ABSTRACT

Morgan Branch James, NURTURING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH GOAL SETTING: A STRATEGY EVALUATION OF THE ABOUT2BE PROGRAM FOR PROBATIONARY COLLEGE STUDENTS (Under the direction of Dr. David Siegel). Department of Educational Leadership, March 2019.

This research was a part of a series of studies designed to evaluate the impact of a goal setting strategy entitled *About2Be* on the engagement and goal setting for probationary college students in the second semester of their freshman year. A quasi-experimental research design was administered utilizing qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of this intervention. The *About2Be* Program is designed to encourage students to examine their future and think about goals that are important to them in three categories: career, personal, and academic. The program's structure and activities help students recognize that strengths and areas of challenge are part of everyone's life, and how people plan and reflect on their goals during development can increase success. Additionally, the project sought a strategy that could be taught in such a way that would effectively engage students (e.g., depict information using multiple means of representation).

Study participants included freshmen students deemed probationary based on their grade point average (GPA) after their first semester of college during the fall of 2017 (according to the university's GPA policies for good academic standing). Study data included rubric scores from pre and post mission statements, observation data, questionnaires, and usability surveys. No statistically significant differences were found from quantitative analysis between rubric scores on participants' pre and post mission statements. However, themes gathered through qualitative analysis of those mission statements, student feedback surveys and focus groups, and teacher observation data provided valuable information to inform future revisions to the curriculum and future evaluation studies setting resources.

NURTURING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT

THROUGH GOAL SETTING: A STRATEGY EVALUATION OF

THE ABOUT2BE PROGRAM FOR PROBATIONARY COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Morgan Branch James

March, 2019

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

College is often thought of as a place where students come to prepare to achieve their lifelong goals. However, the process of setting goals and developing concrete action plans to achieve those futuristic objectives can be difficult for some college students. If the ability to set goals, understand and utilize supports in the college environment, and maintain commitment and motivation to making forward progress is critical for college success, students experiencing challenges in these areas may find themselves marginalized and lost (Hadley, 2006; Hadley, 2007; Trainin & Swanson, 2005; Warde, 2005). Goal setting requires students to be able to visualize achievement, anticipate possible challenges, manage time, and reward themselves, all while trying to create a balanced life (Hoyle & Sherril 2006). Goals for some can mean bucket lists, 5-year plans, and lifestyle changes, and the goals in question can center on different aspects of people's lives: career, personal, education, spiritual, and so on. Long-held and often-cited theories of factors contributing to student success in the college environment emphasize the need for students to integrate into the formal and informal social and academic systems of a college while maintaining a commitment to the university and to obtaining a degree (Astin, 1985; Kuh & Pike, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Even when students enter college anticipating academic barriers and equipped to seek out resources for support and apply study strategies to learn class material, these academic and non-academic challenges may make it particularly difficult to maintain the confidence and motivation to persist. Yet, continued motivation in challenging situations will be critical for students to reach their post-secondary goals. The topic of academic motivation has long been the subject of educational research, and many students begin their education with a natural motivation to learn (Hock, Shumaker, & Deschler, 2003). Typically, students have high expectations for success

and, when given a task, believe that they can accomplish it. Most students are resilient, and when they encounter failure they can continue to push through and work to accomplish their goals. However, over time, some students may lose this confidence and zeal (Miller & Norman, 1979). After years of repeated attempts and failure in academic settings, student motivation may start to diminish. Therefore, it is important to teach students interventions they can add to their educational toolboxes to be called upon when motivation is lacking (Hock et al., 2003).

During the course of an academic career, students may encounter motivationally undermining experiences. If these experiences cause a student's confidence to shut down, there may be a critical window where a strategy or intervention may be the best course of action to help pull the student toward success (Hadley, 2006; Hadley, 2007; Trainin & Swanson, 2005; Warde, 2005). Hazel Markus, a professor of Psychology at Stanford University, studied how a person's sense of self is shaped by culture and how the culture is shaped by people. Her work alludes to the concept of a "possible self", which is how people envision themselves in the future (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Individuals who have clear ideas about what they want to *do, be*, and *have* may be willing to put forth the effort necessary to attain these hoped-for ideas. These visions can also include what students may be afraid of becoming, creating a link between motivation and success.

Statement of the Problem

Goals are what drive us to engage in independent and purposeful behavior, and knowing how to set goals can lead to personal development (Hock et al., 2003). Goal setting in college can be a challenge for students who may not know what they want to pursue or become in the future and who may have had little to no experience taking the lead on their goal setting process (Klassen, R.M., 2010; Klassen, Krawchuk, Lynch, & Rajani,2008; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008).

Goals are our innermost desires that sometimes may not be realized if we don't make plans and share those plans with others. Tapping into student interests and strengths, making the process concrete, and dividing it into small steps may help them set clear goals related to what they want to achieve. As Napoleon Hill once said, "a goal is a dream with a deadline" (Farber, 2003, p. 60). Creating and sharing goals with other people (friends, teachers, family members, and co-workers) has been shown to have the potential to help students create more concrete steps to achieve their potential (Willis, 2007).

National statistics centered around retention and persistence for first-year students indicate a 73.4% of persistence rate across U.S. institutions in the fall of 2016. The persistence rate is the percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year (NSCR, 2018). The spring semester of the first year of college may be a time when universities can identify and intervene for students who, after their first semester, are at risk (e.g., with low GPA) for falling into the over 25% of students who are not retained for their second year.

College brings with it no shortage of decision-making opportunities, such as selecting a major, envisioning a career, and choosing extra-curricular priorities. Students with an inconsistent track record in school may have limited confidence to bring to these very early and possibly high-stakes decisions (Klassen, 2010; Klassen, Krawchuk, Lynch, & Rajani, 2008; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008). Moreover, challenges with matching their learning profile to a new instructional environment and/or difficulty with mastering a strong academic routine may lead to early struggles that reinforce this lack of confidence. Not only may students have limited understandings about how to set and follow through with postsecondary goals, they are also at risk for selling themselves short with what they dare to hope to accomplish.

Purpose of the Study

This study was part of a larger multi-cycle project focused on developing and evaluating a goal setting strategy (*About2Be*) for use with college-age students. The purpose of this study was to test the current version of the strategy in an authentic postsecondary education setting with college students who have experienced initial academic difficulty. Findings from this study will be used to inform the iterative design process related to the *About2Be* strategy. Prior to this research, two cycles of iterative design had already been completed. Cycle 1 was conducted in the spring of 2016 as a multi-campus study, and Cycle 2 was a pilot project that took place during the fall 2017 semester. Each of these cycles yielded different results, helping to continue to inform improvements of the *About2Be* strategy with a new, but similar, population of first year college students.

Previous Research Cycles

Cycle 1 of this project was conducted in the spring of 2016 with the original *Possible Selves* curriculum developed by the Center for Research on Learning (CRL) at the University of Kansas. The original curriculum was designed to target secondary students. This project consisted of a cross-campus collaboration with three universities in the UNC system, and one Community College in North Carolina. Each campus implemented the strategy with a small group of students enrolled in a student support program. Each of the facilitators was trained to implement the strategy by a certified trainer from the University of Kansas's CRL. Using a fidelity checklist, each facilitator implemented the strategy during the spring 2016 semester in a face-to-face seminar using the *Possible Selves* Manual and activities. The findings showed no significant change between the pre- and post- mission statements but did yield important qualitative results in the differences between male/females and high school/college students in

how they set goals. Based on feedback from those facilitating the strategy, the curriculum was restructured to become a web-based model and more age-appropriate for college students. A new title (*About2Be*) for this revised version was tentatively adopted, and new activities, similar to what was used for Cycle 3 (current project), were developed. More of this study will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

The second development cycle (Cycle 2) took place in the fall of 2017. During this cycle, I piloted the revised materials, based on feedback from Cycle 1, with a group of ten freshmen college students in a specialized support program for students with learning disabilities at East Carolina University. Based on what was learned in Cycle 1, changes in timing and student population were also implemented in this second iteration. Specifically, the strategy was implemented earlier in the academic year based on the concern that the time of implementation (in the second half of the school year) in Cycle 1 may have unintentionally impacted the results of the study. Another consideration during the revamping of this strategy was the student population. In Cycle 2, a more homogeneous group of students received the intervention than had been the case in Cycle 1, and because there was only one group of students, fidelity of implementation was not as much of a challenge. This cycle provided valuable feedback on the function and basic design of the online platform.

Results from both Cycles 1 and 2 were used to make informed adjustments to the strategy and research design conducted in the spring 2018 semester. New questions to address also arose regarding differences between gender (male and female) and the overall usability of the online platform. The online platform that was used in Cycle 2 was also used in this iteration. Thus, in Cycle 3 (current project) I was able to better anticipate some of the nuances associated with the online program and the curriculum materials prior to working with students. This new research

not only tested the potential use of the *About2Be* strategy with probationary college students, but it will also inform a future cycle of improvements to the product itself.

Theoretical Framework

Prior research regarding student motivation, goal setting, and the notion of possible selves has been conducted with multiple populations, but it has not been widely applied to the college setting. Research populations in the literature most closely related to this particular study include university-level student-athletes, university students with identified learning disabilities, and probationary high school and middle school students involved in student support programs. Results of these studies pointed to positive outcomes in areas such as persistence, motivation, graduation rates, retention, and overall academic success for students with similar profiles to the students studied in this project (Bouffard, Boisvert, Cezeau, & Larouche, 1995; Hock et al., 2003; Levine, 2005; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Friedman & Mandel, 2009; Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007; Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001; Hsieh et al., 2007).

Mel Levine (2005) found that students who are motivated exhibit three characteristics related to goal setting: finding a goal that is attractive, believing that they can attain the goal, and planning to attain the goal. Students who can readily imagine themselves attaining goals in the future may be more likely to realize their possible selves. Having self-knowledge provides an avenue for helping students create their future selves and possibly avoid their feared selves (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). Because Possible Selves represent hopes, they motivate the pursuit of avoidance of specific behaviors (Markus & Nurius, 1986). For instance, if a student wants to avoid becoming a divorcée (perhaps based on a past experience or growing up in a single parent household), the student may be motivated to choose a career that doesn't require him/her to

spend long hours away from the home, creating an opportunity to give ample attention to one's spouse or family members (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006).

The function of the present research study was to determine if a specific instructor-facilitated goal setting strategy was important for probationary college students in influencing academic engagement and motivation or if students of this caliber are even able to set goals that align with their hopes, expectations, and fears for the future. The student population selected for this project has a track record of performing poorly in college; however, this research framework was applied to this study to help interpret how and when to intervene to help them be successful in college. The current literature, while limited in relevance to the specific population of college students, was nevertheless informative in an effort to identify the nature behind challenges associated with this population and the theory behind other strategies similar in nature to *About2Be*. This study has the potential to not only inform improvements in the *About2Be* strategy but also to contribute to our understanding of goal setting for college students on a broader level. The findings from this third iteration (Cycle 3) of research related to the design of this strategy could possibly inform stakeholders of the benefits of using a structured method of goal setting with college students to plan their future.

About2Be Program

The *About2Be* Program is a goal setting strategy which stems from a strategy called *Possible Selves.* The original *Possible Selves* program was developed from the University of Kansas' Center for Research on Learning (Hock et al., 2003). The premise of *Possible Selves* is based on nurturing and coaching student motivation based on setting goals in three different areas of ones' life: as a person, worker, and learner. The previous version of this strategy focused heavily on the K-12 setting and was recently edited (in earlier cycles of a long-term project) to

appeal to college-age students in hopes of influencing motivation and overall academic performance.

The redesigned *About2Be* version was written and developed to be more age-appropriate and relevant for college students, while still adhering to the core objective of identifying goals, interests, and strengths in multiple areas of a person's life. In essence, I wanted to start from the beginning with students by teaching goal-setting as a foundation from which we could build on in future interactions. Ultimately, I hope to have a strategy that enables students to shape their profiles with engaging activities, group discussions, and thought-provoking scenarios. The new version offers an updated user interface that blends an online platform with an instructor/mentor manual to aid students in their journey of discovering their potential.

Additionally, the *About2Be* strategy encourages students to define personal success, identify inner strengths, create a current-self and future-self collage, develop goals in the areas of a person, worker, and learner, and then create an action plan on how they are going to achieve their set goals. The *About2Be* Program has taken the premise of *Possible Selves* and transformed it into an engaging sequence of activities that has the potential to help foster the development of those before-mentioned items for college students seeking to learn more about themselves. Read more about the *About2Be* strategy including session breakdowns in Chapter 3.

Improvement Goal

Ultimately, with the implementation of this project I am trying to determine whether the *About2Be* goal-setting strategy is beneficial for college students with academic challenges and to evaluate its effectiveness in helping to influence academic engagement and/or achievement. To do this, I implemented a five-lesson strategy with online activities and face-to-face instruction to help guide students in determining some concrete goals and action steps in the areas of a person, worker,

and learner. The *About2Be* strategy aims to address student goal-setting skills in such a way that proactively begins a pattern of planning and reflection that students can use to persist and adjust as needed to make steady progress toward their college goals. The structure sought to help students recognize that strengths and areas of challenge are a part of everyone's profile and recognizing that early in the goal-setting process was critical to success in accomplishing those goals. Additionally, the project sought a strategy that could be taught through direct instruction in such a way that students would find engaging and credible.

Research Questions

This research sought to learn about the impact of the *About2Be* strategy on first-year probationary college students overall role/goal identification and academic engagement. Specifically:

1. Were students who learned the *About2Be* strategy more likely to identify specific goals in each of the 3 goal categories of a worker, learner, and person?

2. Did the strategy influence participant self-expressions of engagement?

3. Did male and female students respond differently to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy in their written mission statements?

4. What were student perceptions related to the usability of the online platform?

5. What did participants state needs to be adopted, adapted, or adjusted for this strategy to be beneficial for other post-secondary students?

Targeted Population

The targeted student population was second-semester first-year college students who had experienced academic difficulty during their first semester and who were deemed probationary by the university. The average age of the student population was between 18 and 20 years old.

Student gender consisted of 21 females and 18 males. The freshmen class profile at the university consisted of about 5,455 students out of a total undergraduate enrollment of 23,010 students (ECU, 2017). A probationary classification for this project was determined by students who have a grade point average (GPA) below a 2.0 and placement in a freshman seminar course intended for students experiencing academic difficulty during the second semester. If a student's GPA falls below a 2.0, the student is placed on academic probation. If during the probation semester, the student's GPA does not rise above a 2.0, the student is placed on academic warning and will only have one more semester to improve their GPA or they will be suspended from the university for one semester (see Table 1).

