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FOSTERING PATHS OF ENROLLMENT FROM AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL TO A
LARGE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

by

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A dissertation in practice submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the College of Education and Human Performance
at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Thomas Cox

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to address the problem of lower enrollment of students from Jones High School in Orlando, Florida than is desired by the University of Central Florida (UCF). The university has new developments in the community near Jones High School and this dissertation in practice seeks to develop recruitment practices to increase enrollment of this population. Alumni from Jones High School who currently attend UCF were selected for a qualitative study including a survey and interview to examine the phenomenological experiences regarding their decision to enroll and the path of enrollment they selected. Multiple paths of enrollment exist for this population which includes entering directly from high school, transferring from other institutions, as well as a guaranteed admission program from local state colleges called Direct Connect.

This qualitative study revealed that the Direct Connect program is the most common path of entry for participants followed by those enrolling from high school. Experiences that influenced decisions to enroll at UCF included convenience factors such as location, the ease of enrolling through the Direct Connect program, and the financial savings associated with a public university and the state colleges. It was also revealed that deficiencies existed in UCF's current recruitment presence on the campus of Jones High School as compared to other institutions of higher education making a more lasting impact. Implications for future practice were offered to encourage existing paths of enrollment and increased UCF recruitment presence on the Jones campus.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While this dissertation bears my name, I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of individuals who have helped me see this project to completion. First, my deepest thanks go to my chair, Dr. Thomas Cox, for his consistent support and even demeanor that was a grounding force even during the most turbulent times. Likewise, Dr. Carolyn Hopp provided a great deal of encouragement and insight as both a professor and co-chair. Each faculty member in the College of Education at UCF that I had the privilege to study under also provided their own influence on this process and I am grateful for their hard work and dedication to their students.

The office of Undergraduate Admissions whom I work with also deserves much credit in supporting me through this endeavor. All efforts in Undergraduate Admissions are the result of teamwork and I am privileged to work alongside some of the most talented individuals in the business. Special thanks to my direct supervisors for their support: Mr. Christopher Dahlstrand, Ms. Elizabeth Costello, and Dr. Gordon Chavis.

The greatest debt of gratitude I owe, and one I will likely never repay, is to my wife. Spouses of graduate students deserve their own special degrees for putting up with us and my wife is no exception. Late nights, frazzled nerves, and a semi-absent husband were par for the course and she weathered these with grace and patience. She is my rock, my support, a shoulder to lean on, and was a reserve of energy and positivity when I was at my end. I literally could not have done this without her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1: DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE	1
Problem of Practice.....	1
Problem Significance	1
Exploratory Questions	6
Positionality	7
Biases	10
Framework Description	11
Methodology	14
Introduction.....	14
Selection of Participants	14
Setting	15
Data Collection	15
Data Analysis	17
Recruitment Framework Development.....	17
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	19

Introduction.....	19
Organizational Context.....	20
The University of Central Florida.....	20
Orange County Public Schools and Jones High School	25
Competitive Admissions Environment.....	27
Global Perspective	27
National Perspective	28
Minority College Enrollment in the U.S and Florida	30
College Choice and Low-Income Minority Students	31
Features of Competitive Admissions.....	32
Factors that Influence Student Enrollment	36
Academic Preparation.....	36
Understanding the Admission Process.....	37
Motivation.....	38
Current UCF Recruitment Practices	41
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	43
Introduction.....	43
Research Design.....	43
Delimitations and Limitations.....	44

Setting	46
Participants.....	47
Data Collection	51
Survey Procedures	51
Interview Procedures	52
Data Analysis	53
Interview Analysis	53
Survey Analysis	54
Triangulation.....	55
Conclusion	56
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	57
Introduction.....	57
Findings.....	58
Research Question 1: What paths are students from JHS taking to enroll at UCF?.....	58
Research Question 2: What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced their decision to attend UCF?.....	60
Research Question 3: What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced the path they chose to achieve enrollment?	87
Conclusion	96

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.....	98
Introduction.....	98
Summary of Findings.....	99
Research Question 1: What paths are students from JHS taking to enroll at UCF?.....	99
Research Question 2: What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced their decision to attend UCF?.....	100
Research Question 3: What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced the path they chose to achieve enrollment?	104
Implications for Practice	105
Summary of Current Recruitment Practices	105
Increase Presence on JHS Campus	106
Strengthen Direct Connect.....	108
Emphasize Convenience	110
Adjust Message.....	110
Summary	112
Suggestions for Future Research	112
Conclusion	114
APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT	116
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT	124

APPENDIX C: UCF IRB LETTER..... 127

APPENDIX D: CODING SPREADSHEET 129

REFERENCES 153

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: UCF FTIC Application Growth	22
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Researcher Positionality	9
Table 2: UCF Student Population 2014	23
Table 3: Survey Participants	49
Table 4: Interview Participants	51
Table 5: Survey Participant Paths of Enrollment.....	59
Table 6: Interview Participants Path of Enrollment.....	60
Table 7: Quotes Regarding Convenience	63
Table 8: Quotes Regarding Direct Connect	66
Table 9: Navigating the Admission Process	68
Table 10: Perception of Admission.....	69
Table 11: Quotes Regarding Admissions Preparation	71
Table 12: Perceptions of UCF.....	72
Table 13: Quotes Regarding Perception of UCF	73
Table 14: Quotes Regarding an Intermediary Step.....	75
Table 15: Quotes Regarding a Negative Perception of UCF	77
Table 16: UCF Engagement of JHS Students.....	79
Table 17: Quotes Regarding UCF's Engagement on JHS Campus	82
Table 18: Quotes Regarding Other University Engagement	85
Table 19: Order of Importance of Emergent Themes	86
Table 20: FTIC Path of Enrollment	88
Table 21: Transfer Path of Enrollment	90

Table 22: Direct Connect Path of Enrollment..... 93

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	American College Test college readiness exam
BCU	Bethune-Cookman University
FAMU	Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University
FCAT	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
FTIC	First Time in College
GPA	Grade Point Average
HBCU	Historically Black College or University
IRB	Institutional Review Board
JHS	Jones High School
PWI	Predominantly White Institution
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
UCF	University of Central Florida
UF	University of Florida

CHAPTER 1: DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Problem of Practice

The number of students who enroll at the University of Central Florida (UCF) from Jones High School (JHS) is lower than desired by the office of Undergraduate Admissions. UCF is a large public university in the same county as JHS and the office of Undergraduate Admissions engages in recruitment activities with the expectation that students from high schools in this county will enroll. JHS, however, represents more than just another school in the district; it is a unique school with a high African American or Black population and UCF has an interest in increasing the enrollment of this population. Moreover, the university has introduced a recent development of a downtown Orlando campus that would be in close proximity to JHS and sees this, in part, as an opportunity to create additional paths of enrollment for these students.

Multiple paths of enrollment exist for these students which will be explored but the overall low number of applications and enrolled students poses a challenge to university admissions officers. In order to face this challenge, information must be gathered about the various pathways these students are taking, the experiences that influence their decisions to choose these various pathways to admission, and how the university can foster these pathways to increase enrollment of this targeted population.

Problem Significance

There are two main contexts in which this problem resides: the University of Central Florida and Jones High School. These contexts will be explored in depth in the organizational context portion of this study, but the problem interacts with both of these contexts in unique

ways. The district in which JHS resides has an educational responsibility to serve all students in the county, including those at JHS. Likewise, the district also has its own goals related to achievement of minority students which would include the majority of students at JHS. The district has recently created the Minority Achievement Office in order to increase minority enrollment in specific college programs. This office has specific goals of working with UCF to increase the number of minority students who enroll in medical and educational programs in college (Minority Achievement Office, 2015). The efforts towards achieving these goals need to be targeted and not haphazard. Identifying the pathways these students are currently taking to college enrollment at the university will help both the district and UCF determine strategies to increase enrollment. Fostering these pathways and identifying student experiences may help streamline the process for more students to enroll.

For the university, the problem directly impacts goals stated by the President of UCF. In 1992, the president established five key goals for the university and one of these is to “Become more inclusive and diverse” (Office of the President, 2015). UCF has created the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to help the university achieve this goal. The enrollment of minority students directly lines up with this vision and the problem of low enrollment from JHS presents a challenge for the university if it is to meet this goal. UCF provides multiple paths of enrollment for these students including First Time in College (FTIC) enrollment, transfer admission options, as well as a special partnership with local state colleges called “Direct Connect”. While these options are available to Jones High School students, the pathways they are taking need to be identified so that efforts can be targeted to make these pathways clear or more appealing in order

to increase enrollment. During the 2009-2010 school year, JHS graduated one hundred and sixty-six students. Ninety-eight of those were college going and only seven enrolled at UCF.

Beyond achieving presidential goals, there are incredible benefits to the entire university community when a diverse class of students is enrolled. When universities enroll a diverse student body, they are preparing them for life in the twenty-first century and they learn important skills relating to interacting with people from various backgrounds. The educational value of this cannot be understated. The benefits of diverse enrollment impact the learning of individuals and the institution as a whole, which impacts society as students move into life outside of college (Milem, 2003). In fact, the very argument of how race and diversity should impact admission policies rests largely on the benefits that a diverse student population provides in an educational setting (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004). Fostering pathways to a college education for minority students is a social justice issue, to be sure, but it is also very much an educational issue for all students as they interact in a diverse environment.

Enrolling a diverse student body is not the only factor in creating diverse and beneficial learning in an institution. Simply having diverse students in the same setting does not ensure that they will interact in meaningful ways. Diversity across majors, in classrooms, in dorms, and in clubs and activities should be considered, as well as the way in which course curriculum is designed, to create meaningful interactions among students (Hu & Kuh, 2003). However, enrolling a diverse student body is the first step because these meaningful interactions will not take place if minority students do not enroll.

In light of this, why would UCF not just open the admission process for these students to make it easier to enroll, regardless of the pathway they choose? There are other goals at the

university that play a role in contributing to the context of this problem. One of these is the goal to raise the academic profile of the university, particularly the academic profile of the incoming First Time in College students. FTIC students are those who have earned less than twelve college credits after high school graduation. This includes the typical population of high school seniors who are applying for admission during their senior year in order to enroll directly to the university. UCF has a competitive, selective admission process due to the popularity of the university and currently offers admission to a little less than half (47 percent) of the FTIC students who apply for the fall term. One of the metrics used to rank the university nationally are the academic credentials of the incoming fall FTIC population. Data such as average incoming high school GPA, average standardized test scores (SAT/ACT), and students with accelerated course options (Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, etc.) are all used to compare the university to other universities within the state and nation (U.S. News, 2014). Transfer students also face a competitive environment where they must show that they have competitive academic credentials and successful completion of specific course work in order to gain enrollment. Like any university, UCF seeks to raise its profile and rankings but also must provide access to students within the state. These sometimes competing goals contribute to the environment this problem resides in.

UCF also exists to serve the educational needs of the state and this should not exclude minority students. The university is one of the twelve public state universities in the state of Florida and these universities exist, in part, to provide, “high quality academic degree programs to meet state economic and workforce needs...to improve the quality of life for Floridians” (Board of Governors, 2014). This mission is directed towards all Floridians, including students

at JHS, and if this population is to increase, than strategies need to be devised to better serve these students. The university does not need to be the only educational option for these students since they have the choice to pursue enrollment at any university they choose, but it should not be a prohibited option, especially when it is geographically the closest and most accessible to central Florida students.

While multiple stakeholders are impacted by this problem, the most pressing of these is the students themselves. A college education can be a major factor in future economic, social, and personal success for students. Students who attend college, and especially those who graduate, generally achieve higher incomes than those who do not. This is true for all students regardless of racial or ethnic differences (Baum & Payea, 2005). The demand for an educated workforce continues to rise nationwide and access to a college education can be the gateway to employment, increased economic welfare, and upward mobility (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Beyond just the attainment of a college degree, those who earn degrees from more prestigious and selective institutions tend to also have better opportunities for higher wage and employment than those who earn degrees from lower-ranked colleges (Reardon, Baker, & Klasik, 2012). In fact, many top companies use college prestige as a factor in recruiting prospective employees (Rivera, 2011) and it is very interesting to note that nearly half of the Fortune 500 CEOs have degrees from one of thirteen selective colleges (Wecker, 2012).

Improving paths of enrollment for students at JHS may improve their opportunities for social mobility, increased income, and employment opportunities. Beyond their own opportunities, attaining a degree can also have an impact on their families, their local communities, and on the state of Florida. The economic benefits of an educated population

cannot be understated. Students who complete a college education are more likely to have lower rates of unemployment, poverty, incarceration, and health issues. They are also likely to exhibit higher levels of volunteerism and voting (Baum & Payea, 2005). Each of these factors has an economic impact for the state and increasing college degree attainment can be a major factor in the economic health of Florida.

Ultimately, increased enrollment of this population is the goal of this study. A crucial step in this process is identifying the current paths these students may be taking to enrollment, gaining information from these students about their experiences that led to enrollment, and using that information to foster these paths to make enrollment more appealing and streamlined.

Exploratory Questions

This dissertation in practice will be guided by three questions related to enrollment of JHS students. The first question will address the paths students are taking to enrollment, the second question will gather information about their experiences regarding their decision to attend UCF, and the third will explore experiences that influenced students to choose the particular path they selected.

1. What paths are students from JHS taking to enroll at UCF?
2. What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced their decision to attend UCF?
3. What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced the path they chose to achieve enrollment?

Positionality

The researcher's role at UCF is as an admission officer within the office of Undergraduate Admissions and is tasked with the responsibilities of both recruiting students and reviewing applicants for admission to the university. The recruitment role seeks to attract qualified, diverse, and talented students to enroll at the university and to meet the enrollment goals that the university has set. The admissions review role involves reviewing applications for admission to determine who is qualified for admission and who is most competitive within the pool of applicants that have been received. These roles are often in alignment but are sometimes at odds with each other. On one hand, the recruitment aspect of the position encourages students to apply and place their hopes and future in the hands of the university, highlighting the fact that the university is an amazing institution that can help students pursue their dreams. On the other hand, the admissions function has a very clear response that tells students that they may attend the university or not.

The role the researcher holds at the university interacts with students from JHS and the researcher is able to observe their numerical enrollment at the university. The office of Undergraduate Admissions has sought to recruit students from this school with limited success and has received goals and encouragement to increase the number of students who enroll from JHS. This is related in part to overall goals of increasing the diversity of student enrollment but it also relates to the potential addition of a downtown campus for UCF that would be in close proximity to JHS. The researcher also has experience reviewing applications from JHS students who apply as First Time in College students and has seen the small numbers of applicants and

competitive students who actually choose to enroll. The department has recognized that they do not receive very many applications from these students and those that do apply are often not competitive for admission compared to students from other schools.

The researcher's positionality in this problem of practice allows for a unique perspective, access to information and experience, and an ability to implement changes. After all, the goal of this action research is ultimately increased enrollment of students from JHS and the researcher's role at UCF allows for the implementation of actions to continue to increase access and foster the various paths that JHS students use to enroll. The researcher's role in this problem is, however, nuanced. In many ways the researcher is an insider as a contributing member of the undergraduate admissions office at UCF who works with students, reviews applications, and helps set policies and practices for the department. However, the researcher is also an outsider to the students at JHS, is not a part of their community, and is not an instructor or administrator at JHS. Moreover, the researcher is a white adult male with whom many of these students may not relate easily due to differences in appearance, experience, and life stage (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

The scope of this dissertation in practice will include research in which the researcher will be an outsider while interviewing former students of JHS. The intent of this research, however, is to inform recruitment practices that UCF will implement to increase access and enrollment and in this, the researcher will act as an insider. The development of recruitment methods will be a process of an insider (the researcher) in collaboration with other insiders (UCF staff). This should result in an increase in knowledge among UCF staff, improved practices, and

transformation of the organization as they seek to implement more effective enrollment methods (see Table 1, category 2).

Table 1: Researcher Positionality

Insider (1)_____ (2)_____ (3)_____ (4)_____ (5)_____ (6) Outsider

Positionality of Researcher	Contributes to:	Traditions:
1. Insider (researcher studies own self/practice)	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Self/professional transformation	Practitioner research, Autobiography, Narrative research, Self-Study
2. Insider in collaboration with other insiders	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Professional/organizational transformation	Feminist consciousness raising groups, Inquiry/Study groups, Teams
3. Insider(s) in collaboration with outsider(s)	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Professional/organizational transformation	Inquiry/Study groups
4. Reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams)	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Professional/organizational transformation	Collaborative forms of participatory action research that achieve equitable power relations
5. Outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Professional/organizational transformation	Mainstream change agency: consultancies, industrial democracy, organizational learning; Radical change: community empowerment
6. Outsider(s) studies insider(s)	Knowledge base	University-based, academic research on action research methods or action research projects

(Herr & Anderson, 2015)

Biases

The researcher's position in this dissertation is not without biases nor is it impartial. The researcher's role at UCF results in a vested interest in increasing enrollment of the population of students from JHS. The office of Undergraduate Admissions would receive accolades from the president of the university if this population was to increase and the researcher would personally gain some professional success and merit for playing a role in increasing this population. The researcher's career would certainly benefit and this bias plays a role in how this dissertation is designed. The focus is directed towards increasing enrollment specifically to UCF, not towards all colleges in general. This is not to say that this project is completely self-centered and that the benefits to students are not considered, just that the researcher's role as a practitioner does direct this towards a specific end.

Engrained in the researcher's role at the university is a drive to recruit students, increase populations, and measure that success. Recruitment is an important role within the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and this comes with a bias that attending UCF is a beneficial decision and students should want to attend. The messaging, tactics of recruiting, and customer service focus of the department are designed to entice or encouraging students to enroll and this comes from a biased position that enrolling at UCF is a benefit to students and to the university.

The researcher's personal biases also include a belief that attending a four year university and obtaining a bachelor's degree is something that should be considered by most students. It is, in all honestly, difficult for the researcher to understand why students would not want to attend a four year university and experience all that a college can offer but that is due to the researcher's own experiences and benefit from attending college. Part of this bias includes a belief in

increasing access to a college education. Opening and fostering paths of enrollment would make it more likely that students will consider, and pursue, a college education.

Framework Description

In response to this problem of practice, this project will propose a framework of recruitment that is differentiated from the normal methods used by the university. A differentiated recruitment framework would modify the recruitment methods undertaken by undergraduate admissions staff at UCF in order to better meet the needs of the students at JHS and impact their college choices in ways that are tailored to their specific needs and context. The goal of this framework will be to increase the number of students that consider attending the university as evidenced by an increase in applications and matriculation of minority students from JHS.

Current recruitment practices approach students at JHS as they would any other students throughout the state of Florida. The school is visited once each year in the fall by undergraduate admissions staff and a presentation is made describing the university and the admissions process. These presentations are attended by seniors and juniors who are interested in the university, have obtained permission to leave class to attend, and who do not have conflicting responsibilities such as a test, lab, or other project. An average presentation lasts about forty-five minutes, which includes ten to fifteen minutes of time where students are able to ask questions.

Guidance counselors at JHS are sent information via mailings and emails that communicate information about the admission process. This information is sent with the intent of helping guidance counselors provide accurate information to their students throughout the year and to place the university on their minds as they interact with students. The goal is to have

guidance counselors suggest the university to students who are interested in a college education and provide information about the application process. The information sent to these guidance counselors is the same that is sent to guidance counselors throughout the state of Florida with no specific tailoring of the message to counselors who work with high minority populations.

A regional college fair is also offered each fall that JHS students are invited to attend. This fair is offered on the campus of the local state college and students from multiple high schools from the area are invited to attend. It is up to the high school to decide if they are willing or able to provide transportation to students who will be attending. The college fair is also offered in the evening and students who are interested in attending would need to take the initiative to do so. This college fair is attended by a large number of college representatives from universities around the nation and students have the opportunity to gain information about academic programs and admissions policies. Students who attend these fairs can typically fill a contact form that places them on a university mailing list where they will receive information via mail, email, and occasional phone calls about the university.

The students who choose to enroll at the local state college are offered access to Direct Connect advisors and information related to transferring to UCF. They also have access to the local college fairs although these events are typically marketed towards First Time in College students. If they request information from UCF, they are sent a separate set of communications tailored to transfer students. A newer event is offered at the university called “Transfer to Be a Knight”, which is a special information session held for students who are considering transferring.

Students who choose to attend other state or community colleges that are not a part of the Direct Connect articulation receive little interaction with staff from UCF on their campus. Periodically throughout the year, information regarding the transfer admission process is delivered to advisors at many of the state and community colleges throughout the state. This is usually in conjunction with visiting high schools or attending college fairs in the area. These interactions sometimes involve a meeting with advisors to discuss transfer issues but more often are a quick meeting that provides literature for their offices. Interested students have access to resources on UCF's website and may select to be a part of the mailing list but will find limited resources on their college campuses. Occasionally, UCF admissions staff members will attend college transfer fairs on the campuses of these colleges but they are not as regular an occurrence as events for high school students.

Students who attend another college or university will only be contacted or solicited if they express interest. UCF does not reach out to students from other colleges or universities other than in a general sense of providing transfer information online and by contacting students who have expressed interest in transferring.

