018 ($N = 2,138$). Students were then matched 1:1 across the three groups based on several pre-college characteristics so as to minimize the chances that participation or membership in one group or the other would skew the data (Johnson, 2001; Creswell, 2014) or that race might be viewed or misinterpreted as a causal variable in this study (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), thereby perpetuating the dominant narrative or deficit-model thinking. These pre-college characteristics included sex, race/ethnicity, high school GPA, first generation status, and socioeconomic status as determined by Pell status. The matched sample (Table 4) consisted of a total of 4,014 students ($n = 1,338$ per group), each with a high school GPA of 3.19.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No FYSC</th>
<th>Previous FYSC</th>
<th>Redesigned FYSC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>69.51</td>
<td>930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>30.49</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>1,228</td>
<td>91.78</td>
<td>1,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-Generation Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non First-Generation</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>15.77</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>1,107</td>
<td>82.73</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pell Grant Recipient</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>13.23</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1,161</td>
<td>86.77</td>
<td>1,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the second phase of analysis, which examined students’ composite score responses to six different NSSE indicators, students from the initial sample who completed a NSSE survey at any point during their tenure at Western Comprehensive University were divided into one of three different groups: 1) those who were never enrolled in any first-year seminar course \( (N = 1,457) \); 2) those who were enrolled in a first-year seminar course between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014 and prior to the course’s redesign \( (N = 452) \); and 3) those who were enrolled in the redesigned first-year seminar course between Fall 2015 and Fall 2018 \( (N = 165) \). Students were again matched 1:1 across the three groups based on the pre-college characteristics of sex, race/ethnicity, high school GPA, first generation status, and socioeconomic status so as to minimize the chances that participation or membership in one group or the other would skew the data (Johnson, , 2001; Creswell, 2014) or that race might be viewed or misinterpreted as a causal variable in this phase of the analyses as well (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). The matched sample for the analysis of NSSE indicator composite scores (Table 5) consisted of a total of 207 students \( (n = 69 \) per group), each with a high school GPA of 3.31.
Table 5. Matched-Sample Groups Utilized in the Analysis of National Survey of Student Engagement Indicator Composite Scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>No FYSC</th>
<th>Previous FYSC</th>
<th>Redesigned FYSC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>92.75</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>98.55</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White- Non Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-Generation Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non First-Generation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.49</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>82.61</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pell Grant Recipient</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>95.65</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Screening and Assumptions

A power analysis was utilized to determine the sample size necessary for each phase of data analysis. For this study, G*Power was employed and determined that a sample size of at least 152 total participants, or 52 per group, was needed to obtain a moderate effect with a power level (Cohen’s $d$) of .80, as this is widely accepted as the threshold for large effects (Howell, 2011). Matched sample groupings for both Phase 1 (traditional indicators of student success) and Phase 2 (composite score responses to six NSSE engagement constructs) met the necessary threshold sample size at 1,338 and 69 participants per group, respectively.

Assumptions

The main assumptions of ANOVA are independence of observations, normality, and homogeneity of variance (Fields, 2013). Additionally, Chi Square requires that no expected frequency is less than 5, which is easily accommodated with the relatively large sample sizes analyzed as part of this study.

**Independence of Observations.** Independence was achieved as each individual participant only contributed one line of data per analysis.

**Outliers.** A score of $z = 3.3$ (+ or -) was used to identify outliers at $p < .001$ (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Based on this criteria, the No First-Year Seminar Course (FYSC) group included outliers on the first year cumulative GPA ($n = 22$), first year units attempted ($n = 27$) and first year units earned ($n = 12$). Using the
same criteria, the Previous FYSC group contained first term GPA ($n = 13$), first year cumulative GPA ($n = 6$), first year units attempted ($n = 19$), and first year cumulative units completed ($n = 13$) outliers. Finally, the Redesigned FYSC group contained outliers on first term GPA ($n = 26$), first year cumulative GPA ($n = 16$), first year units attempted ($n = 35$), and first year cumulative units completed ($n = 10$). Given that these outliers are based on actual academic performance, they are not implausible values. Furthermore, excluding them could result in loss of meaningful between-differences in academic performance. As such, they were included in the analyses and their effect on parameter estimates were evaluated.

**Normality.** Significance testing should not be employed using large sample sizes because they can be significant even for small or trivial effects (Fields, 2013). Instead, substantial departures from normality were assessed using skewness ($\geq 2$) and kurtosis ($\geq 7$) values for both phases of the study (Kim, 2013). As demonstrated in Tables 6 and 7, only one variable, First Year Units Attempted, exceeded the recommended values for skewness or kurtosis (skewness = -2.20). Even so, variable transformations will not be considered because of the resulting lack of interpretability. Nonetheless, normality can be assumed in large sample sizes according to the central limit theorem (Lumley, Diehr, Emerson, & Chen, 2002).
Table 6. Traditional Indicators of Student Success: Tests of Normality Results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No FYSC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Term GPA</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Cumulative GPA</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Units Attempted</td>
<td>42.20</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Units Earned</td>
<td>37.96</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Previous FYSC           |       |          |          |
| First Term GPA          | 3.08  | -1.20    | 2.06     |
| First Year Cumulative GPA | 2.76  | -0.70    | 0.65     |
| First Year Units Attempted | 43.28 | -1.18    | 5.24     |
| First Year Units Earned | 39.21 | -1.20    | 2.19     |

| Redesigned FYSC         |       |          |          |
| First Term GPA          | 2.92  | -1.22    | 1.76     |
| First Year Cumulative GPA | 2.67  | -0.94    | 1.00     |
| First Year Units Attempted | 41.24 | -2.20    | 6.76     |
| First Year Units Earned | 36.37 | -1.38    | 1.66     |

*Note:* For all groups, \( n = 1,338 \).
Table 7. Tests of Normality Results: National Survey of Student Engagement Construct Composite Scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No FYSC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective &amp; Integrative Learning</td>
<td>35.38</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>32.03</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>21.67</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Teaching Practices</td>
<td>39.19</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Interactions</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
<td>-0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Environment</td>
<td>27.60</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous FYSC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective &amp; Integrative Learning</td>
<td>32.81</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>29.64</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>19.06</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Teaching Practices</td>
<td>40.29</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Interactions</td>
<td>36.20</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Environment</td>
<td>32.60</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redesigned FYSC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective &amp; Integrative Learning</td>
<td>32.59</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>34.28</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>19.78</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Teaching Practices</td>
<td>32.71</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td>-0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Interactions</td>
<td>32.80</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>-0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Environment</td>
<td>33.41</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>-0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For all groups, n = 69.