Study Setting

The study took place during the second semester of the traditional university calendar year (January through April) at East Carolina University (ECU). During this academic year, ECU served over 29,000 students. Over 5,700 of those were undergraduate first-year students; 24 of those students participated in the strategy (treatment) group, and 15 participated in the control group, for a total of 39 overall participants. Of the students who participated in the project (control and treatment), 21 were females, 18 were males, 8 were African American, 29 were White, and 2 were Hispanic. The *About2Be* strategy launched with a selection of college student participants, who were enrolled in the Spring 2018 freshman seminar course for probationary students. These students were deemed probationary due to their grade point average from the previous fall semester (2017) falling below the 2.0 requirement (see Table 1). The objective of this freshman seminar course is to assist new students in reaching success during their first year of college and beyond. Topics covered in this course include understanding the transition from high school to college, student development and motivation, goal-setting, learning styles,

Table 1

Academic Standing

First Semester < 2.0 GPA	Second Semester <2.0 GPA	Third Semester < 2.0 GPA
Warning	Probation	Suspension (for 1 semester)

Note. (Good Standing = 2.0 GPA).

memory development, listening skills, note-taking skills, study skills, test-taking skills, communication, critical-thinking skills, university academic rules and regulations, and career development issues (First Year, 2017). This course is typically taught by academic advisors and student affairs educators trained to understand college student development and the academic and social issues encountered by college students, and the *About2Be* strategy is aligned with the goals of the freshman seminar course. Four instructors agreed to include instruction in the goal-setting strategy in the course activities, and two agreed to participate as the control group. The course demographics varied for each section and are identified in Table 2.

Research Design

A quasi-experimental design was used to address the research questions, and participants were assigned to two groups: the strategy group and the control group. The strategy group received the intervention during the duration of the project that is the focus of this dissertation, and the control group was exposed to the strategy later in the semester after the completion of data collection. This was an important consideration for instructors who agreed to allow the strategy to be tested in their courses. It ensured that this group of probationary students received the same strategy as their counterparts, but also necessitated a focus on very short-term impact variables in a small window of time. Results were compared with results from the group not exposed to the variable (control group).

Quantitative data were gathered using three primary measures. A rubric applied to a pre and post-mission statement score sheet (see Appendix B) helped identify the number and level of specificity of comments related to roles, goals, and action steps in each of the categories of worker, learner, and person.

Table 2

COAD 1000 Course Comparison Conditions

COAD 1000	Course Demographics	Number of Student Participants
Section 101	• 4 Females, 4 Males	8
Section 102	• 4 Females, 2 Males	6
Section 103	• 2 Females, 2 Males	4
Section 104	• 5 Females, 1 Male	6
Section 105	• *Control Group* • 1 Female, 7 Males • These students will receive the *About2Be* strategy at another time in the semester.	8
Section 106	• *Control Group* • 5 Females, 2 Males • These students will receive the *About2Be* strategy at another time in the semester.	7

An observation protocol (see Appendix M), completed by the researcher during instruction, was used to tally indicators related to student engagement with the strategy. The Student Usability Survey (Appendix N) revealed both quantitative and qualitative data measuring student perceptions of the online platform using a usability scale and open-ended questions for contextualization and deeper understanding of the quantitative feedback. This scale, developed by Brooke (1996), allowed the practitioner to easily and quickly assess the usability of a given product or service (Bangor, Kortum, & Miller, 2008).

Qualitative data were collected on student mission statements, the Possible Selves Questionnaire, and during focus groups. Student comments in pre and post mission statements were analyzed and coded for general themes as well as the frequency of these themes for male and female students. A process called "open coding" (Berelson, 1952) or "latent coding" (Shapiro & Markoff, 1997) was used for this process. The Possible Selves Questionnaire (see Appendix L) was used to address two levels of participant goals: The Next Year Expected Possible Selves and the Next Year Feared Possible Selves. In this study, both labels contained three main categories: achievement, interpersonal relationships, and personality traits (worded responses). This measure is used to determine the stage at which a student has thought about and/or set goals for the upcoming year. It will be explained further in Chapter three.

Definitions of Key Terms

Goals - Clear statements of what one wants to achieve and is working toward, and when one expects to achieve it.

Learner – A lifetime role as a person who learns. It can include what a person is doing now or what they will accomplish in college, career, and throughout life.

Worker – A lifetime role as a person who works and earns a living. It includes what the

person does now for work, or what they will do in the future as a possible career.

Person – A person's lifetime role as a person who has relationships with him/herself and others. It includes what a person does now and what they will do in the future to keep themselves healthy and fit, as well as everything they are doing and will do to have good relationships with family members, friends, and members of the community.

Hope – Something a person would like very much to happen. It can be a wish or a dream. The person might not be sure it will happen.

Expectation – Something a person would like to happen and is fairly sure it will happen.

Fear – Something that scares or worries a person about the future. It could also be something a person wishes to avoid.

Pre/Post Mission Statement – These statements are administered at the beginning and end of the *About2Be* strategy. The Personal Mission Statement prompt can be found in Appendix C, but the general wording is something like: A mission statement includes ideas about what one would like to be, to do, and to be like, and is usually a short statement (25-50 words), concise, and expresses the values one currently holds.

Probationary – Students who struggle academically to meet minimum grade point average requirements of the university. In this project, these are students with a grade point average below 2.0.

Significance of the Study

The importance of having probationary students embark on goal setting is to create an opportunity for them to think about their futures. Goal setting has the potential to have long term implications on the course of their lives. It is important for educators to be concerned about adult learners in this area. Adult learners experiencing academic difficulty, like the students in this

study, may have views that have been negatively impacted by their previous semester's academic performance. Thus, the timing and the educator's role in cultivating and facilitating a change or transformation of the learner's perceptions may be critical.

Rossiter (2004) suggested that facilitators can assist students in providing options and information tailored to the aspirations concerning the student's possible selves. Adult learners' goals can evolve as they develop a sense of academic empowerment (Oyserman, Bybee & Terry, 2006). Additionally, as students experience success they become more confident and can revisit and revise their goals. Overall, a better understanding of a person's possible selves has the potential to determine achievement and motivation in hopes of leading the learner to visualize their future and relate their present academic involvement with future selves (Otto, 1991, Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002).

Organization of the Study

Prior to this research project, the *About2Be* strategy was implemented in a pilot study in the fall 2017 semester with a small number of students in a specialized student support program for college students with learning differences. This pilot project was a part (cycle 2) of an iterative design process being used to make informed adjustments during the development of the *About2Be* strategy. This small pilot with the revised format of the goal-setting strategy provided an opportunity to work out any functional kinks in the online system and make minor revisions to the manual and online platform prior to implementation of this research.

During the fall 2017 semester, I met with prospective COAD 1000 instructors to ensure alignment between freshman seminar course objectives with those of the *About2Be* strategy. COAD 1000 is the campus name for a freshman seminar course available to all first-year and transfer students at the university. The course is not required for first-semester first-year students

but is required for students who experience early academic difficulty and return to campus in the spring semester with GPAs lower than 2.0. After gaining commitments from instructors to proceed with delivering the strategy in these spring 2018 courses, the project was proposed to and approved by the ECU Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix A). During the first month of the spring semester (January 2018), I received student participant informed consent and began teaching the *About2Be* strategy with 4 different COAD 1000 courses N=24

The *About2Be* strategy contained five sessions. Each session focused on different themes: personal success, strength development, goal development, creations of current and future-self collages, detailed action plans, and a process for self-checking. Each session was interactive, and students were given the opportunity to guide their own action plans through a series of activities and engaging lessons. Read more about the contents of each session in Chapter 3.

Limitations

I was appreciative of the COAD course instructor's willingness for me to visit their classes and implement the *About2Be* strategy. While the strategy was a good fit for the content, intent, and student population of the spring COAD courses, there were some natural limitations to delivering the strategy as a visitor within a single semester. First, I was not the general instructor for the sections of the course used for this project. Therefore, building a relationship with student participants in a short amount of time was going to be difficult. I had limited time to get to know the students, and for them to get to know me. Second, we knew that the population that the strategy itself seeks to support can challenge the design of an intervention study in authentic education settings. This strategy took place during the spring semester, and students would have just returned from a holiday after likely seeing their parents. While results from our first cycle of research implied that the fall semester might be the time of year when the strategy

17

can make the strongest impact, I thought that the opportunity to test the strategy with students returning from the first semester of academic difficulty might be beneficial. Given their rocky start to the college experience, these students might be uniquely primed to take advantage of an opportunity to set goals and develop plans for reaching those goals. However, that does make for a unique population of students and should be kept in mind when thinking about generalizing the results to a general population of college students. Additionally, conversations with parents over the holiday break may have placed added pressure to the students regarding their GPA being low during the first semester and their parent's expectations for the second semester something that could directly impact the beginning measures of the strategy making it difficult to show an impact. Alternatively, the nature of students in this situation may also create limitations to student buy-in and/or the participant's ability/willingness to share and describe their experiences. Students who are labeled as probationary may also have higher dropout rates and not withstand the entirety of the course, thus lowering the already limited sample size (NSCRC, 2016). This did turn out to be an issue, but I felt that it was still important to test the strategy with this high-risk group of students.

Third, since this strategy is new and scoring measures have not been widely used, the instruments are being developed with an iterative process along with the curriculum materials. While the measures used in this project had been added or revised based on experiences in the previous cycles, this is a work in progress. Therefore, to confront this issue, detailed training and scoring examples had to be provided to ensure consistency and reliability between scoring student's statements and surveys. Additionally, close teacher observations were used during each of the activities to help provide background information where scoring measures may lack opportunities to explain the day-to-day details.

Summary

Goal setting provides an opportunity for a student to visualize an achievement while creating an action plan and timeline (Hoyle & Sherril 2006). College is often thought of as a place where students come to achieve their goals, yet some students, specifically those on academic probation, may find goal setting difficult. These probationary students may have had little to no experience with the goal-setting process and may not know what they want to become in the future, thus impacting their academic motivation and persistence (Klassen, R.M., 2010; Klassen, Krawchuk, Lynch, & Rajani,2008; Lackaye & Margalit, 2008). Overall, a better understanding of a person's future self may lead the individual toward achievement and motivation in hopes of relating their present academic involvement with their future academic involvement (Otto, 1991, Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002).

The topic of academic motivation has long been the subject of educational research and is a focus of this research project (Hock, Shumaker, & Deschler, 2003). While similar research populations related to this study include student-athletes, college students with learning disabilities, and probationary high school and middle school students, results with probationary college students is limited. However, these particular research groups do point to positive assumptions in areas such as persistence, motivation, graduation rates, retention, and overall academic success for students with profiles similar to the students studied in this project (Bouffard, Boisvert, Cezeau, & Larouche, 1995; Hock et al., 2003; Levine, 2005; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Friedman & Mandel, 2009; Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007; Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001; Hsieh et al., 2007).

This particular research study focused on evaluating the *About2Be* program's impact on the engagement and achievement of first-year probationary college students as one part of a

series of research cycles to help inform strategy development. While certain limitations did arise with this project, results of this study will be used to plan the next iteration of a resource designed to help college students in transition set goals and take practical steps toward achieving those goals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The first year of college can bring an exciting mix of emotions, adventures, and changes. For students with academic challenges or those who are not well prepared for the academic demands of college, it marks a time when pressures for self-determination and self-regulation increase from what has often been a very structured home/school environment (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). Students living on a college campus can find themselves away from prior support environments and facing the opportunity and challenge to build new ones. While many students transition to college smoothly, develop support systems or strategies and thrive in the university setting, some have difficulty finding their place and making steady progress toward graduation (Newman et al., 2011).

This chapter includes information about theories of self-concept involving motivation and behavior regarding student future-oriented representations. Also addressed are self-efficacy and self-regulated learning in association with goal orientation for college students. Next, this chapter highlights the broad notion of Possible Selves (as a theoretical basis) as it has been applied to youth and young adults to describe self-regulation, gender differences, career selection, marital roles, and goal setting. The theory of goal setting will also be explained, and research studies examined. Student academic performance and student retention ideas and research will be shared regarding trends and their relationship to goal setting in the college environment. Finally, this chapter will look at gender, social, and ethnic contexts as they apply to goal setting in the college environment.

Self-Concept and Regulation of Motivation and Behavior

Theories about a person's self-concept have traditionally contained both cognitive and

emotional components; however, in the past decade, there has been a connection in the research with the motivational aspect of self-concept in relation to the regulation of behavior (Aloise-Young & Hennigan, 2001). The concept of Possible Selves has the potential to serve as a channel between a person's self-concept and their motivation (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007).

The hypothesized activities involving future-oriented representations has the potential to provide individuals with an image or idea of themselves engaged in behaviors relevant to desired outcomes, allowing the person the ability to interpret and evaluate their current and past selves to motivate future behavior (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). For example, students who envision themselves studying and working toward academic improvement may be more likely to motivate this behavior in the future (Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004). The idea of the future self may have the potential to influence behavior more so than others. These selves are linked to self-regulatory acts such as defining a goal to include specific strategies in pursuit of accomplishing the goal. However, if a student cannot visualize himself or herself doing something, it is unrealistic that behavior will change toward that result. If the goal is too far-fetched or too difficult, then it is merely a pipe dream and may not have motivational power to shape behavior (Rossiter, 2007).

The future selves that are most likely to produce a behavior are those that people feel confident they can perform and maintain (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). Therefore, a student who has struggled academically in a previous semester may need assistance in pinpointing those challenges and working toward setting goals that change some of the undesirable behaviors for future semesters. Emotionality of the self- concept regarding Possible Selves helps students develop goals that they want to look forward to and the ones they want to try to avoid (negative) (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). When developing Possible Selves in relationship with the self-

concept, students need to have strategic attitudes, like those geared toward motivation and decision making which leads to an effective outcome, and the ability to recognize limitations in their abilities and self-concept (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Strategic attitudes may look like the changing of a basic motivational function, such as going against what is comfortable for the person, asking more questions, or expecting a different outcome because he/she has changed something in his/her routine (Castellanos, 2017).