These methods have been in place for a number of years with little change from year-to-year. The low enrollment of students from JHS is evidence that these current methods are less-effective than desired at recruiting these students to enroll.

Methodology

Introduction

In order to design a recruitment framework that increases enrollment of students from JHS, efforts must be taken to determine the experiences of these students and their perspectives on enrollment to UCF. This qualitative study is designed to gain information about the phenomenological experiences of JHS students who enrolled to UCF. There are two qualitative sources of information that will be used to determine the experiences that are impacting student consideration of enrollment to the university: a survey of current students attending UCF who attended JHS and an interview of a select number of these students.

Selection of Participants

Current students at UCF who previously attended JHS will be invited to participate in this study. Participants will be identified by information that was captured in a student data base at the time of application and enrollment. All current students who indicated that they had attended JHS will be solicited for participation in the study. Identifying information will be made anonymous to protect student privacy.

UCF students who previously attended JHS will be solicited for participation in the study through their primary email address on file with the university, beginning with an invitation to participate in the survey. This survey will be used to determine the path they took to their enrollment at the university and the experiences that influenced their decision to attend. The survey will include a question that asks if students would be interested in participating in an

interview set at a later time. Students who self-select will be contacted for participation in the interview portion of this study.

Setting

Collection of current student enrollment data will take place at UCF and will be undertaken by the researcher with the assistance of other staff members in the office of Undergraduate Admissions and the department of Institutional Knowledge Management.

The survey will be sent by email and conducted via an online survey platform. The email will be sent to the student email addresses on file with the university. The interviews will take place in a mutually agreed upon location between the researcher and subject. It will likely be a classroom or meeting space at the university.

Data Collection

Current students who attended JHS will be contacted via email to complete a survey administered via an online survey platform. Students will be emailed prior to the administration of the survey with information regarding their voluntary participation, the purpose of the study, and what they will be asked to do. The survey will then be sent via an email including a link to the online survey. A series of emails will be sent during that time to encourage participation and each of these emails will include the link to the survey.

The survey platform will facilitate data collection and will be able to provide information regarding the response rate. The completed surveys will also provide a pool of candidates to

select for the interview component based on the number of those who self-select to participate. Upon completion of the survey an email will be sent thanking the participants. The survey was created by the researcher for the purposes of this study.

Interviews will be held in a mutually agreed upon location that is free of distraction and will be conducted by the researcher. This will likely take place on the UCF campus although the option of virtual interviews via video conferencing will be suggested if negotiating a location is difficult. The participants will be informed of the purpose of the interview and the researcher will review the informed consent process and ask the participants to agree to the waiver of documentation of consent prior to the interview. The interviews will be recorded and brief handwritten notes will be taken. After the interviews end, they will be transcribed and coded. The interview questions were created by the researcher for the purposes of this study.

As a member of the UCF admissions staff, the researcher will not disclose his role; rather, he will say that he is a graduate student in the College of Education at the university. This is in an effort to allow the participants to feel more comfortable as they might feel some hesitation knowing they are talking to an administrator at the university they currently attend. The nature of the questions also relates to their experiences with admission and they may feel less free to discuss their experiences and opinions if they know they are speaking to someone from the admissions office. There is a possibility that these students may have interacted with the researcher while they applied for admission but these measures will be put in place in an attempt to facilitate free discussion.

Data Analysis

The office of Institutional Knowledge Management will provide participant information regarding the number of Jones High School students that currently attend UCF. This data will be used primarily to gain an understanding of the current population of students at the university who attended JHS and to solicit participation in the study.

Survey data will be collected by the online survey platform and response rates will be captured. The response data from the surveys will be used to identify the experiences that students had with preparation for college, navigation of the admissions process, why they chose to attend UCF, and interactions with the university relating to their enrollment. Trends will be identified and this information will be used to inform the development of a framework of recruitment that addresses the issues that are identified.

The interviews will be audio recorded and notes will be taken during the discussion. The recordings will be transcribed and these will be coded by the researcher. Three stages of coding will be used: open coding, focused coding, and axial coding to develop themes that emerged. These thematic elements will be triangulated with survey responses to further bolster the development of a recruitment framework that addresses the experiences of students who attend JHS. The interview data may also provide a deeper understanding of the trends that emerge from the survey instrument.

Recruitment Framework Development

Once trends and themes are identified from the survey and interviews, results will be used to suggest a recruitment framework of differentiated practices for Jones High School. Recruitment methods will be suggested based on the themes that arise from the study in order to

address specific concerns of this population. Issues of practicality and resource availability will be crucial components in developing a framework that is sustainable and able to be implemented. Emphasis will be placed on furthering current paths of enrollment and creating increased access and enrollment.

The framework will be developed during the late spring and early summer of 2016 and will not be able to be implemented until the following school year. The scope of this dissertation in practice will end prior to the implementation of this framework but as a staff member in Undergraduate Admissions at UCF, the researcher will play a role in its implementation and refinement. Continued research may be necessary to refine the framework in the future.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The University of Central Florida seeks to enroll a higher number of students from Jones High School than is currently enrolling. UCF, like many other institutions of higher education, seeks to enroll a diverse student body and JHS has a high Black or African American population. JHS also resides in the same city as the university and there are initiatives at UCF for programs and buildings in the neighborhood in which JHS resides. Students from JHS have a variety of paths to seek enrollment at the university. Understanding the experiences that influence how and why these students choose to enroll can play a part in developing recruitment methods to increase enrollment.

A number of factors play a role in this problem and have been discussed in relevant literature. As a dissertation in practice, these factors are situated in a specific context and this chapter will present a review of these factors and applicable literature, as well as the organizational context for this problem. The review will address the following topics: a review of the organizational context of UCF and JHS, competitive admission practices, minority enrollment, factors that influence student enrollment, and recruitment practices employed by the university.

Organizational Context

This problem of practice is situated in two organizations: UCF and JHS. Both institutions play a crucial role in shaping this problem and the scope of this problem relates to the way students choose to enroll, or not enroll, from one organization to the other.

The University of Central Florida

The University of Central Florida was founded in 1963 and is currently the largest university in the state of Florida and second-largest in the nation. It is located in Orlando, Florida and enrolls approximately sixty-one thousand students in two hundred and ten degree programs and employs over eleven thousand individuals, including nearly two thousand faculty members. The fourteen hundred and fifteen acre main campus is located on the east side of Orlando. In addition, there is a hospitality campus, a medical school, and nine regional campuses which are located throughout central Florida. Ninety-three percent of the student body is from the state of Florida but there are also students enrolled from all fifty states and one hundred and forty-eight countries. The university also provides on-campus housing for nearly twelve thousand students in eleven different communities (Institutional Knowledge Management, 2015).

The university's growth has been marked by various accomplishments in research, partnership, and academic scholarship. UCF students have been recognized as Rhodes, Mellon, and Goldwater scholars and in 2014 the university enrolled two hundred and seventy-five National Merit Scholars. The university has established partnerships in engineering, business, modeling and simulation, digital media, and hospitality management. It is also one of twenty-

five public universities with the Carnegie Foundation's highest designation in community engagement and very high research activity (About UCF, 2015).

The university has continued to enroll academically talented students in an increasingly competitive admission environment. For the Fall 2014 term, twenty-four thousand five hundred and eleven (24,511) First Time in College students (those with less than twelve credits after high school graduation) applied for admission. Of these, ten thousand six hundred and ninety-two (10,692) students were offered admission and three thousand seven hundred and forty-five (3,745) enrolled. The average high school GPA was 3.92, the average SAT score was 1256 (math and critical reading only), and the average ACT was 27.4. The competitive environment has increased over the last fifteen years and is expected to continue this climb (Institutional Knowledge Management, 2014). Figure 1 shows the growth of FTIC applications over a fifteen year period. The number of applicants has risen significantly while the number of admits and enrolled students has increased only slightly.

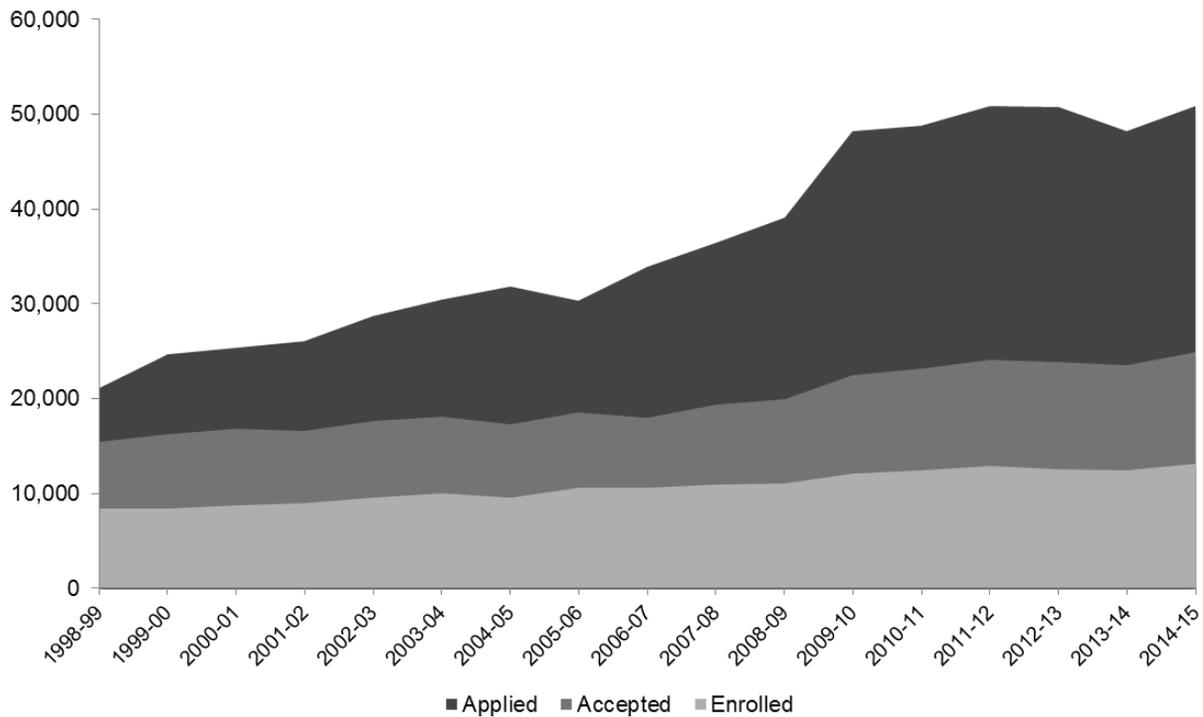


Figure 1: UCF FTIC Application Growth

These pieces of information about the freshman class are often used in publications and rankings. This selective and competitive admission environment plays an important part in this problem of practice. The admissions environment for students exiting high school and intending to enroll at the university has become increasingly competitive for all students and the problem of low minority enrollment from JHS is situated in this context (Institutional Knowledge Management, 2015).

Minority students are enrolling at the university and these numbers are encouraging in light of the problem facing certain students from the district. Minority enrollment for the Fall 2014 First Time in College students was at thirty-eight percent. This is closely mirrored by the entire university population which holds minority enrollment at forty percent. While these

overall numbers are encouraging, it is important to note that for Black or African American students, the numbers are a bit lower. Ten percent of the First Time in College class and eleven percent of the overall enrollment at the university is Black or African American (Table 2). This is significant because the majority of students at JHS are Black or African American.

Table 2: UCF Student Population 2014

Ethnicity	Degree-Seeking First Time, First Year	Degree Seeking Undergraduates	Total Undergraduates
Nonresident Aliens	48	521	603
Hispanic/Latino	1,454	12,047	12,076
Black or African American, Non- Hispanic	643	5,688	5,697
White, Non-Hispanic	3,618	28,862	28,960
American Indian or Alaskan Native, Non-Hispanic	4	102	104
Asian, Non-Hispanic	374	2,923	2,926
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	8	121	121
Two or more races, Non-Hispanic	285	1,684	1,686
Race and/or Ethnicity Unknown	33	348	359
Total	6,467	52,296	52,532

UCF is one of twelve state universities in Florida and falls under the governance of the Florida Board of Governors. The state university system exists to serve the academic needs of the state by providing high quality academic programs, research, and community outreach to improve the economic livelihood of Floridians. The entire system enrolls over three hundred and thirty-seven thousand students and annually awards over eighty-one thousand degrees (Board of

Governors, 2014). The Florida Board of Governors has set in place a variety of regulations that all state universities follow, including regulations that direct the undergraduate admission policies. These admission regulations determine, in part, the necessary documents for consideration for admission, minimum requirements, and state-wide articulations between community or state colleges and the twelve state universities. The degree of flexibility and adjustments of admission practices at UCF is limited to those activities within the scope of these regulations (Florida Board of Governors, 2012).

The state of Florida also includes a system of twenty-eight state or community colleges that provide higher education opportunities for students within the state. These colleges enroll sixty-five percent of the high school graduates from Florida who pursue higher education. Specific to this study, eighty-two percent of all freshman and sophomore students enrolled in an institution of higher education in the state of Florida attend one of these institutions (Division of Florida Colleges, 2015). Articulation agreements between these colleges and the state universities of Florida ensure the transfer of college course work and select degrees. Many students choose to earn an Associate of Arts degree from one of these colleges and use that to transfer to a state university via a “2+2” articulation agreement that exists between these college and the state universities. Students who earn an Associate of Arts degree from one of these colleges are guaranteed admission to one of the state universities, although this does not guarantee admission to their university of choice (Florida Board of Governors, 2015).

UCF has a specific articulation agreement with six of the state colleges in central Florida called Direct Connect. This agreement provides a guarantee of admission to transfer students who earn an Associate of Arts degree from Daytona State College, College of Central Florida,

Valencia College, Seminole State College, Eastern Florida State College, and Lake Sumter State College. This program provides a guaranteed path of entry to the university for students who choose to enroll at these institutions and then transfer to UCF (Direct Connect to UCF, 2015).

Orange County Public Schools and Jones High School

The Orange County Public School District holds the distinction as the tenth largest school district in the nation and the fourth largest in the state of Florida. The district serves over one hundred and ninety-one thousand students and of those, fifty-two thousand attend a traditional public high school. The district enrolls a very diverse population with seventy percent of the district-wide enrollment comprised of minority students. In 2013, the district graduation rate was 86.8 percent from its traditional high schools. While not all graduating seniors intend to enroll in college, this is a large population of students with the potential to seek college enrollment (Orange County Public Schools, 2014).

The large number of minority students in the district has led to the recent creation of the Minority Achievement Office. This initiative was created in order to diminish the achievement gap between minority students and those in the majority by providing specific support and professional development to educators in the district (Lawson et al, 2014). Initiatives include a pipeline to increase the number of minority students moving into education professions and a pipeline toward medical schools. These initiatives necessitate a college education and UCF is the local, public university that provides opportunities for educational and medical programming.

Jones High School is one of the schools within the district that has a high minority population and has low enrollment to UCF. Believed to have begun in 1895, it was officially

established in the Parramore neighborhood in 1921. It began as the first public school for African Americans in Orlando and continues to enroll a high population of Black or African American students (Jones High School, 2015). During the 2011-2012 school year, JHS enrolled nine hundred and twenty-nine students and 92.7 percent of these students were Black or African American. Only 1.5 percent were White, 4.3 percent were Hispanic, and the remaining students were Native American or selected two or more races. 62.6 percent of the students were economically disadvantaged and 15.7 percent were categorized as disabled (Florida Department of Education, 2011).

Academic achievement at JHS is below district averages as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The reading assessment had only thirty-two percent of students at JHS scoring satisfactory or above while the district average was fifty-seven percent. Mathematics was slightly higher with forty-four percent of JHS students scoring satisfactory or above compared to the district average of fifty-seven percent. Interestingly, the writing assessment showed eighty-seven percent of JHS students scoring satisfactory or above, which was higher than the district at eighty-one percent. The FCAT is only a single measure of academic achievement and, like all high-stakes testing, does not address all of the academic factors. It does, however, provide some comparison of how students at JHS are performing compared to their peers district-wide (Florida Department of Education, 2011).

The level of academic achievement at JHS certainly has impacts for gaining admission to UCF in a competitive environment. Students who apply for admission are competing with other students and if they are generally performing lower than their peers, they are less likely to gain

admission. This challenge of gaining admission in a competitive environment may play a role in the path of enrollment students select from JHS to the university.

Competitive Admissions Environment

UCF is a large public university that employs a competitive admission process. This is not a unique scenario. Many colleges and universities around the world have adopted admission policies that require high standards of academic criteria and contribute to a competitive admissions environment. The way in which these policies interact with students creates the environment in which this problem is situated.

Global Perspective

Students from around the world are increasingly interested in enrolling in educational institutions abroad, with a nearly sixty-one percent increase between 1997 and 2005. The majority of these students are interested in studying in western nations with the United States as the main country of interest (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). While other countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have seen increased interest among international students in recent years, the U.S. still enrolls more international students than any other nation (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). An increase of students interested in enrolling at U.S. institutions of higher education adds to the number of students that domestic students need to compete with for admission.

The competition for enrollment fuels a variety of issues including the emergence of agencies that assist (or guarantee) international students admission U.S. colleges and recent controversies related to cheating on SAT testing overseas (Strauss, 2015). Competition for enrollment and the pursuit of education, like many other aspects of society, has become increasingly global. This has led to some agencies and students who are willing to invest large financial resources and in some cases even bend or break rules in order to give themselves a competitive advantage.

National Perspective

Within the United States, there is a long and storied history of college admission requirements that have brought us to the current environment. From the beginning of higher education in the U.S., entrance requirements were set in place to determine which students were suitable for the university environment and which were not. Early in its history, Harvard placed requirements related to a student's ability in Greek and Latin in order to enroll (Statutes, 1989). The relatively few colleges at the end of the 18th century changed as many more institutions of higher education institutions began as the nation expanded westward into the 19th century. As the number and variety of colleges grew nationwide, the growth of these institutions necessitated a change in admission practices. This administrative function that was sometimes carried out by faculty, or even the president of a university, now required administrators such as Deans of Admission (Coomes, 2000).

The twentieth century would come to see continued growth and many efforts towards clearer admission policies and practices. During the middle of the nineteenth century, there was little agreement regarding the required courses or abilities of students for entrance into college.

This became very frustrating to students and those who attempted to guide students to enroll in college. At the turn of the century, area accrediting agencies were created to provide oversight to universities, and by the 1950's a fairly uniform set of requirements were in place. These related to evaluating students based on graduation from high school, certain academic units completed while in high school, and aptitude or achievement test scores (Beale, 2012).

The passage of the Higher Education Act in 1965 (and it's reauthorization in 1980) firmly set higher education as a national priority. Higher education was seen as an important component in the growth of our nation and funding and regulations were attached to this priority (Coomes, 2000). As federal financial aid was offered for higher education, federal policies were further cemented into the enrollment process. Admission practices morphed to become an expanded practice of enrollment management to ensure that student enrollment met financial and growth targets held by the university (Hossler, 1996). Financial aid became not only a means of access to education, but it also became a means of bargaining and recruitment to meet specific enrollment goals. Colleges offering their own institutional aid as a means of recruiting and attracting students are able to shape their enrollment and communicate characteristics of what they look for in a student with this aid (Doyle, 2010).

The Civil Rights Movement also had significant impact on the admission policies and practices within higher education. The Higher Education Act provided increased access to minority students and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 addressed gender issues and the roll of advancing women's opportunities in higher education (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Stromquist, 2013). The shape of college enrollment changed as a more diverse population sought access to enroll. As college enrollment continued to grow, public policy continued to

take shape along with the growth, particularly as the United States continued to see higher education as a vehicle for national growth (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005).

Minority College Enrollment in the U.S and Florida

Throughout our nation's history, the college enrollment of minority students has been a multi-faceted conversation that has undergone shifts and changes in response to societal change. Race-conscious admission policies and practices, such as affirmative action, arose out of social change and upheaval during the 1960's (Stulberg & Chen, 2013). The Supreme Court helped shape admission during their 1978 verdict of *The Regents of University of California v. Bakke* in which they allowed for race-based decision making in the admission process to increase diversity. This continued into the mid-to-late 90's when many states abandoned affirmative action plans in the admission process (Long, 2004). In the state of Florida, this occurred in 2001 when Jeb Bush, Governor at the time, eliminated the affirmative action plans and replaced them with a Top 20 Percent admission program. This program was designed to offer guaranteed admission to the top 20% of students at Florida high schools to the state university system ("Look What Happens", 2002). Calls for rethinking diversity and enrollment practices were issued to determine how these policies were impacting student access (Friedl, 2002).

As these policies changed, accumulated, and underwent adjustments, minority enrollment in colleges fluctuated with them. Fewer minority students applied to colleges in the years following bans on affirmative action. Creative admission policies such as Florida's Top 20 and Texas' Top 10 percent programs were put in place in an attempt to recapture minority enrollment (Dickson, 2006). While policies continued to change and adjust, others remained the same such

as requirements for standardized test scores in the enrollment review. Tests like the SAT and ACT continued to present challenges to minority students (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005) as well as gaining overall scrutiny for their value in predicting college success for all students (Sternberg, 2012). These tests continue to be required by most colleges and universities for admission. Many public universities, such as those in the state of Florida, require these test scores as a non-optional component of the admission process as required by state statutes (Florida Board of Governors, 2015).