**Homogeneity of Variance.** Significance tests for homogeneity of variance should not be employed in large sample sizes because small differences in group variances can produce a test that is significant, meaning the assumption of homogeneity of variance has been violated (Fields, 2013). Hartley’s $F_{max}$ was employed to check for homogeneity of variance. This is the ratio of the variances.
between the group with the biggest variance and the group with the smallest variance. If the ratio is close to 1, the variance is homogeneous. This criterion was employed between each of the matched-sample groups and the dependent variables for both traditional indicators of student success and the six NSSE construct composite scores. For traditional indicators of student success, none of the groups or dependent variables violated the assumption of homogeneity of variance, as Hartley's $F_{max}$ values ranged between 1.0 and 1.3 (see Table 8).

Table 8. Homogeneity of Variance: Traditional Indicators of Student Success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Hartley's Fmax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No FYSC &amp; Previous FYSC</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Cumulative GPA</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Cumulative Units Earned</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No FYSC &amp; Redesigned FYSC</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Cumulative GPA</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Cumulative Units Earned</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous FYSC &amp; Redesigned FYSC</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Cumulative GPA</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Cumulative Units Earned</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding NSSE construct scores, Hartley's $F_{max}$ values ranged between 0.7 and 1.3 from most groupings and variables as demonstrated in Table 9. However, higher ratios of variance occurred between the No FYSC and Previous FYSC group comparisons for Reflective and Integrative Learning (1.6) and Collaborative Learning (1.5) and the No FYSC and Redesigned FYSC group
comparisons of the same constructs (1.5 and 1.9, respectively), indicating the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for these variables. For these variables, Welch's $F$ was reported for the ANOVA result instead of the standard $F$ ratio.
Table 9. National Survey of Student Engagement Construct Composite Scores: Homogeneity of Variance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Hartley's Fmax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**No FYSC & Previous FYSC**
- Reflective & Integrative Learning: 1.6
- Collaborative Learning: 1.5
- Student-Faculty Interaction: 1.3
- Effective Teaching Practices: 1.1
- Quality of Interactions: 1.2
- Supportive Environment: 1.1

**No FYSC & Redesigned FYSC**
- Reflective & Integrative Learning: 1.5
- Collaborative Learning: 1.9
- Student-Faculty Interaction: 1.3
- Effective Teaching Practices: 0.8
- Quality of Interactions: 0.9
- Supportive Environment: 1.1

**Previous FYSC & Redesigned FYSC**
- Reflective & Integrative Learning: 1.1
- Collaborative Learning: 1.2
- Student-Faculty Interaction: 1.0
- Effective Teaching Practices: 0.7
- Quality of Interactions: 1.3
- Supportive Environment: 1.0

Results of the Study

**Phase 1: First-Year Seminar Courses and Traditional Indicators of Student Success**

As previous research on the effects of first-year seminars on traditional indicators of student success has produced mixed results (see Barefoot, Warnock, Diskinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Fidler, 1991; Hendel, 2001;
Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Perrezadian & Credé, 2016; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001), Phase 1 was undertaken to explore possible between-group differences among the three student groups based on their participation or non-participation in a particular first-year seminar course (No FYSC, Previous FYSC, or Redesigned FYSC) with regard to traditional indicators of student success. One-way between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted for the continuous dependent variables of first term GPA, first year cumulative GPA, cumulative units attempted in the first year, and cumulative units earned in the first year. Where significant between-group differences existed, post hoc analyses (i.e., Tukey’s Test, Games-Howell) were employed to determine which groups in the sample differed. An exploratory comparison of means for multiple races/ethnicities was also undertaken to determine if there were additional differences between the groups’ traditional indicators of success.

In the examination of retention into the second year, a dichotomous variable, Chi Square was used to determine between-group differences. Results for all between-group comparisons (ANOVA and Chi Square) are presented below, organized by dependent variable, followed by the comparisons of means for each indicator by FYSC group and race/ethnicity.

**First Term GPA.** A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the relationship between participation in one of three FYSC groups and first term GPA. Mean first term GPA was significantly different for at least one of
the FYSC groups, $F(2, 4,011) = 61.140, p < .001, \eta^2 = .030$. Post hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD test indicated that mean first term GPA was significantly higher for the Previous FYSC group compared to both the Redesigned FYSC group ($p < .001$) and the No FYSC group ($p < .001$). Mean first term GPA was also significantly higher in the Redesigned FYSC group compared to the No FYSC group ($p < .001$).

**First Year Cumulative GPA.** A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the relationship between FYSC participation on first year cumulative GPA. Mean first year cumulative GPA was significantly different for at least one of the student groups, $F(2, 4,011) = 9.257, p < .001, \eta^2 = .005$. Post hoc comparisons using Turkey’s test indicated that mean first year cumulative GPA was significantly higher for the Previous FYSC group compared to both the No FYSC group ($p < .001$) and the Redesigned FYSC group ($p = .007$). Mean first year cumulative GPA was not significantly different in the Redesigned FYSC group compared to the No FYSC group ($p = .500$).

**First Year Units Attempted.** A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to explore the relationship between FYSC group membership and first year units attempted. Mean first year units attempted was significantly different for at least one of the groups, $F(2, 4,011) = 31.228, p < .001, \eta^2 = .015$. Post hoc comparisons using Turkey’s test indicated that mean first year units attempted was significantly higher in the Previous FYSC group compared to both the Redesigned FYSC group ($p < .001$) and the No FYSC group ($p < .001$). Mean
first year units attempted was also significantly higher in the Redesigned FYSC group compared to the No FYSC group ($p = .001$).

**First Year Units Earned.** A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the relationship between participation in a first-year seminar course and first year units completed. Mean first year units earned was significantly different for at least one of the groups, $F(2, 4,011) = 26.539, p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .013$. Post hoc comparisons using Turkey’s test indicated that mean first year units completed was significantly higher for the Previous FYSC group compared to both the Redesigned FYSC group ($p < .001$) and the No FYSC group ($p = .004$). Mean first year units earned was also significantly higher for the No FYSC group compared to the Redesigned FYSC group ($p = .001$).

**First-to-Second Year Retention.** Utilizing Chi Square, a weak (Cramer’s $V= .051$) but significant association was found between FYSC group and first-to-second year retention ($\chi^2 (2) = 10.417, p = .005$). Specifically, students from the Previous FYSC group had the highest first-to-second year retention rate (91%), followed by the No FYSC group (89%) and the Redesigned FYSC group (88%).

**Phase 2: First-Year Seminar Courses and National Survey of Student Engagement Indicators**

In order to test the six hypotheses associated with the selected NSSE constructs, one-way between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted, followed by planned contrasts. Results for the ANOVAs and planned contrasts are presented below, organized by NSSE construct.
Reflective and Integrative Learning. Because this particular NSSE construct measures the extent to which students feel as though they have personally connected to and reflected upon course materials as they relate to students’ experiences (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018), which was identified by Ladson-Billings (1990, 1992) as a culturally relevant teaching practice, is validating in that it honors students’ experiences and encourages them to trust their own knowledge and potential (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011), and was intentionally incorporated into the learning outcomes of the redesigned FYSC, it was hypothesized that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC would report higher levels of engagement with regard to Reflective & Integrative Learning as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the relationship between participation in a FYSC on reflective and integrative learning. Mean Reflective and Integrative Learning composite scores on the NSSE were not significantly different for any of the groups $F(2, 204) = 0.848, p = .430, \eta^2 = .008$.

