LET'S HEAR FROM EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS: DESIGNING A READINESS PROGRAM FOR EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS AT A 2-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGE

A Scholarly Research Project

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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December 2024

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of readiness programs on Early Admission (EA) students at a 2-year public college. EA programs allow high school seniors students to enroll full-time in college courses while earning both high school and college credits. However, these students often face challenges in academic success, social-emotional support, and connectivity. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine how different types of readiness programs (full-semester, half-semester, or none) influence EA students' experiences in these areas. The research was guided by the central question: *What type of readiness program has the most impact on EA students?* Four sub-questions explored the differences in academic success, social-emotional support, and connectivity across the three readiness program conditions. The methodology used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, beginning with quantitative data collection through pre- and post-surveys, followed by qualitative data from open-ended questions to explain the results further. Thirty EA students from Olivia State College participated, with each assigned to one of three groups: full-semester program, half-semester program, or no program. The findings revealed that the full-semester readiness program had the most significant positive impact on students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and peer connectivity. The half-semester program showed moderate benefits, while students with no readiness program struggled the most across all measured outcomes. The study concluded that continuous and structured support over a full semester is essential for promoting EA students' success in both academic and social-emotional domains. These findings suggest that 2-year public colleges should prioritize implementing comprehensive readiness programs to enhance the academic and personal development of EA students. Future research should explore the long-term effects of such programs and their impact on diverse student populations.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to my parents, Yanick and Rodrigue Gilbert, and to my dear son, Jayon M. Barnes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my advisor and mentors, Dr. Bakken and Dr. Estes, for assisting me in completing my scholarly research. Thank you for every minute you spent ensuring a seamless experience throughout my journey as a doctoral candidate. Your guidance, support, and encouragement have been invaluable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE PAGE

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES PAGE

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Graduating from high school with an Associate of Arts (AA) degree or partial college credits is a wonderful way for students to start a new chapter in their lives. These advanced students have opportunities to know what it is like to be a college student, early on. Even though completing high school is already a success in and of itself, being able to obtain college credits in their entirety demonstrates to others that the student is able to follow directions, has outstanding critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, and completes tasks to the end. When a student can earn college credit while still enrolled in high school, their peers, parents, and guardians are typically overjoyed for them. This signifies that the student is ready to go on to the next stage of life. High school students may be motivated to participate in these college programs because costs are partially or completely covered by the school district. This means that parents do not have to worry as much about the cost of college education for their children. Another possibility is that they will graduate college sooner than anticipated and then immediately begin their professional lives. Regardless of the motivations behind it, these programs present opportunities that benefit both students and their parents.

The Early Admission (EA) program is another form of Dual Enrollment (DE) or Early College (EC), in which high school students can simultaneously earn high school and college credits (Miedema, et al., 2022). Senior high school students who enroll full-time in a single postsecondary institution for minimum of 12 to maximum of 18 credit hours are eligible for the EA program. In addition, EA students must enroll in courses that will count toward both their high school graduation requirements and associate and/or baccalaureate degree requirements

(Miedema, et al., 2022). According to Wang et al. (2015), "Participation in dual enrollment programs provides students with exposure to college-level work, which gives them a head start in the pace at which they make initial academic progress at college" (p. 167). Students who participate in high school programs that allow them to obtain college credit before graduating are more likely to experience professional success field after graduation.

Although some researchers have emphasized the value of high school students' experiences in early college environments (Adams et al., 2019), few have specifically examined EA students' perceptions of academic success, social-emotional support, and building connectivity. This paper explores the EA program for high school seniors who attended Olivia State College (OSC; pseudonym), a 2-year public college in South Florida, to simultaneously earn college and high school credits as full-time college students. This chapter provides details of the study's research problem, including background information, challenges, and success stories related to the research problem. Additionally, the purpose of the study, research questions, study design, and framework are detailed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's significance and an overview of the organization of this paper.

Statement of the Research Problem

Research Problem and Background Information

Early Admission (EA) students at 2-year public colleges rarely receive opportunities to share their experiences, perspectives, and suggestions as participants in EA programs. Many U.S. students begin dual enrollment or early college in numerous ways, as early as sixth grade. According to Burns et al. (2018),

> High school students may earn early college credit in multiple ways, some entirely in the high school setting and others by attending classes on a college campus on a part-time

> basis, or, in some cases, high school juniors and/or seniors may attend college on a full-time basis; however, there appears to be no consistent terminology used by researchers to describe these different programs. (p. 28)

The most common terms for these programs are *dual enrollment*, *early college*, and *early admission*. Depending on the state, an institution enters into a dual enrollment articulation agreement with the county school board to provide practical and relevant instruction to all students.

The DE program at OSC is available to students in grades 6–12 at any public, private, virtual, or home-education school in Masai Beach County. The School Board of Masai Beach County fully pays the DE student's college tuition until high school completion (Miedema, et al., 2022). At OSC, the DE program consists of three categories:

1. Dual Enrollment: The enrollment of eligible 6–12 grade students in a postsecondary course (8 maximum credit hours) creditable toward any approved degree program at OSC. Students in grades 6–9 must have a 3.5 GPA, whereas students in grades 10–12 must have a 3.0 GPA. DE students can enroll in college courses during and after high school (Miedema, et al., 2022).
2. Career and Technical Certificate (CCP): For students in grades 10–12 with a 2.0 GPA. Students must take the Test of Adult Education (TABE) test before enrolling in OSC. CCP students are granted the right to enroll in CCP courses during and after high school hours. The CCP program prepares students for immediate job placement (Miedema, et al., 2022).
3. Early Admission: Available to high school seniors with an unweighted GPA of 3.20 who are full-time students at OSC and are enrolled in 12-18 credits. In addition, EA students

must meet the minimum required scores for college readiness on a placement exam (Miedema, et al., 2022).

The criteria and application process to become a DE participant at OSC is as follows:

- Must pass four high school credits, of which two must include one English language arts and one math course.
- Must meet the unweighted GPA for the desired program (DE, CCP, or EA).
- For DE and EA students: Must pass all subject areas of a placement exam (or exams): Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), Preliminary-SAT, American College Test (ACT), Pre-ACT, Post Secondary Readiness Test (PERT), or Accuplacer. CCP students are required to take TABE.
- Have a recommendation letter from the high school principal or someone else in charge (only for EA students).
- All students and their parents or guardians must sign the DE agreement form. The DE agreement form is proof that the student has completed the mandatory online DE orientation and that their parent/guardian has agreed to the terms and conditions of the program.
- Provide a completed DE authorization form, which allows the DE student to choose up to six college courses. The DE authorization form must be signed by the high school counselor, the student, and the parent/guardian.
- Homeschooled students only: The legal compliance form must be signed.
- All students must apply to OSC online.

EA students are fully aware of the disqualification process of the program through the DE orientation and the DE Agreement form (Miedema, et al., 2022). Any student who earns a failing

letter grade of F, D, or W (withdrawal) is automatically withdrawn from the program. The withdrawal letter grade signifies an attempted credit that will not affect the student's GPA (Miedema, et al., 2022). Students may only be reinstated into the DE program if they provide proof of extenuating circumstances that occurred during the semester they failed or withdrew (Miedema, et al., 2022).

Literature Review

Challenges/Obstacles

An EA student is either a first-time DE student experiencing college-level work or a continuing DE student who has college credits and is transitioning to become an EA student. The transition phase for EA students can be burdensome because the EA program requires them to be full-time college students during their senior year of high school (Calhoun et al., 2018). These students are not allowed to attend high school except for extracurricular physical activities. Researchers have argued that early college programs like EA are not beneficial to students. EA students are generally between 16 and 18 years of age and are challenged by the realities of college (Karp et al., 2004). Participating in an advanced program like EA is a student's choice. High school students have chosen to face a challenge and set a goal to graduate high school and earn college credits. The concern is whether high school student receive adequate support in EA programs to achieve their goals.

Some researchers have provided support for their concerns regarding the disadvantages of participating in early college programs. Some claim that high school is very different from college classrooms and that high school students do not understand college lingo or have the emotional maturity to do well in college classes (Karp et al., 2004; Leonard, 2012). Calhoun et al. (2018) reported that adjusting to the demands and rigor of college-level coursework is a

challenge for high school students. The researchers discovered that students were often sleep deprived in order to keep up with their class workload, which led to stress and anxiety (Calhoun et al., 2018). Woodcock and Olson-Beal (2013) explained that restrictions to participation in extracurricular activities were recognized by high school students as an opportunity cost related to early college programs. Students in Locke et al.'s (2014) reported a disconnect between the information they received at home and their expectations of DE programs.

Another obstacle to early college programs at a 2-year college is students' completion of a bachelor's degree. While colleges like OSC offer limited bachelor's programs, they have many Associate of Science (AS) and vocational programs, instead. Early college programs allow students to change their minds about transferring to a university to complete a bachelor's degree, which may not have been their original plan while in high school. Schudde and Brown (2019) and Xu et al. (2019) reported that students enrolling in community colleges immediately after high school were less likely to earn bachelor's degrees, over time. There may be concerns that early college programs direct students away from educational pathways leading to bachelor's degrees (Zeiser et al., 2020). Although EA students' exposure to different degrees and vocational programs at 2-year colleges may jumpstart their success, it may also lead to indecision. For example, say an EA student's original program of study was biological sciences with the plan to transfer to a state university to complete the bachelor's program. However, the student changed majors to pursue an AS degree at the 2-year college and later changed majors again to a vocational program at the 2-year college. The student could be affected by extra charges for taking too many credits and could lose financial aid because of how many credits were taken.

Success Stories/Solutions

Many researchers have acknowledged that the popularity of early college programs have significantly increased over the last decade. Early college programs are becoming more prevalent in high schools; in some cases, they are mandatory. Across several studies on EA, DE, and EC programs, high school students were confident that the level of help and care they received was directly linked to their academic progress (Karp et al., 2004; Leonard, 2012; Moreno et al., 2019; Sethna et al., 2001). Schwartz and Tinto (1987) reported three major factors commonly influenced students' decisions to remain in an institution:

1. Students need to integrate into the institution by fulfilling their academic tasks.
2. Students need positive and frequent informal interactions with faculty and staff.
3. Students require engagement in extracurricular activities and positive peer group interactions. (pg. 47)

A success story related to the early college experience was found in a study by Adams et al. (2019). The scholars focused on Black male students in early college and their perceptions of being part of the Early College High School (ECHS) program. The researchers reported findings on students' overall perspectives about the early college environment using the following research question: How do Black males perceive their ECHS experience? From the findings, three themes were identified: (a) relationships matter, (b) the advantages the school model provides are substantial, and (c) the good outweighs the bad, but there are still challenges. In addition, from the focus groups and interviews, students collectively described the school environment as having a "family feel." While the theme of family strengthened and positively impacted their experiences, the participants quickly focused on tangible and intangible benefits

they received from attending an early college high school: free college credit and future readiness.

Another success story was reported by Zeiser et al. (2020), who focused on eight EC high schools that partnered with 2-year colleges to study students who participated in admissions lotteries. The researchers examined students who won admissions lotteries and were enrolled in college and degree completion throughout high school. The results indicated that rather than engaging students to pursue 4-year degrees, partnerships between EC high schools and 2-year colleges improved students' chances of completing bachelor's degrees in less time. Another finding from this study was that 30% of early college students completed an associate of arts degree or certificate during high school. Also, among EC students who were at the end of their fourth year of high school, over three quarters (76.6%) had enrolled in college; this included 43.9% who had enrolled in 2-year colleges, 21% who had completed an associate degree or certificate without enrolling in a 4-year college, and 11.7% who had enrolled in 4-year colleges (Zeiser et al., 2020).

Summary of the Research Problem

A review of the existing literature revealed conflicting research on the benefits of EC programs for high school students. As a result, it is important to explore the experiences and perspectives of students participating in EA programs at 2-year public colleges. Although colleges offer a variety of resources such as tutoring, academic advising, counseling, disability services, and clubs, these resources do little to reveal what is going on in students' daily lives. Also, the high school students who take part in EA programs come from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, so it is important to consider the needs of diverse learners.

Staff at 2-year colleges should not assume that their EA students are well educated simply because they attended an EA orientation and signed an EA agreement to be admitted to the program. EA students are on their own full-time in college for the first time and may need additional support to complete the EA program. Instead, building relationships with the college staff, parents, and the currently enrolled EA students can help improve students' academic success, provide positive social-emotional support, and build connections. Unfortunately, EA students often lack opportunities to share their experiences, perspectives, and suggestions.

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this study is to use a mixed-method research methodology to discover and confirm the supportive nature of readiness program (full-term, half-semester, or no program) to allow currently enrolled early admission students at the two-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the early admission program.

Research Question:

What type of readiness program (full semester, half-semester, or no program) has more of an impact on early admission students at a 2-year public college?

Sub-Questions:

1. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on academic success?
2. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on social-emotional support?
3. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on building connectivity?

4. Do differences vary across the three conditions?

For the purpose of this paper, full semester is defined as 15 weeks long of instructions, 7.5 weeks of half-semester instruction, and 0 weeks for no program.

Research Design and Framework

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods design provided a framework for developing a holistic understanding EA students' experience while completing their education at a 2-year public college. The study focused on EA students' experiences relative to the themes of academic success, social-emotional support, and connectedness. The readiness program involved a 1-hour semi-monthly virtual meeting of eight EA participants during the fall term of the school year (August-December). With the participants' consent, the researcher recorded the virtual readiness program group meetings.

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study may benefit all public 2-year colleges and partnered high school staff, EA parents, and EA participants. As Burns et al. (2018) explained, "Future studies that include factors such as student motivation, parental involvement, class sizes, and teacher quality would add to the body of knowledge on early college credit programs" (p. 46). Listening to current enrolled EA students in a readiness program setting shed light on their experiences and perspectives. This information was essential to improving services for future, current, and prospective EA students. Based on past researchers' various challenges and successes, this study helped clear up misconceptions about the importance of EC programs.

Organization of the Research Report

This chapter highlighted the research problem, provided pertinent background on EA, and reviewed the challenges and solutions that researchers have had to deal with when studying

the EC experience. The chapter also presented the purpose of this study and the research question. Chapter two provides a comprehensive review of the literature. In Chapter three, a description of the study's research method is provided. Findings are reported in Chapter four, and a discussion of the results appears in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

College students who are actively involved at their institutions while enrolled in courses may be more likely to succeed in their studies, be inclined to register for another semester, and perceive the university as a good fit for their achievements. Community colleges and technical colleges in the United States are recognized for their open admissions policies, low tuition costs, accessibility, and contributions to the democratization of higher education (Wang et al., 2015). Consequently, high school students who graduate from an early college program and then transfer to a 2-year college have many opportunities to decide which path to take to achieve their career goals. These students are given early opportunities to experience life as college students. Parents, teachers, students, and even state legislatures now turn to EC programs to help students offset the growing expense of a college degree and improve graduation rates (O'Keefe et al., 2010).

