1-1-2011

Student perceptions of a special admissions program: The BOOST program

Jessica Elizabeth Rinkel

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

Recommended Citation
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/145

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.
No further reproduction or distribution of this copy is permitted by electronic transmission or any other means.

The user should review the copyright notice on the following scanned image(s) contained in the original work from which this electronic copy was made.

Section 108: United States Copyright Law

The copyright law of the United States [Title 17, United States Code] governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that use may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. No further reproduction and distribution of this copy is permitted by transmission or any other means.
THESIS MAINTENANCE AND REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow these to be copied.

PLEASE SIGN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

__________________________   ______________________
Author's Signature          Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University NOT allow my thesis to be reproduced because:

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

__________________________   ______________________
Author's Signature          Date

This form must be submitted in duplicate.

http://www.eiu.edu/graduate/forms/thesisreproductioncert.html
Student Perceptions of a Special Admissions Program: The BOOST Program

By

Jessica Elizabeth Rinkel
B.A., Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, 2008

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

In The Graduate School, Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, Illinois

April 2011

I Hereby Recommend that this Thesis be Accepted as Fulfilling
This Part of the Graduate Degree Cited Above
This thesis is dedicated to those students who are considered underprepared for higher education, specifically those students in the BOOST Program. We, as public educators, have the responsibility and obligation to provide access to higher education to all those who want it. With good teaching and support systems, there will be many underprepared students who do succeed in higher education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My experience in graduate school has been one of both personal and professional growth, and is one for which I will be forever grateful. Completion of this thesis and of my degree would not have been possible without the help of family, friends, mentors, and faculty. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those individuals.

I would like to thank my thesis committee: Dr. Charles Eberly, Mrs. Cindy Boyer, and Dr. Mona Davenport. Without your support, guidance, and enthusiasm during this process, this thesis would not have been possible.

I would like to thank Mr. Lou Hencken and my coworkers at the Student Success Center. Thank you Mr. Hencken for your five-hour weekly requirement and your guidance in helping me see the importance of writing during cold and rain and relaxing during sunshine. And thank you SSC staff for your constant enthusiasm toward my thesis, especially during the times when I had none.

To my cohort, I would like to thank you for the lessons and the laughs. I have learned so much from all of you, and it will never be forgotten. To Sam Noblit, Wendy Downing, and Brian Neighbors, you all have offered unwavering support and friendship for the past two years, and I will truly miss you. To my close friend, Bria Phillips, thank you for your support and friendship during the past two years. I wish I could put you in my pocket and take you with me always!

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends. The love I have for all of you is immeasurable. Without the phone calls, dinners, movies, and unforgettable nights, I would not have been able to make it through these past two years. I love you! Peace, love, and magic!
ABSTRACT

This study was designed to understand the perception of a special admissions program, the BOOST Program, through the voices of students who successfully completed the program and continued their academic career at Eastern Illinois University or left the institution for various reasons after completing BOOST Program requirements. The researcher conducted one on one interviews with a selected sample of former BOOST students using qualitative, phenomenological methods (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Lichtman, 2010) regarding their perceptions of BOOST Program components. Interviews were examined for significant statements, which led to thematic units, and in turn led to four major themes: support, personal development, program structure, and access to resources. Results showed the experience of the BOOST Program according to participating students was a structured, supportive contact and connection within the University, which aided them in their own personal development and provided them resources necessary for academic success and transition.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DEDICATION**........................................................................................................... i

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**........................................................................................ ii

**ABSTRACT**............................................................................................................ iii

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**............................................................................................ iv

**TABLES**.................................................................................................................. vii

**CHAPTERS**

I.

**INTRODUCTION**..................................................................................................... 1

  - Introduction........................................................................................................... 1
  - The BOOST Program............................................................................................ 3
  - Purpose of Study................................................................................................... 4
  - Statement of Problem......................................................................................... 4
  - Research Questions............................................................................................. 5
  - Operational Definitions..................................................................................... 5
  - Overview of Study............................................................................................... 8

II. **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

  - Underprepared Students..................................................................................... 9
  - Structured First-Year Programs.......................................................................... 10
  - One-on-one Intrusive Advising.......................................................................... 12
  - The BOOST Program......................................................................................... 14
  - Summary............................................................................................................ 16

III. **METHODOLOGY**

  - Purpose of Study................................................................................................ 17
  - Qualitative Design and Reasoning...................................................................... 17
  - Research Questions............................................................................................ 19
  - Participants........................................................................................................ 19
  - Data Collection.................................................................................................. 23
  - Data Analysis..................................................................................................... 24
  - Impact of Researchers Identity on Study........................................................... 26
  - Limitations.......................................................................................................... 26
  - Summary............................................................................................................ 27
IV. FINDINGS

Introduction to Findings................................................. 28
Phenomenological Themes.............................................. 30
Major Theme 1: Support.................................................. 30
  Thematic Unit: Care................................................... 30
  Thematic Unit: Personal Support from BOOST Advisor........ 31
  Thematic Unit: Academic Plan..................................... 34
  Thematic Unit: Support outside BOOST.......................... 35
  Thematic Unit: Comfort.............................................. 38
  Thematic Unit: Group Dynamic..................................... 38
  Thematic Unit: Motivational Feedback............................ 39
Major Theme 2: Personal Development................................. 40
  Thematic Unit: Self-Awareness of Poor Performance in High School 40
  Thematic Unit: Acceptance in College............................. 41
  Thematic Unit: Independence....................................... 43
  Thematic Unit: Personal Growth................................... 43
  Thematic Unit: Transition.......................................... 44
  Thematic Unit: Success............................................. 45
Major Theme 3: Program Structure...................................... 46
  Thematic Unit: One-on-One Meetings.............................. 46
  Thematic Unit: Hierarchy of Programs............................ 47
  Thematic Unit: Components Less than Expectations.............. 48
  Thematic Unit: Definition of BOOST Advisor..................... 49
  Thematic Unit: Definition of BOOST Program.................... 50
Major Theme 4: Access to Resources.................................... 50
  Thematic Unit: Referrals........................................... 50
  Thematic Unit: Orientation......................................... 51
  Thematic Unit: Workshops......................................... 52
  Thematic Unit: Tutoring............................................ 53
  Thematic Unit: Diagnostic Testing................................ 53
Summary........................................................................... 54

V. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Purpose of Study.......................................................... 56
Discussion....................................................................... 56
  Research Question #1.................................................. 57
  Research Question #2.................................................. 59
    BOOST Advisor....................................................... 60
    Academic Plan....................................................... 61
    Motivational Feedback............................................. 62
    Referrals to Resources............................................. 63
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants ......................................................... 23

Table 2: Major Themes and Thematic Units of the Essence of Underprepared.............. 29
Freshman Students in a Special Admissions Program
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the introduction to the present study, the BOOST Program, the purpose of the present study, the statement of the problem, research questions, operational definitions, and an overview of the present study.

Introduction

Student access to higher education is a critical social issue due to the value a highly educated citizenry represents to American society. From the GI Bill and state and federal grant and loan programs to honors programs and provisional programs, colleges and universities have opened their doors to accommodate greater and greater numbers of people who were overlooked in prior years. Access to college for underrepresented students who are deemed academically at-risk is a priority of the Obama administration ("The White House", 2010) as it has been to democratize education for several decades (Gordon, Habley, & Assoc., 2000), but retaining those students once they are in college is the challenge placed before higher education faculties. Hardin (1988) maintained that public education, in particular, should support at-risk students.

There will always be at-risk students who do not make it. But, rather than close the open door to all these students, we should remember: with good teaching and good support systems, there will be many who do make it. We have an obligation, especially those of us in public education, to provide access to higher education to all citizens who can benefit. We have a further obligation to provide assistance to those who need it (as cited in Maxwell, 1994, p. 18).
As Hardin (1988) and others strongly support the need to not only educate all citizens, but also to provide assistance to those underprepared for higher education academic work, this idea has been met with much resistance.

 Remedial and special admissions programs were created to prepare and retain at-risk students for college success, dating back to the early 1900's (Cohen, 1998). According to Cohen, by the mid-1960s the decline in ability displayed by graduating high school seniors led to rapid growth in remedial programs, so that by the 1970s, all but the most selective schools were offering them. As the number of poorly prepared students increased, faculty members were required to instruct remedial courses, “which few enjoyed” (Cohen, 1998, p. 212). Faculty members have traditionally resisted instructing remedial courses for students they define as not being prepared for the academic rigor of higher education. Cohen and Brawer (2008) noted that “most [faculty members] feel that their environment would be improved if their students were more able” (p. 297). According to a 1977 survey of instructors at two-year colleges by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, participants were asked to name one change which would improve their courses. Out of sixteen choices, over half chose “students better prepared to handle course requirements” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 297). Cohen and Brawer also noted that a subsequent survey found almost the exact response among academic faculty twenty years later. Faculty members have continually resisted instructing students in need of remedial courses and special admissions programs or supporting the notion of assisting those in need of further academic preparation.

 Cohen and Brawer (2008) stated the most powerful influence on curriculum and instruction offered in every program was students’ abilities. Thus, to support and enable
students with humble beginnings to access higher education, the presence of remedial and
developmental education is necessary. In 2009, President Obama addressed a goal of his
administration, stating “by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of
college graduates in the world” (“The White House”, 2010). In an effort to complete this
goal, he committed his administration to provide the support necessary for all students to
complete their college education. As Soldwedel (1971) put it, the issue of support for
whom may well be one of social class.

Higher education shall not be higher by virtue of serving the rich, the well-born,
the academically able and advantaged, or those destined to fill the academic
ranks; rather, it shall be “higher” because it takes an adult or near adult beyond his
present level toward a fuller realization of his powers to be (as cited in Maxwell,
1994, p. 18).

The American society cannot afford to dismiss people who need support or remedial
education; there is a need to educate more and more people in order to have active
contributing citizens across all segments of society.

The BOOST Program

Building Outreach and Opportunity for Students in Transition, or the BOOST
Program, was established in 2005 at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) as a special
admissions program for incoming freshman who did not meet the regular admission
requirements. As an intrusive advising program, students are required to meet with their
BOOST Advisors throughout their freshman year, as well as participate in any
recommended activities which aid their successful transition into the institution (Boyer,
2010). The program is specifically designed for students entering their first year of college as a freshman during the first semester of a full academic year.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of the present study was to understand the perception of the BOOST Program from students who successfully completed the program and continued their academic career at Eastern Illinois University or left the institution for various reasons after completing BOOST Program requirements. All BOOST students are considered academically at-risk to successfully transition into the University setting. The BOOST Program is designed to enhance academic success at the University level through specific requirements including mandatory advising, workshops, and campus support services. The focus of this study was to examine what components of the BOOST Program are beneficial to freshman student academic success and transition into an institution of higher education according to the lived experiences of participating students who both continued at EIU or left the institution for various reasons after their program completion.

Statement of Problem

The BOOST Program was created to aid incoming, underprepared freshman who are targeted as academically at-risk, based on their high school grade point average and American College Test (ACT) scores. Since its establishment in 2005, a significant percentage of BOOST Program completers have ended their freshman year in good academic standing. At the completion of the 2009-2010 academic year, 81% of completers were on good academic standing, 6% of completers were on academic warning, 78% of non-completers were on academic probation, and 11% of non-
completers were academically dismissed (Boyer, 2010). Although empirical data supports BOOST Program success, program completers have yet to identify specific components they consider beneficial to their future academic success and transition into the University. To date, no qualitative data have been compiled regarding student perceptions of their successful transition into the University as a result of their participation in the BOOST Program. The present study was a first effort to compile process evaluation data (Schein, 1999) based on student perceptions of the BOOST Program for future development. It was the hope of the researcher that the present study would serve as a source of information for EIU’s Student Success Center staff to further develop the process by which the BOOST Program is carried out.

Research Questions

The following research questions focused the purposes and guided the present study.

1. What is the lived experience of students in the BOOST Program?

2. What components of the BOOST Program do students identify as helping or hindering them for academic success and transition into the University?

3. Is there a difference in perceptions of components of the BOOST Program by students who continued their academic career at EIU and students who left the University for various reasons prior to graduation?

OperationalDefinitions

The following terms provide operational definitions for the purposes of this study.

- Academic Probation. — A student is placed on academic probation if the earned cumulative grade point average is below 2.00 for the second time at the end of a
grading period, but not so low as to warrant academic dismissal ("EIU academic," 2010).

- **Academic Success.** — For purposes of this study, academic success refers to a grade point average of 2.00 or higher on a 4.00 scale.

- **Academic Warning.** — A student is placed on academic warning if the earned cumulative grade point average is below 2.00 for the first time at the end of a grading period, but not so low as to warrant academic dismissal ("EIU academic," 2010).

- **Academic Year.** — An academic year includes both the Fall and Spring semester, excluding summer courses.

- **Academically At-Risk Students.** — Academically at-risk students “refers to students who present credentials indicating high school grade point averages, college entrance exam scores and class ranks which do not meet regular admission standards” (Harris, 2007, p. 9)

- **Academically Dismissed.** — A student is academically dismissed from the University if the earned cumulative grade point average is a 0.00 at the end of a grading period, or if a student on academic probation does not make academic progress toward good academic standing at the end of a grading period ("EIU academic," 2010).