In a research study examining a relationship among goal orientation, self-regulation, and school performance involving seven hundred and two college students (463 Female and 239 male), researchers found that, for both males and females, there did exist a relationship between learning goals and self-regulation toward academic achievement. Relationships were also found for performance goals, but only for males in the study. Additionally, more self-regulatory strategies were reported, and higher academic performance was achieved by students having high concern for both learning and performance goals. More females than males were found to have self-regulatory strategies to achieve higher academic performance (Bouffard, Boisvert, Cezeau, & Larouche, 1995).

Control Theory

Control theory offers a cybernetic (science of communications and control systems in both machines and living things) approach to identity management and adjustment (Burke, 1991; Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997; Stets & Burke, 1994) and seeks to help explain a person's identity stability over time. The model of control theory provides individuals with definitions in a context of what is expected socially and the feedback that follows. The psychological processes operate outside of a person's awareness and can include comparing oneself to an identity (identity standard) and self-perception, which is how someone interprets social feedback. When

the standard and perception don't align (e.g., an adolescent student who dreams of becoming a doctor is told by a teacher that she should pursue a career that does not involve so many science courses), the comparison process may generate an identity disruption. The social process can occur before and after the psychological process; therefore, the teacher's suggestion is the verbal announcement (before), and the student's response or behavior is the identity disruption (after). The student may then fall into a social behavior to reduce feelings of identity disruption (e.g., a student explaining that he or she didn't perform well in science this year because he or she was sick, or that the teacher is not nice or unfair). When this occurs, students may try to verify to themselves that they are able/capable to repair the identity (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001).

Students who find themselves in academic difficulty after only one semester of college may be facing a disruption of goals that were bolstered just a few months before with their college acceptance/admission and are now in question based on a GPA that is not in good standing with university criteria. In this instance, students who are academically in a situation that doesn't align with their identity standard may find themselves in need of a redirection or a place of adjustment that aligns similarly to their originally perceived identity. Goal setting and academic coaching at this time of incongruence may help college students overcome hardships and the idea of not living up to their potential and may help them take steps to regain the control of their goals and plans to achieve them.

Identity Exploration and Psychosocial Moratorium

Erick Erikson (1959, 1980) identified adolescence as a time of forming one's identity by engaging in a "psychosocial moratorium." In his book *Identity Youth and Crisis*, he explained different phases adolescents go through when forming their identities. For example, identity formation involves exploration, where adolescents "try-on" different personalities (Marcia,

1994). He also wrote about how individuals in their teens go through periods of confusion regarding love, work, and their beliefs (Erickson, 1968, p. 156). Furthermore, Cote and Levine (2002) argued that adolescents, especially those in university settings, experience social pressures when attempting to discover their identities. Even when individuals claim to have a firm identity, Cote and Levine (2002) question these identities and suggest that these "commitments" remain in question until the adolescents enter into their adult roles (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001). Research does support that college students are open to identity-relevant criticism, where coaching and strategies may help them internalize positive and negative self-assessments than other adults (Berzonsky, 1998). These "commitment" type processes do help provide guidance for adolescents to stabilize their identities, but compared to control theory, it doesn't account for the changing of these identities over time (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001).

Adaptability is another important characteristic of self-concept. For people to be adaptable, they need to be able to call upon multiple identities and create new ones when needed, enabling them to develop long-term perspectives, manage relationships, and focus on the future (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). For example, an image of crossing the stage during graduation or getting married are vivid and significant thoughts. These images encompass personalized goals that create emotions such as happiness, which give way to meaning and motivation.

In a research study involving seventy-six late adolescents and their peers, researchers focused on the theory of Possible Selves as it tied to career, marriage, and parenthood roles. Identity construction processes like control theory (people work to maintain existing identities) and psychosocial moratorium concept (identity exploration involving actively "trying on" different selves), were used to explain the identity construction processes with participants. The procedures and measures used were a laboratory methodology adapted from Swann and

Predmore (1985), who used a similar method to investigate the stability of self-esteem. Baseline measures were completed before the laboratory procedure, consisting of anticipated career, marital, and parental identity importance. The laboratory procedure took place several weeks later. At the end of the procedure, a pre and post-test using a Likert scale asked participants to rate the importance of anticipated career, marital, and parental identities with 30 items (10 per role). "The goal of the researchers was to test the conditions under which the importance of possible selves remained stable or changed in response to feedback given the presence and behavior of a peer" (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007, p. 62).

Control theory suggests that the pre-test importance, self-verification behavior, and a partner's rejection of the feedback helps create an increase in the participants' overall stability. However, to allow for development and change, identity construction requires some instability. Psychosocial moratorium suggests that identity development involves ''trying on'' discrepant identity information. Research suggests that importance and certainty, as well as adolescent and partner behavior, indicate the prominence of an emerging identity. More exploration (less stability) would characterize more prominent emerging identities.

Results showed that stable self-definitions for anticipated selves were likely when participants worked hard to avoid a role (control theory). Researchers also found that when behaviors of their peers were observed, regarding peers rejecting one of the roles of the participants, the participant's outcome changed more toward a highly important possible self for identity exploration (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001).

Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulated Learning

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy to be the judgment by an individual on their own capabilities to successfully complete a task. In other words, it is a person's confidence and

optimism that they will accomplish something with a favorable outcome (Akhtar, 2008). People like to believe that they can control and command the outcomes of their decisions. Henry Ford once said, "whether you believe you can, or you can't, you are right" (Ford, 1947). Research suggests that the belief of self-efficacy can influence academic achievement and motivation (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). Students with self-efficacy tend to have a higher work ethic, persist longer at accomplishing tasks, and set challenging goals. This enables reinforcement of motivation when students feel they can reach success (Hsieh et al., 2007).

Goal Orientation

Goal oriented behaviors are influenced by the motives students have for completing any task. There are three types of goal orientations: (1) mastery goals, (2) performance-approach goals, and (3) performance-avoidance goals. The first involves students developing and improving their ability, the second is associated with students demonstrating their ability, and the third involves students hiding their ability (Elliot, 1999). Research tells us that each of these types of goal-oriented behaviors has a relationship with positive and negative learning patterns. Mastery goals are associated with positive learning and self-efficacy, performance-approach goals have been inconsistent with both positive and negative learning patterns and self-efficacy, and performance-avoidance goals have consistently been negative in nature in relation to self-efficacy and learning (Hsieh et al., 2007).

In a research study involving 112 undergraduate students from a mostly Hispanic-serving post-secondary institution, 60 first-year student participants were deemed on academic probation (GPA below 2.0), and 52 had GPAs above 2.0. Fifty-one percent of the student participants were first-year students with respect to the other student groups: 3% sophomores, 17% juniors, and 28% seniors. Student participants completed 2 sets of questionnaires, containing 6 questions

measuring their perceived academic efficacy, and 18 from a measure called the "Achievement Goal Orientation Inventory" that measured three goal orientation subscales (discussed above). The assessments used a Likert type scale asking students to strongly agree or not agree to each of the sections.

The procedure for this study took place before the semester started. Students who were deemed probationary were asked to attend a 3-hour long seminar type class provided by an academic support program on campus. Materials taught were similar to a freshmen seminar type class containing content such as academic routines, learning strategies, and student resources. The results indicated a strong positive correlation between performance-approach and performance-avoidance type goals. These two goals are more similar than different due to students adopting one or the other based on their confidence level of achievement and how others will judge their success. Researchers also conducted a regression analysis to evaluate students' GPA as it is associated with self-efficacy and the three-goal orientations. Results indicated that self-efficacy alone was significantly related to students' GPAs. They also found that students who reported mastery goal orientation had higher GPAs, and performance-approach goal orientation was not a significant predictor of GPA. Additionally, the students on academic probation rated performance-avoidance goals higher than those not on probation. Students on academic probation who reported high self-efficacy tended to adopt self-sabotaging goals for learning. This supports the notion that even though students have high self-efficacy for their academic courses, those who find themselves on probation may still avoid challenging tasks and help-seeking behaviors. This study revealed important insights into how students who are on probation differ from their peers who are not on probation, and it further revealed distinctions in

how students approach academic tasks and their beliefs in their capabilities of being successful in college (Hsieh et al., 2007).

Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulation is directly related to the literature pertaining to self-efficacy. Self-regulation involves being able to self-observe, self-judge, and self-react (Bandura, 1986; Kanfer & Gaelick, 1986; Schunk, 1990) (see Figure 1). Self-observe is to give attention to one's behaviors and use these behaviors to inform and motivate. Self-judgement is when one compares one's performance with one's goals and can be affected by standards. For example, a learning goal would be a fixed task, as a test grade, also considered an absolute type of standard (Bandura, 1986). Normative standards are opposite and may involve a social comparison of oneself against those of one's peers to inform social appropriateness. Comparison of one's performance against another helps with goal progress and further motivation to persist. Valuing one's goals is another factor, where these judgments might not withstand their importance if someone doesn't care about them (Schunk, 1990). The notion of self-regulation is relevant to the student population studied in this project. While these students struggled in their past academic semester, identification of specific behaviors that led to these struggles and using self-regulation processes to adjust may help probationary students alter their behaviors in an effort for them to reach a different outcome.

Possible Selves

Possible Selves are personal and intensely individual goals that encompass values, roles, lifestyles, self-beliefs, skills, and interests (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Markus and Nurius (1986) were some of the first researchers to write about the theory of Possible Selves, explaining
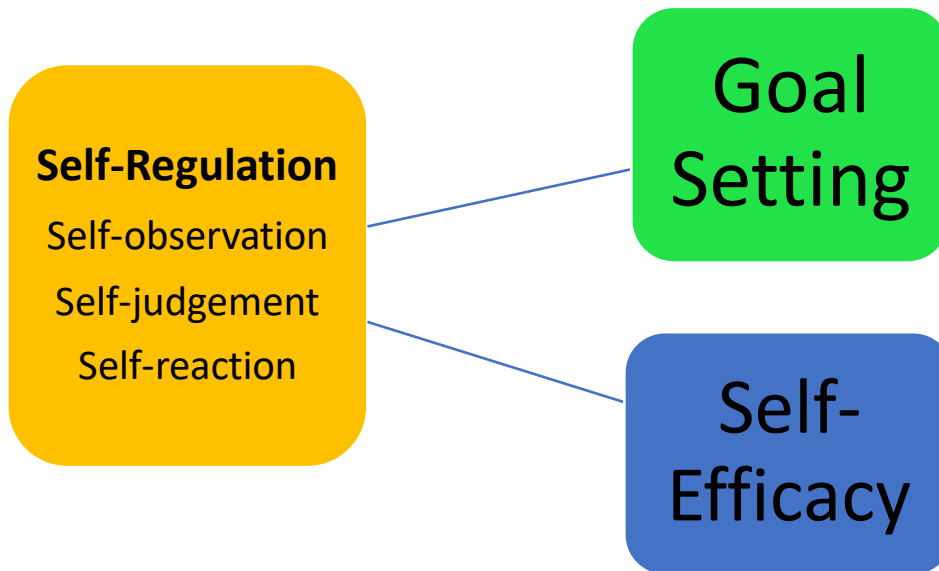
Figure 1. Social cognitive processes involved in self-regulated learning (Schunk, 1990).

that they represent the *selves* a person can become, would like to become, or is afraid of becoming. The theory encompasses both hoped-for (or ideal) selves and feared selves. The hoped-for self has been linked to performance, behavior, and motivation (Hooker & Kaus, 1992). Furthermore, we can also have "ought selves," which are those selves that people feel a duty or obligation to become (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). In distinction, feared selves have been linked to negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and guilt (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999). Feared-selves tend to be connected to personal experiences because they predict the state of the current-self rather than the hoped-for self and are what people try to avoid (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). Fears have the potential to be a much-needed reality check for what students may want to avoid in life, specifically in the realm of academics (poor grades, social peer pressure, and/or the inability to navigate the first year of college).

The broad notion of Possible Selves (as a theoretical basis) has often been applied to youth and young adults to describe a wide variety of constructs and to better understand issues such as health-related behaviors (e.g., smoking, weight loss), thoughts and behaviors of incarcerated youth, self-regulation, gender differences, career selection, choices about extracurricular activities, marital roles, self-concept, goal setting, and more (Abrams &Aguilar, 2005; Aloise-Young, Hennigan, & Leong, 2001).

Possible Selves can be depicted in multiple formats, depending on the person. They can be images, thoughts, senses, realities, beliefs, identities, and more (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Exploration of the Possible Selves can help add a dimension of insight into the process of creating new possibilities for adult learners. As we know, in postsecondary education, we often see learners who are in the midst of a transition, either from high school to college, community college to a larger university or from the

31

workforce to college, to name a few. In addition to transition, college students may also be facing other extenuating circumstances that may make it difficult to strive for success. These can include low GPA, over-commitment to extra-curricular activities, change in health, the loss of a loved one, or other life occurrences that require learning, reflection, and adjustment (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Possible Selves has the potential to "liberate people from feeling trapped or restricted in their options" (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007, p. 94). These envisioned selves can provide a way for students to evaluate and give meaning to the present situations they are in and also provide understanding of their experiences and constraints. Bridges (1980) recommends that students in transition visualize themselves in the expected future state:

"Begin to identify yourself with the final result of the new beginning. What is it going to feel like when you've actually done whatever it is that you are setting out to do? Once it is done then you can say that you are the type of person who does that sort of thing. People may look at you as the one-who-did-it, and seeing yourself through their eyes, you realize what self-confidence is: experiencing yourself as one who can do things like that" (p. 146).

The notion of Possible Selves has the potential to help people create links between their roles and goals through interconnectivity of the present and future. For example, the link between a personal goal and a worker goal could be a possible self that loves to communicate with people and can fit well with a career self that wants to work in business. Although this is a general possible self example, many who participate in learning about their future selves may gain the knowledge of learning how to integrate all their life roles and identities together to create a well-balanced present and future life.

In a research study with student-athletes, sixty participants were randomly assigned to

one of three conditions: the control condition, the career-counseling condition, and the Possible Selves condition. In the control condition, twenty participants received tutorial support from trained tutors and academic advising staff consisting of subject-area tutors, academic advising, and biweekly meetings with a counselor. The twenty participants in the career counseling condition received the same services as students in the control condition, with the addition of six to eight hours of career counseling services over the course of a semester provided by the university's Counseling and Psychological Services. Finally, the twenty students in the Possible Selves condition received the same services as the control group, and they participated in the Possible Selves program. This program consisted of six components focusing on (1) discovering, which provides students an opportunity to identify their strengths and interests; (2) thinking, which is designed to help the student answer the questions "Who am I?" and "What are my hopes, expectations, and fears?"; (3) sketching, where the student looks at the questions of "What am I like?" and "What are my hoped-for, expected, and feared possible selves?"; (4) reflecting, where students write goals and answer the question "What can I be?"; (5) planning, which helps students answer the question "How can I reach my goals?"; and (6) working, the final stage in helping to answer 'How am I doing?", which provides students with an opportunity to revisit their goals for reflection and revising (Hock et al., 2003).