These policies were adopted and changed in efforts to provide equitable access, opportunity, liberty, and increase in welfare to the minority populations of the nation but the accumulation and changes in policies have not achieved those ends. Minority enrollment continues to lag behind that of white students in the state of Florida (Samuels, 2015) and race-conscious admission practices continue to come to national attention as in the case of *Fisher v. University of Texas*. This conversation continues in the public discussion as governors and other elected officials continue to make education reform and policy change a major component of their platforms (Shober, 2012).

College Choice and Low-Income Minority Students

Jones High School enrolls a large number of minority students with the majority being Black or African-American. Many of these students (62.6 percent) are also economically disadvantaged as well (Florida Department of Education, 2011). Low-income students are more likely to academically undermatch when making a college choice. Undermatch refers to students whose academic credentials allow them access to higher quality colleges or universities but they choose to select a lower quality option (Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013). This is in contrast to

high-income students who are more likely than their low-income counterparts to apply for and achieve enrollment at selective colleges and universities (Hoxby & Avery, 2012).

Undermatching is a widespread phenomenon experienced by students nationwide, not just at Jones High School (Dillon & Smith, 2013). Students who undermatch may be forgoing academic resources, financial aid offerings, and course options that they may find at a more selective institution. Less selective institutions typically have smaller budgets resulting in fewer non-academic resources (sports, activities, etc.) that contribute to higher graduation rates (Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013). Beyond the in-college offerings, students who attend more selective institutions may also have additional opportunities in the labor market after graduation (Goodman, Hurwitz, & Smith, 2015).

Features of Competitive Admissions

The issue of enrollment to college and the challenges facing minority students gaining admission are framed by the competitive nature of the admission environment. This competition for enrollment is fueled by a desire to attend prestigious U.S. colleges in which enrollment space is limited. The way in which colleges are ranked and compared nationwide fuels this competitive environment as well.

Many factors are considered in a decision to offer admission to a prospective student but three of the main objectives of the university are meeting bottom-line financial targets, enrolling students capable of academic success, and enrolling a diverse population of students (Espenshade & Radford, 2009). The first of these objectives often sets the criteria for the number of students the university seeks to enroll, based on available space and financial targets. At selective institutions, this limit creates a scenario where there are a number of potentially

successful students that exceeds the enrollment targets of the university. This creates an environment where admission officers will select certain students for admission and deny others.

Criteria for admission varies for each institution but academic factors such as high school GPA, class rank, and standardized test scores (SAT or ACT tests) often play the largest role in admission decisions. These are also often used in the national ranking of colleges and universities and many institutions set growth targets in a race to attract the highest rankings and most talented students (U.S. News, 2014). The importance of these factors in the admission process contributes to the stress and anxiety students may feel related to their academic performance and their ability to gain admission to college (Bollinger, 2002). The ways in which these factors are used in the admission process are not without controversy.

The strength of a high school GPA and class ranking may be greatly influenced by the type of high school in which a student is enrolled. Students who attend talent-rich high schools that offer a rigorous course load may find themselves with a lower class rank due to the number of talented students in the class. These same students may have a much higher class rank and standing at a high school with less talented students and less rigorous courses. These measures can be factored in admission decisions if admission officers are familiar with the differences in these high schools however, this highlights the fact that even numerical factors such as a GPA and class rank are subject to interpretation (Espenshade, Hale, & Chung, 2005).

Standardized test scores are among the most contentious and stressful factors in a selective admission environment due to their perceived importance in admission decisions (Bollinger, 2002; MacGowen, 1999). The perceived importance and anxiety that these test scores cause can be seen by the proliferation of test preparation services and the amount of

money families are willing to spend on these services (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998). Indeed, at the most selective institutions, the average SAT and ACT test scores have risen substantially in the last fifty years and the number of students who were admitted has plunged (Hennessy, 2001; McDonough, 1997). The importance of these test scores places an even greater burden of anxiety on minority students. African American and Latino students historically and currently have lower SAT scores than their White and Asian peers. This is particularly true of those minorities who also come from low income and urban areas (Walpole et.al, 2005). This disparity in test scores is often indicative of broader social disparities between communities, neighborhoods, and individual schools (Letukas, 2016)

Standardized test scores have been used throughout the nation's history and have been used to predict the potential success of students in college (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Zwick, 2007). Like many standardized measures, there is a difference in the predictive validity of these tests for different populations of students (Noble & Sawyer, 2002; Young & Kobrin, 2001). Among these differences, the predictive validity of standardized test scores is lower for students who will be in the minority at the college in which they enroll (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005). There is also lowered predictive validity for students for whom English is not their first language. While there is a difference in predictive validity, it is important to note that these tests do provide information to admission officers and can be used in conjunction with other academic measures, such as high school GPA and class rank, to provide a more accurate prediction of potential college success (Zwick & Sklar, 2005).

One way in which this problem has been addressed is that some selective colleges and universities have chosen to have a test-optional admission policy. Many of these institutions

have adopted these test-optional policies in order to attract a more diverse population of students who may be negatively impacted by the importance of test scores on the admission process. There are, however, alternative reasons that institutions have adopted this policy. One reason is the belief that those students who have scored well on standardized test scores may be more likely to submit their scores while those who have performed poorly will choose not to submit them. This allows the institution to potentially have a higher average SAT to report to ranking agencies and add to their perceived prestige because only the higher scoring students enrolled are submitting their test scores (Syverson, 2007). While this solution is creative and may alleviate some of the challenges minorities face, there are some institutions that may not have this option. The public universities in the state of Florida, for example, are governed by state statutes that require students to submit standardized test scores for admission review for First Time in College applicants (Florida Board of Governors, 2015).

The transfer admission process is also competitive. Students who choose to enroll at another college or university must show that they can be successful in their continued enrollment at UCF. Students who are transferring with less than sixty credit hours of college coursework are considered Lower Division transfer students and are still evaluated for admission based on their high school GPA, SAT/ACT test scores, as well as their college course work. They are, in many ways, still competing with the FTIC students because many FTIC students will arrive in college with some amount of college credit earned through accelerated mechanisms (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Enrollment, etc.).

Transfer student to UCF who earn sixty credits or more are considered Upper Division transfer students and are no longer reviewed based on high school credentials or SAT/ACT

scores. They are still facing a competitive admission environment in that they need to show a competitive cumulative GPA as well as completion of two English Compositions courses, two college-level Math courses, and satisfaction of the World Languages requirements (two years in high school or two consecutive courses in college). The one guarantee of admission is for the students who meet the Direct Connect articulation by earning an Associate of Arts degree from one of the five Direct Connect partner institutions in central Florida.

Factors that Influence Student Enrollment

Many factors impact this problem but there are certain things that need to be in place for students to enroll at UCF. Among these are academic preparation, understanding of the admission process, and motivation to attend and each of these inform a students' decision to enroll.

Academic Preparation

Mention the term “achievement gap” to any educator, and you are bound to find at least some familiarity surrounding this discussion. The difference in academic achievement between minority students and their majority counterparts is not a new problem, nor has it struggled from a lack of research. It is a familiar yet complex and challenging problem that has roots in historic inequalities, economic and sociopolitical structures, and moral complexities (Ladson-Billings, 2006). On standardized testing alone, African American and Latina/o students score lower than White students even when students come from households with a similar income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). This gap in test scores also reflects a gap of test score

achievement throughout the educational system, not just when students are applying for admission to college (McDonough, 2015).

While standardized testing scores do not necessarily reflect all educational performance, they are an important aspect of the ability to gain admission to college. Beyond test scores, the way in which students are prepared while they are in high school has an important impact on student enrollment to colleges and universities and this extends beyond a traditional classroom education (Swail, 2000). Programs designed to prepare high school students can have an impact on student understanding of the admission process, enrollment, and persistence to graduation once enrolled in college (Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2015).

Student academic preparation is an important consideration of how students might approach college enrollment. If students do not feel that they are prepared, whether or not they actually are or not, they are less likely to consider enrollment and apply. This may also play a significant part in their choice of which path they select for enrollment to the university.

Understanding the Admission Process

Minority students are more likely than other students to be the first of their family to enroll in college. This means they are also the first to navigate the college admission process (Terenzini et. al, 1996). Likewise, many minority students who come from low-income families and first generation college students, lack the information and support services needed to navigate the college admission and financial aid processes (Perna, 2015). These students are likely to have unrealistic expectations of what college will be like, they may lack the social support needed to successfully enroll (and persist) in college, and are less likely to be familiar

with the way in which the university system works (Brooks-Terry, 1998; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991).

Students at JHS may lack the guidance from family and educational professionals, such as teachers and guidance counselors, which is necessary to help them with the college application requirements, timing, and understanding of what should be expected during the admission process. Guidance counselors do provide an important role in providing college preparatory guidance to students. However, these efforts are often dampened by other responsibilities that counselors face, such as course scheduling and academic testing (Clinedist et al., 2013). While online resources are an important resource for college preparation, low-income and first-generation students need additional guidance to help prepare for college testing, visiting college campuses, and understanding the availability of financial aid options (Tierney et al., 2009).

An exploration of the experiences JHS students have with college preparatory resources will be conducted. An aspect of this research will determine what resources are available to students such as guidance counselors, access to college application information, and the availability or access to information from UCF. This will include events and recruitment activities that the university utilizes to reach out to these students.

Motivation

Another contributing factor to enroll is the motivation students have to attend the university. This motivation may be intrinsic or extrinsic and may be influenced by social pressures, locus of control, self-efficacy, and college recruitment activities.

Social pressures come in many forms, from general societal stereotypes to peer influence. Positive social pressures towards college enrollment may result from the social capital associated with attending college and earning a degree (Perna, 2000) in addition to access to social networks that provide encouragement and information about college (Kim & Nunez, 2013). Negative social pressures however, may also impact student enrollment. African American students, in particular, may be combating internal battles with negative societal stereotypes regarding their intelligence. This may cause them to either believe these stereotypes, or cause them to feel anxiety about their academic performance because they do not want to prove these stereotypes to be true (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006).

Attribution theory also informs student motivation to seek enrollment at college by addressing how students might attribute their ability to gain enrollment to internal or external variables (Weiner, 2012). Students may be influenced by an external locus of control and a belief that they do not control the variables necessary to enroll and succeed at the university. Students with an external locus of control may believe that overcoming personal obstacles, such as financial limitations, transportation difficulties, and issues of racial oppression are beyond their ability to do anything about them (Brown, Rosnick, & Segrist, 2016). Attributing their inability to enroll or succeed in college to elements beyond their control may inhibit their pursuit of enrollment at the university (Gifford, Briceno-Perriott, & Mianzo, 2006).

Another motivational theory that informs college enrollment is the level of self-efficacy held by students regarding their educational abilities. Self-efficacy is the belief or assessment that an individual holds about their ability to obtain a specific outcome (Bandura, 1986). The self-efficacy that students hold towards a certain task or outcome can be influenced by four

sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Performance accomplishments refer to past experiences and performances an individual experienced. Vicarious experience comes from watching others succeed or fail (i.e., friends enrolling in college or not). Verbal persuasion references encouragements and exhortations from others such as guidance counselors or teachers. Emotional arousal refers to the levels of stress, comfort, excitement, or fear that these students may feel towards college enrollment (Bandura, 1977).

It is important to note that self-efficacy is a multidimensional concept that relates to specific outcomes so students may have high self-efficacy in one dimension of their life while holding low self-efficacy in another (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). Students with low self-efficacy regarding their academic ability will have diminished confidence that they will be able to succeed in additional pursuits while those with higher self-efficacy are more likely to pursue academic challenges and persist to achieve them (Reid, 2013).

The most challenging aspect of self-efficacy beliefs is that they are rooted in past experience. Students who have successful academic experiences are more likely to believe that they will succeed in future academic settings. Students who have struggled or experience failure academically are much more likely to believe that they will continue to struggle and fail in future academic pursuits. Students with high self-efficacy are also more likely to be persistent in their educational pursuits and work through the difficulty with various subject matters because they have a belief that they will eventually “get it”. Students with low-self efficacy may give up more quickly because they believe that they “just don’t get it” (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

College recruitment activities can also play a role in motivating students to pursue higher education. College admission officers routinely visit high schools to provide information about their institution with the goal of increasing interest and enrollment (Lautz, Hawkins, & Perez, 2005). The extent to which UCF employs college recruitment methods on the JHS campus can impact the motivation that students have to seek enrollment. This study will seek to explore the experiences students have with the recruitment methods employed by UCF, their own perceived ability to gain admission, and their experiences navigating the admission process.

Current UCF Recruitment Practices

Current recruitment practices that UCF implements include a number of elements that are employed to engage prospective students, entice them into considering UCF as a college choice, and provide information about the admission process. Elements include online marketing, emails, encouraging on campus visits, college fairs, communication to persons of influence (ex. guidance counselors), and high school visits. Many of these methods used are in line with preferred methods of communication (Goff, Patino, & Jackson, 2010). A high school visit is a hallmark of the admissions profession where admission officers will visit a high school to speak with interested students about the admission process and is practiced by most colleges and universities throughout the nation (Lautz, Hawkins, & Perez, 2005).

Prospective students have a large number of variables to consider when selecting a particular college or university to attend and managing to process all of the information made available can be challenging. In reality, most students will evaluate their decisions based on only eight to ten criteria due to the challenge of managing all of the information made available (Galotti, 1995). Many of the recruiting strategies employed are designed to reach a wide

audience. These methods focus on factors that are more likely to attract students such as the campus climate, quality of educational instruction, and availability of student support. While this can be useful as a general strategy, the most effective recruiting practices should be targeted at those criteria that students identify as the most important to them (Elliott & Healy, 2001).

The university currently does not differentiate its recruiting practices for different types of schools, populations, or regions within the state of Florida. Prospective students are entered into a database and this initiates the communication plan for prospective students and/or applicants, depending on where the student is in the process. High schools in the district are also visited each fall and each high school is typically only visited a single time, regardless of the type of school and population of students. The message communicated at each visit is the same as well, covering general information about the university and emphasizing the components admission process. Students who attend local state colleges have access to advisors and offices on their campus that provide information about transitioning to UCF via the Direct Connect agreement however, students who attend other universities will only receive information about transferring if they request it.

A challenge of this approach is that different student populations have different needs related to their college decisions. African American students, for example, are more likely to place a greater emphasis on the social capital gained by college enrollment than their White peers. However, they typically have less access to information and knowledge about how to actually acquire a college education (Perna, 2000). A high school with a high population of African American students like JHS, may benefit from a message tailored to their needs and they may also need additional assistance with the step-by-step process of gaining a college education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The number of students who enroll at UCF from JHS is lower than desired by the office of Undergraduate Admissions at the university. UCF, like many other institutions of higher education, seeks to enroll a diverse student body and JHS has a high Black or African American population. JHS also resides in the same city as UCF and the university has for new programs and buildings in the neighborhood in which JHS resides. Students from JHS have a variety of paths to seek enrollment at UCF and understanding the experiences that influence how these students choose to enroll can play a part in developing recruitment methods to increase enrollment.

This study seeks to explore the experiences that led these students to enroll at UCF and why they chose to enroll via the path they selected. There are a variety of paths that could lead to enrollment such as enrolling directly after high school, transferring from a state or community college, transferring through the Direct Connect program, or transferring from another college or university. This problem is situated in a specific context and therefore this study seeks to understand the experiences of this specific population of JHS students in relation to enrollment to UCF.

Research Design

This qualitative study used two sources of information were used to explore the phenomenological experiences that influenced the enrollment of students from JHS to UCF: a survey of students who are enrolled at UCF who attended JHS and an interview of a select

number of these students. The survey and interview protocols were designed to provide insight into three research questions:

1. What paths are students from JHS taking to enroll at UCF?
2. What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced their decision to attend UCF?
3. What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced the path they chose to achieve enrollment?

The survey and interviews were designed with current students at UCF in mind who had previously attended JHS, and sought to understand their experiences that influenced their enrollment to UCF. The survey was distributed via email and completed online while the interviews took place face-to-face or virtually via online video conference.

Delimitations and Limitations

This is a qualitative study and is concerned with the phenomenological experiences of these participants at this particular point in time. The delimitations of this study determine the scope and boundaries of the research design while the limitations will set the limit to which this study can be generalized to other populations (Ellis & Levy, 2009).

This study was delimited to only include those students who enrolled at UCF from Jones High School, which does not include the experiences of students who chose not to attend UCF. Also, the population of students identified was limited to students who indicated Jones High School listed in their educational history within the database at UCF. The possibility exists that there may be some students currently attending the university who previously attended JHS who

did not identify this when they applied for admission. It may also be possible that a student attended multiple high schools including JHS and would still qualify for participation. When students apply for admission, they indicate the high school they graduated from and this information is entered into the student database. Only the graduating high school is captured so students selected for participation in this study graduated from Jones High School but may have attended another institution as well.

This study was also only sought to explore the phenomenological experiences of this student population and did not address other academic aspects of the enrollment process. Student experiences were not cross-referenced against incoming student data such as GPA and standardized test scores captured during the admission process.

A limitation of this study is that the survey and interviews relied solely on email contact. Participants would have needed to regularly check their email in order to receive the invitation. The first round of contact was sent to the student email address provided to them by the university, as this was their preferred email on file. A second round of contact was sent to the alternate emails on file as well as the primary email address on file. This was done in an effort to capture responses from students who do not regularly check their university-issued email account. Those participants who regularly check their email may not be representative of the entire population.

This study asks participants to reflect only on past experiences which may be limited by their memory and the amount of time since their enrollment at the university. This study is also designed to inform the practice of the researcher. While it will have an impact to this context, the results are not generalizable to other populations of students in a different context.

Setting

This study was administered in the spring of 2016 at the University of Central Florida, a large public research university located in Orlando, Florida. Surveys and interview participants who were invited to participate were identified as current students of the university. Prior to beginning the study, approval was sought and gained by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Central Florida. Once approval for the study was gained, a written request, including documentation of research approval, was sent to the department of Institutional Knowledge Management at UCF for contact information for participants who matched the study design. This department queried the institutional database and provided participant contact information.

The survey portion of this study was conducted online and was distributed via the preferred email address on file with the university. An online survey platform was used to build and manage the survey questions and responses. Participation in this survey, therefore, was contingent upon participants checking their email in order to receive the invitation and complete the survey. Responses were collected and reviewed via the online platform.

The interviews were conducted on the campus of the university in a mutually agreed upon location or virtually via online video conference. The face-to-face interviews were held in locations free from distractions or interruptions to the research rather than a public area. This setting, while confidential and private, may have been perceived as formal or intimidating, which may have inhibited honest and open responses. The virtual interviews were conducted online via video conferencing. This method of interviewing allowed participants to be in an environment

of their choosing which may have been more comfortable and allowed free discussion. These locations however, were open to distraction.

Participants

The selected participants were students at UCF who previously attended Jones High School. These were identified by a request to the office of Institutional Knowledge Management. When students apply to UCF via any path (First Time in College, Transfer, etc.), they are asked which high school they graduated from. This information is entered into the database and remains on their record even if they are not required to send transcripts from their high school for admission purposes. This allowed the Institutional Knowledge Management office query the database to identify any students who had JHS in their educational record.

One hundred and nineteen students were identified meeting these criteria and all were included in the invitation to complete the survey. The survey was first sent to their primary email address on file. The initial response rates for the survey were low and so additional invites were sent to include any alternate emails that the students had on file with the university. The survey was closed after nine weeks of requests to complete the survey. Response rates improved throughout that time but still remained low.

Thirty-one participants completed the survey but demographic questions were not required to be answered. Although most participants provided this data, some chose to leave these questions blank. As was expected, most participants were Black or African American students (28) which corresponds with the high population of Black or African American students at Jones High School. A large majority of the participants were female (23) and, as a surprise to

the researcher, nearly a third were thirty-five years old or older (10). Table 3 shows the survey participants and the demographic breakdown for those who chose to complete the survey.

Table 3: Survey Participants

Variable	n	%
Reponses	31*	26%
Gender		
Female	23	74%
Male	7	23%
No response	1	3%
Academic level		
Freshman	2	6%
Sophomore	0	0%
Junior	7	23%
Senior	12	39%
College Graduate	8	26%
No response	2	6%
Age		
19-24	11	35%
25-30	5	16%
30-35	2	6%
35+	10	32%
No response	3	10%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino/a	0	0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%
Asian	0	0%
Black or African American	28	90%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	3%
White	0	0%
No response	2	6%
Level of enrollment		
Part-Time (1-11 credits)	7	23%
Full-time (12 credits or more)	15	48%
Not Enrolled	8	26%
No response	1	3%

Note. Total population contacted = 119

Initially, participants for the interview were students who completed the survey and self-selected to complete the interview. The final questions of the survey asked if the participant would be interested in participating in an interview and those who selected “Yes” were asked to provide their email contact for follow up. Only three students who completed the survey indicated an interest in the interview and these students were contacted via email. Two of them were responsive and arrangements were made to select a date, time, and location for the interview. The third would not respond to attempts at contact. Because response rates were so low, an additional email campaign to all one hundred and nineteen participants was conducted seeking participation in interviews regardless of their response to the survey.