Planned contrasts revealed that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC did not have significantly higher mean Reflective & Integrative Learning composite scores than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate at all, $t(204) = 729, p = .476, r = .05$. The hypothesis was not supported.
Collaborative Learning. The NSSE construct of Collaborative Learning measures the degree to which students work together, “[capitalizing] on one another’s resources and skills” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018, p. 26) to solve problems and/or seek a deeper understanding of course materials or concepts. As these are validating experiences in which students draw from what they know and have experienced and gained via community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) while creating opportunity for positive interpersonal interactions and relationships with peers (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011), it was hypothesized that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC, which encouraged cooperative learning and provided myriad opportunities for student collaboration, would report higher levels of engagement with regard to Collaborative Learning as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the relationship between FYSC group and collaborative learning. Mean Collaborative Learning composite scores on the NSSE were not significantly different for at any of the FYSC groups, $F(2, 204) = 1.462, p = .234, \eta^2 = .014$. Planned contrasts revealed that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC did not have significantly higher mean Collaborative Learning scores than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in a FYSC at all, $t(204) = -1.465, p = .144, r = .10$. The hypothesis was not supported.
Student-Faculty Interaction. Student-Faculty Interaction, which assesses the degree to which students interact with faculty members both in and out of the classroom (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018), was selected as a construct, as these practices have been found to have an effect on students’ academic confidence, motivation, and success (Garza, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2002; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Noddings, 1988, 2016; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). It was hypothesized that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC would report higher levels of engagement with regard to Student-Faculty Interaction as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the relationship between FYSC group membership and students' reported student-faculty interactions. Mean Student-Faculty Interaction composite scores on the NSSE were not significantly different for any of the compared groups $F(2, 204) = 0.485$, $p = .617$, $\eta^2 = .005$.

Planned contrasts revealed that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC did not have significantly higher mean Student-Faculty Interaction scores than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC, $t(204) = .245$, $p = .807$, $r = .02$. The hypothesis was not supported.
**Effective Teaching Practices.** The Effective Teaching Practices construct in NSSE gauges the extent to which students feel as though faculty engage in beneficial teaching practices such as providing feedback and using examples to make clear difficult points (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018). Because these practices are posited by Noddings (1988, 2016), Gay (2000, 2002), and Garza (2009) as a demonstration of care and validation (Rendón, 1994, 2006; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011) in the classroom and were intentionally included in the redesigned first-year seminar course and a focus of the professional development workshops FYSC faculty and lecturers were provided, it was hypothesized that Students who participated in the redesigned FYSC would report higher levels of engagement with regard to Effective Teaching Practices than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to explore the relationship between participation in a FYSC on students’ perceptions of and experiences with effective teaching practices. Mean Effective Teaching Practices composite scores on the NSSE were significantly different for at least one of the groups $F(2, 204) = 4.131$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = .039$.

Planned contrasts revealed that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC had significantly higher mean Effective Teaching Practices scores than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who
did not participate in a FYSC at all, $t(204) = 2.848$, $p = .005$, $r = .20$, thus supporting the hypothesis.

**Quality of Interactions.** Quality of Interactions measures the level of positive interpersonal relationships and interactions students experience in college (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018). Students who experience positive interactions with faculty members and find faculty approachable, respectful, and available are more likely to experience confidence in their own academic abilities (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2006; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995, Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). As the redesigned first-year seminar course sought to increase these types of positive interactions between faculty and students, it was hypothesized that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC would report higher levels of engagement with regard to Quality Interactions as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of FYSC participation on quality of interactions. Mean Quality of Interactions composite scores on the NSSE were not significantly different for any of the groups, $F(2, 204) = 0.568$, $p = .568$, $\eta^2 = .006$.

Planned contrasts revealed that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC did not have significantly higher mean Quality of Interactions scores than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who
did not participate in a FYSC at all, $t(204) = .978, p = .329, r = .07$. This hypothesis was not supported.

**Supportive Environment.** The NSSE construct of Supportive Environment measures the degree to which students believe their institutions support them cognitively, socially, and physically (National Survey of Student Engagement), an integral aspect to students’ successful transition to college (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Since the redesigned FYSC focused, in part, on helping students integrate their own persons and experiences with the new experiences of university life with supports in place, it was hypothesized that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC would report higher levels of engagement with regard to Supportive Environment as measured by the NSSE than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in FYSC.

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to explore the relationship between FYSC participation and students' reported ratings of experiencing a supportive environment on campus. Mean Supportive Environment composite scores on the NSSE were not significantly different for any of the groups, $F(2, 204) = 1.748, p = .177, \eta^2 = .017$.

Planned contrasts revealed that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC did not have significantly higher mean Supportive Environment scores than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who
did not participate in a FYSC at all, $t(204) = -1.114, p = .267, r = .08$. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the two phases of analyses undertaken for the study. Analysis of existing student academic performance data using one-way ANOVA, post hoc analyses, and Chi Square was used to explore the relationship between membership in a particular first-year seminar group (e.g., No FYSC, Previous FSYC, Redesigned FYSC) and traditional academic performance indicators including GPA, units attempted, units earned, and retention into the second year. One-way ANOVA were used to determine the relationship between membership in the same first-year seminar groups and students' self-reported levels of engagement and belonging based on student response data from six different indicators or constructs (Cronbach’s alpha, .802 to .888) of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Results of Phase 1: First-Year Seminar Courses and Traditional Indicators of Student Success post hoc analyses revealed that, in the cases of first term GPA, first year cumulative GPA, first year units attempted, and first year units earned, means were significantly higher for the Previous FYSC group than the Redesigned FYSC and No FYSC groups. Using Chi Square, a weak but significant association between first-to-second year retention and FYSC group was also revealed, with the Previous FYSC group being retained at 91%, the No FYSC group at 89%, and the Redesigned FYSC group at 88%. In all cases of
traditional indicators of student success variables, the outcomes were not as expected, though there do exist possible explanations as to why the results were as they were.

In Phase 2: First-Year Seminar Courses and National Survey of Student Engagement Indicators, planned contrast analyses revealed that aside from the construct of Effective Teaching, there were no significant differences between any of the FYSC groups; thus, the hypotheses regarding Reflective & Integrative Learning, Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Quality of Interactions, and Supportive Environment were not supported. However, the hypothesis regarding Effective Teaching was supported, as planned contrast analysis indicated that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC had significantly higher mean Effective Teaching Practices scores than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in a FYSC at all.