The strategy took about six to eight hours of time and was presented to students in one-to-one interactions with a sports counselor or other athletic department staff member. There were no differences among the groups' ACT scores, ethnicity, or gender at the start of the study. The results of the study showed that at the end of the first semester of the freshmen year, students in the Possible Selves condition scored significantly higher than students in the control group on measures of goal identification. That is, they identified more goals beyond the field of athletics

as possible for them in life. Additionally, the number of goals identified by students in the other conditions declined over the course of the year in the athlete and learner areas, while the Possible Selves group increased slightly or maintained. Last, at the end of six years, the Possible Selves group earned higher grade point averages than the students in the other groups. Moreover, 75% of the Possible Selves students graduated, as compared to 45% of the control group and 60% of the career counseling group (Hock et al., 2003). As athletes and performers have discovered, imagining the act of doing something, or having completed something, helps to create a cognitive and emotional pathway to the achievement of a goal (Rossiter, 2007). Cognitive and emotional pathways help to influence an area of the brain that controls detection and correction and is called the Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC). This area is part of the brain's limbic system and is active in cognition specifically for providing error protection and correction. The development of the ACC helps with the success of regulation and controlling of responses. Additionally, some theories of this portion of the brain reveal that it may interact with other cortical structures involved in the regulation of mental and emotional activity (Bus, Luu, & Posner, 2000).

In another Possible Selves study, sixteen pairs of freshmen student-athletes were randomly assigned students with similar ACT scores, gender, and high school GPAs to either a control or an experimental group. Mentors who were in their fifth year were hired and trained as "peer mentors" to deliver the Possible Selves program to the athletes, who were placed in groups of four to six students. Each group met for twelve weeks during the fall semester. The control-group students met with sport counselors individually during the same time period. Students in the Possible Selves program outperformed the control group on measures of specific role identification and goal setting in the areas of academics, personal life, and athletics. Last,

retention results of students taught the Possible Selves strategy were similar to the students who worked individually with academic counselors and staff (Hock et al., 2003).

In another study, the Possible Selves Program was administered with sixty-two middle school students, including those with learning disabilities at an urban school that serves diverse populations. Ten of the students were served in a self-contained special education classroom, twenty-one students were taught in an inclusive career-oriented class, and thirty-one were in an experimental group. Twenty-one of the students in another section of the career-oriented course taught by the same teacher were used as a comparison group. Students in the experimental group participated in the fall semester during two class session each week for twelve weeks. Students in the comparison group received the traditional career-oriented course work. Results showed that students who participated in the Possible Selves program identified more roles than they hoped for the future than those who did not participate. Also, these students identified more goals in the areas of academics and personal life than those in the comparison group (Hock et al., 2003). Overall, the current literature, while limited relative to the specific student population selected for this project, depicts theoretical underpinnings for similar strategies aimed at helping students through difficult academic challenges. These theories are helpful for academic coaches and researchers who must intervene and provide support when needed to help students be successful in the college setting.

Goal Setting Theory

Goal setting theory is based on the premise that individuals who set goals are believed to be more likely to perform at higher levels than individuals who do not set goals (Friedman & Mandel, 2009; Latham & Locke, 1991; Lunenburg, 2011). Goal setting and motivation go hand in hand as an underlying explanation for major theories regarding work motivation and employee

retention. For example, Herzberg's (1959) motivation theory was a two-factor theory based on employees' working environments. The first consisted of motivation factors relating to intrinsic motivation. The second factor was hygiene, which related to extrinsic factors. Lower levels of motivation including hygiene were not determined to increase productivity in the workplace, but higher levels of needs such as the feeling of success and self-worth did provide employees with feelings of satisfaction in their work environment. He found in order to increase employees' performance, motivation must be addressed (Tan, 2013).

Maslow's (1970) motivation theory is also called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which he developed in 1943 in *A Human's Theory of Motivation*. In this theory, Maslow advanced a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted in the form of a pyramid (see Figure 2). Maslow's pyramid is divided into three broad categories. *Basic* needs, which arise out of deprivation, are said to motivate people when they are unmet (e.g., the longer a person goes without food or shelter, their motivation is said to become stronger). *Psychological* and *self-actualization* needs in the pyramid stem from the desire for an individual's need to grow as a person (e.g., growth needs can be achievement, prestige, and self-fulfillment). In his theory, it is noted that *psychological* and *self-actualization* needs cannot be met until the *basic* needs are first met (McLeod, 2017).

Unlike Maslow's and Herzberg's theories of looking at the relationship between internal needs, V. H. Vroom's (1964) theory on motivation (Valence, Instrumentality, Expectancy) pulls apart the relationship from motivation, performance, and outcomes. Vroom's theory explains that certain behaviors result from choices made to maximize pleasure and avoid pain. *Expectancy* is the belief that increased effort will lead to increased performance. The belief that "if I work harder, then I can perform better" would be an example. *Instrumentality* is the belief that if one
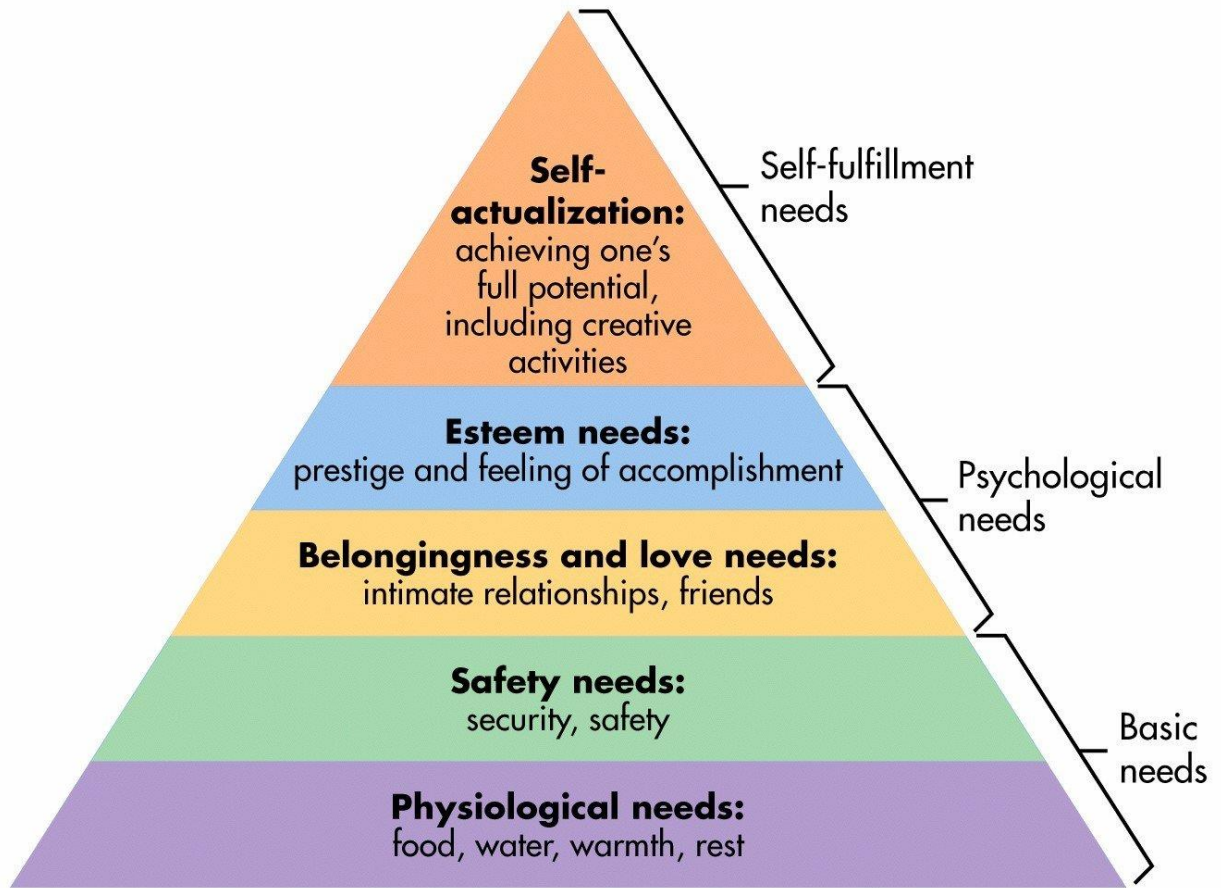
Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2017).

performs well, then a valued outcome will be received (for example, "If I do a good job, there will be something in it for me"). Last, *Valence* is the level of importance that the individual places on the expected outcome. For this to be positive, the individual must desire to attain the outcome over not attaining it. For example, if someone is motivated by money, he/she might not value time off of work in place of working.

Friedman and Mandel (2009) used expectancy and goal setting theories to predict student motivations to perform well and stay in college. Student motivation and goal setting were used in correlation with two traditional predictors (high school GPA and SAT scores) to predict college students' academic performance and retention. The study also looked at motivation and goal setting as ways to improve performance and retention after demographic variables such as SAT scores and high school GPA were controlled. The study population consisted of freshmen students who enrolled in a state college in northern New York during the 2005-2006 academic year. The study was voluntary and began three weeks after the start of the semester. The survey was administered online and was confidential in nature. Over half of the participants were female, and 14% were racial/ethnic minorities. Student responses differed in regard to their gender, minority status, parent's education, and retention status. The researchers used a series of surveys to answer hypotheses including a series of goal setting questions. The researchers found that the traditional SAT scores and high school GPA were a good prediction of freshmen college academic performance and retention. Grade attractiveness and effort to get good grades were also indicators of retention beyond the first year of college. The reasons students voluntarily left college varied widely throughout the study. The given study did not support social motivation as a significant predictor of student retentions beyond the first year of college. To further support the research of goal setting, studies have confirmed that when students participate in goal setting,

they perform better than those who don't set goals (Lunenburg, 2011). Figure 3 demonstrates a simplified view written by Lunenberg (2011) based on the goal-setting theory from Edwin Locke and Gary Latham (1991). In this figure, a view of goal setting is shown where values and goals appear to be two cognitive determinants of behavior. A goal is what the individual is trying to accomplish. Furthermore, challenging goals mobilize energy, which leads to greater effort and persistence. The accomplishment of set goals leads to further motivation, satisfaction, and positive outcomes. The figure demonstrates accordance and relationship within each step of the goal-setting theory (Lunenburg, 2011). A multitude of goal setting parameters exists for students to monitor when attempting to use goal setting as a motivator. Lunenberg (2011) writes a series of prescriptive tips based on the empirical evidence of Locke and Latham's goal setting theory of motivation. Their original theory emphasizes the relationship between goals and performance. Lunenberg (2011), explains the specifics of this theory. For example, one is the importance of the specificity of goals. Goals that are too broad or that don't have a target focus may not provide enough information for the person to know what to reach for. Another example is the difficulty of goals. Goal setting shouldn't set a person up for failure. If the goal is so difficult that the person can't attain it, it may cause rejection of the goal based on its being unreasonable. On the other hand, a goal that is too easy will not yield the desired performance output. Deadlines are also important when setting goals and can lead a person toward increasing the motivational impact of the goal. Goals can be short term, which requires a timeframe of now through six months from now, or long term, which can have parameters of anything over 6 months to an infinite number of years. Goals are highly effective when one is aware of an approaching deadline; one will usually invest more effort in accomplishing the goal. Finally, feedback is an important part of goal setting due to the human element of helping hold someone accountable to
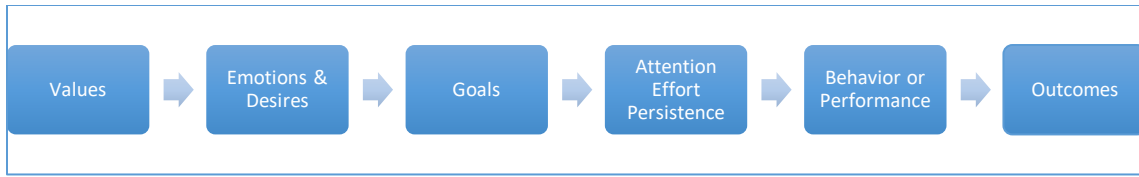
Figure 3. Model of Goal Setting Theory (Lunenburg, 2011).

their goals and determining how well they are doing. Feedback can also provide a person with suggested adjustments to their performance (Lunenburg, 2011).

Existing research tells us that goal setting can lead to performance (Latham & Locke, 1991), but students have different reasons for setting goals and establishing timelines for those goals. For example, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation goals are closely linked to self-determination, just as learning and performance goals are linked to education (Elliot & Dweck 1988; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Most often intrinsic goals are statements centered on health, self-development, community, etc. and can lead to higher performance, reduced stress, effort, and persistence. Extrinsic goals, on the other hand, are those centered on performance, such as money, fame, and status, and are connected to lower performance and well-being (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Possible Selves goal setting centered on career exploration can ignite intrinsic motivation, which connects personal meanings with the importance of having a job. Goal setting centered around work goals can encourage self-direction, determination, and less of the feeling of having to "keep up" with societal pressures (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007).

Academic Performance and Student Retention

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2016), of all students who started college in the fall of 2014, only 60% of those students returned to the institution where they began their freshman year of college. Seventy-two percent of students who started in the fall of 2014 persisted college, which means they didn't return to the institution at which they started, but they did attend college someplace else the following fall semester 2015. Thus, about one out of nine students who start college during the fall term transfers to another institution the following fall term (NSCRC, 2016). While these percentages vary per institution and rely on

41

different factors, including the type of institution (private, public, two-year, not-for-profit, etc.), these findings still suggest that some students are slipping through the cracks.

Many variables go into predicting academic performance and student retention. Some of these include demographics (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Gold, 1995; Reason, 2003), intellectual or academic preparation (Creamer, 1980; Daempfle, 2004), high school grade point average, gender (Hummel & Steele, 1996), socioeconomic status (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 1999; Mohr, Eiche, & Sedlacek, 1998; Wohlgemuth, Whalen, Sullivan, Nading, Shelley, & Wang, 2006), parental educational attainment, and active student participation (Astin, 1984; Heverly, 1999).