Responses from participants continued to be slow for both the survey and interview therefore, an aggressive email campaign was undertaken to increase respondents. Participants were emailed for both survey and interview participation multiple times a week until responses improved.

Six participants self-selected to be interviewed. All six were Black or African American women who represented various ages, paths of enrollment, and individual experiences. Aliases were given to the interview participants and will be used in this document in accordance with the consent documents approved by the IRB (Table 4).

Table 4: Interview Participants

Alias	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Sally	Female	28	Black or African American
Cathy	Female	32	Black or African American
Marla	Female	24	Black or African American
Inez	Female	22	Black or African American
Sheila	Female	52	Black or African American
Tina	Female	25	Black or African American

Data Collection

Survey Procedures

The survey data collection was conducted via an online survey platform that allowed for instrument creation, email solicitation, response collection, and collection of survey data. The survey was designed by the researcher and was created within the platform. Test surveys were completed by the researcher before it was sent to participants, ensuring that the logic and flow of the survey worked properly.

The invitation to participate in the survey was sent to participants and reminder emails were sent out weekly for nine weeks. These emails were sent via the online platform, which was able to measure response rates, the number of emails that were opened, how many participants started the survey, and how many completed. The initial email explained the purpose and intent of the survey while the additional emails were shorter with a brief reminder to participate. Each email was sent to the entire participant list and with a message thanking those who already participated. The survey collection period included the week of Spring Break at UCF which was less than ideal since it can be assumed that students are less likely to engage in academic activity during that week.

The survey was closed after nine weeks. A final email was sent a week prior to closing letting the participants know that the survey would be closing. Participants who attempted to complete the survey after it closed would be presented with a message informing them the survey had expired.

Interview Procedures

The final question of the survey asked if the participant was willing to participate in an interview to provide further information about their enrollment to the university. Students who self-selected were prompted to provide their name and email address. The online survey platform was able to provide a review of all of the responses to this question and those who self-selected to participate in the interview were easily identified.

Participants who self-selected were contacted via email to participate in the interview. The initial email invited them to participate, provided additional information about the intent of the interview and time required, and asked the student to provide a time and date they were available for an interview. Responses to the email were individualized at that point to arrange the time and location. A second round of email invitations were sent to the entire study population inviting them to participate in an interview due to low responses from the survey.

A mutually agreed upon location at UCF was arranged by the researcher and participant for interviews that took place face-to-face. Due to the low response initially, the option for virtual interviews via an online video conference was offered in order to increase participation. Three of the interviews took place in this virtual format rather than in-person.

The researcher began the interview by reviewing a document of informed consent with the participant. This was deemed a minimal risk study and qualified for a waiver of written

documentation so participants were not required to sign a document of consent. All participants agreed to participate and gave consent. If they had declined, the interview would have been cancelled.

After an explanation of the purpose of the study and review of consent documentation, the interview was conducted. The interview was audio recorded for later transcription. The researcher took minimal notes in order to give full attention to the participant. Once the interview was complete, the participant was thanked and the interview concluded.

Data Analysis

Interview Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. These transcriptions were then coded by the researcher in three stages identifying themes and key factors that emerged (Hahn, 2008). A general inductive method of analysis was used by the researcher to identify key content that related to the goals of this study. This content was invariably shaped by the researcher's experiences within the field of undergraduate admissions. Because the purpose of this study is to explore experiences that influenced enrollment decisions, the codes were applied to sentences or phrases that could be linked to a category and factor, rather than to individual words (Thomas, 2006).

The first stage of coding began with a close reading of the transcriptions and used open coding to identify repeated or frequently occurring terms and phrases throughout the interviews. Twenty codes emerged from the first stage of coding and were given a numerical value with no hierarchy.

The second stage of coding involved a focused coding process analyzing additional content that stood out as significant to the researcher. Analysis at this stage identified responses that were strongly stated or that resonated with the researcher during the interview process, not only those that were frequently occurring. The statements were highlighted and had already been identified and coded during the first stage of coding. Once this second stage concluded, the phrases which were given an initial code or highlighted in the second stage were copied and added into a spreadsheet to allow for easier sorting and manipulation.

A third stage of axial coding was then conducted to determine themes that related to the codes identified. Open codes were grouped according to shared content, which allowed for six themes to emerge. For example, codes such as “easy application”, “website”, and “perception of admission” were grouped as a theme titled “Admission Preparation” because these comments reflected the experiences, resources, and perceptions of the admission process, for which the participants were generally well prepared. The theming was added to the spreadsheet to allow for sorting and easier identification of content. The themes were then aligned with the research questions guiding this study to ensure that they were relevant to the study.

Survey Analysis

The survey data was collected in the online survey platform. This provided descriptive data regarding the number of participants who responded, those who started but did not finish the survey, and those who did not complete the survey. Each individual response was also available for review by the researcher.

The survey data was placed into a spreadsheet and organized as it related to each research question. The responses to questions that used a Likert scale indicated experiences in which

participants agreed and other areas in which there were varying opinions and experiences. The responses were placed into tables. Responses that had clear positive agreement among participants were highlighted yellow and those with mixed responses were highlighted blue. Responses that were negative or indicated clear disagreement with a statement were highlighted red. These responses were compared with the twenty initial coding categories and six coding themes that emerged from the interviews which provided additional support for conclusions or provide additional insight into these phenomena.

Open-ended responses were added to a separate tab of the spreadsheet and were then coded according to the same methods used for the interview. Initial coding allowed for additional themes to emerge, although the content fit well into the existing codes and themes. Responses were then grouped into themes and added to a master spreadsheet that included the coded content from the interviews as well in order to compile a complete list of responses relating to each theme.

Triangulation

Survey and interview responses were compared to find parallel and diverging themes that emerged. The open-ended survey responses were added to the master spreadsheet containing the themed content from the interviews for comparison. For the Likert-type questions, the content of the responses was compared to the themes that emerged and were given indicators that related them to the themes.

The coded survey responses were then compared with interview responses in a master spreadsheet that grouped responses by theme for further analysis. These results were used to

indicate where responses were consistent with each other between the two instruments and where responses diverged.

Conclusion

Students who attended JHS and enrolled at UCF were contacted to participate in a qualitative study to gain an understanding of the experiences that influenced their decision to enroll at the university. This qualitative study explored the phenomenological experiences of these students by inviting them to participate in a survey and interview regarding their enrollment to UCF. The survey was administered and data was collected via an online survey platform. Interview participation was solicited from a final question on the survey as well as email invitations. Students self-selected for participation in the interview.

Survey and interview data were analyzed for themes that emerged relating to paths of college entry, experiences with UCF prior to enrollment, and reasons students chose to enroll through the path they used. Coding of interviews allowed for emergent themes and these were triangulated with survey response data to further develop these themes.

An important component in designing recruitment efforts that the university can employ to increase enrollment of this population is understanding the reasons why students choose to enroll and the experiences that influence which paths they select for enrollment. The data collected provided important insight into the factors that the university must address when recruiting JHS students. The low number of participants further serves to highlight the problem of low enrollment of this population.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The number of students who enroll at UCF from JHS is lower than desired by the office of Undergraduate Admissions at UCF. The university, like many other institutions of higher education, seeks to enroll a diverse student body and JHS has a high Black or African American population. Students from JHS have a variety of pathways to seek enrollment at the university and exploring the experiences that influenced how these students chose to enroll can play a part in developing recruitment methods to increase enrollment.

This study sought to explore the experiences that led these students to enroll at UCF and why they chose to enroll via the pathway they selected. Current students at UCF who previously attended JHS were selected and contacted to participate in an online survey and an interview regarding their experiences enrolling. They provided insight into their perceptions of the university and their experiences as they enrolled. This data was collected, coded, and analyzed for insight into these phenomena.

An exploration of these results is reported in accordance to their relation to the three research questions guiding this study:

1. What paths are students from JHS taking to enroll at UCF?
2. What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced their decision to attend UCF?
3. What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced the path they chose to achieve enrollment?

The results of this qualitative study explore these experiences within this specific context as experienced by JHS students who enrolled to UCF.

Findings

The findings inform this problem of practice and are reported according to each research question that guides this study. The phenomena studied and the themes that emerged inform each question holistically but will be reported discreetly for organizational purposes.

Research Question 1: What paths are students from JHS taking to enroll at UCF?

Four distinct paths of enrollment to UCF were provided to participants to select from as these were identified by the researcher as the main ways in which students are categorized in the admission process (Table 5). The majority of participants enrolled through the Direct Connect path (20), followed by those enrolling as FTIC students (6), and then those that transferred from a Florida state or community college (4). This research question is less concerned with the reasons for choosing this path as it is with identifying the actual way in which students enroll. Research question three will explore the reasons that students chose these paths of entry.

Table 5: Survey Participant Paths of Enrollment

Path of Enrollment	Response (n=31)	%
First Time in College student (I was a senior in high school)	6	19%
Transfer student from a Florida state or community college (not a Direct Connect student)	4	13%
Transfer through the Direct Connect program	20	65%
Transfer from another college or university (not a Florida state or community college).	0	0%
No Response	1	3%

Consistent with the researcher’s experience, fewer participants enrolled directly from high school than enrolled as transfer students. The highest frequency of enrollment is through the Direct Connect agreement that exists between the university and the local state and community colleges in the area.

Interview participants followed this trend with four of the six participants enrolled through the Direct Connect path (Table 6). An interesting observation gained through the interview responses however, is that there is overlap between these categories. For example, both Tina and Cathy indicated that they attended Bethune-Cookman University, a historically black university (HBCU), first and then attended a Direct Connect institution prior to enrolling at UCF. They identified themselves as Direct Connect students when enrolling even though they attended another university as well.

Table 6: Interview Participants Path of Enrollment

Path of Enrollment	Response (n=6)	%
First Time in College student (I was a senior in high school)	1	17%
Transfer student from a Florida state or community college (not a Direct Connect student)	0	0%
Transfer through the Direct Connect program	4*	67%
Transfer from another college or university (not a Florida state or community college)	1	17%

**Two participants attended another university first, then Direct Connect*

Research Question 2: What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced their decision to attend UCF?

The purpose of university recruitment is attracting students to enroll, and the reasons that students choose to attend any university are varied. The experiences and factors that these participants identified as influencing their decision to enroll at UCF are categorized under six themes that emerged from coding both interviews and survey responses.

Theme 1: Convenience

The convenience of attending UCF emerged as an important factor when participants described the reasons they decided to enroll at the university. The open-ended responses in the surveys relating to why participants chose to attend UCF as an FTIC, or any of the transfer options, consistently cited the convenience of the location and financing as reasons for enrolling. Interview responses also referenced the convenience of attending UCF as an important factor in deciding to attend. Thirty-six statements were coded with reference to the theme of convenience.

The convenience factor most consistently cited by participants was the location of UCF in relation to their home and supports. In coding the survey and interview responses, location was cited twenty-three separate times as an important reason for considering enrollment. One participant explicitly stated that the location of the university was “the biggest reason” for considering attendance. Even in cases where UCF was not the student’s first choice, convenience won out as the reason for enrolling. One survey participant stated, “UFC is the only university option in my city. I do not like this school and I wish I could attend FAMU or BCU.” Other responses included parental preference for students to stay close to home and the proximity of the university to family. Interview participants also shared the concern of proximity to parental and social support with statements such as, “it was closer to home and I had a boyfriend at the time so I didn’t want to leave him” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).

Another convenience factor cited by participants was the financial cost of attending UCF. Twelve different statements were identified that specifically mentioned the financial cost as influencing enrollment. Survey responses such as “It is the closest university that I could attend to not go in extreme debt” indicate that UCF has a presumably lower tuition cost than some of the other schools these students were considering. The financial cost of attending was stated as not only a reason for attending the university, but was often stated in relation to the way in which students chose to enroll. Many cited the Direct Connect program in conjunction with enrolling at UCF as a way to save money.

One interview participant (Cathy) specifically addressed the demographic makeup of JHS as it relates to finances and location stating, “Jones High School is located in a pretty low-

income area and there's a lot of low-income students that come out of there so there's a lot of people that don't have the opportunity to pay for college and go directly in... if it's one of the more highly educated, more successful ones that obtain scholarships, they're going off to colleges such as Bethune, FAMU, and UF. Those are the ones that are going off on scholarship.” (Cathy, personal communication, April 2016). Her statement indicates that if finances were not a barrier or limitation, JHS students are more likely to choose to attend institutions other than UCF. Likewise, those with financial resources are the ones able to attend institutions outside of their community. A sample of statements regarding convenience is listed in Table 7.

Table 7: Quotes Regarding Convenience

Convenience Factor	Instrument	Quote
Location	Survey	“UFC is the only university option in my city. I do not like this school and I wish I could attend FAMU or BCU.”
Location	Interview	“It was closer to home and I had a boyfriend at the time so I didn’t want to leave him.” (Marla, personal communication, April, 2016)
Cost	Survey	“It is the closest university that I could attend to not go in extreme debt.”
Cost	Interview	“Jones High School is located in a pretty low-income area and there’s a lot of low-income students that come out of there so there’s a lot of people that don’t have the opportunity to pay for college and go directly in. So they’re going to UCF, I would feel, as a transfer because some of the other community colleges are a little less expensive and they wanted to transfer into that. Other than that, if it’s one of the more highly educated, more successful ones that obtain scholarships, they’re going off to colleges such as Bethune, FAMU, and UF. Those are the ones that are going off on scholarship.” (Cathy, personal communication, April, 2016)

Theme 2: Direct Connect

The Direct Connect program was mentioned in eighteen different statements as an important factor in choosing to enroll at UCF. The Direct Connect program provides a guarantee of admission to UCF and the state and community colleges that participate in this program have UCF advisors on their campuses to help students progress through the program and on to admission at the university. As stated earlier (Table 5), more respondents indicated that they

attended via the Direct Connect program than any other path of entry. This is consistent with responses from open-ended survey questions and interviews.

The connection of the Direct Connect program to UCF was cited as a convenient and well known path of enrollment to UCF (Table 8). For example, one interview participant stated that the Direct Connect advisors made the process of enrolling at UCF very easy and straightforward: “at Seminole they have Direct Connect so they had like, the counselors there that knew everything” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016). Other participants indicated that they viewed the Direct Connect program as an intermediary step from one university to another. Three of these participants indicated that they attended an HBCU, then a Direct Connect institution, and finally enrolled at UCF.

The pathway between Direct Connect institutions and UCF begins with students who are attending JHS. One interview participant, Sheila, stated that she had plans to attend UCF with the intent to enroll in medical school. However, she chose to enroll in a Direct Connect school first. She chose this path because she saw the Direct Connect program as a way to “open up the whole college experience, just to see what to expect” (Sheila, personal communication, April 2016). Adding to this, she was enrolled in a program called Bridges to Success at the Direct Connect institution which provided a scholarship that covered the two years of study at that institution. When describing the Bridges and Direct Connect program, she stated “The fact that I was in Bridges, that actually connected me to them. They had all the information and what to do and what to expect, all that stuff. I felt like it was very easy for me to actually apply because of them. I didn’t have any problem with applying at all”.

Another student indicated that the Direct Connect institution provided services and conveniences not available at UCF, which made it easier for her to attend there. She was an adult student with a child at the time of enrollment and stated in reference to UCF that “they kind of cater to the first time students that are coming directly out of high school and going into college and kind of put us to the wayside [laughter]. So, I’d rather them have some type of program strictly for adults and more of a variety of options as far as majors that they can take” (Cathy, personal communication, April 2016). While the Direct Connect program seems widely known and accessible to students, the perception of UCF is that it has more programs and opportunities for first time students and some non-traditional students may find that Direct Connect is their only, or perhaps best, option for entry.

Table 8: Quotes Regarding Direct Connect

Factor	Instrument	Quote
Direct Connect	Interview	“At Seminole they have Direct Connect so they had like, the counselors there that knew everything” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016).
Direct Connect	Interview	“Valencia would kind of open up the whole college experience, just to see what to expect” (Sheila, personal communication, April 2016).
Direct Connect	Interview	“The fact that I was in Bridges, that actually connected me to them. They had all the information and what to do and what to expect, all that stuff. I felt like it was very easy for me to actually apply because of them. I didn’t have any problem with applying at all” (Sheila, personal communication, April, 2016).
Direct Connect	Survey	“I attended FAMU after high school. I left my senior year of college in 1999 to pursue an opportunity that became available to me. I decided to complete my degree in 2013. So because I was out of school for such a long period of time, I had to go to Valencia to take some classes that I needed to be able to enroll in UCF. Valencia was a Direct Connect school, so it helped make that transition easier.”

Theme 3: Admissions Preparation

A third theme that emerged was how students perceived the admission process and their preparation to gain admission and access to UCF. Forty-three statements and survey questions were coded in this theme and the coding referenced two main categories: the ease of navigating the application process and the perception of gaining admission.

The actual application and admission process was clearly identified as being easy and clear for the participants. Survey responses relating to the process of applying, seeking

information about the application process, connecting with advisors, and using the website indicated that participants did not have many issues navigating this process. Table 9 shows that eighteen participants indicated they strongly agree and seven indicated they agreed that they knew what documents were needed to complete an application file. Likewise, fifteen strongly agreed and nine agreed that they knew what UCF required to gain admission. The only survey question that received mixed responses was the first question in Table 9 about students knowing where to find answers to questions about applying.

Table 9: Navigating the Admission Process

Question	S A	A	D	S D	N R	Total Responses
If I had a question about applying to UCF, I knew where to go for answers.	9	9	7	4	2	31
Information about the SAT or ACT exam was easily accessed.	14	8	5	4	0	31
I knew what SAT or ACT test scores The University expected for admission.	14	6	8	3	0	31
When I decided to apply to UCF, I knew what documents I needed to complete my application file.	18	7	3	3	0	31
I knew how to contact UCF if I had questions about attending.	15	8	5	3	0	31
I knew what UCF required of me to gain admission.	15	9	4	3	0	31

**SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, NR=No Response*

Interview responses confirmed that the application process was easy for students to navigate and not a hindrance to admission (Table 11). Every interview participant stated that the application process was easy and that they had advisors and resources available to assist them. The website was most commonly referenced as the primary tool they used. Advisors, particularly Direct Connect advisors, were also referenced as helpful. Sally shared a sentiment very similar to other interview responses stating, “It was very easy. The website, very helpful, detailed information so there was nothing confusing. Everything was pretty straightforward” (Sally, personal communication, April 2016).

The second prong of this theme was the way in which students perceived the admissions process. Fifteen statements and survey questions were coded in relation to how students perceived the ability to gain admission and the admission process. Again, the survey responses showed that the majority of students viewed the admission process as something they were familiar with, that they were prepared well for college, and that they believed attending UCF was

a realistic option for them. The first two statements in Table 10 show that most participants felt prepared by their high school for success in college. The third shows that they spoke about college often in their high school classes. This table also shows that most participants (twenty-two and twenty-four, respectively) felt they were familiar with the application process and that attending UCF was a realistic option.

Table 10: Perception of Admission

Question	S A	A	S D	N D	R	Total Responses
My high school curriculum prepared me for success in college.	9	14	5	2	1	31
My teachers in high school prepared me for success in college.	10	14	5	2	0	31
We often spoke about college in my high school classes.	18	7	3	3	0	31
I felt familiar with the college application process when I applied.	12	10	4	4	1	31
I felt that attending UCF was a realistic option for me.	10	14	2	3	2	31

**SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, NR=No Response*

The interviews gave a more detailed idea of how these students perceived the admission process, particularly while they were in high school. A number of the participants commented that they felt they would have received admission had they applied, but did not actually apply while in high school. For example, Sheila stated, “I graduated with the National Honor Society, so I felt like I had the GPA and the grades. It was just applying, really. I feel like I would’ve got in if I did.” Sally shared a similar sentiment saying, “Yes, I do. I do believe that I could have gone to UCF, and I believe that I could have gotten accepted if I had applied.” Their perception was that they would have received admission had they applied, but did not actually submit an application at that time.

One interview participant, Tina, had a different response from the other participants, sharing that she does not believe she would have been admitted if she had applied straight from high school. She went to Bethune-Cookman University after high school and then transferred to a Direct Connect institution prior to enrollment at UCF. She describes her thought process regarding gaining admission at that time:

“No, I don’t think that I would. No because, a lot of kids say [pause], I don’t know. I know that I would not have been accepted straight out of high school. The schools that I went to, like Bethune-Cookman, it felt like ‘why aren’t you guys studying’ or not doing their work, but I don’t think I was prepared to enter UCF straight out of high school. So a couple people did apply and did not get accepted. I was pretty much sure I wouldn’t get in, so I didn’t even try. I mean, one problem is that you look at it, it’s in Orlando, and it’s a good school, but I don’t know if I can make it at that school academically. It’s hard to get into.” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016).

While other participants believed they would have been able to gain admission, Tina compared herself to other students who applied and were not admitted. She decided that she would not even try to apply because it was difficult to gain entry.