In contrast, approximately one-third of students entering college in the United States will leave without completing a degree within 6 years (Johnson, 2012). High school who participate in EC programs may need additional help navigating the challenges of taking college courses while still in high school. As Holles (2016) said, “The transition to college can be a struggle, and even high-achieving students can find themselves unprepared to succeed” (p. 119). Edmunds (2012) argued that the EC program approach are beneficial and significantly improve college readiness. While research exists on the outcomes associated with EC students’ academic outcomes, little was known about their experiences in these programs. Accordingly, the purpose

of this qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives and suggestions of currently enrolled students regarding their experiences in these programs.

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing, related literature. Topics covered in this literature review include the following: 1) high school students' motivation, 2) research on early admission (EA) programs in the United States, 3) outcomes of EC program completers, and 4) readiness programs for EC students. The chapter concludes with a summary of the significance of EA readiness programs offered by 2-year public colleges.

Literature Review

High School Student Motivation

Defining Motivation

Motivation is one of the forces that influences human conduct. It stimulates competition and social interaction. The absence of motivation can result in mental disorders like depression (DeCharms, 1968). Motivation is the desire to continue pursuing meaning, purpose, and a life worth living. A student's motivating drive is essential to their success in school and beyond. According to Manzano-Sánchez et al. (2021):

> In the educational field, motivation is considered a fundamental element that has a decisive influence on the academic performance and well-being of students, as well as their self-confidence and self-improvement. These variables, along with responsibility, play a key role in the satisfaction of basic needs and in the creation of an adequate classroom climate, to enhance the integral development of students and the teaching-learning processes. (p. 2)

Ryan and Deci (1985) explained developed self-determination theory (SDT) to explain the processes that motivate people. This theory, which provided the foundation for the current

research, refers to the development and functioning of human motivation and personality in specific social contexts. SDT distinguishes between autonomous and more controlling motivations (Manzano-Sánchez et al., 2021). As a result, SDT provides a comprehensive framework for understanding intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being— all of which are concerns directly related to educational establishments (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (1985) argued that individuals have three fundamental psychological needs that are both important and inherent: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

According to Alivernini and Lucidi (2011), “Self-determination is closely linked to the perceptions that individuals have of the origins of their behavior, which are the root causes of their actions in terms of locus of causality" (p. 241). In other words, individuals’ perceptions of the origins of their behaviors are the basis of self-determination (DeCharms, 1968). Students who are genuinely self-determined view their level of engagement with their academics as something they have decided for themselves, based on their own values and interests. Students’ levels of self-determined motivation are impacted not just by the events at school but also by the dynamics of their home lives (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). According to a body of research on high school students’ motivations, the degree to which students can self-regulate is positively reinforced when their parents encourage independence rather than adopting an authoritative or authoritarian stance (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation as a daily routine can allow students to develop a clear sense of mind, make the right choices, and feel confident in their abilities to graduate successfully and on time.

Factors That Motivate High School Students to Graduate

Acceleration programs have increased in American education, allowing many students to graduate high school early (Plucker et al., 2022). Early kindergarten, high school credit courses

in middle school, credit by test, and online coursework are accelerated pathways promoted by states and local education organizations (Plucker et al., 2022). Some secondary school systems favor acceleration policies that keep students in their local high schools; these programs include Advanced Placement (AP) courses, International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, dual credit enrollment (DC) options, and early college high school (ECHS) models on high school campuses. Other programs "allow students to complete some or all of their degree requirements and move on to postsecondary college and career settings" (Plucker et al., 2022, p. 153). Acceleration programs are very common and can help students get a head start on future careers.

Manzano-Sánchez et al. (2021) conducted research assessing the relationships between high school students' motivational profiles, levels of responsibility, the school's social climate, their resilience, and age/gender differences among secondary students in Spain. The sample of 768 students had a mean age of 13.84 years and was comprised of 314 males (46.1%) and 354 females (53.9%). The results indicated that more driven students who had greater satisfaction with their basic psychological needs were more resilient and responsible. These students also had more positive perceptions of their school and learning environments (Manzano-Sánchez et al., 2021).

Students with parents whom outside observers perceive as more emotionally invested and supportive of autonomy tend to be more intrinsically motivated (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Steinberg et al. (1992) conducted a study of 6,400 high school students from various socioeconomic and racial backgrounds, and found parent involvement affected students into adolescence. The types of parental participation that were evaluated included assisting students with homework, visiting school programs, attending students' sports or extracurricular events, assisting students with course selection, and abreast of students' academic achievement

(Steinberg et al., 1992). The researchers also found that positive influences of authoritative parenting on adolescent achievement were mediated by the positive influence of authoritativeness on parental involvement in schooling. In addition, a lack of authority diminished the positive effect of parental involvement on adolescents' achievement.

Steinberg et al. (1992) found parental involvement was significantly more likely to promote adolescent academic achievement when it occurred in an authoritative home environment. Vallerand et al. (1997) “provided evidence for the influence of students’ perceptions of parental support for their autonomy on their levels of self-learning” (p. 243). The degree to which parents advocate for their children's independence in the home depends on their capacity for empathy or the degree to which they can put themselves in their children's shoes. Empathetic parents give their children multiple opportunities to make decisions and express their values and interests as they are growing up (Ryan, 1995).

Factors That Motivate High School Students Not to Graduate

As reported by Alivernini and Lucidi (2011), several studies found students with more self-determined forms of regulation were less likely to drop out and had greater intentions to continue their studies in various schools and training contexts. For example, Vallerand et al. (1997) found that students who dropped out of school had significantly “lower levels of self-determined motivation and higher levels of amotivation” (p. 1162) with school activities as compared with those who continued their studies. Likewise, Otis et al. (2005) found that dropping out was associated with a “decrease in self-determined motivation” (p. 171) during the transition to the first year of high school.

Alivernini and Lucidi's (2011) study aimed to evaluate a model that predicted the intention of dropout among high school students by combining existing knowledge on self-

determined motivation. The study's design was longitudinal, “with measurements performed at three distinct times: the end of the first school term, the end of the school year, and the end of the first school term of the subsequent school year” (p. 249). According to the findings, students' levels of self-determined motivation, which was directly tied to their impression of teachers’ autonomy support, was the most accurate predictor of dropout. Self-efficacy substantially affected students’ intrinsic motivation and academic achievement (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011).

Among the many researchers who have examined the differences between male and female students’ levels of academic motivation, Granero-Gallegos et al. (2014) found males tended to place greater importance on self-determined motivation. Furthermore, Granero-Gallegos et al. reported the “high motivation” profile was more commonly connected with boys, while the “low motivation” profile was more commonly associated with girls. On the other hand, Ardenska et al. (2016) found that, compared to males, girls were “more intrinsically motivated and less externally motivated” (p. 249).

Summary

Motivation to achieve objectives is essential to a purposeful life. To succeed in life, high school students must maintain focus and determination every day. The absence of parents or guardians can undermine students’ academic performance. According to the 2000 Phi Delta Kappa survey, Langdon and Vesper (2000) questioned what elementary and secondary school teachers would alter to improve public schools. The respondents identified a lack of parental involvement as the second-largest barrier to school reform, following a lack of funds (Langdon & Vesper, 2000). Parents should be involved in their children's lives to inspire them to succeed.

Similar Programs

History Of an Early College High School Program

In 1972, "Middle College was a high school on a college campus," as described by Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, U.S. Commissioner of Education, and Chancellor of the State University of New York (Lieberman, 2002, p. 1). Middle college encompassed the academic years of ninth through twelfth grade, employs secondary school instructors, operates mainly on a board of education budget, and satisfies the requirements of the high school curriculum (Lieberman, 2002). The innovative features of the Middle College structure contributed significantly to its success with students who had a history of academic failure and multiple social problems (Lieberman, 2002). The following are a few of the original structural innovations that continue to define the model and are critical to its success (Lieberman, 2002):

1. The total number of students is limited to 450, and the school is called a "small school."
2. High school students who spend time on a college campus are more likely to have a "future orientation." In addition, sharing the college's gym, library, and cafeteria increases the high school's resources, makes better use of the college's buildings, and splits the costs.
3. A shared space, like having teenagers on a college campus, makes college professors less afraid of teaching younger students and makes it easier for high school and college professors to work together.
4. With three counselors for every 450 students in Middle College, it is possible and encouraged to give students a lot of help. In addition, students receive daily counseling

from their peers and in groups, and there are many paraprofessionals to help students (Lieberman, 2002).

As Middle College students did well and the school grew, the original designer, Janet Lieberman, and the Middle College principal in New York City, Cecilia Cunningham, realized that some eleventh and twelfth graders had finished their high school requirements in less than the usual 4 years and were ready, both academically and emotionally, to "go across the street" and take college courses (Lieberman, 2002, p. 2). The record showed that of the 4,581 Middle College students in the United States during the 1999-2000 school year, 41% took more than 3,984 college classes, with a 97.5% pass rate, which was higher than the rate for regular college freshmen (Lieberman, 2002).

Lieberman (2002) stated that during 2000, Middle College leaders received a grant from the Ford Foundation to test a new design called "Early College" (EC). As Webb (2014) stated, "Since 2002, more than 280 ECs have opened nationwide as part of the ECHS, serving more than 80,000 students in 31 states and the District of Columbia" (p. 45). This new design integrated everything that made the original Middle College unique, plus new structural changes based on what students did (Lieberman, 2002). According to Lieberman, EC high school (ECHS) was the "new way for high schools and colleges to work together" (p. 2). It had some of the same features as the old model but focused on different goals: closer collaboration between secondary and higher education and a clearer, faster academic path.

Below are a few EC high school models:

1. It helps students who need to get what they deserve from their regular schools.
2. Demands that the district high school administration and the college president work together.

3. Offers a different order of classes starting in the tenth grade and an accelerated program from the ninth grade to the associate's degree, which can be completed in 5 years or less instead of 6.
4. Combines the resources of a high school on a college campus with college facilities (gym, library, cafeteria) so EC high school students can use all of them (Lieberman, 2002).

The ECHS program gave economically disadvantaged and traditionally underrepresented students opportunities to earn at least 60 semester credit hours toward a baccalaureate or an associate's degree while still pursuing a high school diploma (Zinth, 2016). Moreover, ECHS programs provided college experiences that fostered student success. Moreno et al. (2019) found that students in these programs were more likely to go straight from high school to college than were students in dual enrollment programs.

Early College High School

Moreno et al. (2019) researched ECHS to determine how much ECHS and DE students from the same Texas school district benefited from taking college-level classes while still in high school. In particular, the researchers examined how attending an ECHS affected students' likelihood of attending college compared to (a) non-ECHS students in dual enrollment classes and (b) traditional non-ECHS students who did not take dual enrollment classes. Moreno et al. defined dual enrollments as "any student attending a traditional high school participating in early college access opportunities provided through dual enrollment programs on and off the high school campus" (p. 261). The investigation was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the differences in the demographic characteristics of ECHS, dual

enrollment, and non-ECHS/non-dual enrollment students in this Texas high school district?

2. To what extent is participation in ECHS or dual enrollment related to students' likelihood of postsecondary matriculation?
3. What demographic and academic factors predict postsecondary matriculation for ECHS, dual enrollment, and non-ECHS/non-dual enrollment students?

The sample consisted of students from the graduating classes of 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 from Honest Consolidated Independent School District's (HCISD). Students in the study attended one of three traditional high schools or one ECHS. Between 2014 and 2017, HCISD served between 1,100 and 1,300 high school seniors annually.

The descriptive and logistic regression analysis revealed equity gaps in participation among Black and economically disadvantaged students (Moreno et al., 2019). In addition, while dual enrollment was associated with a higher likelihood of postsecondary matriculation, ECHS students matriculated at significantly lower rates (Moreno et al., 2019). Based on their findings, Moreno et al. (2019) proposed policy changes and institutional practices to increase college access among traditionally underserved student populations, such as prioritizing collaboration between secondary and postsecondary institutions (Hoffman et al., 2009).

Similar Program Descriptions

High school students can earn college credits in multiple ways through EC credit program offered at through high schools; however, researchers need consistent terminology to describe these different programs. For example, other than ECHS, there are few EC credit programs to the EA program, such as concurrent enrollment programs (CEPs), the Advanced Placement program (AP), and dual enrollment (DE) programs (Burns et al., 2018).

Concurrent Enrollment Program. This program started in the 1950s and has grown steadily over the past few decades. According to Burns et al. (2018), a CEP program gives college credit for courses taught in high school by an approved high school teacher using a postsecondary institution's curriculum. Most CEPs require high school teachers to have the same qualifications as teachers on college campuses (Burns et al., 2018). This usually means CEP teachers must have a master's degree and at least 18 graduate hours in their subject area (Burns et al., 2018). The courses are the same college-level courses taught on the campus of the sponsoring college, and the students are expected to meet the same standards as their college-level peers. When students sign up for these classes, they receive both high school and college credits, and their performance is evaluated throughout the course. The credit and grade earned are added to the student's college transcript, and they usually transfer to other colleges and universities in the same way as any course taught directly on the sponsoring college campus.

Advance Placement Program. AP, a 1950s exam-based program, was created to help secondary schools and colleges avoid course repetition (Burns et al., 2018). AP courses focus on "mastering exam content" (DiMaria, 2013, p. 38). The College Board must approve the subject-specific AP Course Audit form and course syllabus for each AP course offered by a high school (Burns et al., 2018). The College Board suggests teachers take an optional training. The exam-based AP program was first designed to prepare students for college with its rigorous curriculum. Recently, AP has been criticized for designing courses that are "a mile wide and an inch deep" and centered on exam topics (Parker et al., 2013, p. 1425). Not all high schoolers who take an AP course take the exam. Non-examinees cannot receive college credit. The College Board considers a three or above on the AP examinations a passing mark, although many universities only accept 4 or 5 for course credit (Burns et al.,2018).

Dual Enrollment. According to Burns et al. (2018), DE students often take college classes at a different institution than their high school, while some schools now offer online sections specifically for DE high school students. Because they have yet to graduate from high school, dual-enrolled students are considered nonmatriculated students, yet they take courses and participate in co-curricular activities alongside standard matriculated college students through either online or face-to-face formats (Burns et al., 2018). Grades earned in DE courses are recorded on the student's permanent academic record (Burns et al., 2018). High school credit is not guaranteed like it is in CEP classes; earned credits depend on the policies at a student's high school (Burns et al., 2018).

