

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FIRST YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

PRESENTED BY FAITH EDWARDS AND SUSAN VERDUIN

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the lived experience of first year college students' transition to the university from graduating high school within the last eighteen months. As an educator for this group of students, it is important to gain understanding on the lived experience of these students' transitioning to college. If there is a greater understanding of the students' feelings and the meaning of this experience, perhaps higher education can provide a higher quality educational experience.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research will attempt to answer the following questions:

- How would you describe the feelings you experienced upon arriving to college?
- How would you describe your transition from high school to attending college?
- What is the most exciting aspect of college for you?
- What is the most concerning aspect of college for you?

The information from this study will provide insight on the lived experience for new freshman students thus providing data which the university can utilize to assist the students in a successful college experience. A phenomenological approach will be utilized. This type of research may provide data which will be useful for NMU.

RATIONALE FOR STUDY

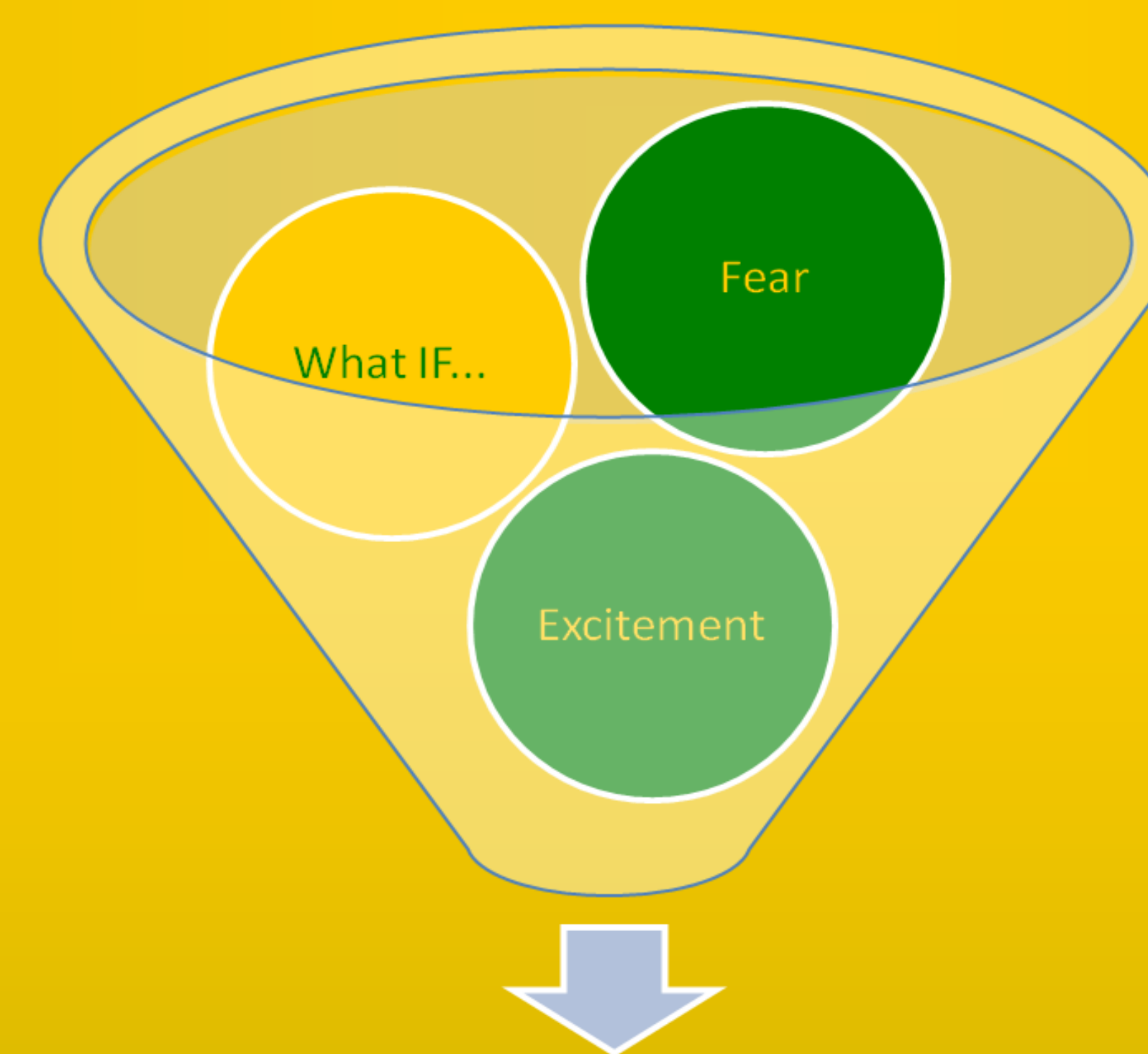
Similar to other institutions studying students, Northern Michigan University (NMU) has traditionally measured student success by retention rates and graduation rates. The Office of Institutional Research and First Year Programs (FYP) work collaboratively in collecting data regarding student success. The Office of Institutional Research at NMU reports that the data collected has been quantitative in nature and welcomes qualitative research. This type of research may provide data which will be useful for NMU to further strengthen the FYP and develop more research studies on student success.

METHODOLOGY

In January 2010, two focus groups of five students, each with the following criteria :

- Graduated high school within the past eighteen months
- Declared Nursing as their major
- Completed UN 100 freshman seminar
- Completed first semester courses
- Enrolled in second semester courses

Students responded to the four research questions, data was collected and analyzed.



Lived Experience

OUTCOMES

Student Descriptors About Coming to College:

- Excited, Nervous
- Fearful, Anxious

Most Exciting Aspect of Coming to College:

- Independence (Making my own decisions)
- Freedom
- A New Beginning

OUTCOMES—Continued

Most Concerned about Coming to College:

- Independence (Not making the right decisions)
- The Unknown
- The "What If's"

Transitional Feelings:

- Enjoying their accomplishments
- Learning about themselves
- Accepting the consequences of their actions
- Unprepared for college life
- Pressure to succeed

Students had a difficult time articulating specific "descriptors". Their initial concerns were about the social aspect of college, not whether or not they would be able to handle college academically. Finding a balance between academic and social life was/is difficult. They noted that once the "euphoria" of being a new college student wore off and reality set in, they became more fearful with regard to their academic achievements and not as concerned about the social aspects of college.

STUDENT QUOTE

"While my journey through college is still very new, I have already learned a lot about myself and what I need to do to succeed. I can't look back at what I didn't do right in the beginning, I can only do it better now!"

CONCLUSION-FUTURE RESEARCH