The following chapter will explore these results in more depth while also providing recommendations for educators, educational leaders, and future research.
CHAPTER FIVE
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how employing culturally relevant and critical pedagogies in first-year seminars might be used to promote equity in higher education. Additionally, given limited current research around how culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies can support equity in higher education for underrepresented students, it was important to explore these potential connections so as to advance the field to continue to make progress in terms of creating equitable learning environments for all. While three different research questions guided the study and analyses, one overarching question framed the study as a whole:

Does the introduction of culturally relevant and critical pedagogies into first-year seminar courses positively impact students’ college-going experience as evidenced by:

a. First terms GPA;
b. First year cumulative GPA;
c. Cumulative units attempted in the first year;
d. Cumulative units earned in the first year;
e. First-to-second year retention; and
Responses to selected NSSE items related to validation, culturally responsive teaching practices, and connecting to prior knowledge and experiences?

This chapter provides an overview of the findings, a detailed discussion of the implications of the results and the study’s limitations, and recommendations for both educational leaders and future research. Organizationally, the overview and implications of the findings will be presented in two phases just as the findings were presented in Chapter 4: Phase 1, which focused on traditionally accepted indicators of student success, such as GPA, units attempted and earned, and first-to second year fall-to-fall retention; and Phase 2, which explored possible relationships between students’ first-year seminar experience and their composite score responses to the select NSSE constructs of Reflective & Integrative Learning, Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Effective Teaching Practices, Quality of Interactions, and Supportive Environment.

Overview of the Results

This study utilized an approach reliant upon archival university data from multiple sources, including existing data regarding students' traditional academic success indicators such as GPA, units attempted and earned during the first year, and retention into the second year, and composite score responses from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). One-way ANOVA; post hoc analyses, including Tukey’s test, Games-Howell test, and comparison of means;
and Chi Square were used to analyze traditional academic success indicators. One-way ANOVA followed by planned contrasts were used to test hypotheses associated with six selected NSSE constructs.

In the case of Phase 1: First-Year Seminar Courses and Traditional Indicators of Student Success, post hoc analyses revealed that means were significantly higher for the Previous FYSC group than the Redesigned FYSC and No FYSC groups with regard to the variables of first term GPA, first year cumulative GPA, first year units attempted, and first year units earned. Additionally, means were significantly higher for the Redesigned FYSC group than the No FYSC with regard to only two variables, first term GPA and first year units attempted.

Using Chi Square, a weak but significant association between first-to-second year retention and FYSC group was also revealed, with the Previous FYSC group being retained at 91%, the No FYSC group at 89%, and the Redesigned FYSC group at 88%. None of the results of Phase 1 supported that which was expected in that there was no significant relationship found between the Redesigned FYSC and any of the traditional indicators of student success and in only two cases (first term GPA and first year units attempted) did the Redesigned FYSC group fare significantly better than the No FYSC group.

With regard to Phase 2: First-Year Seminar Courses and National Survey of Student Engagement Indicators, planned contrast analyses revealed that aside from the construct of Effective Teaching, there were no significant
differences between any of the FYSC groups; thus, the hypotheses regarding Reflective & Integrative Learning, Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Quality of Interactions, and Supportive Environment were not supported. However, the hypothesis regarding Effective Teaching was supported, as planned contrast analysis indicated that students who participated in the redesigned FYSC had significantly higher mean Effective Teaching Practices scores than those students who participated in the previous FYSC or those who did not participate in a FYSC at all.

Interpretation of the Results

Overall, this study found little to no relationship between the Redesigned FSYC and traditional indicators of student success or most of the NSSE engagement indicators. Though the means were significantly higher for the Redesigned FYSC group than for the No FYSC group with regard to first term GPA and first year units attempted, there was higher correlation between the Previous FYSC group and all traditional indicators of success. No significant differences were found for any of the groups with regard to the selected NSSE engagement indicators with the exception of Effective Teaching Practices; for this indicator, the Redesigned FYSC group had significantly higher Effective Teaching Practices composite scores.
Phase 1: First-Year Seminar Courses and Traditional Indicators of Student Success

Though no formal hypotheses were articulated for this phase of the study as it was exploratory in nature, I did enter into the analyses of FYSC group membership and traditional indicators of student success with the idea that, because caring (Gay, 2000, 2002; Noddings, 1988, 2016), validating (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011), and culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998) pedagogies were intentionally incorporated into the redesigned first-year seminar course, significant differences would exist for the Redesigned FYSC group compared to the Previous FYSC and No FYSC groups with regard to first term GPA, first year cumulative GPA, first year units attempted, first year units earned, and first-to-second year retention. As some studies on the relationship between first-year seminar courses and traditional indicators of success have demonstrated correlation (see Hendel, 2001; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzieni, 2005; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Pittenburg et al., 2016; Porter & Swing, 2006; Ryan & Glenn, 2004) and the utilization of caring, validating, and culturally responsive practices in the classroom have been found to be beneficial for students of color in particular (see Garza, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hurtado, Cueller, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Vetter, Schreiner, & Jaworski, 2019), the assumption that students who participated in the redesigned first-year seminar course might demonstrate
significant differences with regard to traditional indicators of student success was not far-fetched. However, this did not prove to be the case with the traditional indicators of student success at Western Comprehensive University as the greatest significant differences were found not for the Redesigned FYSC group, but for the Previous FYSC group, indicating that perhaps the format of the Previous FYSC had greater correlation to these measures of success and the introduction of caring, validating, and culturally responsive practices into the first-year seminar course had little impact on traditional indicators of success.

Though it can't be stated as certain, but this may be due to external influences on students' sense of community and well-being in the years following the launch of the redesigned first-year seminar course, as these years were wrought with community turmoil and fear⁴, both on and off-campus and may have negatively affected students' overall ability to concentrate on their education and studies. This perceived shortcoming will be addressed later in Recommendations for Future Research.

An additional explanation for the overall results of Phase 1 may also rest in the premise that, as first-year postsecondary students, many students are transitioning from a K-12 learning environment that typically aligns itself to what Freire (1970) termed “banking”, whereby teachers are the sole holders and creators of knowledge and students are empty vessels waiting to be filled.

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⁴ Details of these incidents between 2015 and 2018 are being withheld to protect the identity of the institution.
Because of this nature of K-12 education in the United States, it has been proposed that postsecondary students, especially first-year students, experience a “gap between the faculty understanding of college-level coursework and the kind of work [they] are prepared to do” (Cox, 2009, p. 9). If this is the case, it would make sense that first-year postsecondary students’ traditional indicators of success may not be indicative of the potential benefits a first-year seminar course grounded in validating and culturally responsive pedagogies might have, especially if students never experienced the use of these practices in their K-12 education, as their use is contrary to the banking system students learned to navigate prior.

**First Term GPA.** ANOVA and post hoc analyses revealed that first term GPA was significantly higher for the Previous FYSC group than for the Redesigned FYSC or No FYSC groups and that the first term GPA of the Redesigned FYSC group was significantly higher than that of the No FYSC group. This finding is in line with previous research with regard to the relationship between first-year seminar courses and students GPA, as much research has found that there exists a positive correlation between first-year seminar courses regardless of seminar type and GPA (see Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrigh, 2001).