- **Completers.** — Completers of the BOOST Program are students who regularly attended appointments as scheduled and continually practiced the Academic Plan created by the BOOST Advisor.
• Good Academic Standing. — For purposes of this study, good academic standing refers to a grade point average of 2.00 or higher on a 4.00 scale.

• Intrusive Advising. — Robinson (2006) states intrusive advising is “an advisement approach that includes counseling, teaching, academic and social well-being and constant motivation” (p. 6).

• Lived Experience. — The lived experience is a participant’s subjective experience and their perception and meaning of that particular experience (Mertens, 2005).

• Non-Completers. — Non-Completers of the BOOST Program are students who frequently missed or re-scheduled appointments and did not implement the Academic Plan created by the BOOST Advisor.

• Special Admissions Program. — Needle (1991) defines special admissions programs as an admission process involving mandatory requirements designed to enable students who do not meet the regular admission requirements of an institution of higher education to attend that institution (as cited in Harris, 2007, p. 9).

• Successful Transition into University. — For purposes of this study, successful transition into the University occurs when students are acclimated to the University, feel an academic and social sense of belonging at the University, and are able to academically compete with other students at the University.

• Underprepared Students. — Maxwell (1997) noted underprepared students are those who’s “skills, knowledge, motivation, and/or academic ability are significantly below those of the ‘typical’ student in the college or curriculum in which they are enrolled” (as cited in Gordon et al., 2000, p. 133).
Overview of Study

The present thesis presents, in five chapters, findings regarding the experience of students who participated in the BOOST Program as freshman at Eastern Illinois University. Chapter I provides an introduction to the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions that guided the study. Chapter II contains a review of literature regarding special admissions programs. Specifically, areas covered in the literature review regarding special admissions programs include underprepared students, structured first-year programs, one-on-one intrusive advising, and a history of the BOOST Program. Chapter III includes the research methodology and reasoning, descriptions of the processes used to identify participants, data collection, data analysis procedures, the impact of the researcher, and limitations on the study. Chapter IV presents the research findings. Chapter V contains an analysis of the findings, recommendations for BOOST students, the BOOST Program, and future researchers, and a conclusion of the study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews research and related literature of underprepared students, structured first-year programs, and one-on-one intrusive advising; discusses the history of the BOOST Program; and concludes with a chapter summary.

Underprepared Students

Maxwell (1997) defined underprepared students as those students whose “skills, knowledge, motivation, and/or academic ability are significantly below those of the ‘typical’ student in the college or curriculum in which they are enrolled” (as cited in Gordon et al., 2000, p. 133). As Cohen (1998) noted, a decrease in student preparation for higher education occurred during the 1960s as American education witnessed a strong decline in the academic ability of graduating high school seniors. This decrease in college readiness continues today as more and more students are in need of some type of developmental program (Cohen, 1998), such as remedial courses or special admissions programs. Typically, students included in the definition of ‘underprepared’ fall into other categories such as first-generation college students, low socioeconomic families, or minority groups, all of whom can be classified among the lower class and the working class (Barratt, 2011). Because many underprepared students represent these other categories, specifically first-generation college students, they usually do not have a well-developed understanding of higher education and are not likely to seek the academic or personal assistance available to them (Austin, 1977; Gordon et al., 2000).
Structured First-Year Programs

Prior to the beginning of special admissions programs and other first-year programs, preparatory departments offered tutoring and college preparation courses as additions to their curriculum dating back to the mid 1800s (Cohen, 1998; Gordon et al., 2000). The first remedial course in higher education history was offered in 1894 at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts (Gordon et al., 2000), and as American education had a decline in the academic ability of graduating high school students in the mid 1900s, remedial programs increased in order to support the underprepared population (Cohen, 1998). While remedial programs were mainly offered to develop reading, writing, and study skills, underprepared students were in need of further support, specifically easing student transition into a prestige college environment and promoting academic success among underclass students (Barratt, 2011). As the development of remedial programs greatly increased in the late 1900s to even the most selective Ivy League schools (Cohen, 1998; Gordon et al., 2000), first-year programs followed to support those students’ transition and academic success into mass higher education (Strayhorn, 2009).

First-year programs were originally designed to ease the transition from high school to college for at-risk and underprepared students (Strayhorn, 2009). However, over time these programs have evolved in their goals, developing into programs such as first-year experience courses and special admissions programs. While the focus of first-year programs began as an extension of orientation programs, they now focus on additional aspects such as academic success and academic self-confidence. According to the 2006 National Survey on First-Year Seminars, the three most important objectives of all programs included in the study were the development of academic skills, orientation
to campus resources and services, and self-exploration or personal development (National, 2006). Furthermore, the five most important topics reported were study skills, critical thinking, campus resources, academic planning or advising, and time management (National, 2006).

Literature examining the components of first-year programs reveals commonalities among several colleges and universities. According to several studies and reports, the most commonly practiced components were student participation in a special admissions or orientation process ("Campus practices," 1994; D'Abate, 2009; Holland, 1999; Muraskin, 1998), intrusive advisement ("Campus practices," 1994, Heisserer, 2002; Holland, 1999; Muraskin, 1998; Voelker, 2006), conscientious message of success (D'Abate, 2009; Muraskin, 1998), student assessment or testing (Burris, 1990; "Campus practices," 1994; Holland, 1999), resourcing for campus support services (Burris, 1990; Kuh, 2007), tutoring (Burris, 1990; Holland, 1999; "Serving at-risk," 2002; Voelker, 2006), student development, and role models or mentors (D'Abate, 2009; "Serving at-risk, 1989). Other components implemented in the programs included workshops (Burris, 1990), web support (Heisserer, 2002), incentives, and parental involvement ("Serving at-risk," 1989).

Active intervention is required in order for underprepared students to succeed in college (Gordon et al., 2000). Tinto (1993) found that mandatory interventions for underprepared students led to efficient and powerful academic success outcomes. Others are also in strong support of first-year programs creating success for underprepared students in higher education. According to several studies conducted since the late 1990s, structured first-year program participants have successful academic careers in higher
education, including increased grade point averages, credit hours completed, and graduation rates (Sidle & McReynolds, 1999; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrig, 2001), as well as higher retention rates overall (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Sidle & McReynolds, 1999; Williford et al., 2001). More recent studies on first-year programs support past results. In the 2006 National Survey on First-Year Seminars, the National Resource Center surveyed 821 institutions on applicable results which could be applied to their first-year programs. Results showed that nearly 30% of the institutions surveyed reported an increase in academic abilities and nearly 20% of institutions reported an increase in persistence to graduation and grade point averages (National, 2006). In 2008, 133 American higher education institutions participated in a survey conducted by the National Resource Center on student success and learning centers. Over half of the institutions reported increased student academic abilities, academic self-confidence, and grade point averages (National, 2008).

One-on-One Intrusive Advising

According to Robinson (2006), intrusive advising is used “to assess each student’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being during advisement sessions with the hope of providing students with proper knowledge of University procedures and course requirements that provided the student with a sense of belonging and comfort” (p. 12). Every program reviewed for this study was a comprehensive first-year program, all involving one-on-one intrusive advising along with several other components (Burris, 1990; "Campus practices," 1994; D'Abate, 2009; Heisserer, 2002; Holland, 1999; Kuh, 2007; Muraskin, 1998; "Serving at-risk," 1989; Voelker, 2006). Differing from other advisement techniques, intrusive advising is also described as developmental advising.
Winston and Sandor (as cited in Robinson, 2006) described intrusive advising as “growth oriented” (p. 12). Several studies have found intrusive advising to improve grade point average and to have a positive effect on academic achievement for underprepared or academically at-risk students (Austin, Cherney, Crowner, & Hill, 1997; Bernhardt, 1997; Gordon et al., 2000; Schee, 2007). Other authors have concluded intrusive advising was responsible for an increase in retention of underprepared or academically at-risk students (Austin et al., 1997; Bernhardt, 1997; Gordon et al., 2000; Ryan & Glenn, 2003; Schee, 2007; Schwebel, Walburn, Jacobsen, Jerrolds, & Klyce, 2008; Smith, 2007).

During one-on-one intrusive advisement, specific components of advising best support academic success and transition into an institution of higher education. According to Gordon et al. (2000), creating a specific academic plan of action with clear, written goals to improve the student’s academic performance, motivating the student to achieve academic success, and providing continuous feedback to the student are necessary for effective intrusive advisement. Academic plans vary from student to student; however, they usually include an analysis of the student’s skills, regular meetings with the advisor, participation in academic support services including required workshops or coursework, and “a detailed plan developed to address the areas of academic need” (Gordon et al., p. 135). Van (1992) noted underprepared students hold negative attitudes about their academic abilities and self-worth (as cited in Maxwell, 1994); therefore, students will need assistance from the advisor in motivating themselves. “Because the underprepared student is likely to have a negative self-concept with respect to the academic environment, it is important that the advisor provide the developmental student with positive and encouraging feedback when appropriate” (Gordon et al., p. 135).
The BOOST Program

The BOOST Program is a special admissions program at Eastern Illinois University, created in 2005 when it became apparent that a group of students were overlooked by the admissions process. A large portion of underrepresented students were excluded from both EIU’s regular admission requirements and the special admission requirements of the Gateway Program. EIU’s regular admission requirements, which were too high for the underrepresented students, state that a student must have a GPA of 3.00/4.00 and an ACT of at least 18, a GPA of 2.50/4.00 and an ACT of at least 19, or a GPA of 2.25/4.00 and an ACT of at least 22 (“EIU admission,” 2010). Gateway’s admission requirements, which were too low for the underrepresented students, state that a student must have a GPA of 2.00/4.00 and a minimum ACT of 14 (“Gateway,” 2010). Gateway admits underrepresented, disadvantaged students who fit one of the following criteria: first generation college student, low socio-economic status, or minority group member. While Gateway offered an opportunity for qualified students to attend EIU, a group of students with GPA and ACT scores that were lower than those of regularly admitted students, but higher than students eligible for the Gateway program were excluded. Thus, a group of academic affairs administrators, including the Directors of Admissions, Minority Affairs, CASA, and the Assistant Directors of Academic Advising and Student Success Center, formed a committee to create a grant proposal (Sanders, 2004) to support an extensive program including a special admission process, diagnostic testing, advising, required coursework, tutoring, social activities, and other aids in college success. When this proposal was denied, the same committee down-scaled the program and approached Provost Blair Lord with their second proposal (C. Boyer, personal
As a result, BOOST was approved and Academic Affairs funded one graduate assistant to aid Cindy Boyer, Assistant Director of the Student Success Center, in the first year. Since 2005, the BOOST Program has developed into a larger program with the ability to accommodate more first-year students. In the 2010-2011 academic year, the BOOST Program staff included two professional staff, 6 graduate assistants, and admitted 50 students.

Students admitted to the BOOST Program begin their process at EIU during a summer BOOST Orientation program. During BOOST Orientation, students participate in several of the same activities as do students in the regular Freshman Orientation, as well as other special activities specifically for BOOST. These special activities include an introductory presentation to the BOOST Program and mandatory diagnostic testing. Specifically, students are required to complete the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (NDRT), which determines students’ vocabulary and reading comprehension levels, the College Student Inventory, which measures students’ academic skills, motivation, and receptivity to support services, and the Study Behavior Inventory, which is designed to identify current study habits (Boyer, 2010). Students who score below a 12th grade reading level are required to take GST 1000: Reading and Study Improvement. GST 1000 is a reading and study skills improvement course worth two credit hours, which counts towards the student’s GPA, but not towards graduation. Additional requirements include EIU 1111, the University Foundations course, regular meetings with an assigned BOOST Advisor, and fulfillment of an Academic Plan. The Academic Plan (Appendix H) is agreed upon by the student and BOOST Advisor and may include weekly or bi-weekly meetings with the BOOST Advisor, workshops, referrals to other resources, and additional coursework,
as well as developing any needed skills such as reading, note-taking, test-taking, time-management, motivation, and goal setting. Academic Plans are re-evaluated at the end of the Fall semester in order to prepare for the Spring semester. In addition to BOOST Program requirements, BOOST students are expected to attend all classes, utilize Student Success Center resources with problems in class or campus community, and ask all questions necessary for a successful transition. Expectations of completing the BOOST Program include a successful transition to EIU and an increase in academic skills including GPA and academic confidence ("Student success," 2010).

Summary

The review of literature regarding student perceptions of the BOOST Program outlined several elements of special admissions programs. This chapter provided a history and typology of students involved with special admissions programs, as well as a history of general first-year programs in higher education. It also discussed components of general first-year programs that are known to improve academic success and student transition into the University. Specific topics covered in the literature review were underprepared students, structured first-year programs, one-on-one intrusive advising, and the BOOST Program. While there was a substantial amount of literature regarding first year programs, literature regarding student perceptions of these programs was limited.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

This chapter reviews the purpose of the present study, qualitative design and reasoning, research questions, participants, data collection, data analysis, the impact of the researcher’s identity on the study, limitations, and concludes with a chapter summary.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of the present study was to understand the perception of the BOOST Program from students who successfully completed the BOOST Program and continued their academic career at Eastern Illinois University, or left the institution for various reasons after completing BOOST Program requirements. The focus of this study was to examine what components of the BOOST Program were beneficial to freshman student academic success and transition into an institution of higher education according to the voices of participating students who both continued at EIU or left the institution for various reasons.