It is important to note that three of the interview respondents also made reference to programs at JHS that helped them prepare for college. These programs provided exposure to college students, college campus visits, and helped prepare students for college; however, these programs were not referenced with any connection to UCF and will be discussed in additional themes.

Table 11: Quotes Regarding Admissions Preparation

Factor	Instrument	Quote
Navigating the Admission Process	Interview	“It was very easy. The website, very helpful, detailed information so there was nothing confusing. Everything was pretty straightforward” (Sally, personal communication, April 2016).
Perception of Admission	Interview	“I graduated with the National Honor society so I felt like I had the GPA and the grades. It was just applying really. I feel like I would’ve got in if I did” (Sheila, personal communication, April, 2016).
Perception of Admission	Interview	“Yes, I do. I do believe that I could have gone to UCF and I believe that I could have gotten accepted if I had applied” (Sally, personal communication, April, 2016).
Perception of Admission	Interview	“No, I don’t think that I would. No because, a lot of kids say [pause], I don’t know. I know that I would not have been accepted straight out of high school. The schools that I went to, like Bethune-Cookman, it felt like ‘why aren’t you guys studying’ or not doing their work, but I don’t think I was prepared to enter UCF straight out of high school. So, a couple people did apply and did not get accepted. I was pretty much sure I wouldn’t get in, so I didn’t even try. I mean, one problem is that you look at it, it’s in Orlando and it’s a good school but I don’t know if I can make it at that school academically. It’s hard to get into” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016).

Theme 4: Perceptions of UCF

A fourth theme that emerged was the general or wider perception of UCF by students who attended JHS. Twenty-five statements and survey questions were coded relating to how

participants viewed the university and provided insight into the larger perceptions that JHS students have of UCF beyond the admissions experience.

Survey responses revealed both positive and negative perceptions of UCF. Participants felt they would feel comfortable and successful at UCF, but provided mixed responses regarding their level of intimidation at the thought of attending (Table 12). Twenty-four participants indicated they strongly agreed or agreed that they would be successful at UCF, and twenty-three indicated they felt they would be comfortable at UCF. On the other hand, sixteen indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that they thought attending UCF was intimidating. In contrast, fourteen participants indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that the thought of attending UCF was intimidating. The interview responses gave more insight into these experiences.

Table 12: Perceptions of UCF

Question	SA	A	D	SD	NR	Total Responses
I felt that UCF was a place that I would be successful.	10	14	3	3	1	31
The thought of attending UCF was intimidating.	9	7	4	10	1	31
UCF was a place that I felt like I would be comfortable.	6	17	2	5	1	31

**SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, NR=No Response*

Interview participants relayed positive perceptions of the university regarding available programs and opportunities, as well as the general reputation of UCF as a notable institution. Sheila attended UCF as a Direct Connect student with the intent to eventually enroll in the medical school at UCF. She stated, in regards to options available to her, “I think just the opportunity really here is, it’s fantastic” (Sheila, personal communication, April 2016). Sally

shared a positive perception of the university and the specific programs of study she was pursuing: “doing my own research about the programs, their graduation rates, the kind of jobs that students get, influenced my decision to come to UCF and major in those fields” (Sally, personal communication, April 2016). She also mentioned positive perceptions of the athletic programs (Table 13). Even Inez, who shared that she perceived the university as intimidating, stated, “I did hear that UCF is one of the top colleges, so that was a big factor” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016).

Table 13: Quotes Regarding Perception of UCF

Factor	Instrument	Quote
Perception of UCF	Interview	“I think just the opportunity really here is, it’s fantastic” (Sheila, personal communication, April, 2016).
Perception of UCF	Interview	“From doing my own research about the programs, their graduation rates, the kind of jobs that students get, influenced my decision to come to UCF and major in those fields” (Sally, personal communication, April, 2016).
Perception of UCF	Interview	"I think that the university as a whole is progressing, especially the athletics teams which is very good. It brings a lot of students to the university and kind of, really puts UCF on the map, as they say. Especially when they beat Baylor, everyone was just...UCF was the most talked about university" (Sally, personal communication, April, 2016)
Perception of UCF	Interview	“I did hear that UCF is one of the top colleges so that was a big factor” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016).

Another perception emerged as some students felt that their experience at a state or community college was a necessary intermediary step before enrollment at UCF (Table 14). Inez, who had previously stated she felt she would not have gained admission to the university directly from JHS, said that the reason she chose to attend a Direct Connect institution was, “I wanted to start slow at Valencia and get used to the college atmosphere” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016). In speaking about her classmates from JHS, Cathy stated, “A lot of the kids out of there are pretty much, unless they’re going to football or something like that, trying to get that minimum, or that basic education before they go off to a university” (Cathy, personal communication, April 2016). Even Marla, who did enroll directly to the university, viewed community college as something that some students need before enrolling at a university. In speaking about herself she said, “I was never a community college student. I was at the top of my class, so it just made more sense for me to go straight to college. I feel like, when you went to Valencia or colleges like that, it was like you needed an in-between, between high school and college. I didn’t feel like I needed an in-between” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).

Table 14: Quotes Regarding an Intermediary Step

Factor	Instrument	Quote
Intermediary Step	Interview	“I wanted to start slow at Valencia and get used to the college atmosphere” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016).
Intermediary Step	Interview	“A lot of the kids out of there are pretty much, unless they’re going to football or something like that, trying to get that minimum or that basic education before they go off to a university” (Cathy, personal communication, April 2016).
Intermediary Step	Interview	“I was never a community college student. I was at the top of my class so it just made more sense for me to go straight to college. I feel like when you went to Valencia or colleges like that, it was like you needed an in-between between high school and college. I didn’t feel like I needed an in-between” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).

Other statements made by interview participants portrayed UCF in a negative or unappealing light (Table 15). Inez shared that she found the thought of attending UCF as “scary” saying, “I was afraid that if I jumped right into UCF I wouldn’t be prepared for the, you know, you hear the stories of the big classrooms and the professors are not personal”. She went on to say, “The stories scared me. You know, when you’re in high school you can go to your teacher whenever you have a question. But I was told you couldn’t do that at college, so I just assumed UCF was the same way because it was a college. I just put all colleges in the same category.” Her perceptions about universities were not exclusive to UCF, but this did play a role in her decision to choose the particular pathway of entry that she did. When asked where she gained these perceptions, she shared they were picked up from a variety of sources including family, other students, and even television.

“My cousins who were older than me that went to college. They didn’t go to UCF. Maybe other students. Whether they heard it or not, they said it. And also, I watched a TV show one time. I think it was a movie and everyone is in class and they’re like, in an auditorium. So you got like, it looked like there was about 200 students in an auditorium and one professor and the professor was really mean. So, I kind of stereotyped it based on that” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016).

Other interview participants also shared negative views of the university. As stated earlier, Cathy viewed UCF as catering to FTIC students rather than adult students or students who had families. She expressed a desire to have programs that were more appropriate for students like her. Marla, however, shared very specific thoughts about the way UCF might be perceived by those in the neighborhoods near JHS. She states,

“Yeah, but honestly, I feel like UCF doesn’t have much of a presence in Orlando. UCF is on the east...the heart of Orlando is on the west side of Orlando so it’s a good thing that they’re going to put a building downtown, because that’s where the heart of Orlando is – on this side of town, not the east side. A lot of people who are originally from Orlando don’t really consider where UCF is to be Orlando. And then, Orlando has so much other things going on like Disney, Universal; UCF kind of gets lost in the mix. So maybe they need to make more of a presence in the city so that people know they’re here. Not just on the east side but on the west side too. I only see billboards for UCF on the east side but a lot of the students you’re targeting live on the westside” (Marla, personal communication, 2016).

Marla continued to share how even though she attended UCF, she never felt proud to be a student there. She had positive perceptions of other state universities and HBCU’s in the state, but never felt like there was something that made her proud to be a student at UCF. She had previously stated, “If I could choose a college again, I wouldn’t choose UCF again. I would take my butt right to UF.”

Table 15: Quotes Regarding a Negative Perception of UCF

Factor	Instrument	Quote
Negative Perceptions of UCF	Interview	“I was afraid that if I jumped right into UCF I wouldn’t be prepared for the, you know, you hear the stories of the big classrooms and the professors are not personal”. She went on to say, “The stories scared me. You know, when you’re in high school you can go to your teacher whenever you have a question but I was told you couldn’t do that at college so I just assumed UCF was the same way because it was a college. I just put all colleges in the same category” (Inez, personal communication, April, 2016).
Negative Perceptions of UCF	Interview	“My cousins who were older than me that went to college. They didn’t go to UCF. Maybe other students. Whether they heard it or not, they said it. And also, I watched a TV show one time. I think it was a movie and everyone is in class and they’re like, in an auditorium. So you got like, it looked like there was about 200 students in an auditorium and one professor and the professor was really mean. So, I kind of stereotyped it based on that” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016).
Negative Perceptions of UCF	Interview	“Yeah but honestly, I feel like UCF doesn’t have much of a presence in Orlando. UCF is on the east...the heart of Orlando is on the west side of Orlando so it’s a good thing that they’re going to put a building downtown because that’s where the heart of Orlando is – on this side of town, not the east side. A lot of people who are originally from Orlando don’t really consider where UCF is to be Orlando. And then, Orlando has so much other things going on like Disney, Universal; UCF kind of gets lost in the mix. So maybe they need to make more of a presence in the city so that people know they’re here. Not just on the east side but on the west side too. I only see billboards for UCF on the east side but a lot of the students you’re targeting live on the westside” (Marla, personal communication, 2016).
Negative Perceptions of UCF	Interview	“If I could choose a college again, I wouldn’t choose UCF again. I would take my butt right to UF” (Marla, personal communication, April, 2016)

Theme 5: UCF Recruitment

Another important theme that emerged was the manner in which participants viewed the ways that UCF engaged JHS students while they were in high school. Thirty-six comments and survey questions addressed the ways UCF engaged and recruited students at JHS. The majority of these indicated that these efforts were insufficient or ineffective in creating a lasting impression on students.

Table 16 shows the survey questions regarding the presence that UCF had on the campus of JHS, and shows the specific questions for those who enrolled as Direct Connect and FTIC students. Responses showed that most participants did not think there was a strong or visible presence on their high school campus. For all respondents, only five participants indicated they strongly agreed or agreed that UCF personnel were visible on their high school campus, while twenty-four disagreed or strongly disagreed. Only seven strongly agreed or agreed that UCF provided information to their high school, compared to twenty-three students who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

For those who enrolled as FTIC students, it is even more striking. All six participants disagreed that UCF had a visible presence on their high school campus. In contrast, eighteen of those who enrolled through the Direct Connect path indicated agreement that UCF did have a visible presence on their campus. UCF maintains offices and advisors on the Direct Connect campuses, so this was expected by the researcher.

There was mixed response regarding the visibility of advertisements and materials on the JHS campus and the proximity of current UCF students and alumni to each participant. Seventeen participants indicated strong agreement or agreement with the statement that UCF

materials and advertisements were regularly seen, while twelve indicated disagreement or strong disagreement. Similarly, eighteen indicated agreement or strong agreement that they had friends or family members who had attended, or are currently attending, UCF while eleven disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 16: UCF Engagement of JHS Students

Question	S A	A	D	S D	N R	Total Responses
UCF personnel were visible and present on my high school campus.	4	1	8	16	2	31
UCF provided information to my high school about programs and applying.	4	3	10	13	1	31
I have friends or family members that have attended, or are currently attending, UCF.	10	8	4	7	2	31
UCF materials and advertisements were regularly seen in my daily life.	9	8	6	6	2	31
UCF had a visible presence on my high school campus (<i>FTIC path only</i>)	0	0	6	0	0	6
UCF Direct Connect had a visible presence on my campus (<i>Direct Connect path only</i>)	14	4	1	0	1	20

**SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, NR=No Response*

Interview participants were even more explicit in their description of the lack of a presence that UCF maintained on the JHS campus (Table 17). All but one of the interview participants commented on their experiences in high school, stating that they did not recall UCF being present on their campus at all, nor did they have many opportunities to visit the UCF campus located only fifteen miles away. When asked about seeing UCF representation on their high school campus, availability of materials, and options to tour UCF, Inez stated that she never recalled any interaction with the university. Sally also indicated that she did not see any UCF

presence on her high school campus. She was in a college preparation program that took students to tour other colleges but never toured UCF, which is, again, only a short distance away. Cathy and Marla both shared this sentiment as well. Tina indicated she had a cursory knowledge of UCF, but only as it related to the Direct Connect program: “There was no information about UCF. The only thing that we did know was that, you know, they do accept you if you go to Valencia, Seminole State and then they’ll accept you. Other than that, there was no information about UCF” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016).

Interview participants shared that there was not a lack of college preparation activities or university recruitment from other institutions. Sally indicated that her Upward Bound program had strong representation from Valencia State College. Marla also indicated a program she was in (she could not recall the name of it) that gave students the opportunity to prepare for college. The most commonly referenced universities that were recalled, however, were The University of Florida (UF) and HBCU’s like Bethune-Cookman University and Florida A&M University (FAMU), which will be explored in the next theme. Participants did have access to general college recruitment activities in the area. For example, Cathy stated, “I went to a lot of college fairs. They did have a lot of college fairs. However, I don’t recall UCF being on campus” (Cathy, personal communication, April 2016).

Participants also had mixed responses when asked who influenced them to apply. Some had family or friends that had either attended UCF or were currently attending. Others applied with no influence from others at all. Inez shared that her daughter had attended UCF, “She graduated before I did because I’m a returning student. And, I have a couple of friends who graduated from UCF” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016). Tina mentioned that she was

a first-generation college student and did not have any family members who had ever attended college. Cathy, on the other hand, did not hesitate in her response to the question asking if she had anyone in her life that influenced her to attend UCF by answering, “Not at all! [laughs]”.

Sheila was the one interview participant who had a positive perception of the ways in which UCF engaged her as a student and stands in contrast to the rest of the responses. Sheila stated that she had friends currently attending UCF who played a role in her enrollment. She was also part of a college preparation program at JHS that gave the opportunity to tour colleges and hear from current UCF students who were alumni of JHS. She said, “...the high school that I went to, we had some alumni that would come and talk about their experience at UCF. That helped too.” When asked who the most influential people in the college preparation program were, she said in regards to these UCF students, “I’d say students just because they’re already going through the process and so they know more about what to expect and all that stuff.” When asked a final question about what influenced her to enroll, she again circled back to current students from UCF, “I would say the fact that a lot of my close friends are going to UCF, or like, at UCF right now, and one of them is about to graduate. I would say that. And they love it here, so I thought, since I already have friends here, this would be the perfect fit.”

Table 17: Quotes Regarding UCF's Engagement on JHS Campus

Factor	Instrument	Quote
UCF Engagement	Interview	“There was no information about UCF. The only thing that we did know was that, you know, they do accept you if you go to Valencia, Seminole State and then they’ll accept you. Other than that, there was no information about UCF” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016).
UCF Engagement	Interview	“I went to a lot of college fairs. They did have a lot of college fairs. However, I don’t recall UCF being on campus” (Cathy, personal communication, April 2016).
UCF Engagement	Interview	“She graduated before I did because I’m a returning student. And I have a couple of friends who graduated from UCF” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016)
UCF Engagement	Interview	, “...the high school that I went to, we had some alumni that would come and talk about their experience at the university. That helped too” (Sheila, personal communication, April, 2016).
UCF Engagement	Interview	“I’d say students just because they’re already going through the process and so they know more about what to expect and all that stuff” (Sheila, personal communication, April, 2016).
UCF Engagement	Interview	““I would say the fact that a lot of my close friends are going to UCF, or like, at UCF right now, and one of them is about to graduate. I would say that. And they love it here, so I thought, since I already have friends here, this would be the perfect fit” (Sheila, personal communication, April, 2016)

Theme 6: Other University Recruitment

In contrast to the previous theme, other universities were discussed as having a stronger or more memorable presence on the campus of JHS. Twenty-two different statements were coded in reference to the ways in which other universities engaged students at JHS. As previously stated, the University of Florida (UF) and HBCU’s in the state, such at Bethune-

Cookman University (BCU) and Florida A&M University (FAMU), were most commonly referenced.

All but one of the interview participants responded with reference to other colleges or universities having more meaningful or lasting impressions while they were attending JHS. Again, Sheila was the exception with her overall positive view of UCF during high school. Reference was made specifically to other four-year colleges and universities and their recruitment presence on campus. However, participants did reference exposure to state colleges in the area during their time as a student at JHS.

HBCU's were perceived as having a strong representation on the campus of JHS (Table 18). Tina put it most clearly stating, "When people did come out, like colleges, it was mostly HBCU's. Of course like, you know, I went to Jones High School so they [other universities] never really targeted us. It was always schools like FAMU, Bethune-Cookman, it was never...you know, it was all HBCU's" (Tina, personal communication, April 2016). Marla confirmed this as she compared the presence of HBCU's to predominantly white institutions (PWI's), "Yeah, I went to a predominantly black high school so, you know, HBCU's came and we knew a lot about them. But I didn't know too much about PWI's as much" (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).

This is not to say that other institutions did not have representation at JHS. Valencia State College was mentioned by participants in relation to the Direct Connect option and as a perceived stepping stone to a four-year institution. The University of Florida, however, was the most commonly referenced non-HBCU institution that had a presence at JHS. This included being seen on campus and the opportunity to tour their campus. Marla stated, "I went to a trip in

ninth grade to UF and from that trip I was like, ‘I’m going to UF’ all through high school and I just knew I was going to go” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016). She clarified their presence on campus stating, “I do believe they used to come and set up a table at school and people could go there and get information”.

These recruitment efforts from other universities made a lasting impression and influenced the students to want to attend these institutions. In fact, two of the interview participants actually attended BCU first, before transferring back to a Direct Connect program prior to enrolling at UCF. Cathy made a very interesting comment about the perception of the higher achieving students at JHS saying, “...if it’s one of the more highly educated, more successful ones that obtain scholarships, they’re going off to colleges such as Bethune, FAMU , and UF”. These institutions have created a more lasting impression at JHS and may be attracting the highest achieving students. When asked which institutions were present on her high school campus, Sally said, “Yeah, kind of like FAMU, BCU, but not so much UCF”.

Marla offered perhaps the most poignant reference to the other universities and their presence on campus. She discussed how she would have been proud to be a Gator (UF) or a Rattler (FAMU) but never felt proud to be a Knight (UCF). When asked if there was anything UCF could have done to make her enrollment easier or smoother, she contrasted their efforts with UF stating,

“I wish they did the same program that UF had where they take the ninth graders, or something like that, and kind of bring them on campus, because that’s what I did. I went and I stayed on campus and I got to tour the campus and found out different things. When I got to UCF, I didn’t know anything about it” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).

Table 18: Quotes Regarding Other University Engagement

Factor	Instrument	Quote
Other University Engagement	Interview	“When people did come out, like colleges, it was mostly HBCU’s. Of course like, you know, I went to Jones High School so they (other universities) never really targeted us. It was always schools like FAMU, Bethune-Cookman, it was never...you know, it was all HBCU’s” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016).
Other University Engagement	Interview	“Yeah, I went to a predominantly black high school so, you know HBCU’s came and we knew a lot about them. But I didn’t know too much about PWI’s as much” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).
Other University Engagement	Interview	“I went to a trip in ninth grade to UF and from that trip I was like, “I’m going to UF” all through high school and I just knew I was going to go” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).
Other University Engagement	Interview	“I do believe they used to come and set up a table at school and people could go there and get information” (Marla, personal communication, April, 2016).
Other University Engagement	Interview	“...if it’s one of the more highly educated, more successful ones that obtain scholarships, they’re going off to colleges such as Bethune, FAMU, and UF” (Cathy, personal communication, April, 2016).
Other University Engagement	Interview	“Yeah, kind of like FAMU, BCU, but not so much UCF” (Sally, personal communication, April, 2016).
Other University Engagement	Interview	“I wish they did the same program that UF had where they take the ninth graders, or something like that, and kind of bring them on campus because that’s what I did. I went and I stayed on campus and I got to tour the campus and found out different things. When I got to UCF, I didn’t know anything about it” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).

Order of Importance of Emergent Themes

These six themes emerged throughout the analysis of the interview and survey data. During their emergence they were not organized by any defining factor other than how they emerged during analysis. These themes bear significance to the researcher and are ordered in Table 19 below as they relate to their importance to the practice of the researcher.

Table 19: Order of Importance of Emergent Themes

Order of Importance	Theme
1	UCF Recruitment
2	Other University Recruitment
3	Convenience
4	Perception of UCF
5	Direct Connect
6	Admission Preparation

The results relating to UCF Recruitment were most relevant to the research because that is the emphasis of the researchers practice. The researcher actively engages in student recruitment and findings that provide insight into the ways in which these recruitment activities influence student enrollment decisions bear a large deal of weight in defining future practices. Likewise, the recruitment practices of other universities are seen in contrast to the researchers own practice. These provide insight into components of practice that may be incorporated by the researcher.