**First Year Cumulative GPA.** With regard to first year cumulative GPA and first-year seminar group membership, significant difference was found for the
Previous FYSC group in terms of obtaining higher cumulative GPAs in their first year compared to the Redesigned FYSC and No FYSC groups for which there was no statistical difference. The finding regarding no significant differences between the Redesigned FYSC group and No FYSC group seems to closely mirror that of Hendel’s (2001) study, which found no relationship between first-year seminar participation and cumulative GPA. However, in the present study, those students who participated in the previous extended orientation first-year seminar course did experience significantly higher cumulative GPAs, supporting, in part, the findings of Permazadian and Credé (2016) who determined that some first-year seminar courses are more highly correlated to GPA than others. Though no readily-available explanation for why this may have been the case exists, further research into possible mediating or moderating factors, such as class load, course combinations, and so forth, might provide additional insight into why students who participated in the previous first-year seminar course collectively had higher GPAs than the other two groups.

First Year Units Attempted. Similar to the findings regarding first term GPA, ANOVA and post hoc analyses revealed that first year units attempted was significantly higher for the Previous FYSC group than for the Redesigned FYSC or No FYSC groups and that the first year units attempted for the Redesigned FYSC group was significantly higher than that of the No FYSC group. As little prior research has been published with regard to the relationship between first-year seminar course participation and units attempted in the first year, it is
unknown if this finding is in alignment with any existing studies. However, it was important to include this variable, as many advisors began to advise students to take more units in order to decrease time to degree. Some specific programs, though, continued to urge students to take only what they felt they could handle and advised against taking too many courses. Again, this result may have been impacted by a moderating factor.

**First Year Units Earned.** Counter to Hendel’s (2001) previous study on the relationship between first-year seminar course participation and units earned in the first year which found no relationship between the two, significant differences were found between the Previous FYSC, No FYSC, and Redesigned FYSC groups. Surprisingly, both the Previous FYSC group and the No FYSC group demonstrated significantly higher units earned than did the Redesigned FYSC group. Again, there is no readily available explanation or hypothesis to explain why this may have been the case, and future research may be necessary to explore any mediating or moderating factors that might have contributed to this finding.

**First-to-Second Year Retention.** As was the case for the above traditional indicators of student success, students who participated in the previous FYSC demonstrated higher levels of retention from their first fall into the second fall (Previous FYSC, 91%; No FYSC, 89%; and Redesigned FYSC). One possible

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5 Citation omitted to protect identity of institution.
explanation for this may have to do with mandated policies\textsuperscript{6} intended to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree, especially with regard to those policies that are tied to funding (see, for example, CSU Graduation Initiative 2025; California Community College Student Centered Funding Formula). In some cases, in an effort to effectively respond to these increased pressures to ensure that students graduate within the mandated timeframe, colleges and universities have become more selective, thereby reducing the number of low-income and/or minoritized students they accept and enroll (Hillman, 2016) or enrolling but not retaining more students (Snyder, 2015). With this, it is entirely possible that, in an attempt to navigate a mandate tied to student retention/graduation and university funding issued in 2015, Western Comprehensive University either enacted more stringent policies with regard to student progress, academic probation, and/or dismissal from the institution or more strictly enforced those policies which may have been leniently enforced in previous years, leading to increased rates of probation and/or dismissal. Thus, there exists a possible explanation as to why the Redesigned FYSC group, which entered the University in the fall of 2015, was retained at lower rates than the other two groups.

Phase 2: First-Year Seminar Courses and National Survey of Student Engagement Indicators

Drawing from the results of previous studies with regard to the intentional

\textsuperscript{6} Specific initiative names have been omitted to protect the identity of the institution where this study took place.
inclusion of caring (Gay, 2000, 2002; Noddings, 1988, 2016), validating (Hurtado, Cueller, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Vetter, Schreiner, & Jaworski, 2019), and culturally responsive (Irizarry, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rychly & Graves, 2012) pedagogies in the classroom, six NSSE engagement constructs were selected in order to explore the relationship between first-year seminar course design and participation and students’ reported experiences with reflective and integrative learning, collaborative learning, positive student-faculty interaction, effective teaching practices, quality of interactions, and a supportive environment. Because these constructs are linked to teacher behaviors and classroom experiences that can support caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies, all of which informed and were intentionally incorporated into the redesigned course, it was hypothesized that, for all constructs, students who participated in the redesigned first-year seminar course would experience significantly higher levels of engagement with regard to all six constructs. However, five of these hypotheses were not supported by the planned contrast analyses, as no significant differences were found between groups with regard to Reflective & Integrative Learning, Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Quality of Interactions, and Supportive Environment. On the other hand, students in the Redesigned FYSC group did have significantly higher mean Effective Teaching Practices composite scores than those students who participated in the previous
FYSC or those who did not participate in a FYSC at all, supporting the hypothesis.

One possible explanation for the significantly higher Redesigned FYSC group mean Effective Teaching Practices composite scores has to do with the depth and breadth of professional development opportunities presented to the redesigned course’s faculty and lecturers. As part of the professional development offered, faculty and lecturers attended an intensive two-day retreat prior to the start of each fall session. During these sessions, faculty and staff experts, as well as those faculty and staff who attended the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success, engaged FYSC faculty and lecturers in activities and instruction designed to increase the utilization of research-supported teaching practices associated with caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies, including but not limited to: providing scaffolding, especially that which relates to students’ own cultures and/or experiences; showing a personal interest in students and their experiences; providing affective academic support including regular and timely feedback on assignments; engaging students where they are; connecting with students personally; welcoming and embracing the diverse experiences of learners; treating students as unique individuals; recognizing and encouraging students’ capabilities; and expressing a belief that the life experiences students bring with them are beneficial and worthwhile\(^7\), all of which are practices supported by research as

\(^7\) Citation omitted to protect identity of institution.
integral to the success of most students and, in particular, students of color (see Garza, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hurtado, Cueller, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Noddings, 1988, 2016; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Vetter, Schreiner, & Jaworski, 2019). This intensive focus on the applied incorporation of caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies within the redesigned first-year seminar course and the professional development provided to support such activities may have contributed greatly to students’ experience with effective teaching practices as gauged by the NSSE.