Qualitative Design and Reasoning

Qualitative, phenomenological inquiry was the methodological choice for the present study. Lichtman (2010) stated qualitative research is a type of educational research “in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters. It often involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in natural and social settings” (p. 5). The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand human phenomena or the lived experiences of humans. By asking broad, general questions, qualitative researchers rely on the perceptions of participants, collect data consisting mostly of words or text,
and then analyze these words for themes (Creswell, 2005). Along with interpreting verbal responses from participants, qualitative researchers use other senses to observe and interpret non-verbal cues. In the present study, one-on-one interviews were conducted to understand the perceptions of the participants regarding their experiences with the BOOST Program. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1998, p. 3).

The purpose of phenomenology is to “obtain a view into [the] participants’ life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings constructed from their ‘lived experiences’” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 364). Mertens (2005) noted that phenomenological research emphasizes the participants’ subjective experience and their perception and meaning of that particular experience. Lichtman (2010) wrote that “the purpose of phenomenology is to describe and understand the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon” (p. 75). Generally, phenomenology is believed to be coined by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s in Europe, and has now spread broadly throughout the United States (Lichtman, 2010; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). It is also important to note that hermeneutics and phenomenology are closely related in terms of research and are sometimes used interchangeably. Hermeneutics refers to the science of interpretation and explanation (Lichtman, 2010).
Research Questions

The following general research questions guided the present study.

1. What is the lived experience of students in the BOOST Program?

2. What components of the BOOST Program do students identify as helping or hindering them for academic success and transition into the University?

3. Is there a difference in perceptions of components of the BOOST Program by students who continued their academic career at EIU and students who left the University for various reasons prior to graduation?

Participants

Participants for the present study were solicited for participation by three forms of contact. The first form of contact consisted of solicitation via EIU e-mail accounts, obtained as separate electronic distribution lists for all prior cohorts from the Student Success Center. This email included information about the study and requested participation of the student (Appendix D). The second form of contact was referral by BOOST Advisors. Student Success Center staff and graduate assistants employed in the academic year of 2010-2011 referred previous BOOST students to the researcher, as well as provided the researcher with prior student history and contact information. The third form of contact was a flier posted in the campus community, which requested participation and included information on the present study (Appendix E). All forms of contact informed students of an incentive to be entered into a pool to win a $50 gift card upon participation in the study. An estimated 230 students were contacted; the first seven participant volunteers to respond to the forms of contact were selected by the researcher for the purposes of the present study.
The research participants consisted of seven BOOST students admitted to the BOOST Program within the five academic years of its existence. Students entering the BOOST Program are considered to be underprepared for college. Underprepared students are those whose skills, knowledge, motivation, and/or academic ability are significantly below those of typical college students (Gordon et al., 2000). Each student was a successful completer of the program. Of the seven participants, four planned to graduate from Eastern Illinois University, and the remaining three left the University for various reasons after completing BOOST Program requirements. Each student was given a pseudonym for the study drawn from the researcher’s favorite young adult literature (Collins, 2008; Meyer, 2005; Paolini, 2003; Riordan, 2009; Rowling, 1998). The first four students planned to continue their education at Eastern Illinois University, and the last three students left the institution prior to degree completion.

Katniss was an African-American female Political Science major who entered the BOOST Program during Fall 2005. As a single mother, she was enrolled in a parenting course in high school which allowed her daughter to attend day care at the school. The teacher of this class took the student-parents on a college recruiting tour to show them they had the ability to attend college despite their parenthood. During the tour, Katniss was introduced to staff and faculty at EIU and shown family housing, which overall influenced her decision to attend. Katniss applied for admission through the Gateway Program, and was placed in the BOOST Program based on her admission criteria. She continued her education at EIU after her program completion.

Harry was an African-American male Communication Studies major who entered the BOOST Program during Fall 2007. As a member of Access Granted, which is a pre-
college program geared toward assisting underrepresented students to realize their potential success at the college level (College Access, 2011), he visited EIU to experience what to expect at a university setting. During his on-campus visit, Harry was introduced to staff representing Minority Affairs, the Admissions Office, and Academic Advising. His experience at EIU influenced his decision to attend the University. Harry applied for regular admission to EIU, and was placed in the BOOST Program based on his admission criteria. He continued his education at EIU after his program completion.

Arya was an African-American female Marketing major who also entered the BOOST Program during Fall 2007. She chose to attend EIU based on its location in Illinois and the distance from her home. Arya applied to regular admission at EIU, and was placed in the BOOST Program based on her admission criteria. She continued her education at EIU after her program completion.

Eragon was an African-American male Physical Education major who entered the BOOST Program during Fall 2008. As a talented track athlete in high school, he participated in state track competitions at EIU. As a senior, Eragon was offered a track scholarship to attend EIU. His school counselor informed him of a special admissions program, the BOOST Program, and along with this, his scholarship, and the location of the University, Eragon decided to attend EIU. After his BOOST Program completion, he continued his education at EIU.

Annabeth was an African-American female Health Studies major who entered the BOOST Program during Fall 2006. During her senior year, an admissions recruiter from EIU visited her high school. During the visit, Annabeth was highly attracted to the knowledge of the recruiter regarding questions about and facts on EIU. She was also a
member of Access Granted, and was able to visit the institution prior to admission. Along with the location of the University, these factors influenced her decision to attend EIU. Annabeth applied to regular admission at the University and was placed in the BOOST Program based on her admission criteria. After her completion of the BOOST Program, Annabeth was academically dismissed from the University due to her low grade point average.

Percy was an African-American male Sociology major who also entered the BOOST Program during Fall 2006. The size and location of EIU influenced his decision to attend the University. Having applied to regular admission, Percy was admitted through the BOOST Program based on his admission criterion. After his completion of the BOOST Program, he was academically dismissed from the University due to his low grade point average.

Bella was an African-American female Psychology major who entered the BOOST Program during Fall 2009. Bella applied to the University through regular admission, and was accepted to the BOOST Program based on her admission criterion. She decided to attend EIU based on this program and the size of the University. After her completion of the program, she left the University and continued her education at another Illinois public institution.

A summary of the demographic information for participants may be found in Table 1.
Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katniss</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eragon</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabeth</td>
<td>Health Studies</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percy</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, the researcher “bracketed” all preconceptions regarding the BOOST Program (Appendix F). “Bracketing involves placing one’s own thoughts about the topic in suspense or out of question” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 80). Johnson and Christensen (2004) pointed out that phenomenologists must bracket any preconceptions, learned feelings, or experiences with the phenomenon in order to experience it in its purest form.

The researcher conducted one-on-one in depth interviews with seven former BOOST students who successfully completed the program. The site for six interviews
was the Student Success Center at Eastern Illinois University, and the site for one interview was at another state-assisted university where the participant resided at the time of the interview. In all cases, interviews were audio recorded in a quiet location selected by the researcher with the agreement of the interviewee.

Before each interview began, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked the participant to read and sign an Informed Consent document (Appendix B). Participants were notified they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty, and that if they did so, all data collected from them would be destroyed. During this time, the researcher made efforts to enhance rapport with participants in order to create a more comfortable environment for interviewing and to familiarize the researcher with each participant’s manner of communication. According to Lichtman (2010), it is assumed in hermeneutics that humans use language to experience the world and to obtain understanding and knowledge of the world.

The one-on-one interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). The goal of the protocol was to encourage participants to think about their specific experiences with the BOOST Program and describe it in rich descriptive detail. The semi-structured nature of the interview protocol enabled the researcher to make on-site probes as follow-up questions to elicit richer descriptive anecdotes about participant experiences in the BOOST Program.

Data Analysis

The in-depth interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Participants were provided with the transcription of their interview for member checking and offered the opportunity to make any alterations. Johnson and Christensen (2004) explained that
researchers should use member checking whenever possible in the process of phenomenology. “This means that the researcher should have the original participants review the interpretations and descriptions of the experience” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 368). Participants were informed if no response was received by the researcher after three weeks (21 days), it would be assumed they had no alterations for their transcription. None of the participants responded to the interview transcripts, so all transcripts as transcribed were included in the data analysis.

Each of the transcribed interviews was examined for significant statements that had relevance to BOOST Program components. Specifically, if a statement suggested important meaning to the participant in describing the experience, it was included in a list of significant statements and recorded verbatim. Once an exclusive list was created of significant statements, data across participants were examined for common themes regarding the components of the BOOST Program. The purpose of identifying common themes was to describe the ‘essence,’ or deeper level of understanding, of the experience for the group of participants (Lichtman, 2010; Mertens, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Phenomenologists generally assume that there is some commonality in human experience, and they seek to understand this commonality. This commonality of experience is called an essence, or invariant structure, of the experience (a part of the experience that is common or consistent across the research participants) (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 365).

Once the essence of the BOOST Program experiences was determined, all participants were asked to complete a second member check to ensure validity of the essence. The
participants were once again informed if no response was received by the researcher after three weeks (21 days), it would be assumed they were comfortable with the researcher’s interpretation of their lived experiences. No return responses were received.

**Impact of Researchers Identity on Study**

The researcher was a 2009-2011 graduate assistant in the Student Success Center and a BOOST Advisor. The researcher was familiar with the BOOST Program’s admissions process, orientation, structure, and requirements, and also had access to data about the BOOST Program and student progress. The idea for the study occurred as a result of the researcher’s familiarity with the BOOST Program and many of its current student clientele. As a consequence, three current or former BOOST students had prior interactions with the researcher, Bella, Annabeth, and Harry. To experience the phenomenon in its purest form, the researcher bracketed all preconceptions regarding the BOOST Program (Appendix F). However, Lichtman (2010) found in her experiences “that it is too simplistic to think that a researcher can set aside his or her own ideas about a phenomenon” (p. 80).

**Limitations**

The outcomes of the present study apply only to the perceptions of the respondents, and may not reflect the entire range of student experiences with the program and its staff members by all BOOST participants. At the same time, while the researcher made conscious efforts to remain unbiased and objective, “there is no ‘getting it right’ because there could be many ‘rights.’ Descriptions, understandings, and interpretations are based on the data [the researcher] collect[ed] and [the researcher’s] ability to organize and integrate them to make a meaningful whole” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 16). Also, the
present study applies only to the campus on which the study was carried out. Finally, the researcher’s prior exposure to BOOST participants may have limited participant’s full disclosure of information despite efforts made to enhance rapport.

Summary

Chapter III outlines the qualitative design and reasoning of the present study, as well as research questions which guided the study. Seven research participants who were admitted to EIU through the BOOST Program were interviewed using a qualitative, phenomenological method regarding their experiences with a special admissions process and components of the BOOST Program. The interview protocol was described and consisted of in-depth interviews with each research participant. Each interview was transcribed and data analysis was discussed. Chapter IV presents the findings of the research, while Chapter V contains an analysis of those findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future researchers and the BOOST Program at EIU.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter reviews the findings of the present study including the four major themes, thematic units of each theme, and significant statements from the interviews of research participants, and concludes with a chapter summary.

Introduction to Findings

Chapter IV outlines the findings from the interviews conducted for the purposes of this research study. Seven former BOOST students were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the BOOST Program using qualitative methods (Lichtman, 2010). The semi-structured protocol focused on what components of the BOOST Program were beneficial to student academic success and transition into an institution of higher education for underprepared (Gordon et al., 2000) freshman students.

The findings were derived through phenomenological data analysis (Lichtman, 2010; Mertens, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2004), where the transcriptions of interviews were analyzed for significant statements. The purpose of identifying significant statements was to find the commonalities among participants and thus identify the essence of their collective experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The significant statements from the interviews led to thematic units which in turn led to the development of four major themes. The four major themes included Support, Personal Development, Program Structure, and Access to Resources. Table 2 illustrates the essence of freshman students in the BOOST Program through four major themes and their subsequent thematic units. The findings presented are under the four major themes.
Table 2

Major Themes and Thematic Units of the Essence of Underprepared Freshman Students in a Special Admissions Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme 1: Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Thematic Unit: Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thematic Unit: Personal Support from BOOST Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Thematic Unit: Academic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thematic Unit: Support outside BOOST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thematic Unit: Comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Thematic Unit: Group Dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Thematic Unit: Motivational Feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme 2: Personal Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Thematic Unit: Self-Awareness of Poor Performance in High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thematic Unit: Acceptance into College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Thematic Unit: Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thematic Unit: Personal Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thematic Unit: Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Thematic Unit: Success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme 3: Program Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Thematic Unit: One-on-One Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thematic Unit: Hierarchy of Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Thematic Unit: Components Less than Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thematic Unit: Definition of BOOST Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thematic Unit: Definition of BOOST Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme 4: Access to Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Thematic Unit: Referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thematic Unit: Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Thematic Unit: Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thematic Unit: Tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thematic Unit: Diagnostic Testing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Phenomenological Themes**

Four major themes emerged during the data analysis process, Support, Personal Development, Program Structure, and Access to Resources. The major themes represented a combination of the thematic units noted in Table 2. The themes together created rich descriptions of the essence of the participants’ lived experiences and provide a meaningful framework to appreciate the value of the BOOST Program to underprepared students.

**Major Theme 1: Support**

The most prominent theme of the experience of participating in the BOOST Program was student descriptions of the support they received during their first year while participating in the special admissions program. Participants described various aspects of the support they received throughout their BOOST experience including a caring relationship with their BOOST Advisor and the BOOST Program as a whole, personal support from their BOOST Advisor, support and guidance from the Academic Plan, support from friends and family outside the BOOST Program, a relaxing and comfortable environment, the support of a group dynamic environment, and support through motivational feedback.