Summary

A growing number of high school students are looking for college courses and experiences outside of the traditional 4-year degree. Some examples of these pathways include technical diplomas, industrial certificates, and associate degrees (Wang et al., 2015). Because there is limited research on the ECHS model (Moreno et al., 2019), future research is needed to understand why many students who graduate from ECHS do not matriculate to postsecondary institutions; such research may help educators develop interventions and acknowledge policy gaps that inhibit student success (Moreno et al., 2019). Moreno et al. (2019) proposed qualitative research on parental cultural capital and parents' perceptions of ECHS as a possible explanation for the low matriculation rates of ECHS graduates. Moreno et al. argued that parent questionnaires, group discussions, and one-on-one conversations with students could help secondary and postsecondary researchers develop interventions that build cultural capital in families.

Early College Completers

Research on Early College Graduates

Zeiser et al. (2020) examined the college enrollment and degree completion of students who won admissions lotteries and enrolled in eight ECHS that were partnered with 2-year colleges in Grade 9. The researchers assessed the EC impact, in terms of complier average causal effects, on students' postsecondary education trajectories for up to 6 years after expected high school graduation (i.e., Year 10). The survey revealed that by Year 10, 55.7% of EC students had enrolled in 4-year universities, and 34.1% had earned a bachelor's degree (Zeiser et al., 2020). In addition, by year 10, 57.5% of EC students with an associate degree or certificate from high school had earned bachelor's degrees. Zeiser et al.'s instrumental variable analyses of complier average causal effects revealed that compliers in the treatment group were significantly more likely than compliers in the control group to enroll in college each year during the 6 years after expected high school graduation, and go on to finish a bachelor's degree 3 to 6 years after high school graduation. These data show that cooperation between ECs and 2-year institutions may increase students' chances of graduating with bachelor's degree in an accelerated timeframe (Zeiser et al., 2020).

The most thorough study of ECs to date is a "6-year national review of ECHS" undertaken by Berger et al. (2009). The researchers collected data on all "157 ECs available nationwide as of fall 2007" (p. 603). According to the researchers, more than 75% of ECs that opened during the fall of 2007 had partnered with 2-year colleges, and 68% of ECs were new institutions. Community colleges are appropriate partners for ECs due to their mission to serve the local community, their experience serving students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education, and the fact that they are more likely than four-year colleges to have dual

enrollment programs that allow high school students to earn college credits (Barnett et al., 2013). In addition, the national evaluation of ECHS revealed that, compared to their non-EC counterparts in the same district, EC students had greater competence rates on state examinations in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, as well as higher graduation rates (Zeiser et al., 2020).

Two natural experiments by researchers at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro provided the most rigorous evidence on the effects of ECs on student outcomes (Zeiser et al., 2020). Both studies revealed that ECs improved student outcomes during and after high school using admissions lottery data. AIR found that EC admission improved high school ELA achievement, college enrollment, and degree attainment 2–4 years after predicted high school graduation (Zeiser et al., 2020). Berger et al. (2013) also found that EC high school ELA test scores were 0.14 standard deviations higher than the control group. EC students were also significantly more likely than control students to enroll in college (80.7% vs. 70.7%) and graduate from college (23.7% vs. 2.1%) (Zeiser et al., 2020).

Since ECs are new, most research has focused on high school and post-high school results. Except for recent AIR and SERVE findings on the effects of EC participation on bachelor's degree attainment, little is known regarding the longer-term effects of EC programs on student outcomes (Zeiser et al., 2020). Zeiser et al. (2020) observed the beneficial effects of ECs on bachelor's degree achievement; however, the effects were less pronounced on associate degree completion and diminished, over time. Edmunds et al. (2020) observed that EC students completed bachelor's degrees faster than control students, but by the sixth year after Grade 12, the two groups had similar completion rates. Zeiser et al. concluded that both studies did not

examine the impacts of ECs partnering with 2-year and 4-year colleges; therefore, enrollment in ECs collaborating with 2-year institutions may not improve bachelor's degree achievement.

Summary

Zeiser et al. (2020) highlighted the consequences of starting postsecondary education at a 2-year community college. Students who acquire college credits at ECs still need to be discovered due to the support ECs provide. Zeiser et al. (2020) described some of the support provided by ECs, including:

- ECs give academic support and help students transfer to 4-year universities.
- ECs assist students with college applications and financial aid.
- ECs offer a planned sequence of college courses and help students find 4-year universities that will accept their transfer credits.
- EC students can earn up to 2 years of college credits at little or no cost to their families; they may be better able to sustain financial help beyond high school than regular community college students, minimizing their need to work.

Zeiser et al. (2020) found that EC students who earned an associate's degree while in high school may choose to enter employment right after graduation because many of them come from low-income households that would benefit from this college degree. However, participants in Holles' (2016) study offered some contradictory information. One of Holles' (2016) participants shared:

> I went from straight A's in high school to at least one of each letter, including "W," in my first year of college. On paper, I was perfect college material. In practice, the social, financial, familial, and emotional challenges of my freshman year overwhelmed my

> ability to learn how to be a good college student at the same time. I was woefully unprepared. (p. 119)

Although researchers have investigated at-risk populations and the transition to college, Holles noted that additional research was needed to understand how academically accomplished students perceive their degrees of preparedness.

College Readiness Programs

Define College Readiness Program

Despite 25 years of standards-based reform, growing concerns exist that high school graduates are not prepared for college (Conley, 2005*).* Conley (2008), a national expert on college readiness, offered this definition of college readiness:

> College readiness can be defined operationally as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation— in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program. "Succeed" is defined as completing entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible for the student to consider taking the next course in the sequence or the next level of course in the subject area. (p. 5)

Academic preparation is a crucial component of college readiness, consisting of the acquisition of the necessary content and academic abilities for college success (Edmunds, 2012). The most significant predictor of college performance is the difficulty of a student's high school curriculum (Adelman, 2006). In order to succeed in hard courses, students require academic, social, and emotional support (Edmunds, 2012). Other essential components of college readiness include academic practices such as study skills, time management, and the ability to self-monitor

the quality of work (Edmunds, 2012). In addition to defining readiness programs, Conley (2008) states that “nonacademic behaviors, which include the ability of students to interact successfully with college professors and with their college peers, are also beneficial” (p. 82).

Research on College Readiness

Leonard (2012) argued that more college readiness skills are required by high school students, especially those who are underachieving. In addition, Leonard proposed authentic early college coursework to “build confidence and academic momentum” (p. 183). The research project asked, “How can parental support help increase college readiness skills for academically average students?” The case study investigated a partnership between a traditional suburban high school with 600 students and a community college, which was designed to maximize college credit accumulation for students who fell within the “middle academic quartiles” (Leonard, 2012, p. 183*)*. The researcher analyzed the data gathered via student questionnaires, planning meeting records, and interviews with school administrators, instructors, and students (Leonard, 2012*)*. With a cumulative success rate of 91%, 74 students earned an average of 9.4 college credits per year over a 3-year period (Leonard, 2012*)*. The participation of parents was essential to the process of recruitment and enrollment, as well as providing financial assistance and emotional advice. Making a financial contribution appeared to encourage parental participation (Leonard, 2012*)*.

In 2009, the Kentucky General Assembly deemed the large proportion of high school students needing remediation in higher education undesirable and costly (Xu et al., 2023). The state's Targeted Interventions (TI) program was created from a diagnostic cycle (Xu et al., 2023). Xu et al. (2023) estimated the program's effects by tracking the college advancement of seven cohorts of students over 11 years. A difference-in-regression-discontinuity approach was utilized

to compare students just below college preparation benchmarks to those just above, when TI was implemented using Kentucky student-level administrative data from high school to college (Xu et al., 2023). Analysis revealed the TI program considerably boosted the likelihood that first-term students accepted at least 15 credits, which was a crucial predictor of college completion (Xu et al., 2023). However, these early effects did not influence college graduation rates or transfers from 2-year to 4-year colleges (Xu et al., 2023). TI may have pushed out high school core courses, especially math, without increasing instructional time (Xu et al., 2023). High school criteria for college readiness may be compatible with the skills needed to take developmental courses, but more is needed to better prepare students for college-level education.

Mokher and Leeds (2018) discussed that colleges had to assess whether or not they provided sufficient support to students who were on the margins of college readiness. Assessments of students' readiness for college, bridge programs during the summer, pre-college outreach programs, and transition courses are now offered by a number of school systems and states for high school students (Mokher & Leeds, 2018). Even if these initiatives help students score higher on college readiness tests, it is still being determined if they will be successful in college-level coursework (Mokher & Leeds, 2018). Enhanced advising services, first-year seminars, cohesive curriculum routes, and specified course sequences are all ways that colleges can improve student outcomes (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Mokher and Leeds found that creating long-term increases to college achievement requires integrated support from both the secondary and postsecondary educational systems.

Holles' (2016) qualitative case study examined college preparation for high-achieving students at a small science and engineering school in a suburban Rocky Mountain location (hereafter referred to as RMT). The research focused on questions such as:

- Do college freshmen feel equipped for success?
- What caused their college achievements and failures?
- How may student perceptions illuminate college readiness?

These questions encouraged students to explore readiness and connect their pre-college experiences to their college experiences. Each student's story was unique, but the data revealed commonalities. Students discussed how their high school coursework and experiences before RMT affected their college readiness (Holles, 2016). Participants admitted they had to relearn study skills and time management during their first year in college (Holles, 2016). Many RMT students struggled with the rigor and difficulty of core classes, especially so-called “weed-out” classes like Chemistry 1 and Calculus 1. Students expressed that common nonacademic challenges included managing finances for the first time and balancing school with their personal lives. Participants also expressed a need for support systems and relationships to help them cope with these major life changes (Holles, 2016).

Research on College Readiness Programs Specifically for EA Participants

There is no research on college readiness programs, specifically for EA students at 2-year public colleges.

Summary

Students’ college readiness often determines the likelihood of success in college. Readiness describes the extent to which previous educational and personal experiences have prepared them for the expectations and demands they will face in college (Conley, 2008). One major issue is that current college readiness measures are limited in their ability to communicate to students and educators the true range of what students must do to be fully prepared to succeed in college. Schools focused on college readiness should pay attention to fostering college-ready

academic behaviors and skills; in addition, efforts must be made to ensure students are prepared for postsecondary study (Edmunds, 2012). One of Edmunds' (2012) students who attended Grayson Early College described the differences between early college and dual enrollment in high school as follows:

> The thing with the high school is…you're in high school and you're taking some college classes, too. Here (in early college), you are in college. This is like the end of the beginning…so then it just opens up a new pathway for us to keep going. (p. 88)

Summary of the Literature Review

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of the research on the causes and effects of high school students' motivations, the differences between different types of EC programs, research on high school graduates who participated in EC programs, and the purpose of readiness programs for high school students. College readiness involves more than just academic abilities and knowledge; it also pertains to students' choices, attitudes, and social and familial networks (Leonard, 2012). Unfortunately, much of the research on readiness programs for early college or early college credit programs mainly emphasizes underachieving high school students. Accordingly, the current study addressed this gap in the literature by focusing on high-achieving students in an early admission program, who had passed all subject areas of a placement test, and had received a letter of recommendation from their high school principal or home education designee to allow their student to complete senior year at a two-year public college.

Research was lacking on the readiness programs at the 2-year college for EA participants. Chapter 3 provides a description of the study's research methodology. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What type of readiness program (full semester, half semester, or no program) has more of an impact on early admission students at a two-year public college?

Sub-Questions:

1. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on academic success?
2. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on social-emotional support?
3. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on building connectivity?
4. Do differences vary across the three conditions?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Early Admission (EA) students at 2-year public colleges need opportunities to share their experiences, perspectives, and suggestions about the EA program. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the supportive nature of readiness programs (full-term, half-semester, or no program) and allow currently enrolled EA students at a 2-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions for ways to improve the program.

The central research question guiding this study was, "What type of readiness program (full semester, half-semester, or no program) has more of an impact on early admission students at a 2-year public college?" Four sub-questions included:

Sub-Questions:

1. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on academic success?
2. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on social emotional support?
3. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on building connectivity?
4. Do differences vary across the three conditions?

This chapter provides details of the methodological framework, including the methodology, research context, data collection strategies, researcher positionality, and data analysis plan. This study focused on EA readiness programs, their impact on students' academic

success, social-emotional support, and connectedness among students at a 2-year public college. The chapter provides an understanding of the study's concept and implementation, required to understanding the findings.

Research Methodology

Mixed Methods

This study employed a mixed-method research methodology, discerning and validating the supportive attributes of readiness programs (full-term, half-semester, or no program). Mixed method is an expanding field that uses established study designs or methodologies for the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Garrett, 2008). Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) described mixed methods research from four perspectives:

1. *Method Perspective:* In this perspective, mixed methods research primarily focuses on the process and outcomes of using both qualitative and quantitative methods and types of data (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007).
2. *Methodological Perspective:* The methodological perspective sees mixed methods research as inseparable from the more extensive research process, including philosophical assumptions, research questions, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of findings (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007).
3. *Paradigm Perspective:* The paradigm perspective focuses on the philosophical assumptions that underlie mixed methods research. It emphasizes that understanding mixed methods research requires a focus on philosophical issues, such as the nature of knowledge, how knowledge is acquired, the nature of reality, and the researcher's worldviews (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007).

4. *Practice Perspective*: The practice perspective takes a *bottom-up* approach to mixed methods research. It suggests that researchers use mixed methods strategies as they emerge within an investigation (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007).

Leech et al. (2009) explained that mixed methods research is appropriate when research questions cannot be adequately addressed using only quantitative or qualitative methods. This approach is useful when a comprehensive understanding of a research problem is needed, when validation of findings is essential, or when researchers want to explore the *how* and *why* of a phenomenon. Creswell and Garrett (2008) believed the appropriateness of mixed methods research depended on the specific research objectives, the nature of the research problem, and the resources available for conducting the study. Researchers should carefully consider whether a mixed methods approach aligns with their research goals and can provide valuable insights into their chosen topic (Creswell & Garrett, 2008).

Action Research

This study was classified as action research. According to Reason and Bradbury (2008), action research seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in collaboration with others to pursue practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people and, more broadly, the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. The advantage of action research is that it can promote the development of practical knowledge and solutions, challenge traditional positivist views of research, and embrace socially constructed knowledge (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). However, action researchers often need help creating congruency between theory and practice as they aim to better understand and address the issues facing them and their communities (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). According to Mertler (2020), action research combines action and reflection, theory and practice. It encourages researchers to actively engage

with problems and challenges while reflecting on their actions and experiences, leading to continuous learning and improvement (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Collaborative Action Research

This study was collaborative action research, an approach to improving educational practices by involving teachers as active change agents (Kapachtsi et al., 2012). Pimenta (2007) believed that collaborative action research involved researchers and teachers working together to analyze and understand challenges faced within school systems, with the goals of transforming educational practices, improving teacher education, and contributing to the development of public education policies. Kapachtsi et al. (2012) focused on implementing a collaborative action research model in two primary education schools in Greece. The goal was to improve schools from within by employing teachers as active agents of change within their organizations (Kapachtsi et al., 2012).