Convenience was a consistent theme that resonated with the researcher as an important component of the participant's decision to enroll at UCF. As with previous themes, this theme provides insight into content that the researcher can use to influence his practice.

Themes relating to the general perception of UCF and the availability of the Direct Connect program influence the researchers practice but the scope of these themes is less likely to be controlled by the researchers practice. The importance of these themes does relate to the practice of the researcher as will be discussed in the following chapter but they are influenced by larger, institutional decisions and policies in place.

Finally, a large number of statements referenced the theme of Admission Preparation but the overarching results indicate that the admission process was not a hindrance to admission and was easy to navigate. These results will have little impact on the researchers practice because the process does not seem to present a barrier to enrollment at UCF. The implications for the researcher's practices will focus on other themes that present challenges to enrollment.

Research Question 3: What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced the path they chose to achieve enrollment?

As seen in the previous research question, many experiences led these participants from JHS to enroll at UCF. It is also important to note which experiences contributed to the path in which they chose to enroll. Four paths of enrollment were identified in the first research question and participants most commonly chose to transfer through the Direct Connect option. The reasons that students chose each path will be explored by each path of entry chosen.

First Time in College (FTIC)

Six of the thirty-one survey respondents (19%) and one interview respondent indicated that they enrolled to UCF as First Time in College (FTIC) students directly from high school. The survey gave the option of an open-ended response asking participants why they chose to

attend as FTIC students. All responses corresponded to the theme of convenience. Participants indicated that they wanted to be close to home, that UCF was the closest option to their home, or that their family did not want them to leave the area. Given the competitive nature of admission to UCF as an FTIC student, it is presumed that these students had the ability to gain admission at institutions farther from home but chose to attend UCF in part, because of the location.

As previously indicated, these students indicated that UCF did not have a strong presence on their high school campus. Table 20 shows that all six indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed they had access to information about UCF, but gave mixed responses to the ability of teachers and administrators to provide information about UCF. These students chose to attend UCF even though there were low perceived levels of engagement and recruitment from the university.

Table 20: FTIC Path of Enrollment

Question	S A	A	D	S D	N R	Total Responses
Information about the application process was easily accessible.	1	5	0	0	0	6
UCF admissions advisors were accessible to me.	2	2	1	0	1	6
Teachers and administrators at my school were able to provide helpful information about UCF.	2	2	1	1	0	6
UCF had a visible presence on my high school campus.	0	0	6	0	0	6

**SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, NR=No Response*

Marla’s interview also provided helpful information as to why a student from JHS might choose to attend UCF directly from high school. She cited the convenience of UCF being closer to home and her boyfriend at the time, in addition to indicating that her mother did not want her

to leave the area. She also indicated that she attended as an FTIC student, in part, because of her perception of community colleges, “Oh, because I was never a community college student. I was at the top of my class, so it just made more sense for me to go straight to college” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016).

Her enrollment at UCF was also interesting in that she reluctantly attended the university rather than attending with enthusiasm. She referenced other institutions that had a stronger presence on her high school campus (UF, FAMU, etc.) with more enthusiasm, but eventually attended UCF due to the convenience and location. She spoke of her experience with UF saying, “I went to a trip in ninth grade to UF and from that trip I was like, ‘I’m going to UF’ all through high school, and I just knew I was going to go. And then, here comes senior year and I end up at UCF” (Marla, personal communication, April 2016). She even indicated after attending UCF that if she could go back and do it again she would, “take my butt right to UF”. Convenience, then, was an important factor for choosing UCF even when she would have preferred to attend elsewhere.

Transfer from a State or Community College (not Direct Connect)

Four survey participants indicated they transferred to UCF from a Florida state or community college prior to enrolling at UCF but did not take part in the Direct Connect program. Open-ended survey responses indicated that the reputation of these state or community colleges was a reason for choosing this path. Others indicated that UCF simply was not their first choice at the time. Table 21 indicates that information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible for these students. UCF’s presence on their campus and ability of advisors to provide helpful information, however, was less consistent.

Table 21: Transfer Path of Enrollment

Question	S	A	D	S	N	Total Responses
	A	A	D	D	R	
Information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible.	2	2	0	0	0	4
Advisors on my campus were able to provide helpful information about transferring to UCF.	2	0	0	2	0	4
UCF had a visible presence on my campus.	0	1	0	2	1	4
I attended this state/community college with the intent to transfer to UCF.	2	0	0	2	0	4

**SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, NR=No Response*

There were zero interview participants that attended via this path of enrollment, which is not surprising to the researcher. The theme of convenience of attending UCF has emerged as an important factor in choosing a path of enrollment. The state or community colleges that are in close proximity to UCF and JHS all participate in the Direct Connect program. If students are seeking enrollment at a state or community college prior to enrollment at UCF, they will most likely choose a Direct Connect institution, rather than move out of the area to attend college elsewhere and return later to the Orlando vicinity.

Transfer through the Direct Connect Program

The path of enrollment that has the highest level of participation is the Direct Connect agreement. To refresh, students who earn an Associate of Arts degree from one of the six local, participating state or community colleges qualify for a guarantee of admission to UCF. Twenty of the thirty-one survey respondents (65%) indicated they chose this path of enrollment, as did four of the six interview respondents.

Survey participants gave a variety of open-ended responses to why they chose this path. Not surprisingly, convenience was the most frequent response with eight of the eleven responses referencing convenience. These responses referencing convenience cited both the proximity of UCF as well as the financial savings of attending via the Direct Connect program first and then enrolling at UCF. One participant also indicated that an academic scholarship at the Direct Connect institution resulted in that path of enrollment.

Other survey responses indicated that students actually attended another institution first, enrolled in the Direct Connect institution, and then UCF. This is an overlapping path of enrollment that, while not distinct in this study, is of interest. These students identify themselves as Direct Connect students and view this mechanism as a way to transition from one university to another. For example, a respondent indicated attending another institution first, and then needed to “go to a direct connect school first to retake some classes and take new classes prior to enrolling into UCF.” Still another participant indicated that he or she attended another four year institution first, but the cost of that institution was prohibitive and brought the student back to Valencia State College prior to attending UCF.

One participant indicated that the proximity of UCF was the only factor in choosing to enroll. This participant explicitly indicated not liking UCF but that it is the only university option in this city. The student would have preferred to have attended FAMU or BCU. Two other survey participants indicated attending other institutions first and then returning eventually to attend UCF. Students who attended elsewhere, or who would prefer to attend elsewhere, chose the Direct Connect option and then enrollment at UCF, even though it was not their preferred option.

Table 22 reveals that in the Direct Connect path, all twenty participants either strongly agreed or agreed that information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible. Likewise, sixteen indicated they strongly agreed or agreed that Direct Connect advisors were able to provide information about transferring. Sixteen also indicated that UCF had a visible presence on their campus. Most importantly, sixteen participants strongly agreed or agreed that they attended the Direct Connect institution with the intent to transfer to UCF. This indicates a clear path to UCF enrollment for these participants.

Table 22: Direct Connect Path of Enrollment

Question	S A	S A	N D	N D	R	Total Response
Information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible.	13	7	0	0	0	20
Direct Connect advisors on my campus were able to provide helpful information about transferring to UCF.	14	4	1	1	0	20
UCF Direct Connect had a visible presence on my campus.	14	4	1	0	1	20
I attended this Direct Connect school with the intent to transfer to UCF.	15	1	3	1	0	20

**SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, NR=No Response*

Interview responses provided additional insight into this option of enrollment. Sheila had a very positive experience with Direct Connect and had the clearest intent to enroll at UCF. She specifically cited a “Bridges” program at Valencia State College that provided an academic scholarship which assisted her transition from high school to the state college, and finally to UCF. She said that attending Valencia would “kind of open up the whole college experience, just to see what to expect” (Sheila, personal communication, April 2016). Inez had a similar view of the role of the Direct Connect program, but had more concern about transitioning to UCF. She expressed initial apprehension at the thought of attending a four-year university and said she attended the Direct Connect institution because she could transition. “I wanted to start slow at Valencia and get used to the college atmosphere” (Inez, personal communication, April 2016). Both Inez and Sheila also shared that affordability was an important factor in attending a Direct Connect institution first.

Cathy had a unique experience as an adult student with a child. She viewed the Direct Connect institution as having more options and flexibility for her and that UCF catered more to FTIC students. She attended BCU after the Direct Connect institution and then transferred to

UCF. She cited cost, location, and convenience with course scheduling as reasons for transferring from BCU to UCF.

Tina shared that she attended the Direct Connect program, in part, because she didn't think she would gain admission to UCF directly from high school. She viewed it as a way to gain access to the university. She stated, "I did the Direct Connect to Seminole State. But I doubt that straight out of high school I would have gotten accepted". She continued later, "a couple people did apply and did not get accepted. I was pretty much sure I wouldn't get in, so I didn't even try" (Tina, personal communication, April 2016). Admission to UCF as an FTIC student is competitive so students like Tina, who do not think they would gain admission as FTIC students, may view the Direct Connect program as their option to gain access.

Transfer From Another College or University (Not a State or Community College)

There were zero survey participants who indicated they attended UCF by transferring from another college or university. However; some open-ended responses indicate that some participants actually did attend another college or university before enrolling at the Direct Connect institutions. One interview participant indicated she attended another university prior to enrolling at UCF and two others indicated they attended another institution as well as a Direct Connect institution.

Survey responses regarding why students chose Direct Connect indicate that some students are attending other colleges or universities and then using the Direct Connect program as a transition to UCF. One participant indicated that the cost of attendance at another institution caused him or her to transfer to a Direct Connect institution and then to UCF. Another indicated attending FAMU first and then leaving that institution to pursue another opportunity. When

deciding to reenroll in college, the participant indicated needing to take necessary courses to gain admission to UCF, having been out of college for quite some time. The Direct Connect institution was viewed as an option for making an easy transition.

Interview respondents provided insight into the choice to attend another university before attending UCF. Sally attended another university prior to enrollment at UCF as a graduate student. She attended the other university first primarily because she wanted to leave her hometown. She stated, “When I graduated from high school, I wanted to get out of Orlando [laughs]. So, I didn’t want to go to school so close. I wanted to branch out, experience a different city, a different area. I just wanted to go away and learn about a different area and city other than Orlando, which is where I was born and raised” (Sally, personal communication, April 2016). She ended up attending UCF eventually because she wanted to come back home, but her undergraduate studies at the other university were motivated primarily by a desire to leave her hometown.

Both Tina and Cathy indicated they attended Bethune-Cookman University prior to enrolling at UCF, but primarily identified themselves as Direct Connect students. Tina indicated that she attended BCU first and left there because, “I didn’t really like it there, so I came back home and went to Seminole State” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016). It is important to note that she also described schools like BCU as having a stronger presence on her high school campus. She mentioned, “When people did come out, like colleges, it was mostly HBCU’s. Of course like, you know, I went to Jones High School so they never really targeted us. It was always schools like FAMU, Bethune-Cookman, it was never...you know, it was all HBCU’s. There was no information about UCF” (Tina, personal communication, April 2016).

After attending an institution that had a stronger presence on her high school campus, Tina used the Direct Connect program as a way of transitioning to UCF.

Cathy's experience was unique in that she attended a Direct Connect institution, transferred to BCU, and then transferred to UCF. Again, she principally identified herself as a Direct Connect student, even though she transferred to UCF from BCU. The reasons she gave for transferring to UCF from BCU were related to convenience, namely the cost and location. She also cited that she had difficulty with some of her courses transferring from Seminole State to BCU and that "they were trying to make me start over as a freshman, pretty much" (Cathy, personal communication, April 2016). Again, it's important to note that schools like BCU had a stronger perceived presence on her high school campus and her original intent was not to attend UCF. She said that UCF was one of her least favored options. When asked why this was she stated, "I wanted to go out of state, and I initially wanted to go to an HBCU" (Cathy, personal communication, April 2016).

Conclusion

The decision to enroll at any college or university is always a complex decision, incorporating many different factors. Participants who attended JHS and then enrolled at UCF provided a variety of experiences that influenced their enrollment. These factors and their experiences also provided insight into the reasons they chose the path of enrollment they used to gain admission at UCF. Direct Connect is the clearest and most selected path of enrollment, followed by FTIC students. Themes emerged that influenced their decisions to enroll including convenience factors, the ease of navigating the admission process, the availability and convenience of Direct Connect, the general perception of UCF, and the ways in which UCF and

other institutions recruited and engaged students at JHS. Another path of enrollment also emerged in which students attend other institutions and use the Direct Connect program as a stepping-stone or intermediary step toward enrollment at UCF.

These findings provide useful insight towards addressing this problem of practice. UCF seeks to recruit more students from this population and these factors and experiences are valuable pieces of information that should inform strategies and recruitment efforts moving forward. These efforts can not only strengthen the reasons JHS students might choose to attend UCF, but may also strengthen current paths of enrollment, or provide more access through other paths that are not used as frequently.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Introduction

As stated in previous chapters, the University of Central Florida seeks to enroll a larger population of students from Jones High School than is currently experienced. Initiatives at the university, such as increasing minority enrollment, creating a satellite campus in the neighborhood near JHS, and providing access to higher education, drive this goal. Students from JHS who enroll at UCF have a variety of paths of enrollment to choose from. Understanding the experiences that influence how these students choose to enroll is an important step in developing recruitment methods to increase enrollment.

This study explored the experiences that led JHS students to enroll at UCF and why they chose the path of enrollment they selected. One hundred and nineteen JHS students who enrolled at UCF were invited to participate in this study. They were contacted for participation in a survey and interview regarding their experiences when they enrolled at the university. Participants provided insight into the experiences that influenced their choice to attend UCF and why they enrolled via the path they chose.

This qualitative study was interested in the phenomenological experiences of these participants as it relates to their enrollment at UCF. Furthermore, as a dissertation in practice, this study was explored in relation to addressing the specific problem of practice as it relates to UCF and JHS. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What paths are students from JHS taking to enroll at UCF?
2. What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced their decision to attend UCF?
3. What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced the path they chose to achieve enrollment?

The findings reported in the previous chapter will now be discussed in relation to these research questions and will be followed by implications for recruitment practices that UCF can employ in order to increase enrollment of JHS students.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: What paths are students from JHS taking to enroll at UCF?

The findings indicated that the most common path of enrollment students take from JHS to UCF is through the Direct Connect program. Sixty-five percent of the participants indicated they enrolled at UCF as Direct Connect students. Even those who had attended another college or university prior to the Direct Connect institution identified as enrolling through this path. This is a clear, defined path of enrollment that students identified with and saw as a viable option for admission to UCF.

Fewer respondents (nineteen percent) indicated they came to UCF as First Time in College (FTIC) students. This was expected by the researcher, as low FTIC enrollment from JHS was already known to the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. This is a path that should be strengthened, as will be explored in implications for practice.

Four survey participants indicated that they transferred from another state or community college but did not participate in the Direct Connect program. This path, while available to JHS students, is less likely to be selected because the state and community colleges in the area surrounding JHS all participate in the Direct Connect program. JHS students would need to move out of the area to attend one of these state or community colleges and then move back to the area to attend UCF.

Zero survey participants indicated that they enrolled as a transfer student from another college or university. One interview respondent indicated this path. A new path emerged, however, of students who had attended another college or university, transferred to a Direct Connect institution, and eventually enrolled at UCF. Participants who attended another institution in this manner cited the location of UCF, financial savings associated with attending a public university, and discontent with their original institution as reasons to transfer.

Research Question 2: What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced their decision to attend UCF?

Six themes emerged that impacted the participants' decisions to attend UCF: Convenience, Direct Connect, Admissions Preparation, Perceptions of UCF, UCF Recruitment, and Other University Recruitment.

Convenience was a commonly cited reason given for attending UCF. This included both the financial costs of attending a public university, as well as location. Participants referenced the lower cost of UCF compared to other options for higher education, in addition to the university being located nearby. These two ideas are closely related. Participants who wanted to

stay close to home could attend UCF and spend less, as opposed to living away from home and associated supports, and spend more. The location and convenience influenced enrollment, even when they would prefer to attend another institution.

Similar to convenience was the option of having a guarantee of admission to UCF through the Direct Connect program. Students were familiar with this program during high school and it was an option that they knew was available. They had access to programs during high school that informed them of Direct Connect and advisors that connected them to that program. This correlates to the theme of convenience because the Direct Connect institutions are less expensive than UCF. This resulted in some participants choosing to attend the Direct Connect program in order to save money. The two themes of convenience and Direct Connect are important factors in student choices to attend UCF.

Admissions Preparation was another theme that emerged, and the results were surprising to the researcher. The expectation was that students would feel the admission process was either confusing or intimidating, but this was generally not the case. Participants indicated that the admission process was very easy to navigate and not confusing at all. This is a positive indicator that the actual process of applying for admission is not hindering student choice to apply and seek enrollment.

Participants also stated that the perception of the ability to gain admission was not a hindrance to admission. This is, however, an area where participants had variations in their responses. Some participants confidently stated that they knew what was required to gain admission. However, others indicated that one of the reasons they chose the Direct Connect path of admission was because they assumed they would not gain admission as an FTIC student.

This suggests that some students may have preferred to enroll as an FTIC student, but are choosing a surer route via the Direct Connect path.

The perception of UCF that participants held provided a variety of responses and indicators, both positive and negative, of the reputation of the institution. Participants generally regarded UCF as a fairly prestigious institution with strong academic programs and opportunities for students. Other students, however, spoke of the Direct Connect program, or attending a community college, as a necessary intermediary step prior to enrolling at UCF. They viewed UCF with some intimidation, or as a place they would need to adjust to before attending. The convenience of the Direct Connect program, the assurance of admission, and the perception of needing a preparatory experience connected to provide a strong influence toward the Direct Connect path of enrollment.

Other perceptions of UCF were less favorable. One participant mentioned that she felt the university only catered to FTIC students and not adults or non-traditional learners. Another opinion was that UCF is not very well connected to the community near JHS and does not have a strong presence in town. Still others compared the reputation of UCF to other institutions they were more familiar with and had stronger positive feelings toward. The reputation of the university is an important influencer in student's college selection and could stand to be strengthened (Monks & Ehrenberg, 1999, Meredith, 2004).

The way UCF engages and recruits students at JHS was presented in sharp contrast to other universities. This was an area in which UCF was seen very negatively. It was regularly stated by participants that they had very little interaction, if any at all, with UCF on the campus of JHS. They clearly remembered seeing other institutions on campus and had favorable

perceptions of those universities, but did not recall interacting with UCF. UCF was generally perceived as not being present on their high school campus and was not clearly discussed as an option or opportunity for students. The strongest connection to UCF that participants experienced was being informed about the Direct Connect program. The Direct Connect institutions were present on their campus, information was readily available, and enrollment at UCF was mentioned as an end result of that path.

Other institutions had a stronger presence on the JHS campus. Students remembered speaking with them and seeing them. Two interview participants shared that they went to an HBCU prior to attending UCF, which had a regular presence at JHS. The cost savings and location of UCF brought them back to the area to enroll, but their initial preference was another institution. Other participants indicated that they would have preferred to attend one of the other institutions that had been present on their campus during high school, but were unable. They reluctantly attended UCF because of the convenience. Students even had options to tour other institutions, which were much farther away, but never toured UCF, only fifteen miles from JHS.

One student indicated a positive experience with the way UCF engaged her while she was a student at JHS. This stood in contrast to other participants, but suggests what may be effective in addressing this problem. She was enrolled in a program at JHS that provided connections to current students at UCF who were alumni of JHS. She noted that she had friends attending UCF, gave strong positive responses about the opportunities available at UCF, and indicated that UCF was her clear first choice college option.

Research Question 3: What are the experiences of JHS students that influenced the path they chose to achieve enrollment?

Participants indicated experiences that influenced their enrollment as FTIC students, transfers, and Direct Connect participants, and again, convenience was an important influencer for selecting their chosen path of enrollment. For those students enrolling as FTIC students, convenience was most commonly linked to the proximity of UCF to their home and support systems. Transfers and Direct Connect students referenced proximity as well, but also indicated that cost of attendance was an important factor. For some who initially attended another university, they returned to their home area to attend a more affordable institution. For those participating in Direct Connect, the option allowed them to stay close to home and provided a more economical path to earning a Bachelor's degree.

Many of the participants in both the FTIC and transfer categories noted that UCF did not have a strong recruiting presence on the JHS campus. Responses ranged from a general understanding that UCF was an option if they chose to Direct Connect, while others indicated they reluctantly attended UCF because it was the only option in their town. UCF had a general reputation for having strong academic programs and opportunities, but students remembered and referenced other universities having a stronger presence on the JHS campus. Students in the Direct Connect program, however, indicated easy access to Direct Connect advisors and assistance with making the transition to UCF.

As stated earlier, it is interesting to note that some participants who identified as Direct Connect students actually attended another university as well. This discovery points to students using the Direct Connect agreement as a stepping-stone, or intermediary path, to enrollment at

UCF, after having previously attended elsewhere. These students were not specifically addressed in this study, but may warrant future research as a distinct population.