*Thematic Unit: Care*

Throughout the interviewing process, four participants identified care as a meaningful lived experience with their BOOST Advisor. Three of the four students made up the complete group of participants who left EIU after their completion of the BOOST Program. Harry recalled his experiencing explaining, “People really care about you here. People do actually care about you.” For Harry, the experience of feeling cared for was
important to him, and he related back to this point several times in his interview. This feeling of care was “what kept [him] coming back” to the Student Success Center.

Each participant who left the University after their completion of the program also described their experience of feeling cared for during the program. Annabeth “loved the fact that [my BOOST Advisor] listened to me. I loved the fact that she knew I was serious about being in the medical field and she didn’t try to deter me away.” Annabeth found comfort in the care she received from her advisor, specifically simply taking the time to listen to her and supporting Annabeth’s academic goals. Bella was attracted to the BOOST Program due to the care she received from her advisor, and this attraction allowed her to open up communication with her advisor. She reflected on her experience: “They seemed to want to help and that’s something that drew me to it.” Percy’s experience, along with his peers, was his sense of support through the care he received from his BOOST Advisor, “[My BOOST Advisor] really cared. She, you know, was that support for me.” As shown through the interviews with participants, several experienced an identified sense of care from their advisors.

Thematic Unit: Personal Support from BOOST Advisor

The most prominent thematic unit throughout the theme was Personal Support from the BOOST Program. All participants in the study described several experiences in the program as receiving personal support, mostly direct support from their BOOST Advisor. In fact, they all described their relationship with their advisor as being close, comfortable, and personally supportive.

In Arya’s experience she had a very close relationship with her advisor. “I really liked her. I loved her. She is real cool. She helped me and not only that, I would talk to
her and relate to her and she knew stuff I was going through.” Arya’s experience with her advisor was one of empathy; her advisor experienced similar situations compared to Arya’s and was able to relate to her on a personal level. Arya’s relationship with her advisor continued after her BOOST experience: “I still talk to her sometimes. It was a good relationship.”

In Harry’s interactions with his BOOST Advisor, he felt comfortable discussing both academic and personal issues. He explained, “I talked about a lot of issues with her: school, family, roommate issues...career issues. You know, so I talked about a wide range of things.” Harry’s experience was very similar to Arya’s. “We had a good relationship. And we still do.” He continued to meet with an advisor at the Student Success Center after the completion of his program.

Eragon’s BOOST Advisor offered the support he needed for his academic work, but also extended support into his personal life. Eragon described the academic support from his advisor.

She was really nice, and she told me to just try to keep your grades up and stuff like that, and, you know ask me if you need anything or need to get any help. So like throughout the semester every time I went to her, I had questions about little things. She really helped me out.

Eragon then described the personal support he received from his advisor. “She really helped me out with stuff like that and just other stuff that didn’t really have to do with school. She was like a mentor about that stuff.” Eragon felt comfortable discussing all aspects of his life with his advisor, whether it be academic or personal. He summed up his relationship with his advisor, when he stated, “We had a relationship where we would
talk about school stuff and then talk about social life, campus, if things were cool and stuff like that.”

Katniss received personal support from her BOOST Advisor as well. In fact, they were able to relate to one another having both entered higher education as single mothers. Katniss’ experience was close and personally supportive: “We were close. We met once a week. She had a child also, so she could relate to how certain things were kind of hard. She was very helpful.”

Among all of the seven participants, Annabeth’s experience with her BOOST Advisor was the least personally supportive. In Annabeth’s words, her advisor would have offered her personal support if Annabeth sought it. She stated, “I did feel comfortable... I do feel like I could have went [sic] to her if I had a problem with something on campus.” When Annabeth did approach her advisor, she was always given the support she needed. “As far as an advisor, she was very hands on with me; she helped me when I had a question.”

For Bella her advisor’s support was without limitations of any kind. She explained that from the beginning of her BOOST experience, she felt genuine rapport. “Right off the bat...it was a connection. It was nice and my advisor is a cool person; [my advisor’s] really personable.” Once her connection was made, Bella’s maintained an open relationship with her advisor. “I think we pretty much talked about all things. We would sit there and talk sometimes over time and talk about random things.” The personal support Bella experienced from her BOOST Advisor was highlighted throughout her interview.
While Percy’s experience with his BOOST Advisor was one of personal support, his sincerity while discussing his advisor during his interview revealed a much deeper connection than his other peers. During his first year as a college student, his father passed away, and Percy found solace and support from his advisor. “I was having some stressful times. My freshman year actually my father passed so that was a real stressful time for me like at the moment, and I talked to [my BOOST Advisor] a lot about that.” Percy elaborated on his advisor’s support after his father’s death: “She was real helpful and helped me get through the situation. She was someone I could go to if I was stressed out or upset or something.” His BOOST Advisor removed the barriers of scheduled meetings to accommodate Percy’s needs during the difficult time. “She’s understanding and she’s open. She had an open door policy. There would be times I wouldn’t have an appointment and I would just stop on by…and then we would talk for like five minutes.” The bond created from the personal support offered to Percy was unforgettable, which he described during his interview: “I can definitely say that was my favorite person at Eastern.”

**Thematic Unit: Academic Plan**

As students discussed their sources of support in the BOOST Program, three participants described support from the Academic Plan they created with their BOOST Advisor. Harry explained that the Academic Plan (Appendix H) supported him in being successful at the University. “That first year it was great because, you know, we really had a strategic plan and an action plan to get me to what I wanted to do, so I loved that.” Harry’s BOOST Advisor used the plan to hold him accountable for his agreed upon
responsibilities as a student. He explained, “She helped me follow the Academic Plan. I feel like it helped me be successful.”

Arya recalled her experience with the Academic Plan as she stated, “I do remember each time we would come up with the plan each semester, the classes I’m taking, taking out time to study, and tutoring on campus.” Arya’s experience with the Academic Plan was that it aided in her academic success at the University. She explained, “It helped with my academic success when we would go over the Academic Plan.”

Although Bella was unsure of the title of the Academic Plan, she and her BOOST Advisor re-visited the plan often. “In the beginning, there was something I wrote with what I want to accomplish and what I think I can do. And I did that and we would go over it.”

**Thematic Unit: Support outside BOOST**

While all participants experienced personal support from their BOOST Advisors, they also described the personal support they received outside the BOOST Program from their family and friends, as well as other members of the campus community including athletic team coaches and members, Registered Student Organizations (RSO), and Resident Assistants.

Arya’s personal support system extended to her family and friends. Her family was a strong support during her career in higher education, and along with her friends, she enjoyed a personalized academic support system.

My family, like definitely backing me up. And then friends, like well we would all do like study sessions. And sometimes we didn’t get much done, but we did it
to help each other out. If someone has something to do, we will stay up and help
them. But my parents are supportive.

Harry’s support system included his family and friends, and also extended to
several mentors in the campus community.

I had a lot of mentors. I’ve had a number of people that really are on my side and
friends of course. All these people who are really close to me. Of course my
family, my cousins. I really talk to them a lot about school. My parents, I talk to
them enough. I know what works for me. It’s really great to have people by your
side.

Harry developed a system that worked for him, and he found comfort in knowing his
personal support system existed just for him.

Eragon’s experience with a personal support system was unique to the participant
group. He found support as a member of an athletic team at EIU, including his fellow
team members and coaching staff. As a freshman, Eragon could not practice with his
team because of his grades. He explained his personal support system outside of the
BOOST Program.

My track team. They helped me feel like I was part of the team, like even the
coaching staff, and they knew that the reason why I wasn’t practicing was because
I didn’t handle my grades right in high school. And so they made sure I was
getting to class and getting my grades right, and they had a progress report on me
and made sure I was doing my homework, and my friends would make sure like
we’re all doing stuff together socially, but actually academically too.

His team came together and supported him both academically and socially.
Katniss was slightly withdrawn as she described the support she received outside the BOOST Program. One particular friend remained a strong support throughout her college career.

I made some friends. We remained friends all four years of college and one friend helped me a lot, it was one main friend, she kind of helped me so I could work and attend different organizations and she would keep my baby while I went to the organizations.

Katniss also found a support system in a RSO known as the Eastern Student Parent Association (E-SPA).

There was the E-SPA program. Those were the kind of two support systems I had. My mom helped out also. She stayed back [home]. She did what she could, but she was at home, so in Charleston it was my friend and the E-SPA program.

Bella reflected other participants’ support systems, made up of her friends and family. While her family supported her at home, her roommates became her close friends and support for her outside the BOOST Program:

I was in a triple and I had two roommates. We kinda would all do homework so they were good influences in that way. My friends there were good and then of course back home my parents stayed on me and made sure I got everything done.

Percy’s main support outside the BOOST Program was his family. He especially found support from his siblings and other family members who went to college.

I had my family; I also had two siblings who were in college at the time. So if I had a question they were all a call away. And a lot of family all went to college, so I had a pretty good support structure behind me.
Annabeth’s explanation of her experience of her support outside of the BOOST Program was unique to the participants. She explained, “I think my RA and my BOOST Advisor together, they were a pretty good team to me.” Each person provided different but supportive forms of encouragement.

*Thematic Unit: Comfort*

As several participants described their experience in the BOOST Program, they identified a feeling of comfort, of being in a relaxed and supportive environment. As Eragon explained, “It was pretty chill...I was very comfortable.” Harry echoed that feeling when he stated, “It helped me feel comfortable.” Bella described that “everybody just seemed really nice and they seemed to want to help.” This environment was encouraging to her: “I felt comfortable.” Annabeth and Percy also reflected their peers comfort levels. Annabeth stated, “They set it up to where we’re here to help. That’s what I was comfortable with.” Percy said, “It was real lax...I felt very comfortable.” His BOOST Advisor also added to the level of comfort: “She was there for me and made me feel comfortable.”

*Thematic Unit: Group Dynamic*

While the BOOST Program is carried out as an individualized program, many participants’ experiences included a group dynamic which was introduced to them during their BOOST Program Orientation. Katniss enjoyed her experience meeting other students during the BOOST Orientation. “It was fun. It was something new. Getting to meet people because pretty much the people that you met at the orientation were in your class that you would graduate with, the people you would see in your classes.” Harry’s experience meeting other BOOST students during orientation comforted him. “It helped
me not feel like isolated; it helped me not feel as if I’m the only person doing this.”

However, Harry desired more group experiences than just the orientation event.

I wish that I could have met and mingled [with] more of the BOOST [students].

Maybe I could lean on them and become friends since we have something as major as the BOOST Program in common, we could have worked together and stayed in touch all those years.

During his interview, Harry recommended that a group component be added to the BOOST Program. Bella’s experience of a group dynamic reflected Katniss’ experience. She explained, “It was cool. I met all the other students. We all went through the same orientation, so I met all the other students that I would probably be seeing a lot, and that was fun.”

*Thematic Unit: Motivational Feedback*

The final thematic unit of the Support theme was the motivational feedback participants received from their BOOST Advisor. According to Gordon et al. (2000), it is important that an advisor provide underprepared students with positive, encouraging feedback because of the likeliness that this student has a negative self-concept of their academic potential.

The participants who identified this motivational feedback explained it was necessary for their success in the BOOST Program and is something they need in order to remain successful. Katniss described her advisor’s style of motivational feedback: “She let me know when I wasn’t doing well in a class and what I needed to do to do better and just stay[ed] on top of me.” This push “kept [her] on track and made sure [she] stayed on track.” Annabeth acknowledged she needed a motivational feedback to encourage her.
She explained, “I’m the kind of person who needs somebody to report to, to keep me grounded.” Bella paralleled Annabeth’s need for regular encouragement. She stated, “I work well if somebody has something that they expect of me; if they tell me that, I try to do my best with it.” Bella explained that having the motivational feedback from her advisor “helps me to know that I’m doing well and that somebody is happy with me.”

**Major Theme 2: Personal Development**

Another theme derived from the lived experience of BOOST students is best described as an intricate combination of the four major interview themes: Support, Personal Development, Program Structure, and Access to Resources. According to the participants, the essence of the BOOST experience was having a structured, supportive contact and connection within the University, which aided them in their own personal development and provided them resources necessary for academic success and transition. BOOST participation was based on student descriptions of their own personal development. Throughout the interviews, participants discussed their self-awareness of poor performance in high school and their acknowledgement of the program aiding their acceptance, transition, and success in college. The interviews also revealed that participants developed skills of independence and personal growth during their time in the program.

**Thematic Unit: Self-Awareness of Poor Performance in High School**

During interviews, four participants acknowledged they were aware of needing academic performance improvement from high school to college level study skills and grade point averages. As each student described not being accepted into the regular admissions process, their responses began with explanations of their high school
performance being the reason for their college admission barrier. Arya expressed a sense of a new beginning or a fresh start from her high school years as she stated, “It helped me get off the ground. In high school I had a low GPA.” Her nonverbal expressions revealed there had been a sense of worry prior to her acceptance into the program. Eragon, Katniss, and Bella expressed the same awareness of high school performance. Eragon explained, “The program is here for students like me who have a decent GPA…In high school, my study skills were horrible, like last minute studying and last minute everything basically. I didn’t handle my grades right in high school.” Katniss’ self-awareness of her need of improvement came to her during her high school years, “I had made it through high school and I wasn’t on the honor roll; of course I knew back then [high school] was a struggle for me.” Bella also explained she “hadn’t done that well in the beginning of my high school years.”