Collaborative action research can be time-consuming, requiring teachers to dedicate significant time and effort to the process; this can be challenging, especially when teachers have busy schedules (Kapachtsi et al., 2012). Pimenta (2007) argued that the main challenge of collaborative research was the establishment of bonds between university researchers and schoolteachers. Action research is employed to develop practical knowledge that can address real-world problems and challenges. It is a process that seeks to generate insights and solutions that are immediately applicable to improve situations (Mertler, 2020).

Explanatory Sequential Design

The specific research design used in this study was an explanatory sequential design. This design was selected because the investigation involved collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to explain or elaborate on the quantitative results (Subedi, 2016). This

approach is popular among researchers because it provides a general picture of the research problem through quantitative data, with additional and deeper insights from qualitative data (Subedi, 2016). The mixed-methods sequential explanatory design is a popular and straightforward approach for researchers to collect, analyze, and *mix* quantitative and qualitative data in two consecutive phases of a single study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While this method offers advantages such as straightforwardness and opportunities for exploring quantitative results in more detail, it also has limitations such as "lengthy time and feasibility of resources to collect and analyze both types of data" (Ivankova et al., 2006, p. 5).

An explanatory sequential design was selected to examine a readiness program for the EA participants. According to Monahan et al. (2020), a college readiness program is an initiative to prepare students, including those with disabilities, for success in their postsecondary education and future careers. These programs focus on various aspects, including academic preparation, the development of critical thinking and non-academic skills, and transition competencies necessary for college and career success (Monahan et al., 2020). Detgen et al. (2021) stated that students may benefit from positive interactions with mentors, volunteers, and peers, which can boost their confidence and motivation; however, implementing effective readiness programs can require significant funding, personnel, and infrastructure. Overall, college readiness programs recognize the importance of non-academic skills like critical thinking, interpersonal engagement, and transition competencies, which are essential for success in both college and careers (Monahan et al., 2020).

Research Context

Research Setting

This study took place at Olivia State College (OSC), a 2-year public college in Masai Beach County located in South Florida. As of 2022, OSC was the fifth largest of the 28 colleges in the Florida College System, with 35,999 enrolled students. The demographic breakdown of the student body includes 34% Hispanic, 30% White, 29% Black and 7% other races. OSC has five different campuses across south Florida and offers over 130 academic programs of study, such as associate in arts, associate in science, bachelor of science, college certificates, and job preparatory programs. To protect participants' privacy, no key was kept to link participants' names or personal information to the research record. Participants' names and identifiable information was stored separately from the rest of the data collected for this study.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

During the participant recruitment process, the researcher worked as OSC's dual enrollment coordinator. This role involved managing all DE and EA students, which allowed the researcher to submit a smooth request to OSC's Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee team to conduct research on EA students at the institution. Participant recruitment began after approval was obtained from the IRE and the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research (CUHSR) at Bradley University (BU). EA students received an Eventbrite invitation through their school email, personal email, and a texting tool called "RAVE." Prospective participants were invited to RSVP for the live online 2023-2024 EA orientation titled "Becoming an Early Admission student," which took place on July 27, 2023, from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (see Appendix A). The parents of the EA students were encouraged to attend. The goal of the EA orientation was to engage students in many issues such as academic advice, learning about

possible career paths, and determining whether EA students would receive an AA degree at the same time they were awarded their high school diploma. The previous item explored taking part in action research.

On the day of the event, 105 EA students attended, of the 113 who RSVPed. Students who wished to participate in the action research project were notified via email from Dropbox Sign, which contained a link to a recruitment letter (see Appendix B) and was used to share details of the study and participation requirements. Dropbox Sign is used to electronically sign and request signatures on documents in Dropbox. Dropbox Sign is an electronic signature request system that accepts documents uploaded to Dropbox. Dropbox Sign is an easy to use, cost-free solution for obtaining secure electronic signatures for critical agreements in a unified, Dropbox-based process. For EA students under the age of 18 who wished to participate in the study, the recruitment letter was signed by both the student and their parents. For students aged 18 or older, the recruitment letter was signed exclusively by the EA student. The only exclusion criteria for participation in the study was high school students in 11th grade and below were not eligible. Participants had to be eligible EA students approved by OSC.

EA students who attended the EA Orientation on July 27, 2023, were given a 1-week deadline of August 3, 2023, to sign the recruitment letter to determine if they are interested in participating in the study. The final count of signatures on the recruitment letter was 36 EA students. Fortunately, in order to conduct research for the readiness program, 30 participants were required. By selecting students' names by hand from a paper sack, I allocated 10 students to Group 1 for the full semester, 10 students to Group 2 for the half-semester, and 10 students to Group 3 for the no program. Of the 30 participants, the 29 finalists were under 18 years of age; and required both parental consent (see Appendix F), and student assent (see Appendix G),

which was signed and returned to the researcher via Dropbox Sign. A Dropbox Sign document containing both letters was linked, enabling the parent and student to secure their signatures to a single document. Only one student, who was at least 18 years old, electronically signed a letter of informed consent (see Appendix E). Additionally, a demographic form (see Appendix I) was emailed to each of the 30 finalists via Dropbox Sign.

Research Participants

Thirty participants returned the informed consent and assent letter. The final sample consisted of 9 male students and 21 female students (see Table 1). Twenty-nine students were aged 16-17 and one student was between 18 and 20 years old. EA participants in Group 1 (full semester) consisted of one Black student, two White students, three Hispanic students, and four students labeled as Mixed/Other. Group 2 (half semester) consisted of four Black students, no White students, six Hispanic students, and no students labeled as Mixed/Other. Group 3 (no program) consisted of three Black students, one White student, three Hispanic students, and three students labeled as Mixed/Other (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number (n) of EA Participants by Assigned Group

	Male	Female	Age 16-17	Age 18-20	Black	White	Hispanic	Mixed /Other	n	%
Group 1 Full Semester	2	8	9	1	1	2	3	4	10	33%
Group 2 Half Semester	4	6	10	0	4	0	6	0	10	33%
Group 3 No Program	3	7	10	0	3	1	3	3	10	33%
Total	9	21	29	1	8	3	12	7	30	100%

Initially, a combined total of 30 students signed the consent forms and demographic forms; however, 14 students did not complete the pre-survey forms that were sent to their email before the first week of school (see Table 2). The pre-surveys consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix C) and rated-items (see Appendix D) surveys on EA student's opinions of what type of readiness program (full semester, half semester or no program) had more of an impact for EA students at a 2-year public college. Additional questions were based on their opinions related to academic success, social emotional support, and connectivity. Table 2 provides a comparison of EA participants who signed the consent and demographic forms and pre-survey forms. Five students in Group 1, five students in Group 2, and six students in Group 3 completed the pre-surveys. Since 16 students completed all of the pre-survey questions, that number is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

Completed Pre-Survey Forms Comparison

	Consent & Demographic	Pre-Survey	n	%
Group 1 Full Semester	10	5	5	31%
Group 2 Half Semester	10	5	5	31%
Group 3 No Program	10	6	6	38%
Total	30	16	16	100%

Table 3 provides a comparison number from the completed consent and demographic forms, pre-survey forms and post-survey forms. EA students completed the post surveys forms after the conclusion of the readiness program; these surveys contained the same rated items and open-ended questions from the pre-survey. Four students in Group 1, four students in Group 2

and five students in Group 3 completed the post-surveys. Since 13 students completed all of the post-survey questions, that number is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3

Number (n) of EA Participants Completed Post-Survey Forms

	Consent & Demographic	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	n	%
Group 1 Full Semester	10	5	4	4	31%
Group 2 Half Semester	10	5	4	4	31%
Group 3 No Program	10	6	5	5	38%
Total	30	16	13	13	100%

Data Collection

Instruments

Dropbox Sign Platform

Dropbox Sign was used to send pre- and post-surveys (see Appendix C & D) to participants via email at the start and end of the EA preparation program. The researcher paid $60 for the regular plan, which included signature request templates, unlimited signature requests, and the ability to send limitless reminders to participants who had unsigned documents. The surveys were submitted to Dropbox Sign as PDF documents to generate a survey template, which allowed the researcher to add elements to the templates (such as a full name section, date, check boxes, comments, and e-signatures). All signed documents were sent to the researcher's email for analysis.

Remind App

The Remind App is a communication platform that enables educators to reach students no matter where they are. Messages are delivered in real time to a large class, a small group, or a single individual. The researcher had previously used the Remind App to plan announcements ahead of time and attach images and other resources. Three class groups were formed on the Remind App after participants were assigned to their groups (Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3). This function allowed the researcher to communicate effectively and establish a higher response rate when reminding students of forthcoming meetings, deadlines for signing documents, and other important dates. The Remind App sends and receives messages to and from mobile phones.

Data Collection Planner

A data collection planner is a tool that allows researchers to keep a journal of their thoughts, experiences, and activities throughout an investigation. The data gathering diary is a useful tool for tracking a researcher's journey through the research process. The researcher completed a data collection planner for each readiness meeting using Microsoft Word. The process helped the researcher remain focused, reflect on their experiences, and communicate with the participants.

Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet

A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to track attendance for each readiness meeting. According to Gillis (2021), the primary rationale for high-quality attendance data is to understand the relationship between student attendance and student achievement. Spreadsheet data can be formatted, organized, and calculated using Microsoft Excel. As data are modified or added, data analysts and other users can facilitate the visibility of information by utilizing data

organization applications such as Excel (Gillis, 2021). Excel comprises a substantial quantity of cells, which are structured in columns and rows.

Zoom Video Platform

Zoom is a communications platform that connects individuals via video, audio, phone, and chat. Zoom requires an internet connection and a compatible device. Students in Groups 1 and 2 logged into the Zoom meeting using the URL provided by the Remind App.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The researcher chose to implement the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, which is a statistical method that separates observed variance data into different components to use for additional tests (Mertler, 2020). ANOVA is used to determine differences between research results from three or more unrelated samples or groups. ANOVA analyzes the levels of variance within more than two groups using samples from each of them. The variance within each group defined by the independent variable is initially examined in an ANOVA test; this variance is determined using the values of the dependent variable within each of these groups (Qualtrics, n.d.). The variance within each group is then compared to the overall variance of the group means (Qualtrics, n.d.). There are various approaches to using ANOVA; the specific approach used in this study was a one-way ANOVA, known for its most simple form. The one-way ANOVA tests differences between three or more groups based on one independent variable (Qualtrics, n.d.).

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

A Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) is a powerful statistical software that was utilized to understand and make sense of the quantitative findings (Mertler, 2020). After accounting for the impact of the uncontrolled independent variables, an ANOVA is utilized in

SPSS to investigate variations in the mean values of the dependent variable related to the influence of the controlled independent variables (Lani, 2024). A dependent variable for an ANOVA in SPSS needs to be metric that is measured using an interval or ratio scale. In SPSS, an ANOVA requires the presence of one or more categorical independent variables. Categorical independent variables are referred to as factors in SPSS ANOVA (Lani, 2024). A certain set of factor values, or categories, is referred to as a treatment (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

Data Collection Procedures

Rated item surveys and open-ended questions were used to collect data from EA participants in the beginning and the end of the readiness program (see Table 6). As Creswell and Creswell (2018), stated, "the data collection proceeds in two distinct phases with rigorous quantitative sampling in the first phase and with purposeful sampling in the second, qualitative phase" (p. 242). The quantitative component of the study consisted of rated item surveys (see Appendix D: Rated Item Survey), and the qualitative aspect consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix C: Open Ended Questions). In mid-August 2023, before the beginning of the Fall semester at OSC, EA participants received a message from their Remind App to check their email to complete the pre-surveys using the Dropbox Sign platform. EA participants were also prompted to complete the post-surveys toward the end of the Fall semester through Remind App (see Table 6).

The pre and post surveys consisted of open-ended questions and rated-items surveys based on the research questions for this study. Table 4 shows the different types of rated items and open-ended questions that corresponded to each research question. EA participants had opportunities to express their opinions about what type of readiness program (full semester, half

semester or no program) had the most impact for them. EA participants also had an opportunity to answer questions about differences in the effects of in readiness program (full semester, half semester or no program) on academic success, social emotional support, and connectivity (see Table 4).

Table 4

Connecting Pre & Post Survey Questions to Action Research Questions

Research Questions	Rated- Item Question #	Open Ended Question #
Research Question: What type of readiness program (full semester, half semester or no program) has more of an impact for early admission students at a two-year public college?	Questions: 1, 2, 3,	Questions: 4, 10
Sub-Question 1: Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on academic success?	Questions: 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17	Questions: 5, 8, 9
Sub-Question 2: Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on social emotional support?	Questions: 5, 8, 9, 12, 16, 20	Questions: 2, 6
Sub-Question 3: Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half semester vs. nothing) on building connectivity?	Questions: 6, 18, 19	Questions: 7, 3
Sub-Question 4: Do differences vary across the three conditions?	Question: 7	Question: 1

After EA participants completed the pre-surveys of the rated item and open-ended questions, they received calendar invites to save on their email calendar and a flyer of the live online meeting scheduled dates per group (see Table 6). Table 4 provides a sample of the live online EA scheduled meeting dates. Group 1 (full semester) had a total of six scheduled meetings on a Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. Group 2 (half semester) had a total of three meetings on a Saturday from 12:00 p.m. to 12:45 p.m. Group 3 (no program) did not have any scheduled meetings. During each meeting, Group 1 and 2 participants logged in using the Zoom

video platform link that was pre-assigned to them at the beginning of the Fall term. Once the readiness program was completed, students were instructed to complete the post-surveys of the rated item and open-ended questions (see Table 6).

Table 5

Live Online Scheduled Meeting Dates

	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4	Meeting 5	Meeting 6
Group 1: Full Semester Time: 11:00 a.m. -11:45 a.m.	Saturday Sept 9, 2023,	Saturday Sept 23, 2023	Saturday Oct 14, 2023	Saturday Oct 21, 2023	Saturday Nov 4, 2023	Saturday Nov 18, 2023
Group 2: Half Semester Time 12:00 p.m. -12:45 pm	Saturday Sept 9, 2023	Saturday Sept 23, 2023	Saturday Oct 14, 2023			
Group 3: No Program			NO MEETINGS			

During each meeting, the researcher used an encrypted Microsoft Excel sheet to track attendance, and an encrypted Microsoft Word document for their data collection planner to record each meeting (see Table 6). Each meeting began by asking the students how they were doing and if they have any specific questions they had for the researcher. The data collection planner consisted of pre-questions to ask students during each meeting date. Some of these questions included:

- What were a few issues you found when applying as an EA student?
- Why did you choose to become an EA? What are your career goals?