Institutional variables must also be considered when predicting student retention. Examples include the size of the institution, student/faculty ratios, student engagement, and the effectiveness of programs aimed at first-year students such as living-learning communities, etc. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) have suggested ways in which to help students be successful in college with guides to policies, strategies, programs, and services. More recently, these same authors updated their first-year experience handbook to address literature from the late 1980s through the mid-2000s (Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2004).

Additional authors around the same time frame were also writing about efforts to facilitate student retention and academic success (see, for example, *Impact of College Environments on Freshmen Students* [Banning, 1989] and *Academic and Student Affairs in Partnership for Freshman Success* [Murphy, 1989]). All of this literature aligned with the same goal in mind: to help first-year students be successful. Additional studies looked at student motivation, commitment to the institution, goal commitment and integration, and mattering. These are all psychological variables and have predicted academic performance in several

disciplines such as psychology, English, education, and health sciences (Friedman & Mandel, 2009).

Probationary Learning Profiles

Research suggests that students classified as "probationary" in their academic setting may benefit from goal setting as a positive notion of intervention. For example, students who may have earned a low-grade point average during their first semester of college may struggle to find their motivation to push forward given their current situation (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). Furthermore, research suggests that students may benefit from defining specific goals and action steps to help guide them toward worthwhile successes (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Goal setting strategies like the one in this study may have the potential to add a dimension of insight into the process of exploring new possibilities for adult learners.

Students who are attending postsecondary institutions and who find themselves on academic warning or probation increasingly include those with learning differences (e.g., learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and executive functioning challenges. Moreover, they are often first-generation students, have taken a gap year, work full time, have family obligations, or are members of minority populations (Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2010; Newman et al., 2011). While many students with these learning profiles are at risk of failing, transferring, or withdrawing, predictive historical data suggest these students still have the capacity, desire, and potential to be successful in college (Newman et al., 2011). While these students may not be naturally strategic learners, especially in a new academic setting, they may still have the motivation and desire to be successful. Fortunately, some evidence suggests that when directly taught strategic behaviors, students deemed probationary can improve their performance in academic settings (Holzer, Madaus, Bray, & Kehle, 2009;

43

Reid, Kennett, Lewis, Lund-Lucas, Stalburg, & Newbold, 2009; Richman, Rademacher, & Maitland, 2014). This is especially true when students are provided transition support and training in high school prior to transitioning to college. Newman, Madaus, and Javitz (2016) found this strategy as one that positively can impact the decision-making of students to use support resources on campus.

While the findings related to strategy instruction and transition are encouraging, some evidence suggests that patterns of college attendance, retention, and graduation are not as strong as those for students without academic challenges. Limited research documents the experiences of students with learning challenges in the postsecondary setting, and outcomes vary greatly among individual students. That said, existing literature regarding the college experience for these students points to both academic and non-academic aspects of college as potential areas of challenge (Hadley, 2006; Hadley, 2007; Trainin & Swanson, 2005; Warde, 2005). For example, non-cognitive areas of difficulty may include following through with expectations for meeting and communicating with college professors (Hadley, 2006); applying self-advocacy and independence required for obtaining college assistance (Hadley, 2006), maintaining attention, and staying focused in class while studying or during exams (Heiman & Precel, 2003; Jones, Kalivoda, & Higbee, 1997); concentrating, utilizing self-regulation, and maintaining motivation (Reaser, Prevat, Petscher, & Proctor, 2007; Weyandt et al., 2003); memorizing large amounts of material (Heiman & Precel, 2003; Jones, Kalivoda, & Higbee, 1997); managing stress and concentrating during testing situations (Heiman & Precel, 2003); developing and using adequate organization and study skills (Hielingenstien, Guenther, Levy, Savino, & Fulwiler, 1999; Norwalk, Norvilitis, & MacLean, 2008; Reaser, Prevatt, Petscher, & Proctor, 2007); adjusting to

the "freedom" of campus life (Aubrey, 2008; Reiff, Hatzes, Bramel, & Gibbon, 2001); and personal-emotional adjustment and self-esteem (Saracoglu, Minden, & Wilchesky, 2001).

Potential Areas of Intervention

People develop through learning, and as new goals emerge from that learning, so does the concept of the future-self. When studying interventions in setting goals and creating motivation, it is important to consider each student holistically. For example, emotions, individual life issues, and the development of "self" need to be considered when administering an intervention due to the different stages that students will be in during the time of goal setting (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Additionally, each person may have many possible selves that vary in salience (how easy they are to recall), importance, and level of detail (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Some work has extended this to potential areas of *intervention* (Murru, Martin, & Ginis, 2010; Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002).

In a study spanning four-weeks, examining the effects of happiness driven activities involving Possible Selves, researchers led an intervention with students who wrote about their "best possible selves" once a week. Two factors were manipulated during the experiment: (1) whether the activity was administered online versus in-person, or (2) whether the student read a persuasive peer testimonial before completing the activity. Results showed that no differences were found between students who participated in the activities online versus face-to-face, but for those students who read a positive testimonial before writing their "best possible self" statement, there were larger gains in well-being compared to those who read a neutral statement. This is important to note because it provides validity to an online self-administered happiness activity intervention and highlights the importance of student's beliefs in regard to motivating positive change (Layous, Nelson, & Lyubomirsky, 2013). Similarly, the *About2Be* strategy utilized the

45

Possible Selves approach to help students explore and expand ideas about their possible selves in the future, encourage goal setting related to college completion, and envision long-term goals.

Instructional Design Transformational Learning

The premise around transformational learning is that it encourages learners to think about how they learn, validate that learning, and formulate the meaning of their experiences (Mezirow, 1991). This type of learning outlines a way for learners to create meaning through experiences. When meaning is created, it has the potential to lead to a change in behavior, mindset, and beliefs. This can lead to a paradigm shift which can directly impact a person's future. For example, students may realize that they have a strength that was previously hidden, or that a long-held assumption is true/untrue.

The essential components to the transformational learning process are (1) acknowledgment of a need for change in one's life, perspectives, or circumstances; (2) critical reflection on individual or societal assumptions; (3) communication and connection with others who have a similar life experience; (4) exploration of what course of action is possible and desirable; and (5) enacting the new learning as an individual or through social action (Freire, 1970; Jarvis, 1992; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Tennant, 2000). One of the steps of transformative learning, as outlined by Mezirow (2000), is the "exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions" (p. 22). As learners create action steps, they are formulating goals for themselves, operating with a future time perspective.

In the mental framework of absolutism, one's sense of self tends to be good or bad, right or wrong, a success or a failure, and so on. While such a framework has limits, it is also foreseeable and harmless. This process can involve letting go of meaning that for many learners has supported clear definitions of one's values and sense of self (Rossiter, 2007). One

implication for adult educators, in the possible selves framework, is that adult learners are not just developing and expanding their worldview and new ways of thinking about ideas, they are developing and realizing new possible selves and creating a self-concept (Hellstrom, 2001; Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007; Rossiter, 2007).

In working with adult learners, encouragement is suggested to help enable learners to fully articulate the meanings and the selves they are leaving behind (Rossiter, 2007). This may pertain specifically to students deemed probationary in this study due to the feelings of mistakes that may have made during the previous semester's academic work. In his well-known work on transitions, Bridges (1980) emphasizes the point that transitions begin with endings. This may be needed for some participants and not for others but is important to recognize during an intervention of this type.

Future Time Perspective

Many students are able to see how their present behavior and actions have implications for their future; however, some students struggle with this concept. Many students prefer to live in the present, not accounting for the future consequences of their current situation (Simons, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Lacante, 2004). Husman and Lens (1999) defined the concept of the future time perspective (FTP) as the mental representation of the future, constructed by individuals at certain points in their lives to be able to reflect on personal and social influences. For this study, the concept of FTP provides a basis for setting personal goals and life plans, exploring future options, and carrying out major decisions, all of which may affect a person's life course (Seginer, 1992). Future time perspective is similar to the concept of Possible Selves in that it has the potential to influence how far in the future a person can project a possible self

47

(Leondari, 2007). It is important to consider the theory of FTP in this research, and its relationship with motivation.

Gender, Social, and Ethnic Contexts

The very term Possible Selves can imply change, and this relies strongly on the student being able to draw a connection between their current self and their future self. Future direction can and does occur within social, cultural, and historical contexts. These conditions affect and influence what is possible for some in the future (Nurmi, 1993). From a cultural standpoint, a student deemed probationary in the university setting may have views of gender, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status as indicators of marginalization. One's current situation can alter what one believes is possible based on the dominant culture in which one lives. This can control a person's self-efficacy and perceived alignment with Possible Selves (Rossiter, 2007).

By design, the probationary group of students is shadowed by their past academic performances. Helping them believe that their goals can be attained with detailed action steps and concrete timelines have the potential to help them reach their desired future-selves and obtain success. Thus, socially constructed roles, the existence of contextual cues, levels of self-efficacy, and the availability of role models are among the factors that shape and sometimes limit the repertoire of possible selves that an individual can envision (Rossiter, 2007).

In a research study involving the gender gap among high school and college students and their academic possible selves, seven hundred and thirteen university students and four hundred and forty-seven high school students participated. The university sample was 62.3% female with a mean age of 19.8 years and the high school sample was 56.1% female with a mean age of 16.7 years. The LASS test (multifunction assessment highlighting differences between actual and

expected literacy levels) was used to determine students current and possible academic self-views. Results in the Possible Selves component showed that university men scored higher on both the masculine-stereotyped composites (Natural Sciences and Business/Math) and university women scored higher on the feminine composites (Social/Behavioral Science), indicating a gender divergence. In the Humanities and Culture composite, university men outscored the university women slightly. The university study revealed that men and women differed significantly in the areas of their overall academic levels (Business/Math and Humanities/Culture) composites. This is important because it shows how men and women view themselves regarding their strengths and "possible selves" surrounding university academics differently (Lips, 2004).

The high school study revealed different results. The pattern was similar to that of the university study, but the results were not significant. However, girls did rate themselves higher than boys regarding their current and future selves, but not at the level that university men and women did. Overall, the study did reveal that there are differences related to the educational stage of students and their pattern differences do hint at a process of change between students and their self-views (Lips, 2004). The findings also suggest that women may be closing themselves off to possibilities for their future regarding certain academic areas.

In another study regarding gender and the Possible Selves approach, two hundred and twelve high school students (85 boys and 127 girls) participated. All students completed two questionnaires regarding their hoped for and feared Possible Selves and the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents Global Self-Worth Scale. The study found that female adolescents rated their feared possible selves higher than boys. No gender differences regarding the hoped-for possible selves were indicated. Additional results indicate that the differences in male and female

self-views may be linked to their experienced feared selves (Knox, Funk, Elliot, & Bush, 2000).

Final Thoughts

Freshmen college students who have not been well prepared for the academic and independent living strains of college find themselves at a time when demands for self-determination, self-advocacy, and self-regulation increase exponentially from what has often been a very structured home/school environment. The transition from high school to college brings an exciting mix of emotions, adventures, and changes. Students living on a college campus find themselves away from previous support environments and facing the opportunity and challenge to build a new one. Additionally, students who may not have clear ideas of what they want to do in the future can be discouraged. Research suggests that students may benefit from defining specific goals and action steps to help guide them toward worthwhile successes (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007).

Overall, the contributions of literature in the area of goal setting and self-discovery are valuable in regard to research that has been conducted with the theory of Possible Selves and students who struggle academically. There are positive outcomes in the notion of goal setting for students who may be unhappy with their current academic performance (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). The student population most prevalent in the literature is the middle and high school students, and a paucity of research focuses on first-year students in the post-secondary setting. The *About2Be* goal setting strategy aims to build a strong connection between goal setting and self-discovery with probationary college students in hopes of creating a valuable resource for institutions or organizations.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This project utilized a quasi-experimental study design, also called a causal-comparative design, which sought to establish a cause-effect relationship between the strategy and two or more variables (students' engagement and goal setting). As explained by the researchers Gribbons and Herman (1997), a quasi-experimental design is useful in determining the effectiveness and impact of programs and strategies. This research design was chosen because the participants' outcomes were a key concern and may have the potential to be considered as evidence to support the effectiveness of the strategy for future groups. Additionally, this study sought to further determine the effectiveness of the *About2Be* program in its third cycle. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the first cycle of this project was conducted with multiple campuses using the traditional *Possible Selves* curriculum developed by the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas. Each campus implemented the strategy with a small group of students enrolled in a student support program on their respective campus. The findings showed no significant change between the pre and post mission statements but did yield interesting qualitative themes, as well as differences between males and females and between high school and college students in the types of goals they set (see Table 3). In these findings, themes were generated to develop targeted discussions that were closely related to how and why students set goals. For example, students' mission statements addressed the three categories of "person," "worker," and "learner" with high-level general, sweeping statements (James et al., 2018). The cycle also shed light on potential implications for timing of the strategy in the context of an academic year, challenges with the original mission statement rubric, feasibility, and age-

Table 3

Percentage of Comments Coded for Each Theme – Male/Female

P.S. Category	Male	Female	Theme
Learner	28%	34%	Academic Goals (timeline to graduation, GPA, Faster Learning, Work ethic in school)
	26%	19%	Degree Specific (Identify a specific major or degree)
	56%	45%	Post-Secondary Education (college graduate undergraduate or grad)
Person	0%	9%	Good at Something (proficient in hobby, artist, sport, etc.)
	16%	11%	Love to do something (love to ride horses, etc.)
	10%	10%	Strength – Action Steps (desire to build on a strength or improve something)
Worker	36%	19%	Money or Finances
	76%	86%	Specific Career or Job
	22%	20%	Career Action Steps (work ethic, internship, any work context)
Strength	24%	46%	Desire to Make a Difference
	50%	47%	Friends, Family, Personal Relationships
	40%	37%	Person they want to Be (good person, kind)
	26%	30%	How they want to be Perceived by Others (respect, people come to for advice, knowledgeable)
	32%	47%	Personal feelings (happy, fulfilled, balanced)
	26%	24%	Action Steps (travel, health, fitness, spirituality)

Note. (James, Inlow, Williams, & Hock, 2018).

appropriateness of the original strategy for the college setting, and considerations for ensuring fidelity during the delivery of the strategy.