**Thematic Unit: Acceptance into College**

Responses were much more positive when participants described the experience of their general acceptance into the University. In fact, all participants expressed feelings of joy and gratefulness in both their verbal and nonverbal reactions; however, there was a major difference in responses of students who remained at the University to continue their education and those who left for various reasons. Three of the four students who continued their education at the University all expressed positive emotions in their experience, but also passively addressed their awareness of what they perceived as outsiders’ reactions to the acceptance being negative.

Arya shared her experience with a smile and a shrug, “I was excited to be accepted. And even though I had to go through the BOOST Program, I really didn’t see
anything wrong with it.” Harry’s experience was confusing at first and then became positive once he learned of the program’s assistance. “It was interesting because I got accepted at six schools…and I have to go through a program at Eastern, so I was a little confused. But from reading about it and learning about it, it was actually good.” Harry was the one student among those who continued at the University to not mention perceived outsider reactions. Eragon explained his experience:

I know most people would feel like it downgrades you, but I didn’t feel like that at all, and I was grateful to be accepted. It doesn’t matter which program you’re in as long as you’re in college. There are other people that aren’t in college that didn’t have a chance.

Along with Eragon’s verbal explanation, his nonverbal cues also relayed a sense of pride for being accepted in college. He straightened his posture and smiled as he said, “I was just grateful to be accepted. I was happy with that. It wasn’t like I was disappointed because I had to go through this program,” was Katniss’ response. Her experience, along with Arya and Eragon, was excitement and appreciation for being accepted into college through a program; however, it passively argued her perceived reactions of those outside the program. As she said, “It wasn’t like I was disappointed…,” it revealed that she expects others to have had a disappointing reaction to being accepted to a special admissions program.

The three participants interviewed who left the institution after their program completion all expressed feelings of joy and excitement, as well as a sense of relaxation after their acceptance. Annabeth’s experience was one of relief, “I was just like…I’m in! Yes! This is the school I wanted to go to; this is my top choice. Anything I have to do to
get in, I’m in.” Bella expressed her excitement, “It was really a surprise; I was glad I was accepted, and I was glad to have the opportunity and that someone gave me a chance.” Percy explained, “I was just happy honestly to be accepted.” While the students who remained at the University addressed outsider reactions, all participants who left the institution did not mention outsider reactions to a special admissions program. However, all seven participants expressed their joy and appreciation for their admission.

**Thematic Unit: Independence**

Some participants described how they continued to be successful independently after their completion of the program. Arya’s experience during the BOOST Program was to learn the skills necessary to be successful in a college setting, and from there be productive on her own as a student. Her goals in the program were to “stay focused, make sure stuff is done, keep [her] grades up, and from there be able to do it [herself].” Part of her experience in the Program was to acquire the ability to become independent and self-reliable for her academic success. Katniss explained the skills she learned through the BOOST Program facilitated her independence after program completion. She explained, “Once I got back on my own, I was able to take everything I learned [and] apply that to my three years left at the school.” Both participants’ responses reflected the sense of independence gained from their BOOST experience.

**Thematic Unit: Personal Growth**

Throughout the interviews, several participants credited the program as aiding them in achieving personal growth. Whether their growth was identified as helping one grow as a person or breaking through a self-inflicted barrier to education or transition, the students described this growth in different ways, with each statement relating to their own
personal growth. Harry explained the program “helped me out a lot; it helped me grow.” He went on to explain if the BOOST Program would have been available to him all four years of his undergraduate education, he would have been more successful. Despite the program’s end, Harry continued regular meetings as a walk-in student in the Student Success Center. Eragon and Annabeth described their experience with the BOOST Program as having opened their eyes to a realization. According to Eragon, “it opened my eyes up to things I needed to change; it opened my eyes up to what I needed to improve.” A personal epiphany occurred in Eragon as he worked through his freshman year with his BOOST Advisor. In his situation, he became aware of necessary changes within himself, that without he would not succeed in the University setting. In Annabeth’s case, she entered the program with a self-inflicted barrier to assistance from her BOOST Advisor. As she progressed through her first year, she experienced her own version of personal growth: “[my BOOST Advisor] stuck through my stubbornness and kind of made me open up my eyes.” With the assistance of her BOOST Advisor, Annabeth experienced personal growth through breaking down her own barriers to academic success and transition.

*Thematic Unit: Transition*

Several students identified their BOOST experience in materially aiding their transition, creating the sense of welcome and belonging. As Harry described his transition into a college setting, he explained “the whole program” helped him by “[making] me feel comfortable, like there was a plan for me and this school thing,” as opposed to simply being just another student. He said, “There are too many students that get lost in the shuffle, even at Eastern,” but being a part of the BOOST Program, he could see a plan
for himself at the institution. This discovery aided him in feeling a sense of purpose at EIU, instead of being a stranger or outsider at the institution. Eragon’s transitional experience was similar to Harry’s experience in that he was uncomfortable with the unknowns of higher education, but was able to bridge this gap through his relationship with his BOOST Advisor. “Going to talk to [my advisor] and having the BOOST Program there” helped Eragon with his transition into the institution. He explained, “You get scared when you go to college,” but with his BOOST Advisor’s help, he realized, “it’s not that different.” Percy’s experience also mirrored that of Harry and Eragon. He particularly compared his own experience with those of his own friends. “I’ve had some friends who didn’t have a mentor and some of them feel like no one cares about them.” For Percy, his transition was aided by his meetings with his BOOST Advisor. “The fact that you have the meetings with your BOOST Advisor, it’s a way to show they haven’t forgotten about you.” Simply through his personal contact with his advisor, Percy experienced an impression of importance, that someone in the institution was paying attention to him. Katniss and Annabeth identified their BOOST Advisor as their main source of transition in the University because the advisor was a constant resource of answers to any questions. According to each student’s experience, the BOOST Program aided in the student being a part of the institution instead of apart from the institution.

**Thematic Unit: Success**

The final thematic unit making up the personal development theme was success. Many of the interviewers related the success they have experienced in the University setting, both academically and transitionally, to the BOOST Program. Harry was the most descriptive with his experience of success. He explained, “that’s why I keep coming back
to the Student Success Center; I learned that if I don’t come back, I do worse...It puts me in the place where I could be successful.” As included in a previous thematic unit, Harry felt it necessary to continue as a walk-in student when his first year and BOOST experience came to an end. Harry also found success to be a common goal between him and his BOOST Advisor. “[My advisor] wants me to succeed and I want to succeed and I think that put us together.” His experience with success continued past his BOOST experience, as he stated, “I think that I’m successful; I’m going to still be successful after this.” Other students paralleled Harry’s experience with continued success after the BOOST Program and in their future. According to Katniss, “I was able to take everything I learned from my BOOST Advisor [and] I was able to apply that to my three years left at the school.” Bella mirrored this experience, explaining that, “It’s probably been that year I spent with [the BOOST Program] was better for me now.”

**Major Theme 3: Program Structure**

Another major theme described by participants regarding their experience of the BOOST Program was the program’s structure. Throughout interviews, all participants relayed their experience to the interviewer and included discussion on their one-on-one meetings with their BOOST Advisor, the hierarchy of special admissions programs at EIU, expectations with a focus on components with which their participation was not required, and various definitions of a BOOST Advisor and the BOOST Program.

*Thematic Unit: One-on-One Meetings*

As participants described their BOOST experiences, many recalled the one-on-one meetings with their BOOST Advisor. One-on-one meetings are the base of the program, where students meet with their BOOST Advisor on an agreed upon, timely
An early question in the interview protocol was to describe the experience of the BOOST Program as they remember it (Appendix A). Arya’s immediate response to the question was “meetings;” as she explained her experience, she concluded with, “I really remember meetings.” Eragon had a similar response: “just meeting with [my BOOST Advisor] just once every two weeks.” Annabeth and Percy, both students who left the University after they completed the program, explained a major part of their experience was the one-on-one meetings as well. Annabeth recalled, “Probably just the meetings I had when I would go by and check in,” and Percy said the program aided him during “the meetings, like the weekly meetings.”

**Thematic Unit: Hierarchy of Programs**

Most participants were aware of needing academic performance improvement from high school to college, which was reflected in the thematic unit: poor performance in high school. Generally, they were grateful having been admitted to the BOOST Program, reflected in the thematic unit: acceptance into college. However, six students verbalized their awareness of a hierarchy of special admissions programs at EIU. Particularly, students were aware that a separate program known as Gateway existed, which had lower admissions requirements than the BOOST Program [http://www.eiu.edu/~admissions/gateway.php].

When describing his experience at being admitted to the University, Eragon explained he was grateful and excited despite his self-interpreted perception that others look down upon a special admissions program. “I knew there was a lower program, Gateway, and people look down upon that, too.” During Arya’s interview, she discussed her experience with the components of the program, and she stated “there was another
program, Gateway, that had to do study tables,” while BOOST students did not. Eragon explained how his expectations of the BOOST Program were more than what he actually experienced: “I thought it was going to be a little bit more hands on, as in like not as much as Gateway, like four hours [of study tables], but at least one or two study hours. Or like more check-ins or stuff like that.” As he used Gateway for an example, he pointed out the differences in the programs, with Gateway being more intrusive than BOOST. Percy paralleled Eragon’s comparison. “It wasn’t too strict and crazy like Gateway. It didn’t put more pressure on you.” Bella described that she did not have many expectations of the program prior to the beginning of her first year; however, she had “heard of the Gateway Program, but it was different than that.” Annabeth, a student who left E1U after the program’s completion, explained that she needed more structure from the BOOST Program. She resolved that “they need to find a nice medium between the two because Gateway is really strict and BOOST is not strict enough.”

**Thematic Unit: Components Less than Expectations**

Another thematic unit within program structure was that actual components of the BOOST Program were less strict than students expected prior to the beginning of their first year at E1U. Eragon described his experience as being “less than I expected it was going to be...I thought it was going to be a little bit more hands on.” When Arya became aware of the components of the BOOST Program, she explained, “I’m glad we didn’t have to do study tables.” Annabeth described a similar experience as the other two participants. As she became aware of the BOOST components, she explained, “we didn’t have to do study tables or extra stuff or all these restrictions.” Coming into the program, students had specific expectations and judgments of the components; however, their
experiences of the components appeared to be less than that of their anticipated expectations.

*Thematic Unit: Definition of BOOST Advisor*

Participants described their interactions and experiences with their BOOST Advisor; however, the definition of this advisor's job role varied when described by the students. Various statements showed a possible confusion with not only the definition of the BOOST Advisor, but also confusion with the student's Academic Advisor. As Katniss described her experience with her BOOST Advisor, she explained “they did everything I needed them to do as far as...picking my classes, major.” She further explained that her advisor, “helped me get my Gen Eds out of the way; then when I wasn't taking certain classes or I wanted to change my major, she would keep me on track until I decided to take political science.” These particular descriptions by Katniss are responsibilities of a student's Academic Advisor. Annabeth's statements regarding her BOOST Advisor also confused the definition of the advisor. She explained, “I did have to go undecided my first semester, but she still basically set it up to where I was going to have to take Gen Eds before [she put me in a science class].” Although Annabeth's BOOST Advisor may have recommended she take General Education courses as she began her education at EIU, it was not the responsibility of the BOOST Advisor, but rather the Academic Advisor, to make academic course selections. Annabeth also recommended “the advisors could be overall more knowledgeable on all subjects;” however, BOOST Advisors work with students on improving academic skills in a university setting, rather than advise students about their academic courses. These particular descriptions of Katniss and Annabeth’s experiences of their BOOST Advisors
showed either a confusion with the definition of the advisor or the BOOST Advisor taking on responsibilities beyond their given duties.

*Thematic Unit: Definition of BOOST Program*

One question posed to participants was whether or not the BOOST Program met their expectations. Four students described their experience prior to entering the program as one of confusion and misunderstanding. Harry described he “didn’t know what it was at first; I didn’t know what I was going through.” Katniss mirrored this experience in more detail: “I thought maybe it would be like high school and I would meet with an advisor, I mean that’s it. I really honestly didn’t know what to expect. I knew the program was to help, but at what aspect they would help me I didn’t know.” Additionally, Percy explained, “I really didn’t know what to expect to be honest with you,” and Bella said, “Going into it I didn’t understand it.”

**Major Theme 4: Access to Resources**

Another major theme discovered through significant statements during the interviews was Access to Resources. As participants described their experiences of the BOOST Program, they included several descriptions of the resources provided through the BOOST Program, the Student Success Center, and the campus community. These resources included referrals to other resources on campus, BOOST Orientation, 30 minute workshops, tutoring, and diagnostic testing.

*Thematic Unit: Referrals*

An important responsibility of a BOOST Advisor is to act as a reference for other resources on campus, depending on the needs of each individual BOOST student. Several participants’ experience of the BOOST Program involved referrals from their advisor to
other resources on campus. Katniss explained, “They did everything I needed them to do as far as the different resources on campus.” She also stated her BOOST Advisor was “very helpful as far as different resources…if she wasn’t able to assist me, she had the knowledge to guide me somewhere.” When Katniss needed tutoring for specific courses, she stated, “My BOOST Advisor was the one that gave me a list of tutors.” As Arya searched for activities or resources on campus during her freshman year, she stated her advisor “tried to think of things on campus for me.” Eragon reflected his own experience: “She told me just a lot of resources just to get help.” Annabeth felt confident with the resources she was directed to from her BOOST Advisor. She said, “I knew that going through BOOST, I was going to get put in contact with the right people if I ever encountered a problem.” Specifically, when Annabeth was in need of tutoring, her advisor directed her to reliable tutors: “Who they specifically sent me to was better than somebody just going, seeing the flier, or something like that. BOOST pointed me to someone I felt was better.”