- What challenges have you faced?

While students are speaking to the researcher and their peers, notes were made of their responses.

Table 6

Timeline for Data Collection

Late July 2023 • Host Event: Becoming an Early Admission Student • Collect signed Recruitment letters from students and parents (if students are under 18 years of age)
Early August 2023 • Email selected 30 participants to sign the electronic informed consent form, assent form and demographic form via Dropbox Sign
Mid-August 2023 *(Before First day of school)* • Email all participants the Pre- surveys of open-ended questions and rated item surveys. • EA participants received calendar invites to save on their email calendar and a flyer of the live online meeting scheduled dates per group which includes the zoom link
Throughout the semester • Meet with Group 1: Full Semester and Group 2: Half Semester based on assigned date and time via live online. • Use an encrypted excel sheet to track attendance and an encrypted Microsoft word document for my data collection planner to record each meeting
Mid-October 2023 • Group 2: Half Semester completes Readiness program
Mid-November 2023 • Group 1: Full Semester completes Readiness program
Early December • Email participants the Post survey open-ended questions and rated item survey

Data Analysis

Procedures

Analysis of Variance

The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately. The researcher combined the two databases via a form of integration called "connecting the quantitative results to the qualitative data collection" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 242). This is the point of integration

in an explanatory sequential design. The research hypothesis of this study was that a full-term semester of an EA readiness program would encourage currently enrolled EA students at the 2-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the EA program. Figure 1 summarized what had to be calculated to perform a one-way ANOVA (LaMorte, 2019). Table 7 provides a step-by-step description of the procedures and timeline for the analysis.

Figure 1

Analysis of Variance Table (LaMorte, 2019)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares (MS)	F
Within	$SS_w = \sum_{j=1}^{k}\sum_{j=1}^{l}(X-\overline{X}_j)^2$	$df_w = \mathrm{k}-1$	$MS_w = \frac{SS_w}{df_w}$	$F = \frac{MS_b}{MS_w}$
Between	$SS_b = \sum_{j=1}^{k}(\overline{X}_j - \overline{X})^2$	$df_b = \mathrm{n}-\mathrm{k}$	$MS_b = \frac{SS_b}{df_b}$	
Total	$SS_t = \sum_{j=1}^{n}(\overline{X}_j - \overline{X})^2$	$df_t = \mathrm{n}-1$		

where

- X = individual observation,
- $\overline{X}_j$ = sample mean of the j[th] treatment (or group),
- $\overline{X}$ = overall sample mean,
- k = the number of treatments or independent comparison groups, and
- N = total number of observations or total sample size.

Table 7

Procedures and Timeline using ANOVA

Part A: Procedures
Step 1- Define Hypotheses: - Null Hypothesis (HO): There is no discernible difference between the three groups' mean (full term, half semester, and no program) outcomes based on experiences and viewpoints - Alternative Hypothesis (HA): At least one of the groups (full term, half semester, and no program) has a significantly different mean outcome compared to the others. Step 2- Data Collection: - Gather quantitative data from rated item surveys at the beginning and end of the EA readiness program. - Collect qualitative data through open-ended questions from ten EA students in each group (full semester, half-semester, and no program) at the beginning and end of the program. Step 3- Processing: - Clean and organize the collected data. - Ensure that the quantitative data from the surveys are appropriately rated and scored for analysis. - Code and categorize the qualitative responses for easier comparison. Step 4- Perform ANOVA Test: - Conduct an ANOVA test to determine if there are significant differences between the groups. - Utilize Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical software to perform the analysis. - Check assumptions: Homogeneity of variances and normality of residuals among groups. Step 5- Interpret Results: - Examine the ANOVA results to determine if there's a statistically significant difference in outcomes among the readiness program groups. - Describe the effect size to understand the practical significance of any significant findings. - Report findings and discuss implications for the EA program. Step 6- Qualitative Insights: - Analyze qualitative responses alongside quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences and perspectives. - Use qualitative data to enrich and contextualize the quantitative findings. Step 7- Summary: - Based on the analysis, accept or reject the null hypothesis. - Provide recommendations based on the results for the effectiveness of different readiness program durations on EA students.
Part B: Timeline
August 2023 to December 2023: Data Collection Period This phase involves gathering both quantitative (rated item surveys) and qualitative (open-ended questions) data from the participants.

December 2023: Data Processing
Cleaning, organizing, and preparing the collected data for analysis can take some time, especially when dealing with qualitative data coding and categorization.
January 2024: ANOVA Analysis
Use SPCC statistical software once data is prepared
February to March 2024: Interpretation and Reporting
This phase involves understanding the implications of statistical analysis, integrating qualitative insights, and crafting a coherent narrative.

Researcher Positionality

Researcher positionality describes the researcher's relationship and positioning within the research setting and how it might influence the study's design, implementation, and outcomes (Herr & Anderson, 2015). In the current study, the researcher's professional role during the data collection phase, as OSC's dual enrollment coordinator, provided insider access and familiarity with the EA students and the institution. This positionality provided advantages in terms of ease of access to participants, understanding institutional policies, and facilitating the research process. As the DE coordinator overseeing DE and EA students, the researcher's involvement in recruitment methods, such as using school email, personal email, and a texting tool for event invitations, could have potentially influenced participants' response rates and demographics. Additionally, the researcher's role in promoting the action research during the orientation may have influenced participants' decisions to join the study.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methodological framework, distinguishing the several sections that included the methodology, research context, data collection, researcher positionality, and data analysis plan. It dissected the investigation into readiness programs, their impact on academic success, social-emotional support, and connectedness among early admission students at a 2-year public college. Chapter 4 provides details of the study's findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This research employed a mixed-method approach to explore and validate the effectiveness of readiness programs (full-semester, half-semester, or no program) in aiding early admissions (EA) students enrolled at a 2-year public college. This study sought to gather insights and recommendations from students regarding their experiences and perspectives within the EA program. The research question guiding the study was,

1. What type of readiness program (full semester, half-semester, or no program) has more of an impact on EA students at a 2-year public college?

Four sub-questions included:

1. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on academic success?
2. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on social-emotional support?
3. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on building connectivity?
4. Do differences vary across the three conditions?

This chapter reports and discusses the study's findings and results.

Findings

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the readiness program was divided into three targeted groups of EA students (full semester, half-semester, and no program), with two groups meeting online for one hour every 2 weeks. The full semester group attended a total of six

meetings, the half-semester group met three times, and no program group did not meet. Students were randomly assigned to one of the three groups. At the beginning and the end of the EA readiness program, the quantitative component of the study consisted of rated item surveys, while the qualitative aspect consisted of open-ended questions. The surveys were administered to 10 EA students who participated in the full semester, 10 EA students who participated in the half-semester, and 10 students who did not engage in the program during the semester. The Qualtrics survey software was utilized to "understand and make sense" of the quantitative findings through open-ended qualitative questions (Mertler, 2020, p. 250). The researcher hypothesized that a full semester of an EA readiness program would encourage currently enrolled EA students at the 2-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the EA program.

From the total of 30 EA participants who agreed to participate in the readiness program, 16 students completed the open-ended and rated-item pre-survey, and 13 completed the open-ended and rated-item post-survey. The next section of this chapter will explain the findings from the pre- and post-open-ended questions and rated-item survey.

Open-Ended Questions

Key Themes from Pre- and Post- Survey Responses

Several common themes emerged in relation to the main research question and sub research questions regarding the effectiveness of readiness programs for EA students at a 2-year public college. The open-ended questions consisted of 10 written questions divided by the research question and sub-questions common themes, which were (a) program motives, (b) social-emotional support, (c) building connectivity, (d) program duration preference, and (e) academic support. These themes were central to understanding the impact of the EA program on

students' academic success, social-emotional support, and connectivity. Table 8 shows the survey responses related to the themes for pre- and post-open-ended responses.

The first common theme was program motives. Students were primarily motivated by opportunities to accelerate their education, gain college credits, and prepare for future careers. Many responses highlighted desires to escape a less challenging high school environment and start college early, reflecting a drive for academic and personal growth. The second theme was social-emotional support, indicating that the presence or absence of a readiness program significantly impacted students' feelings of social and emotional support. Students in programs (especially full-semester ones) reported feeling more supported and less anxious about their college transition. Those without a program, students often cited a lack of support and increased feelings of isolation and stress.

The third common theme was building connectivity, with students often mentioning the EA program facilitated a sense of community and belonging, which was crucial to their social integration and academic collaboration. The fourth theme was program duration, indicating that students' preferences for the duration of readiness programs varied, with many advocating for full-semester programs due to the sustained support they provided. However, some students valued shorter programs or believed no formal program was necessary if sufficient online resources were available. The fifth theme was academic support, indicating a link between the structure of readiness programs and academic preparedness. Students in full and half-semester programs expressed greater confidence in managing their coursework and navigating academic challenges. They also highlighted the benefits of having access to academic advising and tutoring as part of these programs.

Table 8

Survey Responses on Themes for Pre and Post-Open Ended Survey Responses

Themes/ Question #	Responses by Groups					
	Pre-Survey			Post-Survey		
	Full Semester	Half-semester	No Program	Full Semester	Half-semester	No Program
Program Motives Question # 1	Q1: "The ability to gain as many college credits while in high school"	Q1: "receive my A.A degree" Q1: "leaving high school"	Q1: "tired of the high school atmosphere and lack of a challenge the high school classes had"	Q1: "desire to receive A.A degree before high school"	Q1: "I want a challenge" Q1: "get a head start in college"	Q1: "not having to go to school everyday" Q1: "poor experience in HS following Covid"
Social-Emotional Support Question # 2, 6	Q2: "having someone to talk to…" Q6: "students will not feel alone in the process"	Q2: "lack of social interaction at the college compare to high school	Q 6: "having a readiness program give EA students a place to share thoughts/ emotions"	Q6: "Yes…having someone to talk to if they get lost during the process"	Q2: "not getting as much social interaction like high school" Q 6: "if activities are built for it"	Q2: "EA application process was troubling" Q6: "everything is easily accessible"
Building Connectivity Question # 3, 7	Q3: "providing students with resources …encourage them to ask questions"	Q7: "they will have a chance to interact with other EA students"	Q3: "I don't think a readiness program is necessary"	Q7: "have a readiness program will help student pass and feel better about the program"	Q3: "no readiness program can be a disadvantage to certain students"	Q3: "I think the Intro to College course is enough college prep"

Program Duration Preference Question # 4, 10	Q4: "college advisors to help with the EA process and be more helpful" Q10: "benefit future generations coming into EA program"	Q4: "have a place to go for guidance" Q10: "full semester …having a place to go when looking for guidance"	Q4: 'I don't think it's needed" Q10: "I don't think it's necessary"	Q4: "we need a readiness program...I would institute it now" Q 10: "Full semester…it will help them not feel lost or alone"	Q4: "to promote a successful experience" Q 10: "half-semester… manageable for everyone's schedules"	Q4: "should be fun and informative" Q 10: "no program… I understand what I am getting into before I participate."
Academic Support Question # 5, 8, 9	Q 8: "starting my GPA as high as possible"	Q 5: "utilizing tutoring services when needed" Q9: "receive help from family and friends"	Q9: "I am not receiving support but I am more self-motivated"	Q5: "feels 100% EA will impact students academic" Q8: "having someone who knows the process to help you"	Q 8: "continue to do well to receive A.A degree Q9: "email reminders and other notifications"	Q5: "Personally, NO" Q9: "I'm pretty independent when it comes to school"

Table 9 illustrates the survey frequency distribution of themes for pre and post-open-ended responses. The table provides the frequency of students' references to specific types of support associated with each of the five themes. For example, the Program Motives theme, survey Question 1, benefits/college credits were coded as types of support to demonstrate the frequency for each participant. Three pre-survey/full-semester group participants responded to receiving college credits and benefits, whereas four students were coded from the post-

survey/full-semester group. This indicated that more students referenced benefits/college credits from the full semester post-survey than the pre-survey.

Table 9

Survey Frequency Distribution on Themes for Pre and Post Open-Ended Survey Responses

Theme/ Type of Support	Frequency					
	Pre-Survey			Post-Survey		
	Full Semester	Half-semester	No Program	Full Semester	Half-semester	No Program
Question 1						
Program Motives						
-Benefits/College Credits	3	2	2	4	2	1
Questions 2, 6						
Social-Emotional Support						
-Support from loves ones	8	3	2	4	2	1
-Expectations to graduate high	5	5	2	3	2	0
school	5	4	3	1	3	1
-Receive Preparation assistance						
Questions 7, 3						
Building Connectivity						
- Fear of Failure from	2	1	0	2	2	1
family	2	4	1	2	1	2
-Encouragement from friends	2	3	2	3	3	1
and family						
-Feel a sense of belonging to a						
group						
Questions 4, 10						
Program Duration Preference	4	1	0	3	1	0
-Full Semester	1	3	1	1	3	0
-Half-semester	3	1	2	2	1	2
-No Program						
Questions 5,8,9						
Academic Support						
-Family Support	2	2	2	1	3	2
-Boost Motivation	3	2	2	2	3	1
-Uncertainty of	7	3	0	3	2	1
completion	5	5	1	3	1	2
	3	4	3	3	3	2

-Earn an Education degree -Have a Goal Setting to graduate						

Findings of Themes Pre and Post Responses

Program Motives

Students recognized multiple benefits from the programs, particularly the full semester program, which offered more comprehensive insights and support during the transition to college life. Students were primarily motivated to enroll in EA programs to gain college credits, earn an Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree earlier, and enhance their resumes. As one student in the full semester program shared, they participated for "the ability to gain as many college credits while in high school." A student in the no-program group said they were "tired of the high school atmosphere and lack of a challenge the high school classes had." Responses indicated a strong desire for academic advancement and escaping an unchallenging high school environment.

Social-Emotional Support

Students placed significant emphasis on support from loved ones and expectations to graduate, which varied across different program durations. The full semester program was noted for "providing more consistent support." Students expressed varied feelings regarding the availability of social-emotional support. Those in structured programs felt better supported, especially with managing anxiety and the transition from high school. A common concern was "the lack of social interaction compared to their previous high school experiences," which some students felt could be mitigated by a readiness program. Responses varied significantly regarding the perceived adequacy of social-emotional support, with students in structured programs reporting better support mechanisms. One student said that "managing time has been challenging…I can get very anxious and feel overwhelmed…however, I am managing." Another

student mentioned, “Having a readiness program gives EA students a place to share thoughts/emotions.” These responses underscored the need for robust support systems within readiness programs to address the emotional and social challenges of transitioning from high school to college.