Using an iterative design process, goals and methods for Cycle 2 built upon learning during the first cycle. This second cycle of pilot research was conducted with a smaller group of ten freshmen college students in a specialized support program for students with learning disabilities at East Carolina University. Between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, substantive changes were made to the curriculum resource. Specifically, the curriculum was restructured to utilize a web-based model instead of the pencil/paper worksheet model used with the original materials. The strategy resources themselves were changed to reduce redundancy, be more age-appropriate for college students, and take into consideration the student-support delivery methods typical for college settings. A new title (*About2Be*) was also developed for the curriculum. This second cycle enabled me to test these new resources with a small group of students prior to Cycle 3 (this current dissertation project). The time of year the strategy was delivered was modified in Cycle 2 based on results from the first research project that suggested an influence from previously learned materials in the student support seminar on the impact of the strategy itself. Another consideration during the revamping of this strategy was the student population. In addition to the size of the group, a limitation in Cycle 2 was the use of the resource with students who already participate in a comprehensive support program. Therefore, it was not possible to tease the results of this specific curriculum from the rest of the program supports (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, structured study time, etc.) in order to assess the impact of the procedure. Instead, this group of students was accustomed to having strategies taught in learning seminars specifically to focus on building proactive academic routines. With this in mind, the goal was not to measure pre-post differences in students but was solely to observe student use of and get feedback about

the new website and the delivery of the new curriculum. We revisited that research question with a revised rubric for the current project in hopes of getting closer to assessing what we wanted to learn in the research question. Cycle 2 also provided the opportunity to test the instruments I planned to use in Cycle 3. The results from both previous studies were used to make informed adjustments to the curriculum and methods for this project (Cycle 3). Participation in all cycles affords me the ability to better anticipate some of the nuances associated with the online program and the curriculum materials. Therefore, this new research will not only test the impact of the *About2Be* strategy with probationary college students, but it will also inform the next stage of improvements to the product itself.

Research Questions

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the following questions were measured using qualitative and quantitative assessments:

1. Were students who learned the *About2Be* strategy more likely to identify specific goals in each of the 3 goal categories of a worker, learner, and person?
2. Did the strategy influence participant self-expressions of engagement?
3. Did male and female students respond differently to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy in their written mission statements?
4. What were student perceptions related to the usability of the online platform?
5. What did participants state needs to be adopted, adapted, or adjusted for this strategy to be beneficial for other post-secondary students?

Setting and Participants

As described in Chapter 1, the *About2Be* study was conducted at East Carolina University in 6 freshmen seminar classes (COAD 1000) during the second semester of the traditional

university calendar year (January through April). More specifically, the strategy was implemented during the months of January and February 2018. The student population consisted of 39 students ranging in age from 18 to 20 years. Twenty-one of the students were female, 18 were males, 29 were white, 8 were African American, and 2 were Hispanic. The students in these courses were deemed probationary for academic challenges, primarily due to earning a first-semester grade point average of less than 2.0 (see Table 1). Twenty-four students were assigned to receive the strategy (treatment group), and 15 students were assigned as the comparison group. See Table 2 for course-specific demographics, which varied for each section. There was no random assignment per student, but rather each class was assigned either the strategy or comparison classification. During the time of strategy implementation with the comparison groups, the regular instructor was not presenting any goal setting instruction in an effort to ensure that any instruction the student participants received between the *About2Be* goal setting sessions would minimize the impact of the dependent variables being assessed within the study. The comparison group was given the treatment later in the same semester as a delayed treatment to ensure both groups of students were able to receive the strategy. Results of the treatment group were compared to the results of the comparison group, noting the significance of differences (if any) on the dependent variables. To measure the significance of a change in pre and post mission statements, a scoring measure was developed and used to compare the number of identified roles, goals, specificity of goal statements, and identified action steps.

Prior to this cycle, the Possible Selves and *About2Be* curriculum were delivered to students who were participating in fairly comprehensive student support programs by facilitators who knew the students well. This project sought to assess the use of the program with a broader population of students in the general college population – but who had demonstrated academic

difficulty in their first semester of college. The overarching question that I wanted to answer with this project was whether the *About2Be* strategy shows promise as a relevant and impactful strategy for helping students increase their overall role/goal identification and academic engagement. Following up on qualitative patterns of student responses from Cycle 1, I also wanted to determine if there were differences between gender (male and female) perceptions and uses of the strategy. Finally, I tested the overall usability of the online platform with this different group of students. Freshmen seminar courses, specifically for probationary students (students with a GPA below 2.0) during the second semester of the academic year, provided an excellent group of students with whom to ask these questions.

The objective of the freshmen seminar course is to assist new students in attaining success during their first year of college and beyond. Topics covered in the freshmen seminar courses included understanding the transition from high school to college (for example, helping students locate and utilize the multitude of campus services and resources to aid them in a successful transition). Additionally, student development, motivation, and goal-setting are also addressed. These strategies provide students with a better understanding of their learning style and how to apply that to their study habits. Study skills are also highlighted in this course, including memory development, listening, note-taking, test-taking, and critical thinking. All have the potential to help students develop a battery of effective skills to guide them toward success. Lastly, the course covers the university academic rules and regulations regarding integrity and advising and registration processes for future semesters (First Year, 2017). This course is typically taught by academic advisors and student-life faculty with some sections taught by academic faculty in different departments on campus. These instructors receive a 2-day training

to facilitate an understanding of basic information about college student development and the academic and social issues college students may encounter.

The *About2Be* goal setting strategy aligned closely with the goals and objectives of the course, and each instructor allowed me to teach the *About2Be* goal setting strategy to the students. I met with each class five times over the course of three weeks. Specifically, the *About2Be* strategy aligned with the following course objectives: campus and academic engagement, involvement in co-curricular activities, peer-to-peer and peer-to-faculty connections, goal setting, student learning, accepting responsibilities, relationships, personal and student development, identity exploration, appreciating differences, civility, career direction, and values.

About2Be Strategy Implementation

The *About2Be* strategy was administered in seven consecutive sessions, with five of those taught in the classroom and two completed via the student's personal time outside of class. Each session focused on different areas, including personal success, identification of strengths, student perceptions of their current and future-selves, goal development, and self-reflection. Each lesson was interactive and available online via the student's password protected profile. Students were given the opportunity to guide their own action plans and encouraged to be actively engaged in the goal-setting process. The regular course instructor was present at the time of strategy implementation, and it was communicated to him/her to reinforce the completion of the outside activities before the next class session. Each session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and is explained below in detail.

Session one ("*Introduction to About2Be*") and session two ("*Why Study About2Be*") introduced the *About2Be* strategy with the focus on familiarizing students with the curriculum

and providing an overview of the strategy. These sessions were introduced during the same class meeting and explained the importance of goal setting and how it can lead to motivation and success.

Students were informed that the purpose of this program is to provide them with an opportunity to think about their hopes, dreams, and fears for the future, specifically with the development of action steps to make this attainable or avoidable (fears). After the initial strategy discussion, students watched a series of video clips featuring young people who exhibited strong dreams for the future. After each clip, the students discussed the character's dream and what the character experienced. I reminded students that the *About2Be* program will help them examine their hopes and dreams for the future and plan to start reaching for those dreams. After the video clips, I showed the students each section of the *About2Be* website, explaining the different activities that would be required for mastery of the strategy. I showed specific examples from a completed portfolio, so students could begin to visualize their completed portfolio. At the end of the session, I asked students if they had any questions or concerns regarding the strategy as I had explained it to them.

Session three ("*Defining Success"*) was also administered during the first class meeting. It focused on student definitions of success and the writing of their pre-mission statement. Students were instructed to write a short and concise personal mission statement about what they wanted to do, to be, and to be like. Students were informed that a typical mission statement is short and concise, including only about 25-50 words, and they were given 15-20 minutes to complete the statements. Students were also given the option to use dictation (being read to or listening) or a scribe (writing while the student speaks). Students typed their pre-mission

statements in their online profile in the "pre-mission statement" section. A sample student pre-mission statement is included in Appendix C.

Students were then asked to brainstorm statements or indicators that describe their idea of success. I asked students to think about and write "what would it mean for you to be a successful learner, worker, or person?" I also discussed with students the notion that their ideas of success may have been heavily influenced by others in the past, but now they have the chance to start forming their own ideas about what it means to be successful. After students wrote their definitions of success, they watched a series of videos depicting others defining success and what it means for them. Students then discussed the themes that stood out from the videos and had the opportunity to make any desired revisions to the definitions they previously wrote. Students then wrote their official definitions of success in the "definition of success" section of the *About2Be* portfolio and saved their work. Students who felt comfortable doing so shared their definitions of success with the class.

Session 4 ("*Strengths and the Current Self*") was administered during the second class meeting and focused on having students identify their strengths as person, learner, and worker. Students were asked to complete three strength/career finding inventories using online links provided from the *About2Be* website *before* the class met. These inventories helped students think about potential strengths, interests, and careers that may impact their future. See Appendix J for a list of inventories from which students selected. Next students were asked to create a set of "strengths post-cards" and a "current-selves collage" (see Appendix D and E for examples). The strengths postcards are designed to build on the inventories students completed and required participants to focus on what they feel are their top three strengths. Each postcard features one of those strengths along with a picture that the student feels depicts that strength. Students also

write a caption (description of the strength). Students can reference the "Strengths Postcard" section as they create a current-self collage, an activity designed to help students to fully describe the way they see themselves today. For an example of the Strengths Postcard, see Appendix E. Students were encouraged to start the collage by focusing on their strengths, and then expand to cover more broadly how students could describe their current selves. Students selected images and created a short written statement to include in their online collage in the "current-self collage" section.

Session 5 ("*Identifying My Hopes, Expectations, and Fears using the About2Be Tree Organizer*") was administered during the third class. It allowed students to identify their hopes, expectations, and fears in regard to themselves as a person, worker, and learner. I provided direct instruction about the terms and definitions of each of the categories, and the students and I brainstormed some examples together. Next, students were instructed to sketch their responses to each category (person, worker, and learner) onto a graphic organizer resembling a tree (see Appendix E). The tree graphic organizer is symbolic and allowed students to use some creativity and to see themselves represented as a whole. The trunk identified the students' characteristics and ways in which they described themselves (funny, kind, organized, performs well in math, etc.). Each limb of the tree represented a major area of the student's life – a person, a learner, and a worker. Building off the limbs, the branches represented each student's hopes and expectations in relation to each major area. Lastly, students were instructed to draw potential dangers to their tree, which represented fears that students felt about their goals or in different areas of their lives. For example, lightning striking the tree may represent getting sick in the "person" area, and disease on the tree may represent losing a job in the worker section. Finally, students were asked to examine their trees and identify which areas were strongest and weakest. Students who were

comfortable doing so shared their trees with the group. Students then took pictures of their trees and uploaded them to their online profile on the *About2Be* website. An example of the graphic tree organizer is in Appendix E.

Session six ("*Reflecting on Goals and Planning Ways to Reach Goals"*) built in reflection for what students could possibly become in the future based on their identified goals and action plans. This session was taught during the fourth class meeting. Students used their trees to identify areas that had more branches than others, or more goals and expectations. Students were asked to analyze the positivity of their trees and to identify areas that seemed unbalanced. Based on this analysis, students worked on identifying and ranking three short-term goals that would help them attain the main hope they had for their lives in each of the three areas (person, worker, and learner). For example, graduating from college or staying off academic probation would relate to the "learner" area. Students were encouraged to set goals that were clear and specific about what they wanted to achieve and a date by which they would achieve it. Students then typed these goals in their online profile and began to make an action plan, specifying target dates and identifying people who might help them achieve the goal for each category (Person, Worker, and Learner). For an action plan example, see Appendix F. This portion of the strategy serves as a capstone to the *About2Be* curriculum by requiring students to create goal-driven action plans based on the culmination of all the activities and materials in their *About2Be* online portfolio. Beyond creating goals for each of their living areas, this session allowed time to develop actual realistic action steps to help achieve these goals. Students discussed what an action plan is and recognized the importance of creating smaller steps to complete a goal. Napoleon Hill's statement that "a goal is a dream with a deadline" served as an anchor for this session of the strategy (Farber, 2003).

Session seven of the strategy ("*Creating the Future-Self Collage*") was discussed during the fifth class session but was an activity students completed outside of class. It enabled students to review their action plans and revise goals and steps, as needed. Students created their future-selves collage using their goals, action plans, and graphic tree organizers to show visually what their future may look like. Students added images and created a short statement explaining what their future may entail. This session was similar to the session where students created their "current-self collage." An example of a student's future collage is in Appendix G.

Finally, during session eight (*"How is the Journey?"*), which was taught during the fifth and final class meeting, students were instructed to write their post-mission statements (see Appendix H). I explained the importance and impact a mission statement can have in a person's life and how these types of statements can be used to define who you want to become and help you stay focused on your goals. We briefly discussed the mission statements of successful companies. For example, Starbucks' statement is to "inspire and nurture the human spirit, one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time" (Farfan, 2017). Students assessed their progress toward their goals, with a plan to revisit their online profiles later in the semester, and later in their academic career.

Assessment of Project Outcomes

Both qualitative and quantitative data for this study were collected, allowing for comparison and prediction among measures to ensure the validity of results (Rossie, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Multiple measures allowed for a broader understanding of the overall impact of the strategy.

Measures and Analysis

The overarching objective guiding this project was to determine whether the *About2Be*

strategy influenced the students' overall role/goal identification related to academic engagement and whether there were gender differences in language between male and female students. Additionally, I wanted to determine the overall usability of the online platform based on student responses and determine what may need to be adopted, adapted, or adjusted for this strategy to be beneficial for other post-secondary students in the future. Measures and observations started on day one and continued through each day of instruction. Measures included the Pre/Post Mission Statement scoring rubric, Possible Selves Questionnaire, Student Usability Survey, focus groups, and the Teacher Observation Report.

Pre/Post Mission Statement Scoring Rubric

Quantitative data for this study included measuring the differences between student's pre and post mission statements using a scoring rubric (see Appendix B). This measure is directly connected to the following research questions:

1. Were students who participated in the *About2Be* strategy more likely to identify specific goals in each of the 3 categories of a worker, learner, and person?

2. Did male and female students respond differently to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy in their written mission statements?

From the treatment group, I scored each student's pre-mission statement against the post-mission statement, looking specifically for differences in scores. A point system was used with the rubric to determine the quantity and specificity of statements for roles, goals, and action steps in each of the categories (person, worker, and learner). To ensure fidelity and interrater reliability, I trained two other academic colleagues (who were not involved in this study) to score the pre and post mission statements using a rubric designed for this strategy. Interrater reliability was observed to measure the degree of agreement among raters, looking specifically for a

consensus. A training process was implemented with the raters to ensure each one was knowledgeable about the scoring measure and the underlying strategy (learner, worker, person). I provided examples of previous mission statements (from cycle 2) for raters to practice with using the scoring rubric. I informed the raters that the statements were anonymous, and each statement would have a code and that they would not be informed if they were scoring a pre or post statement.