Thematic Unit: Orientation

During the summer before the start of the first year, the BOOST Program offers a unique Orientation program for incoming students separate from the general new student orientation program. Three participants recalled their BOOST Orientation as a helpful and informative experience which clarified their misunderstandings. Eragon described his experience: “It was actually fun, it was pretty good, it wasn’t like regular orientation. It was more focused on what the BOOST Program is and how they were going to develop students into regular students and help them succeed.” Katniss’ questions regarding the BOOST Program were answered during her orientation event. She stated, “It was a big
help informatively; it answered any of the questions I had.” Annabeth paralleled her peers’ experiences when she explained, “It gave me a better understanding of what it was; it did help with my understanding of what they expected and what we were going to be doing all year.”

**Thematic Unit: Workshops**

The Student Success Center, which houses the BOOST Program, provides 30 minute topical academic skill-building workshops each semester. Other departments at EIU also provide workshops, such as the Writing Center and Career Services. These workshops were not a component of the BOOST Program, but were often recommended or required by a BOOST Advisor as extra help for their students. Throughout the interviews, participants had differing views about the workshops. Arya did not find purpose in attending the workshops. She stated, “I feel like they were just there, I went and then moved on...they’re time fillers.” Harry found the workshops he attended to be informative; however, relying upon himself to carry out the skills discussed in the workshops was a struggle for him. He said, “I feel like they helped me. Once I get them down. I feel like implementation is a big thing.” For Harry, it took several workshops for him to attend before he was able to accomplish a specific skill. Eragon’s experience with a workshop provide by the Writing Center aided him in writing a paper. He explained, “It was a writing one. It helped me get started on one of my first big papers.” Once Katniss attended workshops by the Writing Center and Career Services, she saw an improvement in academic skills. She described her experience stating, “They helped me as far as resume writing, interviewing, I’m better at paper writing. It helped me from when I first started college.”
Thematic Unit: Tutoring

As students in the BOOST Program move through their freshman year, they may require tutoring in specific courses with which they are struggling. Three students recalled their experience with the tutoring services at EIU. Harry had a positive experience with his tutoring services at the Writing Center and saw an improvement in his work. He stated, “My writing skills have gotten better; my papers got better, and it was great.” Eragon also visited the Writing Center as a BOOST student. He said, “I liked it a lot. I definitely would tell freshman to go there.” Annabeth utilized tutoring services directed to her by her BOOST Advisor. She said, “BOOST pointed me to someone...That’s really who I went to every single time and I always like the tutor.”

Thematic Unit: Diagnostic Testing

As students entered the BOOST Program, they participated in diagnostic testing at the Student Success Center. Specifically, students completed the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (NDRT), which determines students’ vocabulary and reading comprehension levels, the College Student Inventory (CSI), which measures students’ academic skills, motivation, and receptivity to support services, and the Study Behavior Inventory (SBI), which summarizes students’ study skills (“Student success,” 2010). Throughout the interviews, four students recalled their experience with diagnostic testing.

Harry had a positive experience with the NDRT, which placed him in GST 1000, a reading and study skills improvement course. He stated, “It put me in the place where I could be successful. It put me into the right classroom or told me the right level I was at and then we could work from there.” His experience with diagnostic testing also informed him of his study skill level and identified where he needed improvement, which
was information he welcomed. Eragon’s experience with diagnostic testing focused on the SBI. He explained, “The study skills one, it opened my eyes up to things I needed to change; it opened my eyes up to what I needed to improve.” The SBI offered information on his necessary improvements in order to achieve success at the college level, which he welcomed as well.

Percy and Bella’s views differed from their peers. Percy’s experience was one of apathy. He stated, “I’m kind of indifferent about the test.” Bella seemed annoyed as she stated, “I don’t really think standardized tests like that are fair because I don’t think it proves anything.”

**Summary**

Chapter IV outlined the findings of the research study according to the experiences of participants. Four major themes emerged from the participants’ significant statements regarding their experience while in the BOOST Program. These four themes were Support, Personal Development, Program Structure, and Access to Resources.

The most prominent theme of the experience of BOOST Students was Support. Participants described various aspects of the support they received throughout their BOOST experience both from the BOOST Program and its components, as well as outside the program.

Another theme derived from the significant statements of student descriptions was Personal Development. Participants discussed their self-awareness of poor performance in high school and their necessity of the program aiding their acceptance, transition, and success in college. This theme also included personal development of independence and growth. Program Structure was also a major theme, common to all participants. This
theme included the participants' experience with components of the BOOST Program including one-on-one meetings, the hierarchy of programs, expectations of the program, and various definitions of a BOOST Advisor and the BOOST Program. The final major theme discovered through significant statements during the interviews was Access to Resources. Included in this theme were several descriptions of the resources provided through the BOOST Program, the Student Success Center, and the campus community.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This chapter reviews the discussion, recommendations, and conclusion for the present study, and is dedicated to discussing the findings that emerged from the three original research questions guiding the study.

Purpose of Study

The research conducted in the present study was designed to understand the perception of the BOOST Program from students who successfully completed the BOOST Program and continued their academic career at Eastern Illinois University, or left the institution for various reasons after completing BOOST Program requirements. The focus of this study was to examine what components of the BOOST Program were beneficial to freshman student academic success and transition into an institution of higher education according to the voices of participating students who both continued at EIU or left the institution.

Discussion

Several significant statements emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts. From these statements several thematic units were identified, which in turn led to four major themes: Support, Personal Development, Program Structure, and Access to Resources (Table 2). These themes were used to address the three questions guiding the present study.
Research Question #1: What is the lived experience of students in the BOOST Program?

The purpose of identifying significant statements was to find commonalities among participants and thus identify the essence of their collective lived experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Mertens (2005) noted that phenomenological research emphasizes the participants’ subjective experience and their perception and meaning of that particular experience. Lichtman (2010) wrote that “the purpose of phenomenology is to describe and understand the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon” (p. 75). The lived experience of BOOST students is best described as an intricate combination of the four major interview themes: Support, Personal Development, Program Structure, and Access to Resources. According to the participants, the essence of the BOOST experience was having a structured, supportive contact and connection within the University, which aided them in their own personal development and provided them resources necessary for academic success and transition.

With significant statements, Eragon explained his lived experience within the BOOST Program. Through “meeting with [his BOOST Advisor] just once every two weeks,” Eragon built a supportive relationship with his advisor. “We had a relationship where we would talk about school stuff and then talk about social life, campus, if things were cool and stuff like that.” His BOOST Advisor provided him with the necessary resources. “She told me just a lot of resources just to get help.” The BOOST Program as a whole “opened [his] eyes up to things [he] needed to change; it opened [his] eyes up to what [he] needed to improve.”

Katniss’ significant statements also echoed the essence of her lived experience. As she was admitted to the BOOST Program, she “was just grateful to be
accepted. [She] was happy with that… [Not] disappointed because [she] had to go through this program.” Through a supportive and understanding relationship with her advisor, she was kept on task and directed to the appropriate resources she needed. “We were close. We met once a week. She had a child also, so she could relate to how certain things were kind of hard. She was very helpful.” She explained further that her advisor “would keep [her] on track…being able to get assistance from my advisor; if she wasn’t able to assist me, she had the knowledge to guide me somewhere.”

Although Bella left the University after completing the BOOST program, her significant statements revealed similar experiences to her peers. Through a supportive relationship with her BOOST Advisor, Bella was able to gain personal development and access to necessary resources. She explained, “It’s probably been that year I spent with [the BOOST Program] was better for me now.” Her relationship with her advisor was comfortable from the beginning.

   Right off the bat, it was very easy transitioning because it was a connection and I liked that the advisors were young, too, so it’s a lot less intimidating. It was nice and my advisor is a cool person, she’s really personable.

   The information offered to her by components of the program “gave me a better understanding of what it was; it [helped] with my understanding of what they expected and what we were going to be doing all year.”

   The participants’ lived experiences reflected that of underprepared students successfully completing similarly structured programs. Maxwell (1997) defined underprepared students as those students whose “skills, knowledge, motivation, and/or academic ability are significantly below those of the ‘typical’ student…in the college” (as
Because many underprepared students are first-generation college students, they usually do not have a well-developed understanding of higher education and are not likely to seek the academic or personal assistance available to them (Austin, 1977; Gordon et al., 2000). Programs such as the BOOST Program offer the active intervention required for underprepared students to succeed in college, according to Gordon et al. (2000). Structured programs incorporate objectives including the development of academic skills, orientation to campus resources and services, and self-exploration or personal development (National, 2006). Reflected in the essence of lived experiences, the BOOST Program successfully achieved these objectives.

Research Question #2: What components of the BOOST Program do students identify as helping or hindering them for academic success and transition into the University?

According to the 2006 National Survey on First-Year Seminars, the three most important objectives of structured first-year programs were the development of academic skills, orientation to campus resources and services, and self-exploration or personal development (National, 2006). Programs incorporate specific components to achieve these objectives. The five most common components included in first-year programs were study skills, critical thinking, campus resources, intrusive advising or planning, and time management skills (National, 2006). The BOOST Program implements components similar to these, including an orientation, diagnostic testing, a first-year seminar course (EIU 1111: University Foundations), one-on-one intrusive advising, and an individualized Academic Plan. The Academic Plan is agreed upon by the student and BOOST Advisor and may include weekly or bi-weekly meetings with the BOOST Advisor, workshops, referrals to other resources, and additional coursework, as well as
developing any needed skills such as reading, note-taking, test-taking, time-management, motivation, and goal setting ("Student success," 2010).

Participant interviews revealed components they felt helped or hindered their academic success and transition into the University. The most commonly reported components which helped students’ academic success and transition were the BOOST Advisor, Academic Plan, motivational feedback, referrals to resources, and orientation.

**BOOST Advisor**

The most prominent component which aided student academic success and transition among research participants at the University was a personal connection with the BOOST Advisor. All participants in the study described their relationship with their advisor as being close, comfortable, and academically and personally supportive. Arya had a very close relationship with her BOOST Advisor. She said, “I loved her...she helped me and not only that...she knew stuff I was going through.” Eragon’s BOOST Advisor offered the support he needed for his academic work, but also extended support into his personal life. “We had a relationship where we would talk about school stuff and then talk about social life, campus, if things were cool and stuff like that.” Percy’s BOOST Advisor also helped both his academic success and transition. “She would help me with school stuff and other stuff too...I was having some stressful times. My freshman year actually my father passed so that was a real stressful time for me, like, at the moment, and I talked to [my BOOST Advisor] a lot about that.”

The relationship formed between a BOOST student and the BOOST Advisor can be described as a mentoring relationship. The BOOST Program used an individualistic approach to student advisement, tailoring the structure of the program to each student.
based on their individual needs. Mentoring is similar to this approach in that it is tailored to each student, with open, honest, and direct attention and discussion between the student and the mentor. At the time of this study, recent discussions and research in higher education supported that “mentoring can be highly effective for students” (Berrett, 2011, para. 1). “There is a growing importance of [mentoring] connections to a student’s sense of engagement and eventual success” (Berrett, 2011, para. 5).

**Academic Plan**

Another component aiding student success and transition into the University was the individualized Academic Plan students created with their BOOST Advisor. According to Gordon et al. (2000), creating a specific Academic Plan of action with clear, written goals to improve the student’s academic performance, motivating the student to achieve academic success, and providing continuous feedback to the student are necessary for effective intrusive advisement. As Gordon et al. maintained, the individualized Academic Plans implemented by the BOOST Program aided students in their academic success and transition.

Harry explained that the Academic Plan supported him in being successful at the University. “That first year it was great because, you know, we really had a strategic plan and an action plan to get me to what I wanted to do, so I loved that.” Arya recalled her experience with the Academic Plan as she stated, “I do remember each time we would come up with the plan each semester, the classes I’m taking, taking out time to study, and tutoring on campus.” She explained, “It helped with my academic success when we would go over the Academic Plan.”
Motivational Feedback

According to Van (1992) underprepared students commonly hold negative attitudes about their academic abilities and self-worth (as cited in Maxwell, 1994); therefore, BOOST students needed assistance from their advisor in motivating themselves. "Because the underprepared student is likely to have a negative self-concept with respect to the academic environment, it is important that the advisor provide the developmental student with positive and encouraging feedback when appropriate" (Gordon et al., 2000, p. 135).

Participant interviews revealed motivational feedback as another component which helped participants in their academic success and transition. The participants who specifically identified motivational feedback explained it was necessary for their success in the BOOST Program, and is something they needed in order to remain successful. Katniss described her advisor's style of motivational feedback: "She let me know when I wasn't doing well in a class and what I needed to do to do better and just stay[ed] on top of me." This push "kept [her] on track and made sure [she] stayed on track." Annabeth needed the same reinforcement. "I'm the kind of person who needs somebody to report to, to keep me grounded." Bella paralleled Annabeth's need for regular motivational feedback.