Building Connectivity

Connectivity among peers and the academic community was another significant theme. Students believed that readiness programs could potentially “help build a sense of community,” though opinions on this were varied. Students advocating for readiness programs explained that “having a readiness program will help students pass and feel better about the program”; in contrast, one skeptical student shared, “I do not think a readiness program is necessary.” This divergence in opinions suggested that while some students saw great value in these programs for building connectivity, others perceived a different benefit level, highlighting a subjective aspect of such interventions. Responses highlighted “fears of failure” and “the importance of encouragement from friends and family.” Students in the program felt more connected and supported. The potential for readiness programs to facilitate “community building” and “student interaction” was highlighted. Students felt that such programs could help them feel more integrated and connected, potentially easing the transition to college life.

Program Duration Preference

Opinions on the optimal duration of readiness programs varied. Some students advocated for a full-semester program to provide continuous support. In contrast, others believed a half-semester or no formal program could be sufficient, suggesting an online introduction might be adequate. This theme revealed a divide in students’ perceptions of the intensity and duration of support needed, with some expressing a desire for substantial initial support and others favoring

independence. Students' preferences for the duration of readiness programs showed a mix of support for both full and half-semester options, reflecting diverse needs and perspectives of what constituted effective support. One student supporting a full semester program advocated for a full semester "because it will benefit future generations coming into the EA program." A student advocating for no program mentioned, "There is information online that explains EA program and therefore do not find a readiness program necessary." These statements reflected students' varied expectations from readiness programs, with some advocating for extended support and others believing in self-sufficiency.

Academic Support

All students deemed academic support as crucial to success, with specific emphasis placed on tutoring and guidance for course selection. One student's response to Question 5, explaining how a readiness program impacted EA students' academic success: "…utilizing tutoring services when needed." Question 8 asked about students' current academic priorities, with one student responding, "Starting my GPA as high as possible." Students emphasized the importance of academic support in achieving their goals, which included "maintaining high GPAs" and "managing course selections." The emphasis on academic support highlighted its critical role in students' early college experiences, particularly in ensuring academic success and confidence. There was a notable concern about the complexity of navigating college resources, with students in structured programs feeling better supported. Overall, tutoring services and academic advising were frequently mentioned as crucial elements of the EA experience.

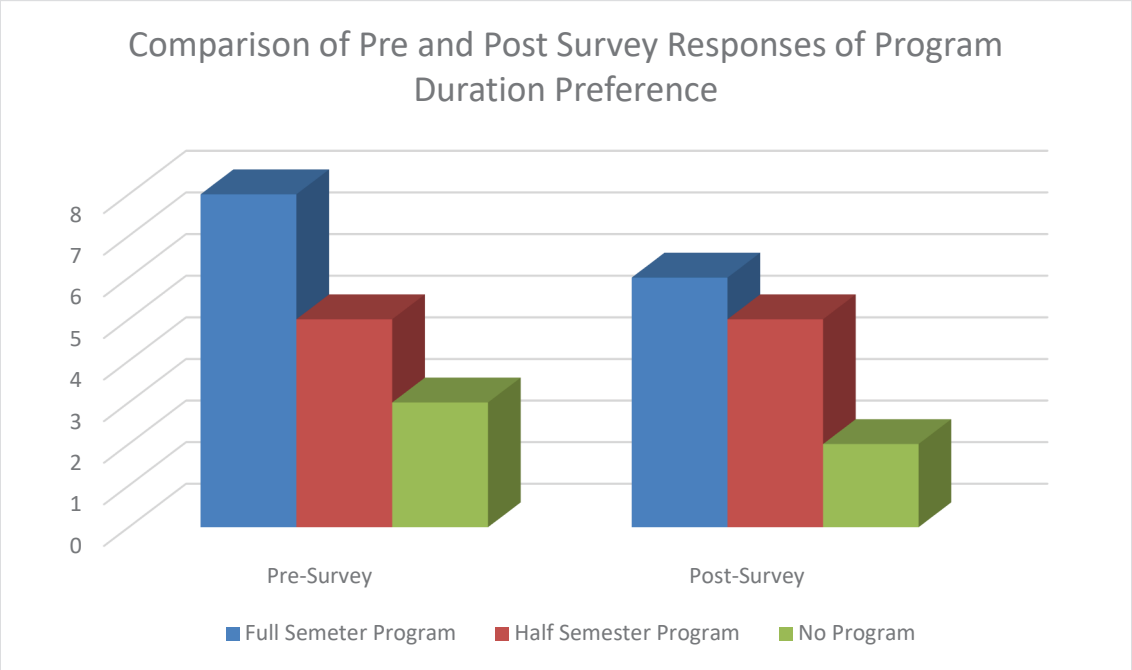
Preference for Program Duration

A preference for the full semester program was more frequently expressed, suggesting that longer duration programs were perceived as more beneficial. Figure 2 compares the pre- and

post-survey responses regarding preferences for program duration. For the pre-survey, eight students chose full semester, five for half-semester, and three chose no program. For the post-survey, six students chose full semester, five chose half-semester, and two chose no program. Therefore, 14 votes were chosen for the full semester program, 10 for the half-semester program, and five for the no program combined from the pre-and post-survey.

Figure 2

Comparison of Pre and Post Survey Responses of Preference for Program Duration



Students in structured readiness programs generally reported better academic, social, and emotional adjustment than those without formal programs. Students' backgrounds, expectations, and personal circumstances led to varied experiences and perceptions of the readiness programs. This suggested the need for flexible program structures that cater to diverse student needs.

Rated Item Survey

Comparative Analysis Between Groups

The pre- and post-survey responses highlighted each group's average (also known as the mean) results by adding all numbers in the data set and dividing them by the number of values in the set. Table 10 displays the means of the pre-and post-rated item survey questions by group, organized according to the number of research questions. The columns are systematically arranged to show the pre-survey and post-survey mean results for each of the three programs, facilitating an easier comparison of outcomes. Table 11 compares the differences in the higher mean by groups. SPSS software was used to demonstrate which survey questions exhibited higher mean results in the pre- and post-surveys or if they remained consistent. Notably, the *no program* group was the only one where the mean results for question 5 remained unchanged, indicating uniform responses from all students in this group across both surveys. The following sections provide a comparative analysis between the full, half, and no program groups according to Table 11 results.

Table 10

Pre and Post Rated Item Survey Questions Means by Groups

Question #	Full Semester Pre-Survey	Half-Semester Pre-Survey	No Semester Pre-Survey	Full Semester Post-Survey	Half-Semester Post-Survey	No Semester Post-Survey
1	4.00	3.20	3.33	5.00	2.75	3.00
2	4.20	3.00	3.33	4.00	2.5	3.20
3	1.80	2.20	2.17	1.00	1.75	2.50
4	3.80	3.60	3.67	3.50	4.00	3.40
5	2.60	2.60	3.00	2.25	3.00	3.00
6	2.60	2.80	3.50	2.50	2.75	3.40
7	2.20	3.80	3.33	2.75	3.50	3.80
8	3.80	3.80	3.67	4.00	4.00	3.80
9	4.20	2.40	3.00	3.25	3.25	2.40
10	5.00	4.40	4.00	4.75	4.50	4.80

11	3.20	2.00	3.00	3.75	2.75	2.50
12	2.80	2.20	2.83	3.67	3.00	2.00
13	4.20	4.00	3.50	4.00	4.25	4.60
14	4.00	4.20	3.83	4.50	4.25	4.80
15	4.40	4.00	4.33	4.75	4.75	4.60
16	4.40	4.00	3.67	5.00	4.25	4.60
17	3.40	3.60	3.33	3.75	4.00	4.60
18	2.20	2.20	2.00	2.75	2.25	2.40
19	3.60	2.60	3.17	3.50	2.00	2.40
20	4.20	4.20	3.50	5.00	4.50	4.20

Table 11

Comparing the Differences in Higher Mean by Group

GROUP	Pre-Test Score Higher than Post Test Score	Post Test Score Higher than Pre-Test Score	SAME
FULL	2,3,4,5,6,9,10,13,19,	1,7,8,11,12,14,15,16,17,18,20	
HALF	1,2,6,7,19,	2,4,5,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,20	
NONE	1,4,6,9,11,12,19,	2,3,7,8,10,13,14, 15,16,17,18,20	5
SIMILARITY	6,9,19	8,14,15,16,17,18,20	

Full Semester vs. Half Semester/No Program

In the pre-survey, the full semester group's higher mean scores on Questions 3, 5, 10, and 13 indicated that those students began their academic journey with more positive perceptions and expectations regarding the college experience. These questions, which likely pertained to aspects such as academic readiness, social integration, and personal development, suggested the full semester program may better prepare students psychologically and academically before they even begin their college coursework. This can be attributed to the extended duration of the program, which allows for more comprehensive orientation, deeper engagement with academic content, and stronger relationship-building activities.

The post-survey data, wherein the full semester group demonstrated higher mean scores for Question 1, further supported the notion that the extended duration and possibly richer content of the full semester program had a lasting positive impact on students. The higher scores

in the post-survey reflected an enhancement in students' overall satisfaction and perceived value of their college experience. This continued advantage indicated the benefits of the full semester program extended beyond initial preparation, influencing students' ongoing academic and social experiences.

Half-semester vs. Full/None

The half-semester group demonstrated distinct trends where they might lag in certain areas compared to the other two groups. In the pre-survey data, the half-semester group's higher mean score for Question 7 indicated that even before the program began, these students had more optimistic expectations or better initial perceptions about certain aspects of their upcoming college experience than students in other groups. This could suggest students who opted for the half-semester program initially felt more confident or believed that a shorter, more intense readiness program was better suited to their needs or learning styles. The structure of the half-semester program might appeal to students who prefer a quicker, more intense educational experience, which they believe will sufficiently prepare them for college without the commitment of a full semester.

In the post-survey data, students enrolled in the half-semester readiness program reported higher mean scores for Questions 5 and 9. This suggested that by the end of the program, those students perceived a significant benefit in specific areas compared to their counterparts in both the full semester and no program groups. The high scores in these questions might reflect specific strengths of the Half-semester program for addressing key issues within a condensed timeframe. The concentrated nature of the half-semester program might allow for intensive focus on certain skills or knowledge areas, leading to a perceived immediate improvement in these domains. The shorter duration may lead to a more efficient delivery of content and support,

which could be perceived by students as more effective, especially in semesters of practical or application-oriented learning outcomes.

No Program vs. Full None

Pre- and post-survey data revealed intriguing trends among the students in the no program group, which consisted of participants who did not enroll in any readiness program. Their performance, particularly in certain survey questions, provided valuable insights into the nuanced impact of foregoing structured readiness programs. In the pre-survey, students in the no program group reported higher mean scores for Question 2 compared to those in both the full and half-semester groups. This finding could suggest students who chose not to participate in any readiness program already felt confident in their abilities to handle college demands, reflecting a higher level of intrinsic motivation or self-sufficiency. Another possible explanation may be that readiness program was perceived by those students as redundant and they did not believe it offered additional value beyond what they already knew or could achieve, independently.

In the post-survey data, it was particularly noteworthy that the no program group scored higher on Questions 11 and 12 than both the full and half-semester groups. This outcome might indicate these students developed effective strategies for managing their studies and college life without structured support, indicating strong personal learning and adaptation skills. It might also suggest that certain aspects or content covered in the readiness programs were either too generic or did not align well with students' specific needs or expectations, which could cause them to feel that they gained more via independent exploration and learning.

Response Trends Across Different Survey Times (Pre vs. Post)

Full semester. Students in the full semester group tended to improve their post-survey responses compared to the pre-survey for several questions. This indicated a positive change in their perceptions or experiences after completing the semester-long program.

Half Semester. Students in the half-semester program generally showed less consistent improvements. In some cases, scores on the post-survey were lower than the pre-survey. Mixed results were indicated, with some improvements noted but less consistently across different metrics compared to the full semester.

No Program. Students who did not participate in any program often had lower scores than those in structured programs, especially in the post-survey data, suggesting less improvement or satisfaction. Those students typically had the lowest scores, suggesting they felt less supported and prepared.

Specific Observations from Mean Scores

Question 1: Full semester. Higher mean scores in the post-survey for the full semester group suggested increased satisfaction or feelings of preparedness after completing the program.

Question 10: Academic success. Full semester and half-semester groups showed high initial and post-program scores, indicating strong academic outcomes.

Questions 7 and 15: Social and emotional support. Higher scores in structured programs suggested better support mechanisms.

Patterns in Variability and Change

The full semester group's mean increase from the pre- to post-survey might indicate effective interventions that the shorter or no program durations failed to replicate. Some

questions showed little change across all groups, suggesting these aspects of the student experience were less influenced by the duration of readiness programs.

Attendance Data

The full and half-semester groups convened virtually on Saturdays for 45-minute sessions, with the full-semester group holding six meetings while the half-semester group had three. Table 12 illustrates the attendance differences between these groups, highlighting strong initial participation (seven attendees on both the first and second days), which declined significantly by the fourth and fifth sessions, almost dwindling to none by the fifth and sixth meetings. Similarly, the half-semester group began with robust attendance (six attendees on the first day) but experienced a steeper decline, culminating in very low attendance by the third meeting. There was no recorded attendance for the no-program group, as it was agreed that this group would not have meetings as part of the study. The initially high attendance figures in the structured programs suggested an initial commitment or obligation, yet sustaining this engagement proved challenging, especially in the shorter-duration programs.

Table 12

Comparing the Differences in Attendance by Groups

Group		Attendance
Full Semester	Day 1	7
	Day 2	7
Virtual Meetings on Saturday from 11 am to 11:45 am	Day 3	5
	Day 4	4
	Day 5	0
	Day 6	1
	Total number of people attended at least one session	8

Half- Semester Virtual Meetings on Saturday from 12 pm to 12:45 pm	Day 1	6
	Day 2	4
	Day 3	1
	Total number of people attended at least one session	7
No Program		NONE

Chapter Summary

The full semester readiness program had the most significant impact on EA students. The data indicated that students in the full-semester program consistently reported higher satisfaction and felt more academically, emotionally, and socially supported. This was supported by qualitative feedback and quantitative mean scores, suggesting a more positive transformation in students' perceptions and outcomes than in shorter or non-existent programs. Chapter 5 concludes the study's final report by discussing implications for practice and offering recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to use a mixed-method research methodology to discover and confirm the supportive nature of readiness program (full-term, half-semester, or no program) to allow currently enrolled early admission students at the two-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the early admission program.

Research Question:

What type of readiness program (full semester, half-semester, or no program) has more of an impact on early admission students at a 2-year public college?