While participation in the redesigned first-year seminar course may not have had any significant positive correlation to students’ engagement with Reflective & Integrative Learning, Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Quality of Interactions, and Supportive Environment as reported by the NSSE, there appears to have been no negative impact of the incorporation of caring, validating, or culturally responsive pedagogies, as ANOVAs and planned contrast analyses found no significant differences—positive or negative—between the three groups. As many of these constructs reach beyond the confines of the classroom with regard to student experience, it could be that additional external factors (mediating or moderating) may have influenced students’ lived experiences at Western Comprehensive University resulting in a relatively steady experience with regard to these five constructs over the course of the years for which NSSE data was utilized for this study (2011 through 2018).
In their work, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) developed a conceptual framework for the utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy in the K-12 classroom which included five themes: (1) identity and achievement; (2) equity and excellence; (3) developmental appropriateness; (4) teaching the whole child; and (5) student-teacher relationships. They stressed that, for culturally responsive pedagogy to be effective or to reach its fullest positive impact on students’ experiences, all five areas must be engaged in the classroom, a sentiment also expressed, at least in part, by Barefoot (2000) with regard to improving first-year seminar classes. Drawing from students’ experiences during their first year of college, Barefoot concluded that first-year seminars ought: 1) provide for opportunities for students to interact with successful peers, thereby helping to build an identity of achievement; 2) increase opportunities for intentional student-faculty interaction; and 3) raising the bar for student expectations. This assertion that there are multiple factors with regard to how educators effectively employ culturally responsive pedagogy is also supported by the work of Rychly and Graves (2012) and Irizarry (2007). Additional research also supports that both caring (Garza, 2009) and validating (Hurtado, Cueller, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995) practices are multi-dimensional and require the continual coexistence of multiple themes or elements.

If this is the case, it may be possible that, because faculty and lecturers who taught in the redesigned first-year seminar course received so much professional
development in the realm of effective teaching practices, they concentrated primarily on that and did not engage in the additional factors or behaviors necessary to create truly caring, validating, or culturally responsive classroom spaces. Additionally, it is unknown whether or not any other faculty or lecturers on campus engaged in any of these practices at all. If students did not experience caring, validating, or culturally responsive pedagogies in an ongoing, consistent way, it may have contributed to the very similar experiences they reported with regard to the selected NSSE constructs, outside of Effective Teaching Practices. This idea will be explored more fully in Recommendations for Educators and Educational Leaders.

Limitations of the Study

As alluded to frequently above, one of the primary limitations of this study was that it did not take into consideration or explore potential mediating or moderating factors. As such, the present study provides only an exploratory analysis of most variables, especially with regard to traditional indicators of student success. Additionally, the present study took into account a narrow and limited view of success as determined only by traditionally accepted indicators of such, including only GPA, units attempted and earned, and first-to-second year retention. Suggestions for ways in which to mitigate this limitation are provided in Recommendations for Future Research.

Another limitation with regard to the quantitative data collected for this study is that the data spanned a short period of time. All data utilized in Phase 1 of the
study were effectively from students’ first year of college only and did not include any long-range data, thus eliminating the opportunity to explore any possible relationships between FYSC groupings and traditional student success indicators through the second, third, and fourth years (and beyond) of college. This is addressed in Recommendations for Future Research.

Two possible limitations may have influenced the results of Phase 2: First-Year Seminar Course and National Survey of Student Engagement Indicators, namely a relatively small, non-representative sample size and the utilization of several years’ worth of NSSE data across multiple administrations. Though G*Power analysis indicated that a sample size of 52 participants per FYSC grouping was sufficient to obtain a moderate effect with a power level (Cohen’s $d$) of .80, as this is widely accepted as the threshold for large effects (Howell, 2011), which was reasonably surpassed with 69 participants per group, the matched sample included only White and Latinx students, was 93% female—both potential mediating factors—and, therefore, not representative of the overall campus demographics. Additionally, to include as many participants as possible, multiple administrations of the NSSE were included in the study, representing student responses from the first-year, sophomore, and senior iterations of the survey. Thus, students’ class year may have had an impact on their responses with regard to the select NSSE constructs.

Recommendations for Educators and Educational Leaders

One of the primary takeaways of this study for educators and educational
leaders alike is that changes in how first-year seminar courses, and potentially other college-level courses as well, are taught can affect students’ experiences with regard to effective teaching practices. As part of the course redesign process, faculty and lecturers were strongly encouraged to attend intensive, two-day professional development retreats prior to the start of each fall session. During these sessions, faculty and staff experts, as well as those faculty and staff who attended the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success, engaged FYSC faculty and lecturers in activities and instruction designed to increase the utilization of research-supported teaching practices associated with caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies (see Garza, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hurtado, Cueller, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Noddings, 1988, 2016; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Vetter, Schreiner, & Jaworski, 2019). This intensive focus on the applied incorporation of caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies within the redesigned first-year seminar course and the professional development provided to support such activities may have contributed greatly to students’ experience with effective teaching practices as gauged by the NSSE.

As such, the primary recommendation stemming from the results of this study for educators and educational leaders, especially those at minority-serving institutions, deals with the offering of intentional professional development opportunities surrounding the incorporation of caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies.
responsive pedagogies within the postsecondary context. As many college and university faculty are not trained in pedagogical methods (see Cahn, 1978; Jensen, 2011; Milton, 1972; Rieg & Wilson, 2009; Robinson & Hope, 2013; Tinto, 2005), specific professional development opportunities related to caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies, which have been demonstrated to have profound positive affects for students of color (see Garza, 2009; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hurtado, Cueller, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Noddings, 1988, 2016; Rendón, 1994, 1996; Rendón & Jalomo, 993, 1995; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Vetter, Schreiner, & Jaworski, 2019), may prove incredibly beneficial for faculty, adjunct professors, lecturers, and the students they teach. Although many colleges and universities offer professional development opportunities to faculty, adjuncts, and lecturers, these opportunities are not always ceased upon. Institutions of higher education may wish to develop a concrete plan to increase participation by including professional development for the implementation of validating and culturally responsive pedagogies in mandatory new faculty orientation programs.

Because establishing a sense of belonging and feeling seen, welcomed, and validated is critically important to the success of minoritized students (Irizarry, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), especially first-
year students (Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993, 199, 2005), universities may wish to require all faculty, adjuncts, and lecturers who teach lower division courses to attend such professional development opportunities. These requirements may be further incentivized for faculty by way of continuing education credits, completion badges, or special acknowledgements and credits regarding evaluation, review, and/or tenure processes.

Although professional development opportunities for faculty, adjuncts, and lecturers might be organized in myriad ways, as one with nearly twenty years’ experience in designing and delivering professional development trainings to educators at all levels, I would recommend that any professional development designed to increase the incorporation of caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies within postsecondary classrooms be developed along three primary themes, all of which must be included in the professional development training: 1) the establishment of need for and benefits of culturally responsive and validating pedagogies in the classroom by way of primary research and seminal works by researchers and educators such as Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Nel Noddings, Laura Rendón (and associates), Daniel Solórzano (and associates), and Tara Yosso; 2) the identification and description of specific strategies that might be used in the classroom to demonstrate care and/or honor and validate students’ lived experiences, cultural background, cultural wealth, and held and created knowledge; and 3) the opportunity to develop practical and tangible products, such as learning outcomes, syllabi, and
projects or assignments, that employ or capitalize on validating and culturally responsive pedagogies. I also recommend that any professional development opportunities take place in either a faculty cohort or learning community environment, as this will encourage the development of faculty collaboration so as to increase the chances that faculty might not only share their ideas with one another, but also continually work together as discussed below to continue the iterative process of improving their pedagogical expertise and teaching effectiveness.