Implications for Practice

Summary of Current Recruitment Practices

The current recruitment practices undertaken by UCF to students at JHS are no different than the methods that are used at other high schools throughout the region and state. Current practices involve a number of standard practices that occur at all high schools in the region. The school is visited once each fall by a member of the UCF Undergraduate Admissions staff to make a presentation to students who are interested in attending the university. The presentation is made during the school day to students who are willing, and able, to leave class to attend. The presentation is directed toward seniors in high school, and while it does cover some of the reasons why UCF is an appealing institution, most of the presentation is dedicated to informing students of how the admission and application process works. There is a question and answer period, but student information is not captured and there is no follow up after the visit.

Guidance counselors at JHS are sent information via mailings and emails as part of a larger communication plan to all guidance counselors who have interacted with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. Again, this is not specific to JHS, but is a general communication plan directed towards guidance staff at any type of high school: rural, private, small, large, urban, etc.

There are also regional college fairs that students from JHS are invited to attend, but these are not held at JHS and are intended to serve students from multiple high schools in the region. They are held in the evening, transportation is not provided, and attendance is not mandatory. UCF does not specifically invite students to attend the fair; this is handled by the organizers of the college fair.

There is a general communication plan to all prospective students that may include students from JHS. When student information is collected through the website, college fairs, email contact, or any other means, it is entered into a database. These students are then sent a round of email communications that include information encouraging them to apply, links to various portions of the Undergraduate Admission website that may be helpful, and encouragements to visit the UCF campus. Again, these communications are generic in nature, designed to appeal to students from a variety of different backgrounds.

In order to increase enrollment of this population of students, additional or adjusted recruitment methods are needed. These are recommended in response to the data collected during this study, and are targeted at increasing enrollment of JHS students to UCF. These suggestions may strengthen existing paths of enrollment to the university such as the Direct Connect program, as well as strengthen other options, such as the FTIC enrollment and transfers from other universities.

Increase Presence on JHS Campus

As the findings indicated, UCF does not have a strong recruitment presence on the campus of JHS. Study participants indicated other universities were present and branding their institutions as appealing places to study, but UCF was conspicuously absent from that list. This

is surprising because UCF is the closest option to their community, and convenience was such a strong factor in students selecting their eventual enrollment at the university.

UCF should, therefore, increase its recruitment presence on the JHS campus. Methods of recruitment that UCF should employ should mirror or exceed that of other institutions who are recruiting students at JHS. This should also include specific communication strategies directed towards helping JHS students gather information about the programs, cost, and opportunities available to them at UCF (Kern, 2000). This would include regular visits to campus throughout the year in order to provide access to UCF information and personnel, rather than a single visit during the fall.

One effort that has been previously unexplored is the option to regularly visit JHS during their lunch periods. This allows for multiple visits without disrupting the school schedule, and without competing with the academic efforts of JHS faculty. UCF would have to compete with student socialization during lunch but it would allow for a relatively easy and consistent presence on campus. As with many efforts, feasibility would need to be considered as the Undergraduate Admissions staff have a number of schools throughout the region requiring visits throughout the year.

Another effort was inferred by some of the positive experiences the participants reported during the interviews. Sheila indicated a strong relationship to current students at UCF who were alumni of JHS. She remembered them visiting the JHS campus as part of the college preparation program she attended. This is an available resource that could prove to have a profound impact on building a positive presence on the JHS campus. The staff from UCF that visit JHS could recruit current UCF students who are alumni of JHS to visit with them and help

provide an example of JHS students enrolled at the university. These students could also provide a valuable voice in helping prepare JHS students for the transition to college as well as help them determine if UCF is indeed a good fit for them (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). This could provide JHS students an opportunity to build self-efficacy through both the vicarious experience of seeing former JHS students at UCF as well as verbal persuasion from these students encouraging them towards enrollment at UCF (Bandura, 1977).

Another recruitment tactic that emerged from interview responses is derived from the references that participants made to touring other institutions. Marla referenced an opportunity to visit The University of Florida during the ninth grade, and how this influenced her desire to attend there. Campus tours are an important factor in college selection by helping students determine if a college is a good or a poor fit (Tobolowsky, Outcall, & McDonough, 2005). Even if those students end up taking the Direct Connect path, campus tours are still important resources in determining a good fit (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Laanan, 2013).

Considering that UCF is so close to JHS, it is reasonable for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions to invite students from JHS to tour the campus. Campus tours for groups and individual families are something that the Office of Undergraduate Admissions already offers on a daily basis, so this works well with current operations. Funding for transportation may be an issue to arrange between JHS and UCF. However, the distance between UCF and JHS is much less than the distance to UF and may be more manageable for both parties.

Strengthen Direct Connect

The Direct Connect program is a clearly defined path of enrollment for students from JHS. The financial appeal of attending a Direct Connect partner institution, the convenience of

the location in proximity to their community, and the guarantee of admission to UCF make this path appealing to many students and this should be strengthened. Students indicated that the Direct Connect institutions had a presence on their high school campus and when they did attend the Direct Connect institutions, they had access to advisors and information about the Direct Connect process. These are strong relationships that should continue to be invested in and fostered.

One adjustment to these current practices is strengthening the partnership that exists between the Direct Connect institutions and UCF. Staff from UCF and the Direct Connect institutions should coordinate visits to the JHS campus in order to maximize this path of enrollment. Having representatives from both institutions present allows students to gather information about both institutions and strengthen this path. For example, if UCF is consistently visiting JHS during the lunch period on certain days, the Direct Connect institutions could be invited to attend at that time to help students see this pathway and strengthen this partnership.

An important reminder for UCF is to make sure it does not communicate that the Direct Connect path is the only path to enrollment. As will be stated later, some students may be more interested in enrolling through the FTIC path rather than through Direct Connect, and this should be encouraged. It can also help ensure that students do not undermatch in their college selection if they could benefit from additional resources and opportunities available at UCF that may not be available at the Direct Connect institutions. However, as identified in this study, many students find the Direct Connect path a more convenient and practical option to achieve enrollment at UCF.

Emphasize Convenience

Convenience emerged as a clear influence on student enrollment to UCF, both in relation to the proximity of the university to their community, as well as the financial savings gained by attending a local, public university. This is something that should be emphasized in all communications to JHS students from UCF. Conversations and messages directed toward students, guidance counselors, and families of JHS students should emphasize the benefits of staying close to their community and the economic advantages.

Specific email messages should be sent to local high school students and guidance counselors, including JHS, which emphasize the benefits of staying local. Publications that the Office of Undergraduate Admissions generates are used in a variety of settings and need to be generic enough to be used in any of these settings. However, specific messages or posters could be made and brought to visits to JHS that show the university's proximity and financial benefits associated with attendance. The Undergraduate Admissions staff who visit JHS should be instructed to emphasize convenience in conversations and presentations as well. An emphasis on convenience is likely to yield a higher number of students who are considering attendance elsewhere.

Adjust Message

As mentioned previously, the prevailing recruitment message to students at JHS emphasizes the admissions process and the steps necessary to navigate this. While this is important information, participants indicated they generally had an easy time navigating this process and finding information. The website was helpful and they had access to advisors who

could answer their questions. Less effort should be directed toward the details of the admission process and should be directed toward the reasons why students would want to attend UCF.

Included in this message should be an explanation of the different paths available to students, primarily the FTIC and Direct Connect paths. UCF does not currently have an emphasis on recruiting students from other four-year, bachelor's degree granting institutions and so this should not be emphasized at this time. Students should be informed of all of the opportunities available to them at UCF, the distinctive features of the university, and the reasons why they should consider studying there (including convenience). Following this, students should be informed of the paths in which they could enroll and what the advantages and disadvantages are from each. UCF has an interest in enrolling students as FTIC students directly from high school, but also wants to strengthen the Direct Connect path. The Undergraduate Admissions office should spend more effort informing students of their options and enticing to them to attend, rather than explaining the function of the admission process.

This is not to say that information about the admission process is unimportant. It should still be included, but should be adjusted to provide students with links and resources where they can find this information on their own as well as contact information for advisors. Guidance counselors could also be provided with more of the technical points of the admission process, in order to be a more valuable resource to students. These counselors are an important ally in the recruitment process and provide valuable information to students who seek college enrollment. These relationships should be developed and maintained throughout all efforts of UCF recruitment (Johnson, Stewart, & Eberly, 1991).

Summary

These recruitment methods are listed above as distinct suggestions, but their impact is summative. Efforts to increase a UCF presence on the JHS campus can incorporate an adjusted message related to reasons why students should attend UCF. Bringing students to the UCF campus can emphasize convenience as well as impact their view of what makes the university unique and appealing. Visiting the UCF campus can also reinforce how close it is to their community, and for those who choose Direct Connect, how close it is to their local state college. These efforts can combine to increase JHS enrollment to UCF through multiple paths.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study provided an important glimpse into the complex reasons that JHS students may choose to attend UCF and the various paths they selected for enrollment. While insightful, additional research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of this population. First, this study only included participants who actually enrolled at UCF from JHS. Additional study should be conducted of the many students at JHS who do not choose to attend UCF. There may be additional experiences that influence students who do not enroll which were not identified in this population.

Second, an interesting population emerged from this study of students from JHS who attended another university and then used the Direct Connect program as an intermediary step on their path to enrollment at UCF. UCF does not currently have an interest in directly recruiting students who attend other four-year, bachelor's degree granting institutions, but it seems there may be a population of students transferring this way who need specialized information or services. If students are attending another institution and using Direct Connect as an

intermediary option, they may have a unique set of needs regarding their enrollment process. The Direct Connect institutions may also benefit from studying this population, since they enroll at those institutions first.

Third, there were mixed messages regarding participant's perceptions of the admission process. Participants were not generally intimidated by the admission process or their ability to gain admission, particularly as Direct Connect students. Some did, however, express hesitancy about their ability to gain admission as FTIC students. Gaining admission as an FTIC student is competitive and students need to present a fairly high grade point average and SAT or ACT test scores to gain admission. A study of JHS student's academic readiness and overall competitiveness for admission upon leaving high school should be undertaken in conjunction with JHS. Currently, very few students from JHS apply as FTIC students, so it is difficult to determine if students at JHS would be competitive for admission as FTIC students. Results of this study could further inform recruitment tactics and emphases.

Finally, financial aid options are certainly a factor in how students select a college. This should be considered by UCF as it relates to this population. Current recruitment methods do include academic scholarships that all admitted students are considered for but there is limited need-based aid available through the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. For many students at JHS, the availability of need-based aid may be a significant factor in their enrollment decisions and should be studied, particularly those students from low-income families (Roderick, Nagoaka, & Coca, 2009). A review of financial aid resources at other institutions, such as the Bridges scholarship mentioned by Sheila, may provide insight into financial resources effective at recruiting JHS students.

Conclusion

The reasons that students choose to attend a particular college or university are varied and complicated. Likewise, the paths of entry that students may take to enrollment at a university are not always as linear as might be supposed. This study sought to provide insight into the experiences that students from JHS considered when they chose to attend UCF, and the experiences that influenced the path of enrollment they selected. As the university makes plans to further develop a downtown campus in the community of JHS, it is important that an understanding of this population emerges in order to foster the paths of enrollment that these students take and increase their enrollment.

This study revealed that convenience is a strong influencing factor in this population's decision to attend UCF and can even sway students to attend who would rather enroll elsewhere. Participants indicated the application process was not difficult and was easy to navigate. The study also exposed that UCF does not have a strong presence on the campus of JHS and needs to strengthen its image and brand within this community. Participants indicated that they want to attend a university that is convenient and affordable, but they also want to attend a university they are excited about and has connected with them in meaningful ways during their high school career.

The University of Central Florida seeks to enroll more students from Jones High School. While these two institutions exist in the same city, they have not historically had a strong partnership. These communities will soon be closer as UCF seeks to create buildings and programs near JHS. Fostering paths of enrollment of JHS students to UCF presents a unique challenge as it relates to these new developments and the unique population and needs of JHS

students. This study provides insight into the experiences that influence enrollment of JHS students to UCF and ways in which UCF can seek to increase enrollment of this population in the future.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

This survey will be created and administered online through an online survey platform and will be emailed to the participants.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey which is designed to gain information about your experiences relating to how you came to be a student at UCF. As a reminder, this survey data is confidential, anonymous, and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete, likely less.

Demographics (participants can choose to not answer)

- Please select your gender:
 - Male
 - Female
- Please select your grade level:
 - Freshman
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
- What is your age? (Open response)
- Please select your ethnicity (you may select more than one):
 - Hispanic or Latino/a

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- What is the highest level of education completed in your household:
 - Grades 1-8 (Middle School)
 - Grades 9-12 (some High School)
 - High School graduate or GED
 - Some college
 - Associates degree or Technical School
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Graduate School or beyond
- Please select your current level of enrollment this semester:
 - Part-time (1-11 credits)
 - Full-time (12+ credits)

Questions for all categories:

For the following statements, please indicate whether you Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), or have No Response (NR). When answering these questions, think back to the time when you were deciding to attend UCF:

- Preparation in High School
 - My high school curriculum prepared me for success in college.

- My teachers in high school prepared me for success in college.
- We often spoke about college in my high school classes.
- Teachers and administrators in my high school helped me know how to apply for college.
- I felt familiar with the college application process when I applied.
- If I had a question about applying to college, I knew where to go for answers.
- Information about the SAT or ACT exam was easily accessed.
- I felt prepared for the SAT or ACT exam.
- UCF engagement
 - When I decided to apply to UCF, I knew what documents I needed to send to complete my application file.
 - UCF personnel were visible and present on my high school campus.
 - UCF provided information to my high school about programs and applying.
 - I knew how to contact UCF if I had questions about attending.
 - I knew what UCF required of me to gain admission.
 - I have friends or family members that have attended, or are currently attending, UCF.
 - UCF connected with me in meaningful ways.
 - UCF materials and advertisements were regularly seen in my daily life.
- Motivation:
 - I felt that UCF was a place that I would be successful.
 - I felt that attending UCF was a realistic option for me.

- The thought of attending UCF was intimidating.
- UCF was a place that I felt like I would feel comfortable.
- I had a pretty good idea of what to expect at UCF.
- I knew I had what it took to gain admission to UCF.

Questions for specific categories:

- I applied to UCF as a:
 - First Time in College (Freshman) student: I came straight to UCF from high school and did not take college courses between high school graduation and enrollment at UCF (Dual enrollment courses taken while in high school would not count).
 -
 - Transfer from a Florida State or Community College (not Direct Connect): I took some course work after high school graduation at a state or community college prior to enrolling at UCF.
 - What made you decide to attend a state or community college prior to enrolling at UCF? (Open-ended response)
 - *For the following statements, please indicate whether you Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), or have No Response (NR).*
 - Information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible

- Advisors on my campus were able to provide helpful information about transferring to UCF.
 - UCF had a visible presence on my campus.
 - I attended this state/community college with the intent to transfer to UCF.
 - My coursework adequately prepared me for success at UCF.
- Transfer through the Direct Connect program: I earned an Associate of Arts degree from a Direct Connect partner institution (Valencia College, Seminole State College, Eastern Florida State College, Lake Sumter State College, Daytona State College) prior to enrolling at UCF.
- What made you decide to attend a Direct Connect school prior to enrolling at UCF? (Open-ended response)
 - *For the following statements, please indicate whether you Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), or have No Response (NR).*
 - Information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible
 - Direct Connect advisors on my campus were able to provide helpful information about transferring to UCF.
 - UCF Direct Connect had a visible presence on my campus.
 - I attended this state/community college with the intent to transfer to UCF.
 - My coursework adequately prepared me for success at UCF.

- Transfer from another college or university: I attended another college (not a Florida state/community college) prior to enrolling at UCF.
 - What made you decide to attend another school prior to enrolling at UCF?
(Open-ended response)
 - *For the following statements, please indicate whether you Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), or have No Response (NR).*
 - Information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible to me.
 - Advisors on my campus were able to provide helpful information about transferring to UCF.
 - Advisors at UCF were able to provide helpful information about transferring to UCF.
 - I attended this college or university with the intent to transfer to UCF.
 - My coursework adequately prepared me for success at UCF.

Interview Selection

Would you be interested in participating in a further interview regarding your enrollment to UCF? This would be approximately 20 minutes of your time and would be conducted on campus at UCF. If you are interested, please select yes and provide your name and contact information below. This will invalidate the anonymity of your responses to this survey but your information will still be kept in the strictest confidence.

- Yes
 - Name
 - Email
- No

Thank you. The survey is now complete.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Facilitator: Thank you for volunteering to take part in this interview to further discuss your experience enrolling at UCF. As I indicated when you filled out the survey, I am here to learn more about your experience in choosing to enroll at UCF and navigating the admissions process. Everything that you have to say here is confidential and will be anonymized in my analysis and reporting of your responses. I am recording this discussion so that I don't have to take notes now and can give you my full attention. I will use the recording to transcribe this discussion and the recording will be kept in my safekeeping. Once this project has concluded, it will be destroyed.

These questions that I am asking you have no right answers – I want to learn from you and your experiences. Having said that, you do not need to respond to any of the questions if you do not want to. Do you have any questions about the study or the interview before we begin?

1. Did you enroll at UCF as a First- Time in College, transfer from a state/community college, Direct Connect, or transfer from another college or university?
2. What were some of the biggest factors that went into your decision to attend UCF? Why did you choose to enroll here?
3. What were some of the biggest factors that went into your decision to enroll in the way that you did (First Time in College, Transfer, Direct Connect, or Other College)?
 - a. Transfer probe: What drew you to your other college? Programs? Finances? Access?
 - b. Who were the people that influenced you to attend?
4. How would you describe the process of applying for admission?

- a. Was information easily available?
 - b. Was it confusing?
 - c. What resources did you use? Advisors? Website? Printed materials?
5. In what ways did UCF engage your high school while you were a student there? Were these helpful? Meaningful? Were they present on your campus? Did you take a tour of UCF? Did they have any college nights or fairs in your area?
6. When you were in high school, did you have a sense that UCF was an option that was within your grasp?
 - a. Did you feel academically prepared? Why or why not?
 - b. Was it a place you thought you would feel comfortable? Why or why not?
 - c. Did you have an idea of what UCF would be like or was it a mystery?
7. What would have made your enrollment to UCF easier or smoother?
 - a. What do you wish you had known?
 - b. What services would you have had access to?
 - c. Was there something that other colleges/universities did that you wish UCF had done?
8. Do you have any final comments about what influenced you to enroll at UCF?

Thank you for your time and for the information you provided.

APPENDIX C: UCF IRB LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Colin Wyenberg

Date: February 23, 2016

Dear Researcher:

On 02/23/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: Factors Influencing Jones High School Students and their Path of College Entry to the University of Central Florida
Investigator: Colin Wyenberg
IRB Number: SBE-16-12033
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 02/23/2016 09:44:45 AM EST

IRB Manager

APPENDIX D: CODING SPREADSHEET

First Stage Code Given	Axial Coding - Themes	Survey Question	Participant	Likert	Text/Results
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Sheila		I transferred from actually, Valencia from Direct Connect
Location	Convenience		Sheila		It's closer to home
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Sheila		And also the medical school here. I'm also planning on going to med school
Stepping Stone	Perceptions of UCF		Sheila		Valencia would kind of open up the whole college experience, just to see what to expect .
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Sheila		Valencia would kind of open up the whole college experience, just to see what to expect .
Finances	Convenience		Sheila		scholarship with Bridges
DC advisors	Direct Connect		Sheila		My advisor at Valencia actually. Since I was in the Bridges program, they kind of give you a broad perspective on like ,
Location	Convenience		Sheila		I was looking for somewhere closer to home and somewhere that I'm already familiar
Current UCF students	UCF Engagement		Sheila		I had a couple of friends that's already here
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Sheila		It was actually not bad. It was nothing that I wasn't expecting
Website	Admissions preparation		Sheila		the website, there's...you have to go through different like
Website	Admissions preparation		Sheila		I would just say the website really. They pretty much told you to go on the website whenever you're ready and that was it

DC advisors	Direct Connect		Sheila		When you say “they told you” that was your advisors at Valencia? Sheila: Yeah Colin: Ok. Were they Direct Connect advisors? Sheila: Yeah
UCF Tour	UCF Engagement		Sheila		There were like, the college tours and stuff like that. I went to a few of them
Jones program	UCF Engagement		Sheila		And there was the CROP program there also at our school
Current UCF students	UCF Engagement		Sheila		Or students that were like...like the high school that I went to, we had some alumni that would come and talk about their experience at the university. That helped too.
Jones program	UCF Engagement		Sheila		It’s Professional Opportunity...something like that for students. But...we had a lot of seminars
Current UCF students	UCF Engagement		Sheila		We had students, again, that came to talk about their experiences from different universities. I know we did have a lot of UCF students and they also had tours and stuff like that
Current UCF students	UCF Engagement		Sheila		I’d say students just because they’re already going through the process and so they know more about what to expect and all that stuff.
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Sheila		Yeah, that’s actually where I was planning on going
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Sheila		I was. I graduated with the National Honor society so I felt like I had the GPA and the grades. It was just applying really. I feel like I would’ve got in if I did

UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Sheila		I heard a lot about the different sororities and fraternities and all the different activities that were going on but I wasn't really focusing on that.
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Sheila		But on the outset it sounds like academics were the more important piece for you
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Sheila		I would say Direct Connect. The fact that I was in Bridges that actually connected me to them
DC advisors	Direct Connect		Sheila		They had all the information and what to do and what to expect, all that stuff. I felt like it was very easy for me to actually apply because of them.
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Sheila		I didn't have any problem with applying at all
Finances	Convenience		Sheila		So you said Valencia had the Bridges scholarship program and it sounds like that was a big part of you attending Valencia. Do you wish UCF had something like that then? Sheila: Yeah. [laughter] Yeah definitely
Current UCF students	UCF Engagement		Sheila		I would say the fact that a lot of my close friends are going to UCF or like, at UCF right now
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Sheila		I know the programs and stuff like, when they come to our school to visit, they talk about different opportunities that they have
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Sheila		they kind of let you see what you're gonna, like what you're getting yourself into or if this is really for you. I think just the opportunity really here is, it's fantastic.