Sub-Questions:

5. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on academic success?
6. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on social-emotional support?
7. Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on building connectivity?
8. Do differences vary across the three conditions?

This chapter will present the analysis and discussion in relation to the research questions, answers to the study's research questions, implications for practice, explore the limitations of the study, and propose recommendations for future research. It will be organized according to the

following headings: Analysis and Discussion, Answers to the Study's Research Questions, Implications for Practice, Limitations, Suggestions for Future Research, and Conclusion.

Analysis and Discussion

The open-ended responses provided deep insights into students' experiences, feelings, and perceptions. Key themes included program motives, academic and social-emotional support, building connectivity, and program duration preference. Supportive themes touched on the importance of college credits, the need for academic preparation, and the role of social interactions. It also provided narrative data that revealed students' nuanced views, such as their fears, motivations, and individual challenges. The survey responses offered detailed feedback on program effectiveness, highlighting the full semester program's ability to provide comprehensive support. It also provided variability in responses, showing a range of emotional and subjective responses not captured by quantitative measures, alone.

The rated item survey findings provided structured and quantifiable data about students' experiences, allowing for comparisons across groups and time points. The rated item pre- vs. post-survey comparison allowed for a direct comparison of changes in students' perceptions before and after participating in the readiness programs, over time. The SPSS software allowed for an assessment of differences and measured the significance of findings. Although the rated-item responses revealed less about individual experiences, they showed general trends, such as the full semester program's superior academic support and emotional well-being outcomes. The rated item responses provided a broad overview of program impacts but need more depth of individual student narratives.

Both data types were essential to developing a holistic understanding of the impacts of readiness programs. The open-ended responses contributed depth to understanding the student

experience, highlighting individual stories and nuanced perspectives. Conversely, the rated item survey quantified those experiences, providing a clear, comparative analysis of the effectiveness of different program durations. Those methods offered a comprehensive understanding that combined the richness of qualitative insights with the rigor of quantitative analysis, thus enabling informed conclusions about the effectiveness of readiness programs.

Answers to the Study's Research Questions

This study examined the effectiveness of readiness programs in enhancing the academic success, social integration, and emotional well-being of EA students at a 2-year public college. By comparing full-semester, half-semester, and no-program scenarios, this research aimed to identify which model offered students the most substantial benefits, informing future educational policies and program designs at similar institutions.

What type of readiness program (full semester, half-semester, or no program) has more of an impact on EA students at a two-year public college?

According to the results from the pre- and post- open-ended surveys, students in the full-semester program consistently reported higher satisfaction and felt more academically, emotionally, and socially supported. This was reflected both in qualitative themes and quantitative mean scores. These data suggest that students in the full semester readiness program generally had a more positive transformation in their perceptions and outcomes than those in shorter or non-existent programs. This pattern aligned with the hypothesis that longer, more structured readiness programs could provide more comprehensive support and yield better academic and emotional outcomes for students.

Families often provide emotional encouragement and motivation, which are crucial during the transition to college. When families are supportive of their children's educational

endeavors, they tend to encourage participation in programs that they perceive as offering the most comprehensive support, such as full semester programs. A full-time participant shared, "My parents felt more at ease knowing I was in a full semester program that would help me adjust thoroughly to college life." Family support can also provide a sense of stability and security, making students more willing to commit to longer-duration programs. Knowing they have a solid support system behind them, students may feel more comfortable taking on the extended commitment of a full semester readiness program.

To support the results for this research question, Leonard (2012) conducted a qualitative descriptive case study to answer the question, "How can parental support help increase college readiness skills for academically average students?" The study used multiple data collection instruments and methods, including student surveys, semi structured interviews with small focus groups of students, parents, and EC teachers, minutes of the semimonthly meetings, and document artifacts. Analysis revealed that parental engagement was essential to recruitment and enrollment, financial support, and emotional support (Leonard, 2012). Many parents were thinking ahead to college even when their children were not. When some parents realized their children were not ready for honors courses, the EC program was a welcome alternative that parents supported. Some parents preferentially enrolled their child in the EC program because of the College Success Seminar (Leonard, 2012).

Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on academic success?

Yes, there was a difference in student success across the programs. Students participating in the full semester program reported better academic support and outcomes, as reflected in higher mean scores in the post-survey data, indicating a perceived improvement in readiness and

support over the course. Students in the half-semester and no-program groups generally showed less consistent or lower academic improvements. Students in full-semester programs consistently showed better outcomes in both academic and emotional metrics. This suggested that the program's duration and intensity were crucial to its effectiveness.

The Bridge to Employment (BTE) program, a Johnson and Johnson initiative, has worked with 14-to-18-year-old students in disadvantaged communities worldwide since 1992 to increase their awareness and understanding of health careers and higher education opportunities. The program has been shown to affect students' math and language arts grades positively, but qualitative research has yet to be conducted to understand the reasons for BTE's effects better (Detgen et al., 2021). The study aimed to gather qualitative data from BTE program alums who graduated between 2006 and 2016 to understand the program's impact on their experiences, attitudes, and long semester outcomes. The finding for the BTE was that their programs exposed students to a wide variety of career options, helping them make informed decisions about their future paths (Detgen et al., 2021). They focused on developing crucial soft skills essential for academic and career success. Compared to the EA readiness program results, students benefitted from positive interactions with mentors, volunteers, and peers, which could boost their confidence and motivation.

Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on social emotional support?

Yes, there was a difference in emotional support across the groups. The full-semester program provided more consistent and substantial social-emotional support. This was evident from higher post-program satisfaction scores and more positive feedback in the qualitative data. The less structured or shorter programs provided less perceived support. The structured

programs, especially the full semester, provided students with better social and emotional support, as reflected in higher post-program satisfaction and perceived support. Research consistently underscores the critical role of social integration in educational settings, influencing student success, satisfaction, and retention rates. Several studies have shown that students who feel socially integrated are more likely to succeed academically and have higher overall satisfaction with their educational experience. Tinto's (1975) study is seminal in how social integration affects student persistence. His theory posited that social and academic integration was crucial for student retention. According to Tinto, the more students feel like they are part of their academic and social communities, the more likely they are to complete their studies.

Participants in this study who chose either full or half-semester programs indicated mixed responses regarding the impact of the readiness program on their social-emotional support. Some comments reflected concerns, such as the "lack of social interaction at the college compared to high school," suggesting that the programs may not fully compensate for the rich social environment of high school. On the other hand, other participants highlighted positive aspects, noting that "they will have people similar to them to talk to," which pointed to the potential of these programs to facilitate connections among students who might otherwise feel isolated. This dichotomy underscored the complexity of designing programs that effectively address students' diverse social and emotional needs transitioning to college life.

Is there a difference in readiness programs (full semester vs. half-semester vs. nothing) on building connectivity?

Again, the full-semester program outperformed the others in building connectivity among students. The full-semester program participants felt more connected and supported, as indicated by their qualitative responses and higher scores on related survey questions. Adam et al.'s (2019)

study focuses on Black male students in Early College and their perceptions of being part of the Early College High School program. The researcher found that Black males were impacted mainly by educational opportunity gaps and were identified as the most underserved population in the educational system, on all levels. From those findings, three themes were identified: (a) relationships matter, (b) the advantages the school model provides are substantial, and (c) the good outweighs the bad, but there are still challenges. From the focus groups and interviews, students collectively described the school environment as a "family feel." While the theme of family strengthened and positively impacted students' experiences, the participants soon focused on both a tangible and an intangible benefit they received from attending an Early College High School: free college credit and readiness for their futures.

Similar to findings from the current study, qualitative feedback from participants in the full-semester program often reflected a deep appreciation for the sense of community and belonging fostered by the program's extended duration. Students frequently mentioned feeling part of a supportive network, which not only aided in their academic pursuits but also provided a social safety net during their transition to college. As one student explained,

> Being in the full-semester program made me feel like I was part of a community. It wasn't just about the classes; it was about forming bonds with peers who were in the same boat as I was, which made the whole college transition less intimidating.

Overall, the full-semester readiness program's performance in building connectivity underscored its value in the holistic development of students. Together, the qualitative responses and survey results painted a clear picture of how such programs can significantly enhance students' social and academic experiences, suggesting that institutions should consider prioritizing and possibly expanding these programs to maximize their impact on student success.

Do differences vary across the three conditions?

Yes, differences varied significantly across the three conditions, with the full semester readiness program consistently showing the best outcomes regarding academic success, social-emotional support, and connectivity. Both the half-semester and no-program groups generally exhibited fewer positive outcomes. Differences in the impact of half-semester vs. no-program scenarios indicated that any structured support was better than none. However, the optimal duration and content of such programs was critical. Monahan et al.'s (2020) study aimed to understand the empirical support behind College and Career Readiness (CCR) frameworks, which were crucial to developing appropriate assessments and interventions. The passage described a college readiness program as an initiative to prepare students, including those with disabilities, for success in postsecondary education and future careers. According to Monahan et al. (2020), different studies used varying methodologies and frameworks, making it difficult to generalize findings across all college readiness programs. The passage suggested more emphasis on college readiness than career readiness within these frameworks, which may need further exploration (Monahan et al., 2020).

Analysis of student responses showed a clear preference for some form of structured support over none. Students participating in even a half-semester readiness program reported better adjustments in understanding college demands, managing time effectively, and feeling less overwhelmed by the transition from high school to college. These benefits were particularly evident in the reflections on academic and social-emotional support. For example, a half-semester participant said of receiving structured support: "Having someone to talk to if they get lost during the process helps a lot," compared to a quote from a no-program participant: "I am not receiving support, but I am more self-motivated." This contrast highlights that any structured

support, even if limited in duration, generally enhances the early college experience by providing targeted help and resources that are in no-program scenarios.

Implications for Practice

Several practical implications emerged from the results of this investigation. Many of the following recommendations highlight ways the structure and duration of readiness programs can impact students' academic success, sense of support, and social connections. The most significant implication for practice that can be made from this study emphasizes the value of full-semester programs. Findings from this investigation consistently revealed that full-semester programs provided students with the most comprehensive support. Not only did these programs foster greater academic success, but they also nurtured students' social and emotional development while creating a sense of community. Consequently, institutions that offer EA programs should consider prioritizing full-semester programs to encourage better engagement and acclimatization to the college setting. Longer-duration EA programs could provide a standard for other readiness initiative designed to promote academic achievement and retention.

Another implication for practice emphasized the value of parent/family involvement. Participants in the full-semester program felt more confident and at ease, knowing their families supported their involvement. Accordingly, colleges should create initiatives that promote parent/family involvement. Schools may do this by offering informational sessions to families, which emphasize the benefits of EA programs and family involvement in students' academic success.

Findings from this study also highlighted the value of social support and connectivity, which provide additional guidance for practice. The full-semester program had a positive impact on students' social and emotional well-being. EA programs could increase these benefits by

integrating other types of support services, like counseling, peer-mentoring, and routine check-ins with professors. Students' social and emotional needs are heightened during the transition to college, so EA programs should go beyond academic preparation to help mitigate common experiences of anxiety and isolation during this phase. In addition, EA programs should also integrate activities and interventions that foster connection and community among students. Colleges may host collaborative learning opportunities, social events, and peer support groups to create a sense of family among students within EA programs. Supportive networks could help students accomplish their long-term academic goals.

Although the full-semester program seemed to have the most benefits, students in the half-semester program also experienced positive effects. This suggests that while longer duration programs may be preferred, any type of structured support is better than none. Colleges that sponsor EA programs might consider flexible offerings that accommodate the different needs and time constraints of students. Shorter programs could still provide essential academic and social support to students who cannot commit to full semester programs.

Finally, findings highlight the need for educational policies that provide funding to EA programs at community colleges around the country. Policymakers should advocate for programs that are both academically rigorous and supportive of students' holistic development. Resources should be allocated to develop and maintain structured readiness programs that align with students' diverse needs.

Limitations

While findings from this study provides valuable insights into the effects of readiness programs on EA students at a 2-year public college, it is important to consider study limitations when interpreting the results. First, this study leveraged a relatively small sample of EA students

at a 2-year public college located in South Florida. The small sample size and narrow geographic scope precludes generalization of findings. Another limitation related to the sample was the potential of participant self-selection bias. Because participation was completely voluntary, those who chose to participate may have had certain experiences or characteristics, which were beyond the scope of this research to investigate, that differed from students who did not participate. Students may have also opted out of the study based on a lack of time or interest, potentially skewing the findings toward those with more positive experiences with the program.

A second limitation pertained to the reliance on self-reported data, through participants' responses to survey items and open-ended questions. While self-reported data can provide rich insights, it is also subject to recall bias, self-censorship, and personal interpretation. In addition, because data were collected for a single period, they do not reflect the long-term effects of EA programs. A longitudinal investigation may have provided more comprehensive insights. While this study compared the outcomes of EA programs of different durations, it did not account for variations within those programs. Differences in content, instructor quality, and student engagement may have influenced students' outcomes. Accordingly, findings may be reflective of specific characteristics of the program's delivery, which were not controlled for or analyzed.

Another notable limitation of the study was the low number of students who consistently attended the readiness program sessions, particularly in the full-semester and half-semester groups. Despite initial recruitment efforts and participation agreements, only a portion of the students regularly attended the scheduled meetings. This limited attendance may have affected the outcomes, as students who did not fully engage in the program might not have experienced the full range of benefits intended by the intervention. As a result, the findings may not fully

capture the potential impact of the readiness programs on academic success, social-emotional support, and connectivity. Future research should aim to improve attendance rates to ensure more comprehensive data collection and a clearer understanding of the programs' effectiveness.

Finally, the study concentrated on academic success, social-emotional support, and connectivity as the primary outcomes of the readiness programs. While these are important aspects of an EA program, they are not exhaustive of all factors that could influence students' outcomes. Despite these minor limitations, this study contributed new information on the effects of a readiness programs on EA students.

Suggestions for Future Research

Results from this study provide a number of future research opportunities that would expand upon the current findings and address limitations of this study. First, future researchers could consider expanding the population and scope to include geographically diverse locations and institutions. The current study focused on a single 2-year public college in South Florida, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future researchers could explore readiness programs across diverse geographic locations and types of institutions, including rural, urban, and suburban community colleges, as well as 4-year institutions. Investigating different program structures in a variety of educational settings might broaden understandings the impact of EA programs.

Another opportunity for future investigation would be to conduct a longitudinal study focused on long-term outcomes of EA programs. The current project focused on the short-term effects of readiness programs on students' academic success, social-emotional support, and sense of connectivity. Future researchers could conduct longitudinal research to track EA students' progress over time. Such research could also examine the influence of readiness programs on

other factors, such as students' retention rates, degree completion, transfer rates to 4-year institutions, and career readiness. Insights could help determine the lasting benefits of these programs, as well as opportunities for improvement.