Educational leaders at the postsecondary level may also consider encouraging a campus climate that not only accepts, but encourages innovation and the trying out of new methods and pedagogies without retribution for doing so, as faculty fear often impedes such (Hodges, 2006). This may be accomplished by setting up innovation awards or spotlights for those faculty, adjuncts, and lecturers who develop plans for the implementation of new methods and pedagogies and are willing to share their experiences, successes, and challenges with other faculty members. A reduction in the fear of retribution for trying out new ideas might also be accomplished by either suspending evaluations of teaching for the first year in which new pedagogies are implemented or by allowing faculty, adjunct, and lecturer to formally respond to their evaluations of teaching so that they might provide to their chair, dean, or other administrator(s) conversational insight into the new strategies they implemented and possibly the reasoning behind them, a potential explanation as
to why students may have responded the way they did, and plans, where appropriate, to make changes for improvement in subsequent iterations of the course(s). Not only might this minimize faculty fear, but it would also promote a culture of continual reflection and improvement within the teaching community on campus.

By reducing faculty fear and encouraging new and innovative pedagogies and strategies for teaching, institutions might support the development of what Bensimon et al. (2004) have termed “practitioner-as-researcher”. Within this model, “the outcome is knowledge that heightens the members' awareness of what is occurring within their institutions and increases their motivation to effect change” (Bensimon et al., 2004, p. 108). In seeking to better understand and assess that which they are doing in the classroom—how they are teaching, how they are interacting with and honoring students—and how their pedagogical choices can affect student outcomes, faculty may be more willing to embrace and engage in pedagogical change if it means better outcomes for students. If faculty are encouraged to do this and can comfortably engage in the continual improvement process as practitioners-as-researchers, they may likely engage in many aspects of participatory action research by seeking to enact change via an iterative process of engagement, collaboration, observation, and reflection, a research method known to effect positive change especially with regard to marginalized and minoritized communities (Walter, 1993). Again, this continued collaborative process might be more easily facilitated if faculty were to participate
in validating and culturally responsive professional development as either a cohort or learning community. This approach and process places the onus of minoritized students’ success on equity-minded faculty, adjuncts, and lecturers and places them in a position to become agents of change whilst seeking to dismantle deficit-based thinking, practices, and policies at their institutions (Bensimon, 2007).

In addition to providing and engaging in professional development activities centered around caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies, postsecondary educators and educational leaders might also look for ways in which to establish or expand out-of-classroom validating and belonging experiences for marginalized students, as lack of a sense of belonging or validation in non-classroom spaces has also been found to negatively impact minoritized students’ college success (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Jalomo, 1993, 1995; Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). Beyond providing validation and support in the classroom, Rendón (1994) asserts that the entire campus must be reshaped into that of a therapeutic learning community for students of color to fully experience academic growth and development; they must feel welcomed, accepted, and validated outside of the classroom.

One way colleges can do this is to actively create and foster a campus climate and community that encourages positive relationships between students,
faculty, and peers both in and outside of classroom spaces; promotes and supports cultural and/or identity pride; and believes in the ability of all students to achieve success (Rendón, 1994). This might be accomplished via the establishment of various cultural or identity pride centers or spaces on campus, the development of engaging activities to allow students to engage with faculty and staff members outside of the classroom in fun activities such as faculty/staff and student intramurals, board game or video game marathons, dances, and so forth. Student successes might be celebrated by way of departmental spotlights or open houses whereby students’ projects, creations, or research are showcased. Institutions may want to consider establishing faculty-led student clubs and organizations based on common interests, especially those that celebrate and honor myriad cultures and backgrounds. Additionally, faculty and staff might either organize or join student-led activism movements intended to effect change with regard to social injustices enacted upon minoritized, marginalized, and oppressed peoples. In doing so, institutions of higher education that are designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions or Minority-Serving Institutions might actually make positive strides towards not only serving and supporting the students they are entrusted to educate (Garcia, 2019; Nuñez, Hurtado, & Galdeano, 2015), but also potentially initiating and supporting positive change within society as a whole.

Recommendations for Future Research

As mentioned previously, the analyses undertaken in this study were
primarily exploratory in nature even though the topics at hand are multifaceted and quite complex. As such, I provide below several recommendations for future research with regard to the study of how the implementation of caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies at the college level, and in particular first-year seminar courses, might be better understood or utilized to bring about more equity at postsecondary institutions, specifically Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

In their study, Padgett, Keup, and Pascarella (2013) explored the relationship between first-year seminars and their relationship with students’ lifelong learning tendencies, finding that students who participated in a first-year seminar were more likely than their non-participant peers to seek out and reflect upon information in order to form their own thoughts and opinions regarding their daily lives and experiences and that the chances of students’ synthesizing ideas, information, and personal experiences increased with participation in first-year seminars. Since first-year seminars were found to have lasting impacts on students, perhaps a longitudinal study of the effects of validating and culturally responsive pedagogies in the college classroom, and in particular first-year seminar course, would reveal long-term effects on students’ traditional indicators of success or, if qualitative methods are employed as recommended below, within the affective domain.

Although Phase 2 of this study was reliant upon a priori hypotheses, the data analysis techniques applied throughout the study were based in primarily exploratory methods. Though ANOVA, post hoc analyses, and planned contrast
analyses are beneficial when trying to get a general sense of the overall differences that may or may not exist between groups, more complex analyses may provide an even deeper understanding of the data. For example, multivariate analyses might be undertaken to explore the existence of mediating or moderating factors that were not accounted for in the current study. Combined factor analyses and regression model analyses, such as structural equation modeling, might also prove beneficial as these techniques can bring to light any latent variables, identify mediating or moderating factors, and allow for the modeling and testing of more complex relationships between and among variables (Hoyle, 1995; Ullman & Bentler, 2003; Werner & Schermelleh-Engel, 2009).

As mentioned in the Interpretation of Results for Phase 1, the introduction of the redesigned course appears to have had no effect on students’ traditional measures of success. However, it has long been proposed, especially by scholars and researchers who apply various critical lenses to educational research, that traditionally accepted measures or indicators of student success, such as GPA, units earned, and retention and graduation rates, are inherently flawed, grounded in a dominant perspective of “white normative standards” (Garcia, 2019, p. 3), and do not necessarily provide a full picture of student success, especially with regard to students of color (see Astin, 2016; Cuellar, 2015; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). This study and its use of said traditionally accepted indicators of student success, by design,
did not move beyond or push back against the dominant narrative that perpetuates the idea that it is these measures of success alone that are legitimate, thus potentially negating any possibility of being truly transformative in nature. In line with the thinking of scholars who seek to expand upon what is considered success, especially for students of color, by employing various lenses to their research (see, among others, Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, & Vallejo, 2004; Cuellar, 2015; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Garcia, 2019; Mertens, 2010, 2019; Solórzano, 1998), further research with expanded definitions or indicators of student success, such as enrollment in post-baccalaureate programs and job placement (Garcia, 2019) or a sense of agency or empowerment (Cuellar, 2015), may very well push back against the accepted dominate narrative and strengthen the possible transformative nature of the study.