Upon completion of training, I gave the raters 10 mission statements to score, and then I entered their scores to determine the interrater reliability. The first percentage of interrater reliability was 1%, where the raters only scored one statement the same. Since the percentage was not within the 70th percentile range, I determined that further training was needed. I went back through the training elements with the raters to make sure they understood how to use the scoring rubric. Additional training was only required after this first process of scoring. Upon completion of additional training, another 10 statements were given to the raters. The second interrater reliability percentage was 72%, which showed a better understanding of the rubric, so I proceeded to give all the statements to the raters, and they completed them within two weeks. Upon completion, the interrater reliability percentage was again 72%. Next, I compared my scores with the other rater's scores to reach a consensus, and that score was used for data entry.

Next, I used a paired t-test to measure the differences between the student's pre and post mission statements. This test was used only for the student participants in the treatment group to determine if there was a significant statistical difference in their statements before and after the strategy. Specifically, with this test, I am looking for an increase in the student's identification of specific goals as a worker, person, and leaner. The scoring rubric is available in Appendix B.

Student mission statements were also analyzed qualitatively using a coding method called "open coding" (Berelson, 1952) or "latent coding" (Shapiro & Markoff, 1997). Themes were deduced from the pre and post mission statements, and statements were coded using these themes. To determine differences between gender, I coded the themes from each participant's pre and post mission statements and mapped the results to the following sub research questions:

1. Were students who participated in the *About2Be* strategy more likely to identify specific goals in each of the 3 categories of a worker, learner, and person?

2. Did male and female students respond differently to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy in their written mission statements?

The themes that were most commonly identified in the pre and post mission statements relating to student's goals, roles, and action steps were compared and contrasted between each other and between male and female students. Most statements were general in nature when compared pre and post but when looking at gender, males and females in this project differed in their statements related to a specific major and their overall "success." For example, females emphasized *"I want to major in criminal justice"* type statements more frequently than males (F 34%, M, 19%). Males, however made more statements related to having overall success (F 6%, M 15%). For example, males made statements like *"...I want to be successful no matter what I do"* or *"I want to have success in my life."* Themes where no to little difference was calculated centered around graduate school or an advanced degree (M 13%, F 13%), grade point average (M 2%, F 8%), and graduation (M 8%, F 13%). The results from these themes may help determine future research and use of the strategy, thus helping to answer if males and females respond differently to the *About2Be* strategy.

Qualitative data for this study were also collected from the Possible Selves Questionnaire (see Appendix L), focus group field notes (see Appendix J for focus group questions), and the open-ended questions from the usability survey (see Appendix N). Focus groups were conducted to determine the overall participant's attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions to the *About2Be* strategy. The results for these measures can be found in Chapter Four.

These qualitative results were mapped to the following research questions:

3. Did male and female students respond differently to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy in their written mission statements?

   a. What were student perceptions related to the usability of the online platform?

   b. What did participants state need to be adopted, adapted, or adjusted for this strategy to be beneficial for other post-secondary students?

Possible Selves Questionnaire

The Possible Selves measure is designed to determine the stage at which a student has thought about and/or set goals for the upcoming year. The measure was developed by Daphna Oyserman, a professor at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Multiple publications have used this measure to study juvenile delinquency, African American identity, school involvement, gendered racial identity, academic outcomes, American Indian mascots, low-income mothers, socioeconomic disadvantage linked to behavior, and identity-based motivation. The Possible Selves Questionnaire asks participants to think about next year in two categories: The Next Year Expected Possible Selves and the Next Year Feared Possible Selves. For this study, students were asked to categorize their Next Year Expected and Feared

Possible Selves in three main categories: achievement, interpersonal relationships, and personality traits. The Possible Selves Questionnaire was measured by coding the categories of expected and feared possible selves based on the results from each of the student's responses for each measure. An example of the questionnaire is shown in Table 4 and includes subcategories and examples.

Student Usability Survey and Focus Groups

Both the Student Usability Survey (see Appendix N) and focus groups (see Appendix J) were conducted in accordance with research questions four and five. The student usability survey was administered to gather feedback from student participants regarding the usability of the online platform, the pacing of the strategy, likability of the activities, goal setting value, and behaviors of motivation for success. It was presented in the form of a Likert scale, where students selected from 1 (Not Very) to 5 (Very) in correspondence with the questions.

A focus group was conducted with 10 of the student participants to gauge the overall structure, function, and aesthetics of the *About2Be* online materials and resources. The questions asked were:

1. What was your overall impression of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?

2. What would you change/not change about the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?

3. What was your favorite activity? Least favorite?

4. Did the *About2Be* strategy influence your overall academic engagement?

5. Any other comments/concerns about the strategy?

The results of these questions can be found in Chapter Four.

Table 4

Examples of Next Year Possible Selves

Possible Selves	Categories	Examples of Possible Student Statements
Achievement/School-Expected Selves		
	Job/Career	in a good job, have a good job, a well-paying job, working at a store or Restaurant, in a particular career, earning an income
	Activities in College	Exec board of fraternity/sorority, more involved, studying abroad, playing basketball
	College Academics	Figuring out my major, back at ECU for sophomore year, on dean's list, higher GPA, applying to a nursing program
	Independent Living	Living in my apartment, living with my boyfriend
Achievement/School – Feared Selves		
	Job/Career	Being unemployed, not having a job
	Activities in College	Getting in trouble, going to jail, partying too much,
	College Academics	a college dropout, skipping class, GPA dropping, 8:00 AM classes, procrastinating
	Independent Living	Being home all the time, bad habits, drinking, doing drugs, sleep deprivation, living with my parents
Interpersonal Relationships – Expected Selves		
	Family	Living with my boyfriend, a great mother to my child, mutually supportive relationship,
	Peers	Have friends, be a good friend

Table 4 (continued)

Possible Selves	Categories	Student Statements
Interpersonal Relationships – Feared Selves		
	Family	Having to move back in with my parents, leaning on my parents too much, being homesick, kicked out at home, being a bad mother
	Peers	Being without friends, negative people
Personality Traits – Expected Selves		
	Independence or Maturity	Independent, responsible, relieving stress, exercising, healthy
	Attitude	Happy, helpful to others
Personality Traits – Feared Selves Independence or Maturity		
	Independence or Maturity	Wasting time, playing video games all the time, not sleeping, letting my ADD beat me, depression, going back to the way I used to be, bad habits, staying in my comfort zone
	Attitude	Bad vibes, stress, self-doubt

Teacher Observation Report

In the second sub-question (b), I wanted to know if the strategy influenced self-expressions toward engagement. I used the Teacher Observation Report to help determine influences in student engagement during strategy instruction. This type of observation is deliberate and focused. The Teacher Observation Report has been accepted readily in the past as a legitimate source of information for recording and reporting student demonstrations of learning outcomes in education (Maxwell, 2001). Appendix M is an example observation checklist that was used for this project.

It has been argued that the use of the Teacher Observation Report is not ideal in relation to issues such as representativeness, observation, control of influences, standardization, objectivity, stereotyping, and bias. While these limitations are realistic, having a protocol to record specific pre-determined student behaviors can help to ensure that the person delivering the strategy is able to efficiently collect data about student engagement without later having to rely on memory or sweeping impressions (Maxwell, 2001, p. 8). I also took precautions to mitigate these limitations as much as possible. For example, observed behaviors were defined and recorded every 5 minutes to ensure evidence was recorded frequently and formally (see Appendix M). Each lesson was designed to enable students multiple opportunities to ask questions and demonstrate or provide examples of what they learned. I also communicated with the students' regular instructor the importance of the students not receiving any type of goal setting assignments or discussion before the strategy began. To tackle the issue of standardization, I was sure to provide quality requirements and activities to be able to collect evidence-based data allowing students a holistic approach to the strategy elements. Objectivity was another factor to consider; where my judgments might be subjective and prone to

70

inconsistencies, I made sure that all data collection instruments were the same between participants and that the procedures used during the study were strengthened and verified by earlier research practices. Stereotyping was also something to consider given the nature of the student participants (GPA below 2.0). To combat this, I tried to hold myself to the mindset that each class was approached as a new opportunity to test hypotheses from prior and current impressions. Finally, the issue of bias is something researchers are always faced with. To challenge this, I consistently attempted to stay vigilant during data collection to maintain ethical standards and to keep myself accountable to present evidence-based justifications for my findings.

Study Limitations

The *About2Be* strategy has the potential to provide a springboard for interacting and building relationships with students focused on hopes and goals for the future. This study provided insights about the differences between male and females regarding their career, education, and family goals; however, it did not provide differences between their pre and post statement results, which may be an indicator that that type of assessment needs further review as a measurement tool for use in this strategy. In order to fully assess the impact of this strategy, future research is needed that extends this study and addresses some of the limitations of this project.

For this research, I taught *About2Be* to all participants in the strategy group in order to ensure that each group received consistent information and instruction. While that was critical for this project, it will be important to also assess issues related to feasibility and fidelity of implementation across multiple instructors with future research. This study did not address the impact of the strategy when delivered by multiple facilitators. Moreover, I am not the

participants' general instructor for this course, something that might also impact results. On the one hand, it was difficult to build strong a rapport with the students and for them to get to know and trust me in a short amount of time. This might have limited the depth of information they felt comfortable sharing. On the other hand, being a "guest" in the class could impact the results in a positive way that might not occur if their general instructor had provided the instruction.

This strategy took place during the second semester of the students' first year of college, just after they returned from a holiday break and from seeing their parents and family members. Family influences could have impacted the students' thought processes, overall motivation, and attitudes toward regaining success in the college setting. The target population for this research involved students who were taking the freshman-seminar course, typically after encountering some academic difficulty the previous semester. Thus, there is a chance that interactions with their parents over the winter break (who would have seen their grades from the first semester) may have involved discussions about "making changes" that would have been fresh in the minds of the students on the pre-measures. This could limit the ability of the strategy to show impact from the pre-measures to the post-measures. Future research should test the strategy at the beginning of the first year of college during the fall semester.

This study was designed to measure relatively short-term outcomes, which are only possible given the target population (freshmen seminar students). While this probationary group is critical to reach, I could not ethically keep the students in the control group from receiving the goal setting instruction before the semester ended. Additionally, the nature of this dissertation is short-term. Future research could assess the long-term impact of the *About2Be* strategy.

Another potential limitation may be participant dropout rates. Student participants who are deemed probationary and are obligated to register for a freshman seminar course control

whether they stay in the course until the end of the semester. Thus, students could drop the course during the period of data collection. At the beginning of the semester, each regular instructor provided me with a copy of their course roster. On average, each class contained between 16-20 students. When I arrived to teach the strategy, about three weeks into the start of the semester, each class only had about 10-12 students attending regularly. During the implementation of the strategy, on average there were 3-5 students absent during each class. This made it difficult for each student to receive information and strategy directions/activities on a consistent basis. The design of the strategy is very structured in that in each class session students complete an activity that builds upon a previous activity. Therefore, if a student misses even one class, they can get off track with the pace of the strategy. Since students missed a few of the class sessions, I had to spend time reviewing and catching students up with what had been taught the session prior. This happened in four sessions during the implementation of this project. This is potentially a serious issue to consider when working with probationary students in this capacity, but even more so, a stronger finding to support that this student population does indeed need goal setting and engagement type strategies to aid them in their academic success.

Because this project involved a strategy that is relatively new, scoring measures have just been created and only used one time prior to this study. Future research is needed to more fully assess the validity and reliability of the measures used to score students' roles, goals, and action statements. Because the study was situated in a probationary freshman-seminar classroom setting, there may be limitations to student buy-in and/or the participant's ability/willingness to share and describe their experiences.

Data collected using the teacher observation report should be considered with attention to potential influences that include representativeness, observation, control of influences,

standardization, objectivity, stereotyping, and bias. While I attempted to reduce the impact of these influences (see Teacher Observation Report section), these data will naturally be subjective. However, the observational notes provide an important context for the quantitative data and can be considered in tandem with student self-report data.

Lastly, when conducting a strategy method with student participants, the researcher needs to provide adequate feedback for purposes of program development or improvement. Due to the newness of this strategy and the setting and population with which it takes place, rarely can a researcher control every important variable and outcome, even with the best experimental design. To combat that, I made certain to use transparent and unbiased perceptions during each session through the duration of the project. I challenged the theories of representativeness, observation, influences, standardization, objectivity, stereotyping, and bias in the Teacher Observation Report above.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The overarching question of interest in this study was whether the *About2Be* strategy impacted student participants by helping then identify future roles and goals for their lives. Specifically, this research sought to learn about the impact of the *About2Be* strategy on participants' overall role/goal identification and academic engagement by asking (1) Were students who learned the *About2Be* strategy more likely to identify specific goals in each of the 3 goal categories of a worker, learner, and person? (2) Did the strategy influence participant self-expressions of engagement? (3) Did male and female students respond differently to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy in their written mission statements? (4) What were student perceptions related to the usability of the online platform? and (5) What did participants state needs to be adopted, adapted, or adjusted for this strategy to be beneficial for other post-secondary students? Information learned about these secondary questions will help inform decisions about specific adjustments for this strategy to be beneficial for other post-secondary students in the future.

Research Question 1 Findings

The first research question addressed in this study was: Were students who learned the *About2Be* strategy more likely to identify specific goals in each of the 3 goal categories of a worker, learner, and person? The strategy itself is organized around these three categories, so I wanted to learn whether students began thinking about their future using similar language. The hypothesis for this question was derived from a prior research study involving the *About2Be* strategy, where researchers found that more specific goals were identified after the strategy was learned. Given the new structure of the strategy, I wanted to see whether students did so when

using the new online platform. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used for this research question.

The quantitative analysis for question 1 involved a comparison of pre and post-mission statement scores of student participants. A mission statement scoring rubric found in Appendix B was used to capture each occurrence between student participants pre and post statements. More specifically, it tallied student comments in each of the categories of person, worker, and learner. Additionally, the mission statement scoring rubric utilized a point system designed to determine the specificity of statements for roles, goals, and action steps in each of the three categories. A paired *t*-test was used to determine if a statistically significant difference was found between students' pre and post mission statements related to the first research question. Table 5 reveals the pre and post mission statement results for the strategy group (*n*=24) and the control group (*n*=15). Table 6 reveals data from the pre and post mission statement results for the entire population (*n*=39).