The current research did not involve an examination of the ways variations in program implementation may have influenced student outcomes. Such variations could include characteristics like program content, instructional quality, and instructional strategies. Accordingly, future researchers could examine the specific elements of readiness programs that contribute most significantly to student success.

Another opportunity for investigation is to explore and compare the effects of other types of academic support models. While findings from the current study highlighted the benefits of full-semester programs, they also suggested *some* structured support is better than *none*. Future researchers could explore the effectiveness of alternative support models, such as hybrid programs, which could be more accessible for students who cannot commit to a full-semester EA program.

The final recommendations pertain to support and other influences on student success. Given that family support was found to influence students' experiences in readiness programs, future researchers could examine if family and community engagement strategies enhance student outcomes. Specifically, researchers could explore the effectiveness of programs designed to involve families during the transition to college to identify ways to foster a supportive environment beyond the college campus. Such programs could include parent orientations, family counseling, or community-based support networks. In addition, future research could be conducted to examine how other non-academic factors affect EA students, such as financial challenges, mental health, housing security, and access to campus resources. A more holistic

examination of these influences could provide insights on additional supports that could improve EA programs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to use a mixed-method research methodology to discover and confirm the supportive nature of readiness program (full-term, half-semester, or no program) to allow currently enrolled early admission students at the two-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the early admission program. The study was guided by the following research question: "What type of readiness program (full semester, half semester or no program) has more of an impact for early admission students at a 2-year public college?" The study followed a mixed-methods approach and revealed that that full-semester readiness programs provided the most comprehensive support for EA students, resulting in improved academic outcomes, stronger social-emotional support, and a greater sense of community.

The data indicated that students in the full-semester program consistently reported higher satisfaction and felt more academically, emotionally, and socially supported. These results were supported by qualitative feedback and quantitative mean scores, suggesting a more positive transformation in students' perceptions and outcomes than in shorter or non-existent programs. The research also underscored the importance of family involvement, the role of structured support in students' transitions to college, as well as flexible programming that can meet diverse student needs. While the findings suggest significant benefits of full-semester programs, they also highlight the value of any form of structured support in aiding students' success during their early college experience.

This research contributed new insights to the body of knowledge on readiness programs for EA students by highlighting the effectiveness of different program durations and the importance of providing holistic support. These insights can guide educational leaders and institutions when designing and implementing programs that foster academic and personal growth for EA students. This research laid a foundation for continued exploration into best practices that support early college students in their academic journeys, thereby improving their overall educational experiences and outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

EARLY ADMISSION FLYER

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Study Title: Let's Hear from Early Admission Students: Designing a Readiness Program for Early Admission Students at 2-Year Public Colleges

Dear Early Admission participant,
As a requirement for completion of the Ed.D. degree in Higher Education Administration at Bradley University, I must do an action research project. My topic will be based on designing a readiness program to discover and confirm the supportive nature of readiness programs and to allow currently enrolled early admission students at the two-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the early admission program.

As a dual enrollment coordinator at Palm Beach State College who manages dual enrollment and early admission students from Palm Beach County, you are in a great position to give first-hand information and personal comments during the Fall 2023 semester. Three groups of early admission students will be targeted by the readiness program: full semester, half semester, and no program. The full-semester group will meet online for one hour every two weeks throughout the whole semester, while the half-semester group will meet for one hour every two weeks until mid-semester. Students in the no-program group will not get together. I will pick the people in each group at random. At the beginning and end of the readiness program, rated item surveys and open-ended questions will be administered to ten early admission students who participated in the full semester, ten early admission students who participated in the half semester, and ten early admission students who did not engage in the program during the semester.

We do not believe that there are any risks or discomfort associated with this study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You don't have to participate and can stop at any time. The names of all the participants in the readiness program and any identifiable information will not be disclosed and will be kept confidential. Your information will be stored in a locked office and the computers used will be password protected. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to the research, and findings could lead to enhancing the importance of readiness programs for early admission students across any public two-year colleges.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and no penalty will be assessed if you choose not to participate. Please indicate your participation interest by signing your name on this letter below and turn it in before you leave. You will receive an email informing you that you have been selected as a participant finalist, as well as a consent letter to read and sign.

If you have any questions about the study, as always, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. If you have general questions about being a research participant, you may contact Bradley University's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects office at (309)
677-3877.

Sincerely,

Printed Name: _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____
**If you are under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must sign.*
Parent's signature:_____ Date:_____

APPENDIX C:

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Research Question: What type of readiness program (full semester, half semester, or no program) has more of an impact on early admission students at a two-year public college?
Please answer all questions to the best of your ability.

1. What motivated you to become an early admission student?

2. Has anything been troubling you as an early admission student? Tell me about it.

3. How do you feel about no readiness program for early admission students at your institution?

4. What are your expectations of having a readiness program for early admission students at your institution?

5. Do you believe a readiness program will impact early admission students on academic success? Explain.

6. Do you believe a readiness program will impact early admission students on social-emotional support? Explain.

7. Do you believe a readiness program will impact early admission students on building connectivity? Explain.

8. What are your academic priorities at the moment?

9. In what ways are you receiving academic support to remain a productive and proactive early admission student?

10. Do you feel your institution should have an early admission readiness program for a full semester, half semester, or not even have a program? Explain which one.

APPENDIX D

RATED ITEM SURVEY

Research Question: What type of readiness program (full semester, half semester, or no program) has more of an impact on early admission students at a two-year public college?

The purpose of this questionnaire is for you to share your opinion on a readiness program for early admission students. Please check the number, using the code below, that describes how much you agree with each statement. Your responses will be anonymous. Please respond honestly and by circling only one number for each statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I feel there is a need for a full semester readiness program for early admission students	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel there is a need for a half-semester readiness program for early admission students	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel there is NO need for a readiness program for early admission students	1	2	3	4	5
4. I currently receive support to improve my academic success at the college	1	2	3	4	5
5. I currently receive support to improve my social-emotional support at the college	1	2	3	4	5
6. I currently receive support for building connectivity at the college	1	2	3	4	5
7. The application process to becoming an early admission was seamless	1	2	3	4	5
8. My high counselor or my home education designee supports me in becoming an early admission student	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am nervous about being an early admission student	1	2	3	4	5
10. It is important to me to earn college credits while in high school	1	2	3	4	5
11. Becoming an early admission student is challenging for me	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am afraid that I will not do well as an early admission student	1	2	3	4	5
13. I feel academically prepared to take college courses	1	2	3	4	5
14. I feel that I will do well being enrolled full-time at my college	1	2	3	4	5
15. I completely understand the purpose of becoming an early admission student	1	2	3	4	5
16. I feel safe being an early admission student	1	2	3	4	5
17. I know where to look for resources that will support my academic goals	1	2	3	4	5
18. I feel a disconnection with family and friends to becoming an early admission student	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am sometimes confused about what's going on at my college	1	2	3	4	5
20. My family members and/or friends encourage me to do well almost every day	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Study Title: Let's Hear from Early Admission Students: Designing a Readiness Program for Early Admission Students at 2-Year Public Colleges

Dear Early Admission participant,
As a requirement for completion of the Ed.D. degree in Higher Education Administration at Bradley University, I must do an action research project. My topic will be based on designing a readiness program to discover and confirm the supportive nature of readiness programs and to allow currently enrolled early admission students at the two-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the early admission program.

As a dual enrollment coordinator at Palm Beach State College who manages dual enrollment and early admission students from Palm Beach County, you are in a great position to give first-hand information and personal comments during the Fall 2023 semester. Three groups of early admission students will be targeted by the readiness program: full semester, half semester, and no program. The full-semester group will meet online for one hour every two weeks throughout the whole semester, while the half-semester group will meet for one hour every two weeks until mid-semester. Students in the no-program group will not get together. I will pick the people in each group at random. At the beginning and end of the readiness program, rated item surveys and open-ended questions will be administered to ten early admission students who participated in the full semester, ten early admission students who participated in the half semester, and ten early admission students who did not engage in the program during the semester.

We do not believe that there are any risks or discomfort associated with this study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You don't have to participate and can stop at any time. The names of all the participants in the readiness program and any identifiable information will not be disclosed and will be kept confidential. Your information will be stored in a locked office and the computers used will be password protected. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to the research, and findings could lead to enhancing the importance of readiness programs for early admission students across any public two-year colleges.

If you have any questions, contact Yanella Gilbert at gilberty@palmbeachstate.edu. If you have general questions about being a research participant, you may contact Bradley University's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects office at (309)677-3877.

Your informed consent

You are voluntarily making a decision to participate in this study. Your signature means
that you have read and understood the information presented and have decided to participate. Your signature also means that the information on this consent form has been fully explained to you and all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this study Date

_____ _____
Signature of Participant **[if appropriate, or legally authorized representative]**

Printed Name

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR PARENTS

Study Title: Let's Hear from Early Admission Students: Designing a Readiness Program for Early Admission Students at 2-Year Public Colleges

Dear Early Admission Parents,
As a requirement for completion of the Ed.D. degree in Higher Education Administration at Bradley University, I must do an action research project. My topic will be based on designing a readiness program to discover and confirm the supportive nature of readiness programs and to allow currently enrolled early admission students at the two-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the early admission program.

As a dual enrollment coordinator at Palm Beach State College who manages dual enrollment and early admission students from Palm Beach County, your child is in a great position to give first-hand information and personal comments during the Fall 2023 semester. Three groups of early admission students will be targeted by the readiness program: full semester, half semester, and no program. The full-semester group will meet online for one hour every two weeks throughout the whole semester, while the half-semester group will meet for one hour every two weeks until mid-semester. Students in the no-program group will not get together. I will pick the people in each group at random. At the beginning and end of the readiness program, rated item surveys and open-ended questions will be administered to ten early admission students who participated in the full semester, ten early admission students who participated in the half semester, and ten early admission students who did not engage in the program during the semester.

We do not believe that there are any risks or discomfort associated with this study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Your child doesn't have to participate and can stop at any time. The names of all the participants in the readiness program and any identifiable information will not be disclosed and will be kept confidential. Your child's information will be stored in a locked office and the computers used will be password protected. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your child's participation will be a valuable addition to the research, and findings could lead to enhancing the importance of readiness programs for early admission students across any public two-year colleges.

If you have any questions, contact Yanella Gilbert at gilberty@palmbeachstate.edu. If you have general questions about being a research participant, you may contact Bradley University's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects office at (309)677-3877.

Your informed consent

You are voluntarily making a decision to allow your child to participate in this study. Your signature means that you have read and understood the information presented and have decided for your child to participate. Your signature also means that the information on this consent form has been fully explained to you and all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

I agree to allow my child to participate in this study. **Child's Name:**_____

_____
Signature of Parent **[if appropriate, or legally authorized representative]**

Printed Name Date:

APPENDIX G

ASSENT LETTER FOR STUDENTS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE

Study Title: Let's Hear from Early Admission Students: Designing a Readiness Program for Early Admission Students at 2-Year Public Colleges

Dear Early Admission participant,
As a requirement for completion of the Ed.D. degree in Higher Education Administration at Bradley University, I must do an action research project. My topic will be based on designing a readiness program to discover and confirm the supportive nature of readiness programs and to allow currently enrolled early admission students at the two-year public college to share their experiences and perspectives and provide suggestions as participants in the early admission program.

As a dual enrollment coordinator at Palm Beach State College who manages dual enrollment and early admission students from Palm Beach County, you are in a great position to give first-hand information and personal comments during the Fall 2023 semester. Three groups of early admission students will be targeted by the readiness program: full semester, half semester, and no program. The full-semester group will meet online for one hour every two weeks throughout the whole semester, while the half-semester group will meet for one hour every two weeks until mid-semester. Students in the no-program group will not get together. I will pick the people in each group at random. At the beginning and end of the readiness program, rated item surveys and open-ended questions will be administered to ten early admission students who participated in the full semester, ten early admission students who participated in the half semester, and ten early admission students who did not engage in the program during the semester.

We do not believe that there are any risks or discomfort associated with this study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You don't have to participate and can stop at any time. The names of all the participants in the readiness program and any identifiable information will not be disclosed and will be kept confidential. Your information will be stored in a locked office and the computers used will be password protected. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to the research, and findings could lead to enhancing the importance of readiness programs for early admission students across any public two-year colleges.

If you have any questions, contact Yanella Gilbert at gilberty@palmbeachstate.edu. If you have general questions about being a research participant, you may contact Bradley University's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects office at (309)677-3877.

Your informed assent

You are voluntarily making a decision to participate in this study. Your signature means
that you have read and understood the information presented and have decided to participate. Your signature also means that the information on this assent form has been fully explained to you and all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this study Date

_____ _____
Signature of Participant **[if appropriate, or legally authorized representative]**

_____
Printed Name

APPENDIX H

Research Study Timeline

DATES	Tentative schedule
June 1	Create an RSVP LINK for the event flyer
June 5	Advertise event flyer with RSVP QR code and link: Appendix A
June 9,10	Send Reminders to attendees days before the event via email and text
July 11, 2023	• Host Event: Becoming an Early Admission Student • Collect signed Recruitment letters from students and parents (if students are under 18 years of age
July 12, 2023	Send Thank you emails to attendees.
The first week of August	Email selected participants to sign the electronic informed consent form
Middle of August	Work on college readiness syllabus/ tentative program schedule for full and half semester
Last week of August (before Fall semester begin)	Email all 30 participants the open-ended questions and rated-item surveys --- **Appendix C of the open-ended questions** **-Appendix D of the rated-item survey**
2 weeks after the first day of class	First virtual college readiness program for full and half-semester group
Through the semester	Meet with the full and half semester participants every two weeks
Mid-October	The half semester group will be done with the program.
December	Full semester group will be done with the program
Day after the last day of class	Email 30 participants the open-ended questions and rated-item survey **-Appendix C of the open-ended questions** **-Appendix D of the rated-item survey**

APPENDIX I:

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Student Name:

Demographic Form

Please fill out the demographic form.

1. Gender: What is your gender?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Transgender
    d. Other
    e. Prefer not to respond
2. Age: What is your age?
    a. 14-15
    b. 16-17
    c. 18-20
    d. 21 or older
3. Ethnicity (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity.
    a. Nonresident Alien
    b. Hispanics of any race
    c. American Indian or Alaska Native
    d. Asian
    e. Black or African American
    f. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
    g. White
    h. Two or more races
    i. Race and ethnicity Unknown
    j. Other (please specify): _____
    k. Prefer not to respond
4. Location: Which campus is the closest to your home?
    a. Boca Raton
    b. Lake Worth
    c. Palm Beach Gardens
    d. Loxahatchee
    e. Belle Glade