I work well if somebody has something that they expect of me; if they tell me that, I try to do my best with it...[it] helps me to know that I'm doing well and that somebody is happy with me.
Referrals to Resources

According to Burris (1990) and Kuh (2007), advisor referrals to other campus support services is a commonly practiced component of structured first-year programs and helps transition the student into the institution. Referrals to campus resources and services were a component identified as having aided students in academic success and transition as well. BOOST Advisors acted as references for other resources on campus, depending on the needs of each individual BOOST student. Katniss explained, “They did everything I needed them to do as far as [pointing me to] different resources on campus...if she wasn’t able to assist me, she had the knowledge to guide me somewhere.” As Arya stated her advisor “tried to think of things on campus for me.” Eragon reflected his own experience: “She told me just a lot of resources just to get help.” Annabeth felt confident with the resources she was directed to from her BOOST Advisor. “I knew that going through BOOST, I was going to get put in contact with the right people if I ever encountered a problem.”

Orientation

Prior to BOOST students starting their freshman year, BOOST Program staff members offered a unique orientation program separate from the general new student orientation program. Participants agreed the orientation component of the BOOST Program offered a helpful introduction to the program. Eragon described his experience: “It was actually fun, it was pretty good, it wasn’t like regular orientation. It was more focused on what the BOOST Program is and how they were going to develop students into regular students and help them succeed.” Katniss said, “It was a big help informatively; it answered any of the questions I had.” Annabeth paralleled her peers’
experiences when she explained, “It gave me a better understanding of what it was; it did help with my understanding of what they expected and what we were going to be doing all year.” According to several sources, a commonly practiced component of first-year programs was an orientation process that aided students to initially familiarize themselves with the institution ("Campus practices," 1994; D’Abate, 2009; Holland, 1999; Muraskin, 1998).

*Other Components: Workshops, Tutoring, and Diagnostic Testing*

Other components identified to help or hinder students’ academic success and transition in the University were workshops, tutoring, and diagnostic testing. Although these themes were not as prominent as others, they were common themes among participant interviews. According to the literature reviewed for the present study, these components were usually included in an individualized Academic Plan (Gordon et al., 2000). As for the BOOST Program, diagnostic testing was required by all entering BOOST students, while workshops and tutoring were required based on each student’s need. These common components of first-year programs help the student with success and transition in the university setting (Burris, 1990; "Campus practices," 1994; Holland, 1999; "Serving at-risk," 2002; Voelker, 2006).

Some participants stated the workshops they attended helped their academic success and transition into the University while other students claimed it had no effect. Eragon’s experience with a workshop provided by the Writing Center aided him in writing a paper. “It helped me get started on one of my first big papers.” Katniss saw an improvement in academic skills after attending a workshop. “They helped me as far as resume writing, interviewing, I’m better at paper writing. It helped me from when I first
started college.” Arya did not find purpose in attending the workshops. “I feel like they were just there, I went and then moved on...they’re time fillers.” Harry found the workshops he attended to be informative; however, relying upon himself to carry out the skills discussed in the workshops was a struggle for him. “I feel like they helped me once I [got] them down. I feel like implementation is a big thing.”

All participants who participated in tutoring found it to be academically helpful. Harry had a positive experience with his tutoring services at the Writing Center and saw an improvement in his work. “My writing skills have gotten better; my papers got better, and it was great.” Eragon’s experience with the Writing Center was also helpful. He said, “I liked it a lot. I definitely would tell freshman to go there.” Annabeth utilized tutoring services directed to her by her BOOST Advisor. She said, “BOOST pointed me to someone...That’s really who I went to every single time and I always like the tutor.”

Participants had mixed opinions about the diagnostic testing component, as they did with the workshops. Harry explained the diagnostic testing was helping him. “It put me in the place where I could be successful. It put me into the right classroom or told me the right level I was at and then we could work from there.” Eragon had a similar opinion. “The study skills one, it opened my eyes up to things I needed to change; it opened my eyes up to what I needed to improve.” Percy and Bella’s views differed from their peers. Percy’s experience was one of apathy. “I’m kind of indifferent about the test.” Bella did not feel the diagnostic testing helped her success or transition. “I don’t really think standardized tests like that are fair because I don’t think it proves anything.”
Research Question #3: Is there a difference in perceptions of components of the BOOST Program by students who continued their academic career at EIU and students who left the University for various reasons prior to graduation?

In the 2009 Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) reported what was described as “a tale of two states of Illinois” (Illinois Board, 2009, p. i). According to the report, “one Illinois is well educated and prosperous, with virtually unlimited opportunities,” while the other Illinois “is vastly underserved educationally and struggling economically, with severely constricted opportunities” (p. i). This wide achievement gap, deemed the “prosperity gap” (p. i) by IBHE, leaves minorities and low-income persons with far lower levels of educational attainment. Students included in the definition of ‘underprepared’ fall into these categories of minorities, low-income families, and first-generation college students. As a result, they usually do not have a well-developed understanding of higher education and are not likely to seek the academic or personal assistance available to them (Austin, 1977; Gordon et al., 2000; Barratt, 2011).

The purpose of the BOOST Program at EIU was to serve this group of underprepared students in higher education. As a special admissions program at Eastern Illinois University, the BOOST Program works with underprepared students to create a successful transition to EIU and an increase in academic skills including GPA and academic confidence (“Student success,” 2010). A recent study on first-year programs by National Resource Center showed that nearly 30% of the institutions surveyed reported an increase in academic abilities and nearly 20% of institutions reported an increase in persistence to graduation and grade point averages as a result of student
participation in first-year programs (National, 2006). In 2008, 133 American higher education institutions participated in a survey conducted by the National Resource Center on student success and learning centers, and over half of the institutions reported increased student academic abilities, academic self-confidence, and grade point averages (National, 2008).

The BOOST Program has generated similar results. Specifically, in the 2009-2010 academic year, 81% of program completers were on good academic standing, and plan completers earned an average of 25.3 credit hours and an average 2.61 grade point average. However, some students who successfully completed the program left the institution for various reasons. If students are successfully completing the program, why then are they leaving the institution prior to graduation? One research question focused on the difference in perceptions of components of the BOOST Program by students who continued their academic career at EIU and students who left the University prior to graduation. Participants representing both groups experienced different perceptions of the following components: Academic Plan, workshops, tutoring, and diagnostic testing.

**Academic Plan**

According to participant interviews, the Academic Plan was a thematic unit which aided in academic success and transition into the institution. However, while two students who continued their education at EIU described the Academic Plan as a supportive experience in the BOOST Program, only one student who left the institution prior to graduation described the Academic Plan as being supportive. Harry explained, “It was great because…we really had a strategic plan and an action plan to get me to what I wanted to do, so I loved that.” Arya said, “It helped with my academic success when we
would go over the Academic Plan." Harry and Arya continued their education at EIU after they completed the BOOST Program. After Bella’s completion of the BOOST Program, she left the University. She said she “wrote...what I want[ed] to accomplish and what I [thought] I [could] do...and we would go over it.” Comparatively, there is an obvious difference in perceptions of the Academic Plan between the two participant groups. Among those who left the University for various reasons, a personal connection to their Academic Plan appeared to be less direct or not mentioned, as if they had not made personal meaning out of the experience of developing a plan.

According to Gordon et al. (2000), creating a specific academic plan of action with clear, written goals to improve the student’s academic performance, motivating the student to achieve academic success, and providing continuous feedback to the student are necessary for creating a successful academic career and transition in higher education. Students who participate and utilize the Academic Plan the way it is set up for them are able to develop goals which guide them through their first year of college. The Academic Plan also focuses on individualized areas of improvement based on the need of each student, such as tutoring, workshops, and other resources on campus. As supported in literature, students who utilize the Academic Plan are much more likely to transition into the University and achieve academic success (Gordon et al., 2000). More students who identified the support of the Academic Plan and utilized it appropriately continued their education in the institution, while those who did not identify the Academic Plan support were more likely to leave the institution after their program completion.
Workshops, Tutoring, and Diagnostic Testing

All BOOST Program students completed diagnostic testing which measured students’ academic and study skills, motivation, and receptivity to support services. Students were also recommended by their BOOST Advisor to attend various workshops in the campus community and tutoring sessions depending on their individualized needs. Participants representing both groups, those who continued their education at the institution and those who left the institution for various reasons, had differing perceptions of the three components, workshops, tutoring, and diagnostic testing. According to several studies and reports, these common components of first-year programs help the student with success and transition into the university setting (Burris, 1990; "Campus practices," 1994; Holland, 1999; "Serving at-risk," 2002; Voelker, 2006;).

Participants’ perceptions of workshops differed between those who continued their education at the University and those who left prior to graduation. Several departments on campus provided workshops for students, including the Student Success Center, the Writing Center, and Career Services. Of the students interviewed for the present study, three students experienced help from the workshops they attended. All of them were students who continued their education at EIU after their program completion. Harry described his experience of the workshops. “I feel like they helped me.” Eragon found aid from a workshop provided by the Writing Center. “It was a writing one. It helped me get started on one of my first big papers.” Katniss echoed Eragon’s experience with the Writing Center and also attended workshops by Career Services. “They helped me as far as resume writing, interviewing, I’m better at paper writing. It helped me from when I first started college.” The other participants interviewed, including one student
who continued her education at EIU and all of the three students who left the institution after their program completion, did not have similar positive or meaningful experiences with workshops.

Participants’ perceptions of tutoring also differed among those who continued and those who left the University. Depending on the individual needs of each student, BOOST Advisors recommended students attend tutoring to improve understanding of content in various academic courses. Two of four students who continued their education at EIU experienced positive support from tutoring. Harry and Eragon attended tutoring to improve their writing skills. Harry explained, “I liked it. My writing skills have gotten better; my papers got better, and it was great.” Eragon said, “I liked it a lot. I definitely would tell freshman to go there.” One of three students who left the institution after their program completion found the tutoring to be supportive. Annabeth explained BOOST put her in contact with the best tutors, which she appreciated. “BOOST pointed me to someone I felt was better [than other recommendations]. That’s really who I went to every single time, and I always liked the tutor.” The other participants interviewed, including two students who continued their education at EIU and two students who left the institution after their program completion, did not make any mention during their interviews of using or being recommended to use tutoring services.

Finally, participants’ perceptions of diagnostic testing differed among those who continued and those who left the University. As students entered the BOOST Program, they participated in diagnostic testing, which measured students’ academic and study skills, motivation, and receptivity to support services. Of the students interviewed, two who continued their education at the University after their program completion found
diagnostic testing to be helpful. Harry said, “It put me in the place where I could be successful. It put me into the right classroom or told me the right level I was at and then we could work from there.” Eragon paralleled his experience saying, “The study skills one…opened my eyes up to things I needed to change, it opened my eyes up to what I needed to improve.” Both Harry and Eragon had positive perceptions of diagnostic testing. Quite the opposite perceptions were held by two students who left the institution for various reasons after their program completion. Percy and Bella had apathetic or negative perceptions of diagnostic testing and did not find them helpful. Percy’s perception was unmoved. “I’m kind of indifferent about the test.” Bella had a much more negative and emotional perception on diagnostic testing. “I don’t really think standardized tests like that are fair because I don’t think it proves anything.” Unlike student perceptions of the workshops and tutoring, which showed more students who continued their education after their program completion were more likely to experience support from the components, student perceptions of diagnostic testing were more polarized. Of the students who described their experience with diagnostic testing, students who continued their education at the institution had positive perceptions of diagnostic testing, while students who left the institution had negative perceptions of diagnostic testing.

Several explanations may be plausible for participants’ perceptions of workshops, tutoring, and diagnostic testing. These include not having needed to attend workshops or tutoring, not having attended workshops or tutoring when recommended, or not having found workshops, tutoring, and diagnostic testing supportive to their academic success or transition at the institution. Regarding diagnostic testing specifically, polarized
perceptions (positive versus negative) may be based on prior emotional reactions to standardized testing experiences. Also, these participants may have struggled with utilizing resources available to them on campus, which is a common factor of underprepared students (Austin, 1977; Gordon et al., 2000), of which the BOOST Program strives to overcome. Although this study did not result in the explanation of why students’ experiences differed, it does show there was a difference in perceptions of these components between participants who continued their education at the institution and participants who left the institution prior to graduation.

Recommendations

It was the hope of the researcher that the present study would serve as a source of information for EIU’s Student Success Center staff to further develop the process by which the BOOST Program is carried out. Recommendations for students participating in the BOOST Program, the BOOST Program and BOOST Advisors, and future researchers conclude the final chapter. These have been developed by the researcher from her study of the BOOST Program.

Recommendations for BOOST Students

1. Students need to utilize the BOOST Program, their BOOST Advisor, and the Student Success Center for every possible service available. If staff members do not know the answer to a student question, they will point students in the direction of someone who does. Students should be sure to utilize all other resources on campus as well.

2. Students need to take advantage of the workshops offered in the campus community; workshop content is geared towards issues that many students deal
with in higher education. The workshops benefit students' academic careers. Also, students should keep in mind the power of lifelong learning. They should not simply memorize information, but learn the information offered and incorporate it into their lives. They should build their knowledge on their prior learning and the quality and quantity of processing current information (Downing, 2008).

3. Students should be vocal and honest about the things they would like to see added to the BOOST Program. The Student Success Center strives to make sure program participants are successful, and staff members have the ability to find ways to incorporate students' suggested ideas.