Location	Convenience		Sheila		Would you have considered at all going to another school outside of the area? Sheila: Right now? No. Maybe med school, like after I get my bachelor but even then, I'd still like to go to the UCF med school
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Inez		I came from Valencia. Transit...is it called transit? Transferred over? Colin: Uh huh. Did you do the Direct Connect ? Inez: Yes I did
Location	Convenience		Inez		Biggest factor was location.
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Inez		because I could Direct Connect from Valencia
Location	Convenience		Inez		And so the location here in town was a big part of that? Inez: The biggest part
Finances	Convenience		Inez		first of all cost because I wanted something that was affordable
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Inez		afraid that if I jumped right into UCF I wouldn't be prepared for the...you know, you hear the stories of the big classrooms and the professors are not personal
Stepping Stone	Perceptions of UCF		Inez		I wanted to start slow at Valencia and get used to the college atmosphere
Current UCF students	UCF Engagement		Inez		My daughter. She is a graduate of UCF. She graduated before I did because I'm a returning student. And I have a couple of friends who graduated from UCF.
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Inez		Oh, very easy. That's...I mean, just as I said it, it was very easy
DC advisors	Direct Connect		Inez		I had advisors. Of course your undergraduate advisors

					helped me, at Valencia and at UCF
Website	Admissions preparation		Inez		But you used the website to apply obviously. Inez: Yes
Location	Convenience		Inez		When I was in high school, I started at Valencia because again, location. My father wanted me to be closer to home first. So I didn't really interact with anyone from UCF
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Inez		College...four-year college back then was scary. So, I probably wouldn't have tried to go to a four-year college
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Inez		Inez: No I don't. Colin: Any printed materials in offices or? Inez: No, I did not. Not back then. In fact...no. Not at the counselors office. Colin: Did you ever attend any college fairs or anything like that in the area? Inez: No, not back then. Colin: And then, while you were in high school did you ever tour UCF? Inez: No
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Inez		Education wise I was prepared. I had really good teachers at Jones High
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Inez		Just hearing the stories. The stories scared me. You know, when you're in high school you can go to your teacher whenever you have a question but I was told you couldn't do that at college so I just assumed UCF was the same way because it was a college. I just put all colleges in the same category

UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Inez		<p>My cousins who were older than me that went to college. They didn't go to UCF. Maybe other students. Whether they heard it or not, they said it. And also, I watched a TV show one time. I think it was a movie and everyone is in class and they're like, in an auditorium. So you got like, it looked like there was about 200 students in an auditorium and one professor and the professor was really mean. So, I kind of stereotyped it based on that.</p>
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Inez		<p>What would have made it easier or smoother? Mmmm...nothing. Everything...I mean, nothing. I didn't see anything that was complicated for me</p>
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Inez		<p>Oh, I did hear that UCF is one of the top colleges so that was a big factor. But that's about it. There's nothing else</p>
Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Sally		<p>I graduated from University of South Florida</p>
Location	Convenience		Sally		<p>Well, I was moving back home. So that was one – moving back from Tampa to Orlando</p>
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Sally		<p>I was interested in the health services administration, the Master's program. That's what I wanted to get into.</p>

Location	Convenience		Sally	<p>When I graduated from high school, I wanted to get out of Orlando [laughs]. So, I didn't want to go to school so close.</p> <p>I wanted to branch out, experience a different city, a different area, I just wanted to go away and learn about a different area and city other than Orlando which is where I was born and raised. I wanted to branch out a little bit but not too too far from home. So that was really the biggest thing of me choosing USF because Tampa is not that far from Orlando so if I need to commute or come home for something, it's not that bad. So, that was pretty much the main thing. Then after, kind of wanting to come back home</p>
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Sally	<p>And then the public administration program, well actually both of them: the health services and the public administration program were one of the, kind of like the universities big graduate programs they have. From doing my own research about the programs, their graduation rates, the kind of jobs that students get, influenced my decision to come to UCF and major in those fields</p>
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Sally	<p>It was very easy. The website, very helpful, detailed information so there was nothing confusing. Everything was pretty straightforward</p>

Website	Admissions preparation		Sally		The website was my primary resource and just looking up information about both of those programs.
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Sally		No. I would say no to all of those. No UCF presence
Jones program	UCF Engagement		Sally		More so Valencia because I was in the Upward Bound program that they had with Valencia
Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Sally		We took field trips but we went to like, UF. We didn't really [laughs] go to UCF
Jones program	UCF Engagement		Sally		Because of the programs I was in, they actually took us to visit different colleges
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Sally		For instance, Spelman was another one.
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Sally		Yes, I do. I do believe that I could have gone to UCF and I believe that I could have gotten accepted if I had applied
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Sally		I would say comparing both schools, it was very simple with both
Location	Convenience		Sally		It was really location. They didn't do anything special it was just me wanting to get out of here [laughs].
Athletics	Perceptions of UCF		Sally		I think that the university as a whole is progressing, especially the athletics teams which is very good. It brings a lot of students to the university and kind of, really puts UCF on the map, as they say. Especially when they beat Baylor, everyone was just...UCF was the most talked about university. But I had a very good, positive

					experience with UCF
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Sally		Um...I really don't know. I would put it kind of on the administration because I would think that you would have someone come in from UCF being that it's so close but there just wasn't any, I don't know. I don't think anyone reached out to UCF to invite them to come. Like I said, we had Upward Bound which was partnered with Valencia but...I kind of see them more along the lines of tech schools and pushing Valencia, Mid-Florida, Orlando Tech, more than UCF.
Administrators	UCF Engagement		Sally		Um...I really don't know. I would put it kind of on the administration because I would think that you would have someone come in from UCF being that it's so close but there just wasn't any, I don't know. I don't think anyone reached out to UCF to invite them to come. Like I said, we had Upward Bound which was partnered with Valencia but...I kind of see them more along the lines of tech schools and pushing Valencia, Mid-Florida, Orlando Tech, more than UCF.

HBCU	Other University Engagement		Sally		So you saw other schools, just not UCF? Sally: Yeah, kind of like FAMU, BCU, but not so much UCF?
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Cathy		I went to Seminole State College in Florida. Colin: Did you Direct Connect then? Cathy: Yes
Location	Convenience		Cathy		Convenience. I graduated high school back in 2003 so I kind of took my time. I'm a little bit older [laughs]. So the convenience factor as far as distance
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Cathy		I went to Bethune-Cookman and that was kind of a distance. And it was a little bit harder to complete all of the classes because they were trying to make me start over as a freshman, pretty much
Location	Convenience		Cathy		So I transferred to UCF. It was convenience, time-factor, distance
Finances	Convenience		Cathy		The money because Bethune was a private school and it was more expensive
Finances	Convenience		Cathy		So, it was less expensive
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Cathy		it was more convenient to do it that way and Direct Connect or transfer to another school so that's what I did it that way

Finances	Convenience		Cathy	Well, with Seminole State, I'm not sure if it's actually a program or if it's all around or if it was just something they were doing at the time but Seminole State actually allowed me to attend as an independent student. I first wanted to go to Valencia but they, for some reason, couldn't prove that I was a citizen [laughs]. I don't know how that happened but they were trying to consider me an out-of-state student so I went to Seminole and not only did they enroll me as an in-state student, they also enrolled me as independent because I didn't have to go under my parents because I had a child at the time
No influencers	UCF Engagement		Cathy	And were there any people in your life that influenced you to attend UCF in particular? Cathy: Not at all [laughs]
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Cathy	It wasn't confusing, it was pretty easy. The information was easily available. Just getting all of the information such as immunizations, some of that was a pain. Other than that, it was pretty smooth
Website	Admissions preparation		Cathy	I used the website and I didn't have any advisors at the time
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Cathy	I went to a lot of college fairs, they did have a lot of college fairs however, I don't recall UCF being on campus.
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Cathy	Uh huh, there were a lot of HBCU's

Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Cathy		There was also UF and um...Florida State on campus but I don't recall UCF
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Cathy		Did you ever take a tour of UCF when you were in high school? Cathy: No
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Cathy		Absolutely! It was one of my last options [laughter] but it was certainly an option
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Cathy		Because I wanted to go out of state. I wanted to go out of state and I initially wanted to go to an HBCU
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Cathy		There are two things in particular that jump out at me. The first thing would be because I'm an adult student, they kind of cater to the first time students that are coming directly out of high school and going into college and kind of put us to the wayside [laughter]. So, I'd rather them have some type of program strictly for adults and more of a variety of options as far as majors that they can take
Finances	Convenience		Cathy		Jones High School is located in a pretty low-income area and there's a lot of low-income students that come out of there so there's a lot of people that don't have the opportunity to pay for college and go directly in
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Cathy		Other than that, if it's one of the more highly educated, more successful ones that obtain scholarships, they're going off to colleges such as Bethune, FAMU , and UF

Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Cathy		Other than that, if it's one of the more highly educated, more successful ones that obtain scholarships, they're going off to colleges such as Bethune, FAMU , and UF
Finances	Convenience		Cathy		Those are the ones that are going off on scholarship. Other than that, it's a pretty low-income area
Stepping Stone	Perceptions of UCF		Cathy		A lot of the kids out of there are pretty much, unless they're going to football or something like that, trying to get that minimum or that basic education before they go off to a university
Athletics	Perceptions of UCF		Cathy		A lot of the kids out of there are pretty much, unless they're going to football or something like that, trying to get that minimum or that basic education before they go off to a university
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Cathy		But I mean, you're right, a lot of the HBCU's and UF, they have a bigger presence at Jones too. You said yourself that you didn't see UCF there, you saw other school and we're right down the street. Cathy: Right!
FTIC			Marla		First time in college
Location	Convenience		Marla		it was closer to home and I had a boyfriend at the time and I didn't want to leave him so...[laughter
Stepping Stone	Perceptions of UCF		Marla		Oh, because I was never a community college student. I was at the top of my class so it just made more sense for me to go straight to college. I feel like when you went to

				Valencia or colleges like that, it was like you needed an inbetween between high school and college. I didn't feel like I needed an inbetween
Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Marla	I originally, I went to a trip in ninth grade to UF and from that trip I was like, "I'm going to UF" all through high school and I just knew I was going to go. And then here comes senior year and I end up at UCF
Location	Convenience		Marla	Yeah, my mom. ...She didn't want me to go! [Laughter]
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Marla	I believe it was easy. Everything was kind of step-by-step so it was nothing too confusing. It was easy to find, the website was easy to use.
Jones program	UCF Engagement		Marla	Yeah at my high school, I had this one advisor who was specifically focused on getting us into college, the whole process, getting our dorms and everything. So I had that kind of advisor.
Jones program	UCF Engagement		Marla	It was a program. I don't remember what the name of the program was but it was a program I was in. Colin: Okay. So it was you and a few other students? Marla: Yeah
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Marla	I don't ever remember UCF coming to my school. Maybe like...one time. I don't remember though. Colin: Did you take any tours of UCF? Marla: No. The first time I went on campus, really on

					campus, was orientation. I think. Mind you, this all happened in 2010 so [laughter]
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Marla		Yeah, I went to a predominantly black high school so, you know HBCU's came and we knew a lot about them. But I didn't know too much about PWI's as much
Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Marla		Let me think again...that's not true. They did because I went to the UF trip and that was through my school and I do believe they used to come and set up a table at school and people could go there and get information. I don't know if it's UCF specifically but PWI's did. UF did at least
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Marla		you felt like UCF was an option for you, it was within your grasp, it was realistic? Marla: Uh huh. Yeah.
Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Marla		I wish they did the same program that UF had where they take the ninth graders, or something like that, and kind of bring them on campus because that's what I did. I went and I stayed on campus and I got to tour the campus and find out different things. When I got to UCF, I didn't know anything about it
Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Marla		Part of me...if I could choose a college again, I wouldn't choose UCF again. I would take my butt right to UF . [laughter]

Reluctant student	Perceptions of UCF		Marla		I don't know...it's something about... I never felt proud to be a Knight. I don't know why. I felt super proud to be a Tiger, which was my high school alma mater. I would feel super proud to be a Gator (UF) , even super proud to be a Rattler (FAMU) but for some reason I just never felt super proud to be a Knight. There was nothing about UCF that made me happy to be there, like I was excited. It was just like, something I had to do. And this may just be me personally, my own feelings or something that is a general consensus but I never felt excited or proud to be a Knight. I guess...maybe I went there for the wrong reasons. Who knows? [laughter]
Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Marla		I would feel super proud to be a Gator (UF) ,
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Marla		even super proud to be a Rattler (FAMU)
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Marla		The majority of my class, they either went to FAMU
Other SUS	Other University Engagement		Marla		a lot of them went to UF
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Marla		I feel like UCF doesn't have much of a presence in Orlando. UCF is on the east...the heart of Orlando is on the west side of Orlando so it's a good thing that they're going to put a building downtown because that's

					where the heart of Orlando is – on this side of town, not the east side
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Marla		A lot of people who are originally from Orlando don't really consider where UCF is to be Orlando. And then, Orlando has so much other things going on like Disney, Universal; UCF kind of gets lost in the mix. So maybe they need to make more of a presence in the city so that people know they're here. Not just on the east side but on the west side too. I only see billboards for UCF on the east side but a lot of the students you're targeting live on the westside
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Tina		Yeah, I transferred from Seminole State. Colin: Did you Direct Connect then? Tina: Yes
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF		Tina		There was the program that I'm in
Location	Convenience		Tina		The location you know, being in Orlando
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Tina		Originally, I went to a different university. I went to Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona
Direct Connect	Direct Connect		Tina		I didn't really like it there so I started going to Seminole State, came back home, and went to Seminole State. Then I did the Direct Connect to Seminole State

Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Tina		But I doubt that straight out of high school, I would have gotten accepted
Location	Convenience		Tina		Why Seminole State over Valencia or one of the other schools? Was it location again? Tina: Yeah, at the time I was living in Seminole County
No influencers	UCF Engagement		Tina		No, I'm a first generation college student so none of my family have been to college. So, there were not family, it was all based on me. I never, at Seminole State, I never was close to the counselor or friends there that would have persuaded me to go there. That was all my decision, that was always my plan was to go to Seminole State and then, of course, pursue my bachelors. It was always, like, one step after the other
DC advisors	Direct Connect		Tina		No, of course at Seminole they have Direct Connect so they had like, the counselors there that knew everything
Easy Application	Admissions preparation		Tina		So it was a pretty easy process. Just apply and send over your transcript so everything was easy
DC advisors	Direct Connect		Tina		Yeah, the materials that they gave me there
Website	Admissions preparation		Tina		I also looked at the website for the program that I'm in at UCF, the classes that I needed to take, the classes I should enroll in. That was pretty much what I used
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Tina		No never. UCF didn't have much of a presence at our school

HBCU	Other University Engagement		Tina		When people did come out, like colleges, it was mostly HBCU's. Of course like, you know, I went to Jones High School so they never really targeted us. It was always schools like FAMU, Bethune-Cookman, it was never...you know, it was all HBCU's.
UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Tina		There was no information about UCF. The only thing that we did know was that, you know, they do accept you if you go to Valencia, Seminole State and then they'll accept you. Other than that, there was no information about UCF
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Tina		No...I don't think that I would...No because, a lot of kids say...I don't know. I know that I would not have been accepted straight out of high school. The schools that I went to, like Bethune-Cookman, it felt like "why aren't you guys studying" or not doing their work but I don't think I was prepared to enter UCF straight out of high school.
HBCU	Other University Engagement		Tina		The schools that I went to, like Bethune-Cookman, it felt like "why aren't you guys studying" or not doing their work but I don't think I was prepared to enter UCF straight out of high school
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Tina		Oh yeah so a couple people did apply and did not get accepted. I was pretty much sure I wouldn't get in so I didn't even try

UCF not present	UCF Engagement		Tina		You know, the only thing I would say is that they could have had a better presence on my high school campus. And been there and presented that as an option to more students...so then more than a few students would apply
Perception of admission	Admissions preparation		Tina		I mean, one problem is that you look at it, it's in Orlando and it's a good school but I don't know if I can make it at that school academically, it's hard to get into.
Location	Convenience	5	N/A		Parents Didn't Want Me To Leave.
Location	Convenience	5	N/A		Wanted to stay local in Orlando
Location	Convenience	5	N/A		Close to home
Location	Convenience	5	N/A		Close to home
UCF Reputation	UCF Engagement	7			UCF was not one of my top choices
Location	Convenience	7			Convenience and reputation of the school
Location	Convenience	9			UCF is the only University option in my city. I do not like this school and I wish I could attend FAMU or BCU.
Direct Connect	Direct Connect	9			Due to me graduating from Valencia College
Direct Connect	Direct Connect	9			I attended a 4 year university and left my senior year in 1999. I hadn't attended school since that time. I needed to go to a direct school first to retake some classes and take new classes prior to enrolling into UCF.
Location	Convenience	9			convenience
Location	Convenience	9			I was a turning college student and Valencia was a convenient option because of location.

Finances	Convenience	9			I received an academic scholarship.
Location	Convenience	9			It is the closest University that I could attend to not go in extreme debt.
Finances	Convenience	9			Tuition costs
Finances	Convenience	9			I applied to UCF and was accepted as a high school senior. I choose another school. The expense of that school brought me back to Valencia.
Finances	Convenience	9			It helped cut the cost for general studies classes.
Direct Connect	Direct Connect	9			I attended FAMU after high school. I left my senior year of college in 1999 to persue an opportunity that became available to me. I decided to complete my degree in 2013. So bc I was out of school for such a long period of time, I had to go to Valencia to take some classes that I needed to be able to enroll in UCF. Valencia was a direct connect school, so it help make that transition easier.
Perception of admission	Admissions Preparation	3		9	My high school curriculum prepared me for success in college.
Perception of admission	Admissions Preparation	3		10	My teachers in high school prepared me for success in college.
Perception of admission	Admissions Preparation	3		18	We often spoke about college in my high school classes.
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF	3		9	Teachers and administrators in my high school helped me know how to apply to UCF.
Perception of admission	Admissions Preparation	3		12	I felt familiar with the college application process when I applied.

Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	3		9	If I had a question about applying to UCF, I knew where to go for answers.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	3		14	Information about the SAT or ACT exam was easily accessed.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	3		14	I knew what SAT or ACT test scores The University expected for admission.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	3		18	When I decided to apply to UCF, I knew what documents I needed to complete my application file.
UCF not present	UCF Engagement	3		4	UCF personnel were visible and present on my high school campus.
UCF not present	UCF Engagement	3		4	UCF provided information to my high school about programs and applying.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	3		15	I knew how to contact UCF if I had questions about attending.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	3		15	I knew what UCF required of me to gain admission.
Current UCF Students	UCF Engagement	3		10	I have friends or family members that have attended, or are currently attending, UCF.
UCF not present	UCF Engagement	3		7	UCF connected with me in meaningful ways.
UCF not present	UCF Engagement	3		9	UCF materials and advertisements were regularly seen in my daily life.
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF	3		10	I felt that UCF was a place that I would be successful.
Perception of admission	Admissions Preparation	3		10	I felt that attending UCF was a realistic option for me.
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF	3		9	The thought of attending UCF was intimidating.
UCF Reputation	Perceptions of UCF	3		6	UCF was a place that I felt like I would be comfortable.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	6		1	Information about the application process was easily

					accessible.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	6		2	UCF admissions advisors were accessible to me.
Jones program	Admissions Preparation	6		2	Teachers and administrators at my school were able to provide helpful information about UCF.
UCF not present	UCF Engagement	6		0	UCF had a visible presence on my high school campus.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	8		2	Information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	8		2	Advisors on my campus were able to provide helpful information about transferring to UCF.
UCF Reputation	UCF Engagement	8		0	UCF had a visible presence on my campus.
UCF Reputation	UCF Engagement	8		2	I attended this state/community college with the intent to transfer to UCF.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	10		13	Information about transferring to UCF was easily accessible.
Easy Application	Admissions Preparation	10		14	Direct Connect advisors on my campus were able to provide helpful information about transferring to UCF.
UCF presence	UCF Engagement	10		14	UCF Direct Connect had a visible presence on my campus.
Direct Connect	Direct Connect	10		15	I attended this Direct Connect school with the intent to transfer to UCF.

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