Another recommendation for future research revolves around the utilization of qualitative methodologies, including voiced research (Smyth & Hattam, 2001), applied with critical lenses. Though quantitative methodologies are often touted as the most legitimate among research methodologies (Bensimon et al., 2014), they often reveal only part of the story, as “statistical analyses [can] obscure individual experience” (Grumet, 1990, p. 3), especially with regard to those who have been systemically and systematically marginalized (see Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Powers, 2007; Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Qualitative research methods
that employ critical lenses can challenge “traditional notions of how to conduct, practice, or rhetorically engage in educational politics and leadership” (Alemán, 2009, p. 295), push back against dominant ideology (Solórzano, 1997), and honor the lived experiences of those who are typically silenced and marginalized (Garcia, 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), providing a much broader and deeper understanding of the issue(s) at hand. This is critical for any research that aspires to be transformative in nature or seeks to provide a counter-narrative, as qualitative or voiced research is “explicitly committed to bringing into existence perspectives previously excluded, muted, or silenced by dominant structures and discourse” (Smyth & Hattam, 2001, p. 407). Additionally, this type of qualitative research may also aide in the creation and legitimization of more accurate indicators of student success, especially for students of color, as those “positioned on the disempowered end of a social system will often have different perspectives on that system than those positioned with power in the system” (Frank, 2013, p. 365).

Conclusion

An abundance of research has been conducted in terms of examining the effectiveness of High Impact Practices (HIPs), including first-year seminars (Kuh, 2008; Finley & McNair, 2013; Hendel, 2001; Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Permzadian & Credé; 2016; Pittendrigh, Borkowski, Swinford, & Plumb, 2016; Porter & Swing, 2006; Ryan &
Glenn, 2004). Research surrounding equity in higher education has also proliferated, especially in recent years (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Banks & Banks, 2019; Burke, Crozier, & Misiaszek, 2016; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). However, little exists in the way of examining how carefully designed first-year seminar classes may impact underrepresented students’ sense of agency or how the use of culturally relevant, critical, and validating pedagogies (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Rendón, 1994) can promote equity in higher education. Additionally, the existing research has primarily been undertaken at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and tends to frame college-going and the transition to college in a dominant perspective (Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 1993), in effect, marginalizing and silencing those students who do not fit the dominant discourse (Rendón, 1994; Delagdo Bernal, 2002).

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore how employing culturally relevant and critical pedagogies in first-year seminars can be used to promote equity in higher education. It was also particularly relevant to study the potential effects these changes in the course may have had, as faculty will most certainly be making decisions with regard to how—and possibly if—first-year seminar courses should be taught in the future.

Data analyses for the study were undertaken for each of the two separate types of data collected, student academic performance data (Phase 1) and NSSE survey data (Phase 2). In each analysis, students from all three groups were matched based on several pre-college characteristics so as to minimize the
chances that participation or membership in one group or the other would skew the data (Johnson, 2001; Creswell, 2014). These pre-college characteristics included high school GPA, sex, race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status as determined by Pell status.

In the first phase of analysis, one-way ANOVA; post hoc analyses, including Tukey’s test and Games-Howell test; and Chi Square were used to explore the relationship between membership in a particular first-year seminar group (e.g., those who were enrolled in a first-year seminar course between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014; those who were enrolled in a first-year seminar course between Fall 2015 and Fall 2018; and those who were never enrolled in a first-year seminar course) and traditional academic performance indicators including GPA, units attempted, units earned, and retention into the second year. One-way ANOVA and planned contrast analyses were used in Phase 2 to determine the relationship between membership in the same first-year seminar groups and students’ self-reported levels of engagement and belonging based on student response data from six different indicators or constructs (Cronbach’s alpha, .802 to .888) of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Overall, the study found little to no relationship between the Redesigned FSYC and traditional indicators of student success or most of the NSSE engagement indicators. Though the means were significantly higher for the Redesigned FYSC group than for the No FYSC group with regard to first term GPA and first year units attempted, there was higher correlation between the
Previous FYSC group and all traditional indicators of success. No significant differences were found for any of the groups with regard to the selected NSSE engagement indicators with the exception of Effective Teaching Practices; for this indicator, the Redesigned FYSC group had significantly higher Effective Teaching Practices composite scores.

Though the results may not have indicated that which it was assumed they might, several recommendations for educators and educational leaders were proposed. These included: 1) providing and engaging in professional development activities centered around caring, validating, and culturally responsive pedagogies; 2) the intentional implementation or expansion of cross-campus experiences for students of color in which they feel welcomed, accepted, and validated outside of the classroom; and 3) the employment of a practitioner-as-researcher and/or participatory action research model at the university-level that encourages faculty to critically assess and reflect upon their pedagogy in order to improve the experiences and outcomes of their students.

Recommendations regarding future research were suggested primarily in an effort to mitigate some of the limitations of the present study. Namely, these were: 1) the utilization of more complex and robust analyses, which may provide an even deeper understanding of the data; 2) the intentional employment of various critical lenses and expanded definitions or indicators of student success; and 3) the application of qualitative methodologies, including voiced research.
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER
January 17, 2020

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2020-139

Mrs. Joanna Oxendine and Prof. Edna Martinez
COE - Doctoral Studies Program
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mrs. Joanna Oxendine and Prof. Edna Martinez:

Your application to use human subjects, titled “Validating, Culturally Responsive, and Critical Pedagogies in First-Year Seminar Courses at a Hispanic-Serving Institution” has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California State University, San Bernardino has determined that your application meets the requirements for exemption from IRB review Federal requirements under 45 CFR 46. As the researcher under the exempt category you do not have to follow the requirements under 45 CFR 46 which requires annual renewal and documentation of written informed consent which are not required for the exempt category. However, exempt status still requires you to attain consent from participants before conducting your research as needed. Please ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.
Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee the following three requirements highlighted below. Please note failure of the investigator to notify the IRB of the below requirements may result in disciplinary action.

- Submit a protocol modification (change) form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before implemented in your study to ensure the risk level to participants has not increased,
- If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research, and
- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system when your study has ended.

The protocol modification, adverse/unanticipated event, and closure forms are located in the Cayuse IRB System. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Donna Garcia

Donna Garcia, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board
REFERENCES


Number 25. National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, Columbia, SC.