4. Students should be vocal regarding their concerns about their own academic and personal development in college. The support services on campus are in place to serve students, and the only way for services to aid in student development is if they know what students want.

5. Students should be proactive in helping themselves to become better prepared as a student, professional, and person. They are in control of the life they live and want to live.

Recommendations for the BOOST Program and BOOST Advisors

1. Participant interviews revealed confusion regarding the definition of the BOOST Program, thus reinforcing the need for an Orientation program. BOOST Program developers should create a pre-orientation packet to send to students' homes, which includes a welcome letter from the Director of the BOOST Program, facts about the program, what is to be expected from students who enter the program, and what is to be expected as a result of program participation.
2. During the initial BOOST meeting, the BOOST Program staff should incorporate a student panel of previous BOOST Program completers to offer insight to incoming students. Students may benefit from the experiences and advice of a peer.

3. The BOOST Program staff should incorporate social events for BOOST students to interact with each other and form support groups within the campus community.

4. A program evaluation of the BOOST Program should be developed for students to complete after their completion of program requirements. Evaluations should be anonymous if possible to encourage student honesty about their lived experiences.

5. The BOOST Program should end with a closing event that offers closure to the program, discusses options to continue services at the Student Success Center as a walk-in student, and introduces other resources that will benefit students as they continue their education at EIU.

6. BOOST Advisors should be careful not to confuse their responsibilities regarding academic advising with the professional responsibilities of campus Academic Advisors.

7. BOOST Advisors should be very informed about available resources on campus. They should be proactive about informing themselves to best help their students. They should form relationships with other professionals on campus and create strong contacts of which to refer their students when necessary.
Recommendations for Future Researchers

1. Interview a larger group of former and current BOOST students to achieve a greater understanding of the overall lived experience. Recommended interview groups include:
   a. Current BOOST students
   b. Former BOOST Students who successfully completed the program and continued their education at EIU.
   c. Former BOOST students who successfully completed the program and left the University for various reasons.

2. When interviewing participants who left the University after their program completion, specifically ask for their reasons influencing the decision to leave.

3. Examine the effect of student interaction with academic faculty on student success and transition.

4. Examine whether or not students have experienced the type of individualized focus offered through the BOOST program in past academic settings.

5. Examine the impact of interpersonal relationships with success and transition in the college setting.

6. Examine how the label of being a BOOST student effects the academic and social development of participants.

7. Examine the explanation of why students’ perceptions of components differ among those who continued their education at the University and those who left the University after program completion.
Conclusion

The primary purpose of the present study was designed to understand the perception of the BOOST Program from students who successfully completed the BOOST Program and continued their academic career at Eastern Illinois University, or left the institution for various reasons after completing BOOST Program requirements. The focus of this study was to examine what components of the BOOST Program were beneficial to underprepared freshman student academic success and transition into an institution of higher education according to the voices of participating students.

The National Resource Center found that modern day structured first-year programs incorporated three main objectives, including the development of academic skills, orientation to campus resources and services, and self-exploration or personal development. Furthermore, the five most important topics reported were study skills, critical thinking, campus resources, academic planning or advising, and time management (National, 2006). Results from the 2006 National Survey on First-Year Seminars showed out of 821 institutions, nearly 30% of the institutions surveyed reported an increase in academic abilities and nearly 20% of institutions reported an increase in persistence to graduation and grade point averages (National, 2006). In a similar survey in 2008, over half of the surveyed institutions reported increased student academic abilities, academic self-confidence, and grade point averages (National, 2008).

The present research study found similar results through phenomenological methodology regarding participant perceptions of a special admissions program known as the BOOST Program at Eastern Illinois University. Participant interviews revealed the lived experience of the BOOST Program as having a structured, supportive contact and
connection within the University, which aided students in their own personal development and provided them resources necessary for academic success and transition. This study showed that underprepared students entering the BOOST Program were having similar experiences as those in related programs, and that their needs as underprepared students were being met. More importantly, it showed that students were individuals, and the needs of each student varied depending on many circumstances. While a collective lived experience was revealed through the analysis of participant interviews, each participant had an individualized experience during the program. The BOOST Program offered a special admissions program with specific components which were easily molded to fit the individual needs of participating students, and therefore facilitated academic success and successful college transition to students when program components were proactively and appropriately utilized.
References


Schee, B.A.V. (2007). Adding insight to intrusive advising and its effectiveness with


*Recruitment & Retention in Higher Education, 20, 6-8.*


*Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, & Practice 2, 327-340.*
APPENDICES
Appendix A
Interview Protocols
Interview Protocols

1. What were the reasons you choose to attend Eastern Illinois University?
2. When you think of your experience with not being accepted into the regular admission process, what comes to mind?
3. Please carefully describe your experience when you were accepted into the BOOST Program?
4. Recall your experience with the BOOST Program, think about that specific experience carefully for a few moments, and then describe that experience to me.
5. What were your expectations of the BOOST Program?
6. In what ways did the BOOST Program meet or exceed your expectations?
7. When you think of your experience with the BOOST Program what comes to mind?

BOOST Components

8. During the summer before you attended EIU, did you attend the BOOST Orientation?
9. Please carefully describe your experience with the BOOST Orientation.
10. Please carefully describe your experience with the diagnostic tests (Nelson-Denny Reading Test, CSI) you completed?
11. Please carefully describe how the diagnostic tests helped with your transition to or academic success at EIU?
12. Please carefully describe the relationship you had between yourself and your BOOST Advisor.
13. How comfortable did you feel talking about classes or personal issues with your BOOST Advisor?
14. Did you and your BOOST Advisor create an Academic Plan together?
15. Please carefully describe how your BOOST Advisor helped you in following your Academic Plan.
16. Please carefully describe how well you followed your Academic Plan.
17. Please carefully describe how your BOOST Advisor helped with your transition to or academic success at EIU.
18. As a BOOST student, did you attend any workshops provided by the Student Success Center? [Here, for your own use, list the possible workshops students could have attended that were offered through the BOOST Program.]
19. Please carefully describe your experience with these workshops.
20. As a BOOST student, did you attend tutoring services?
21. Where did you learn about these tutoring services?
22. Please carefully describe your experience with these tutoring services.
23. Please carefully describe your personal support system beyond the BOOST Program, for example, tell me about your circle of friends, and the ways they helped you become comfortable or not with university life on campus.
24. What components of the BOOST Program best helped or hindered your transition into EIU?
25. What components of the BOOST Program best helped or hindered your academic success at EIU?
26. Overall, describe how you feel the BOOST Program helped or hindered your transition to and academic success at EIU.
Appendix B
Informed Consent
Consent to Participate in Research
Student Perceptions of the BOOST Program

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jessica Rinkel, a College Student Affairs graduate student at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a former BOOST student who completed the program requirements. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding to participate. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in an in-depth interview with the researcher and answer a series of questions about your experiences with the BOOST Program and how its components assisted you with academic success and transition into a university setting.

There are no reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts, including physical inconveniences and their likelihood, that will develop based on the significance of this study. Participants in the study will not receive benefits, but the information gathered will serve as a source of information for Eastern Illinois University’s Academic Department, Student Affairs Department, and the Student Success Center staff for future development of the BOOST Program at Eastern Illinois University. Participants will have the option to enter into a drawing for a $50 gift card. At the end of the interview process, the participant will have the option to write down his or her email, which will be randomly drawn for the winner of the gift card.

Any information obtained in connection with this student and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the principal investigator. In reported data, a pseudonym will be used in place of participants’ names. You will not be identified by name. The recorded data will be stored in a locked desk to which no one will have access other than the Principal Investigator. Information from the participants who formally withdraw from the study will remain confidential. All documentation and recorded interviews will be destroyed after the completion of the research project.

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services for Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact the principle investigator, Jessica Rinkel, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Charles G. Eberly, at the following addresses:

Jessica Rinkel
Student Success Center
Charleston, IL 61920
jerinkel@eiu.edu
217-581-6696

Dr. Charles G. Eberly
Buzzard Hall
Charleston, IL 61920
cgeberly@eiu.edu
217-581-7235
Appendix C
Rights of Research Subjects
RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Avenue
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: 217-581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

_________________________
Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date

_________________________
Signature of Principle Researcher ___________________________ Date
Appendix D
Participation Email
PARTICIPATION EMAIL

Hello!

This is Jessica Rinkel and I am a Graduate Assistant in the Student Success Center. This year I am completing my master’s thesis research and my subject deals specifically with the BOOST Program. Cindy Boyer gave me your name, and I am hoping you would be willing to do an interview with me about your experience with the BOOST Program. If you participate in this study, you will have the opportunity to submit your name in a drawing for a $50 gift card. Please contact me and let me know if you are willing to be a participant in this study.

Thanks!

Jessica Rinkel
Graduate Assistant, Student Success Center
Eastern Illinois University
1305 9th St. Hall
Charleston, IL 61920
217-581-6696
www.eiu.edu/~success
Appendix E
Participation Flier
If you were a BOOST Student at EIU, your participation is needed for a research study conducted by Jessica Rinkel, a master's student in the Department of Counseling and Student Development. If you choose to participate, your name will be entered to win a $50 gift card!

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 581-6696 or via email at jerinkel@eiu.edu
Appendix F
Researcher Bracket
RESEARCHER BRACKET

Prior to data collection, the researcher "bracketed" all preconceptions regarding the BOOST Program. Johnson and Christensen (2004) pointed out that phenomenologists must bracket any preconceptions, learned feelings, or experiences with the phenomenon in order to experience it in its purest form. "Bracketing involves placing one's own thoughts about the topic in suspense or out of question" (Lichtman, 2010, p. 80). The following statements were the researcher's preconceived thoughts prior to participant interviews.

1. Students will associate negative emotions with having been admitted to a special admissions program.

2. Students may feel embarrassed of their admission to the BOOST Program in regard to their peers or even isolated from their peers. This may have an effect on their social transition to the University.

3. Students may identify their BOOST Advisor as the most helpful component of the BOOST Program.

4. Students may have a lack of personal support outside the BOOST Program; specifically, students may not have a supportive family system.

5. The BOOST Program may meet or exceed the expectations students had prior to entering the University.

6. Students who left the University after their program completion may not take personal responsibility for their actions at the University; they may put blame on or have negative emotions towards the BOOST Program or Advisor.

7. Students who continued their education at the University after their program completion will express positive emotions towards the BOOST Program or Advisor.
Appendix G
BOOST Program Agreement
Building Outreach and Opportunity for Students in Transition (BOOST)
Eastern Illinois University

BOOST AGREEMENT

The requirements listed below are designed for students admitted to Eastern Illinois University through the BOOST Program. These requirements are designed to enhance academic success at the University level.

By signing this agreement, I am affirming my willingness to participate in the program and committing myself to the time and work necessary for improving my academic skills. I understand this includes:

- Following all recommendations made by the Academic Success Center per my academic plan
- Attending all meetings with my BOOST advisor
- Completing all necessary assessments as required by the BOOST program
- Attending all classes
- Completing all academic work on time to the best of my ability
- Attending all programs or workshops necessary for achieving academic success

By signing this document, I commit to the following understandings:

- I understand that if I must re-schedule a BOOST advisor appointment due to illness, it is my responsibility to contact my advisor for an appointment at his/her earliest convenience.
- I understand that being successful at the University is my responsibility and the BOOST program has been established to help me in this endeavor.
- I understand that it may be necessary for Eastern Illinois University staff to contact my parent(s) or guardian concerning my academic work, behavior, or completion of this program.
- I understand that the BOOST program will last for the duration of the fall and spring of my first year at Eastern Illinois University.
- I understand that failure to complete BOOST requirements will result in my dismissal from Eastern Illinois University.

Print Full Name: ________________________________

Student's Signature: ____________________________ Date: ________________

I understand that my son/daughter has been admitted to Eastern Illinois University through a special admission program because he/she did not meet the regular admission requirements. I understand that in order to remain enrolled at Eastern Illinois University, my student must adhere to all University policies and procedures, including the Student Conduct Code and the BOOST academic plan prepared by the Academic Success Center. Failure to do so may result in dismissal from the University.

Print Full Name: ________________________________

Parent or Guardian Signature: ____________________ Date: ________________
Appendix H
Academic Plan
BOOST INDIVIDUALIZED ACADEMIC PLAN
Student Success Center

Name ____________________ E# __________________________
Phone __________________ Address ______________________
E-mail ___________________ Academic Advisor ____________

REQUIREMENTS: (Check boxes that apply)
☐ Note-taking instruction  ☐ Learning Styles assessment
☐ Time Management  ☐ Tutoring services-Specify _____________
☐ Test-taking instruction  ☐ GST 1000 Fall ‘09
☐ Motivation  ☐ Goal setting
☐ Meetings with Boost Advisor:  Weekly Bi-Monthly Monthly
☐ Support Services (specify):

........................................................................

........................................................................

........................................................................

........................................................................

I AGREE TO THE TERMS OF THE ACADEMIC PLAN REQUIREMENTS OUTLINED ABOVE.

Student Signature ____________________ Date ___________

BOOST Advisor ______________________ Date ___________
VITA

Jessica E. Rinkel

Birthday: December 1, 1985

Birthplace: Mattoon, Illinois

Education:

2009-2011 Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, Illinois
Master of Science, College Student Affairs

2004-2008 Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, Illinois
Bachelor of Arts, English