Pre/Post Mission Statement Data

Mission statement data were collected pre and post strategy instruction in an effort to determine a difference in student participants thinking about future goals (see Table 5 for relevant data.). First, I calculated the difference between the pre and post scores $(di = yi - xi)$, where y was the post-mission statement score and x was the pre-mission statement score. Next, I calculated the mean difference ($\bar{d}$). Third I calculated the standard deviation of the differences, (*sd*), and used this to calculate the standard error of the mean difference, SE(d) = *sd*/square root of n. Next, I calculate the *t*-statistic, which is given by *t*=d/SE(d). This statistic follows a *t*-distribution with *n*-1 degrees of freedom. The degrees of freedom are determined as 23 (*n*-1).

Table 5

Pre and Post Mission Statement Results Using the T-Test for Strategy and Control Group

Participants

One-Sample Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation (s.d.)	Std. Error (SE)	Standard Error Mean (SEM)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	*p*
Strategy Group	24	2	8.56	0.35	5.37	23	0.28
Control Group	15	-1	3.33	0.085	-16.37	14	.469
All Student Participants	39	1	7.15	0.183	3.49	38	2.02

Table 6

One-Sample Test Using Strategy Group

	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Difference	24	0.2841	2	0.4736	3.5264

This indicates that 23 numbers in the data set have the freedom to vary as long as the mean remains 2. Last, I calculated that the p-value for this paired t-test to be 0.2841, using the 95% confidence interval (0.05) (see Table 6). The formula used was:

2+- (0.2841 x 5.3729) = 2+- 1.5264 = (3.5264, 0.4736).

Given the results depicted in Table 5, the difference in scores is not statistically significant. I can be 95% sure that out of the sample size of 25 students, only between 1 and 3 students will be within the population parameter. For the data provided, the p-value (0.2841) is not less than the significance level (0.05), which also indicates that these results are not statistically significant. Comparably, the 95% confidence interval [3.5264, 0.4736] does include the null hypothesis mean of 2; however, no statistically significant difference exists. Therefore, analysis of the pre and post mission statements reveals that the strategy did not make a statistically significant difference. Statistically speaking, student mission statements were no more goal-oriented before the 5-week intervention. This strategy demonstrates the statistical effect for students on the margins.

The same process was utilized to determine significance levels for the control group (n=15) and the entire student population that participated in the strategy (n=39). For the control group, the degrees of freedom were determined as 14 (n-1), indicating that 14 numbers in the data set have the freedom to vary as long as the mean remains -1. The calculated p-value for this t-test was .469, using the 95% confidence interval (0.05).

For the entire student population, the degrees of freedom were determined as 38 (n-1), indicating that 38 numbers in the data set have the freedom to vary as long as the mean remains 1. Last, using the tables of t-distribution to compare my value for t to the tn-1 distribution, I

calculated that the p-value for this paired *t*-test will be 2.0244, using the 95% confidence interval (0.05) (see Table 7). The formula used was:1+- (2.024 x 3.496) = 1+- 7.075 = (6.075, 8.075).

This confirms that the difference in scores is not statistically significant. We can be 95% sure that out of the sample size of 39 students, only between 6 and 8 students will be within the population parameter. For our example, the P value (2.0244) is not less than the significance level (0.05), which also indicates that these results are not statistically significant. Similarly, our 95% confidence interval [6.075, 8.075] does not include the null hypothesis mean of 1, and we draw the same conclusion. Therefore, the pre and post mission statements did not reveal that the strategy made a statistically significant difference.

Research Question 1 Findings

Using a qualitative approach to discover results from research question 1, major themes were pulled and counted based on the student participants' mission statement responses. The themes were divided among the major categories of learner, worker, and person. In the learner category, the themes that emerged were graduation, grade point average (GPA), specific major, and graduate school or advanced degree. In the worker category, themes consisted of success statements, general career statements, specific career statements, and finances and money. In the person category, themes were travel, family/marriage/children, religion/spiritual, specific "be like" statements, character statements, healthy living, and social.

Using a qualitative approach, each mission statement was analyzed and categorized into ideation units or themes and coded, based on student statements. During the initial review phase, I determined key ideas and categories that emerged from the data and developed working definitions of each one. Then, together with the two other rubric scorers, we reached a consensus about themes that seemed to accurately represent the content of the

Table 7

One-Sample Test using Total Population

	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Difference	38	2.0244	1	6.075	8.075

participant mission statements and further refined those themes. Once the themes were finalized, I determined how to best define, summarize, and represent the data according to the agreed-upon themes.

During the review phase, after reading the statements, comparisons to the original list of defined categories of learner, worker, and person were evaluated as to whether the categories adequately represented the data. I provided feedback to the first reviewers, and together along with the two reviewers reached consensus for the themes. Then, the mission statements were coded by hand. The results of the themes centered around statements about graduation, careers, finances/money, family/marriage/children, and specific "be like" statements such as *"I want to be like my mom or dad."* The themes aligned with each of the categories of person, worker, and learner utilized in the *About2Be* goal setting strategy. In the next two tables, the theme percentages of statements mentioned are identified for the strategy group (see Table 8) and the control group (see Table 9).

In the learner category for student participants in the strategy group, over half of the students (56%) mentioned plans for a specific major such as *"history," "business,"* or *"studying abroad."* Secondly, about a quarter of the students (23%) mentioned wanting to go to graduate school or achieve an advanced degree by attending *"law school," "medical school,"* or a *"military academy (West Point)."*

In the worker category, almost half of the students (42%) included specific career statements (e.g., becoming a *"meteorologist," "doctor," "lawyer," "dentist," or "teacher"*). The second most utilized theme in the worker category (25%) was coded as "success statements," such as articulating a desire to *"be successful," "have a good job,"* and/or *"get a good job."*

82

Table 8

Strategy Group Mission Statement Themes by Category (Learner, Worker, Person) N=24

(24 X 2=48)

Theme	Example Statements	Percentage
Category: Learner		
Graduation	Graduate from college, graduate in 4-5 years	21% (10/48)
Grade Point Average (GPA)	Increase my GPA, get a 2.7 GPA, be more studious, get assignments completed and turned in	15% (7/48)
Specific Major	History Degree, Business Degree, Study abroad	56% (27/48)
Graduate School or Advanced Degree	Law School, Medical School, Dental School, WestPoint	23% (11/48)
Category: Worker		
Success Statements	Be successful, have a good job, get a good job	25% (12/48)
General Career Statements	Help people, role model, work outside my comfort zone	13% (6/48)
Specific Career Statements	Meteorologist, Doctor, Lawyer, Dentist, Teacher, Entrepreneur, Nurse, Military	42% (20/48)
Finances/Money	Support my family, make a 6 figure income, have a lot of money	4% (2/48)
Category: Person		
Travel	Travel the world	13% (6/48)
Family/Marriage/ Children	Have a family, have children, get married, be a wife/husband	38% (18/48)

Table 8 (Continued)

Theme	Example Statements	Percentage
Religion/Spiritual	Get closer to God, walk in faith	4% (2/48)
Specific "Be Like" statements	Be like my mom/dad, be kind, be a good person, be happy, be better, do good	46% (22/48)
Character Statements	Have more confidence, integrity, honesty, generous, positive, focused, motivated	31% (15/48)
Healthy Living	Exercise more, eat healthy, be healthy, have a nice home	4% (2/48)
Social	Be more approachable, make new friends, have more friends, social interactions	4% (2/48)

Note. Each student wrote a pre and post-mission statement, therefore the percentage is out of 48 statements, rounded to the nearest percentage.

Table 9

Control Group Mission Statement Themes by Category (Learner, Worker, Person) N=15

(15 X 2=30)

Theme	Example Statements	Percentage
Category: Learner		
Graduation	Graduate from college, graduate in 4-5 years	30% (9/30)
Grade Point Average (GPA)	Increase my GPA, get a 2.7 GPA, be more studious, get assignments completed and turned in	7% (2/30)
Specific Major	History Degree, Business Degree, Study abroad	40% (12/30)
Graduate School or Advanced Degree	Law School, Medical School, Dental School, WestPoint	50% (15/30)
Category: Worker		
Success Statements	Be successful, have success	24% (7/30)
General Career Statements	Help people, role model, work outside my comfort zone, own business, have a good job, get a good job	63% (19/30)
Specific Career Statements	Meteorologist, Doctor, Lawyer, Dentist, Teacher, Entrepreneur, Nurse, Military	57% (17/30)
Finances/Money	Support my family, make a 6-figure income, have a lot of money	20% (6/30)
Category: Person		
Travel	Travel the world	10% (3/30)
Family/Marriage/ Children	Have a family, have children, get married, be a wife/husband, take care of my mom	37% (11/30)
Religion/Spiritual	Get closer to God, walk in faith	0% (0/30)

Table 9 (continued)

Theme	Example Statements	Percentage
Specific "Be Like" statements	Be like my mom/dad, be kind, be a good person, be happy, be better, do good	34% (10/30)
Character Statements	Have more confidence, integrity, honesty, generous, positive, focused, motivated	17% (5/30)
Healthy Living	Exercise more, eat healthy, be healthy, have a nice home	0% (0/30)
Social	Be more approachable, make new friends, have more friends, social interactions	7% (2/30)

Note. Each student wrote a pre and post-mission statement, therefore the percentage is out of 30 statements, rounded to the nearest percentage.

Finally, in the person category, forty-six percent (46%) of participants in the strategy group made comments pertaining to specific "be like" statements, such as: *"I want to be like my mom," "I strive to be kind," "I want to be happy," "I want to do good."*

The content of statements in the control group varied from the strategy group participants' statements. Data revealed in the learner category that half of the student participants (50%) mentioned graduate school and/or earning an advanced degree in *"law school," "medical school,"* and/or *"dental school."* The next most frequently included type of statement (at 40%) was the identification of a specific major in college such as *"history"* or *"business."*

In the worker category, the control group included statements that fell into the category of General Career Statements (63%). In this category, students stated most that they wanted to *"help people," "be a role model," "work outside my comfort zone,"* and *"get a good job."* The next highest percentage (at 57%) was the identification of specific career statements such as *"meteorologist," "doctor," "lawyer," "dentist,"* etc.

Lastly, for the control group, in the person category, thirty-seven percent (37%) of students stated that they wanted to have a family and get married. These statements included *"be a wife/husband," "take care of my mom," "have children,"* etc. The second highest percentage in this category was specific "be like" statements (at 34%) which included *"be like my mom," "be happy,"* and *"be better."*

Research Question 2 Findings

A descriptive approach was used to help determine results for research question 2 - Did the strategy influence participant self-expressions of engagement? The Teacher Observation Report was used for each class (4 sections), during each class meeting (total of 5 sessions for

each section) (see Table 10). A tick mark was recorded every five minutes for observed

behavior, for a total of 50 minutes for each class meeting. Table 11 was used to report the data.

The highest result, based on all four course sections and five class meetings, indicated

that student participants used *"appropriate materials to complete activities"* 1,070 times over the

course of the strategy. The next noteworthy result was the *"interaction with a computer for*

completion of online activities," which indicated that students were engaged 1,065 times during

strategy instruction. Results significantly dropped for the next highest observed behavior of *"use*

of cell phone" at 159 instances. This was an undesirable behavior due to strategy activities not

requiring the use of a cell phone, but rather a computer; however, due to current social behaviors

of college students and the use of their phones, this result did not significantly affect the overall

engagement of the student participants, as it was a rare instance in which they used their cell

phones during instruction. The next notable result was *"communication with researcher"* (135

occurrences) and *"asks and answers questions"* (107 occurrences). For the researcher to include

this type of interaction in the data, the encounter between student and researcher would have

been more than a friendly "hello," but rather a communication exchange during instruction of the

About2Be curriculum materials. For example, one of the encounters that was recorded for data

purposes was a communication exchange when the researcher asked a student to share their

strengths from the strengths post-card activity. These behaviors were similar given the nature of

the strategy and engagement toward the instructor (researcher) and within the classroom. Other

behaviors that had below 100 occurrences were *"communication with peers,"* (59) *"students did*

not use appropriate materials to complete activities," (35) *"regular instructor spoke to class,"*

(10) *"students late for class,"* (7) and *"students left class during instruction"* (0).

Table 10

Teacher Observation Checklist: Student Engagement

Time in minutes	Behavior Observation Definition	Number of times behavior occurred over the course of 5 class meetings for 4 sections
Communication with peers	Students communicated verbally with peers	59
Communication with the researcher	Students communicated verbally or nonverbally with the researcher. Nonverbally may include head nodding when the researcher was speaking	135
Uses Cell Phone	Students used their cell phone during instruction	159
Asks/Answers Questions	Students asked or answered questions from the researcher or from other students (discussion)	107
Interaction with Computer for completion of online activities	Students interacted with their computer and the *About2Be* website to complete their online activities	1,065
Working on the computer but not for completion of online activities	Students used their computer but for use other than completing activities in the About2Be Curriculum (i.e. checking social media websites, etc.)	2
Students used appropriate materials to complete activities	Students used handouts (when applicable) or other resources to complete activities related to the *About2Be* curriculum, i.e., *About2Be* online website	1,070
Students did not use appropriate materials to complete activities	Students used other materials besides their computer to complete activities	35
Students Left Class during instruction	Students left class during instruction	0

Table 10 (continued)

Time in minutes	Behavior Observation Definition	Number of times behavior occurred over the course of 5 class meetings for 4 sections
Students Late for Class	Students arrived in class after the scheduled start time	7
Other observations	Other observations included the regular course instructor speaking to the student participants about course-related agenda items that did not include *About2Be* curriculum instruction information. These occurred at the beginning or the end of the class.	10

Table 11

Strategy Group Mission Statement Themes by Gender (Male, Female) N=24 (24 X 2=48)

Theme	Example Statements	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Category: Learner			
Graduation	Graduate from college, graduate in 4-5 years	8% 4/48	13% 6/48
Grade Point Average (GPA)	Increase my GPA, get a 2.7 GPA, be more studious, get assignments completed and turned in	2% 1/48	8% 4/48
Specific Major	History Degree, Business Degree, Study abroad	19% 9/48	34% 16/48
Graduate School or Advanced Degree	Law School, Medical School, Dental School, WestPoint	13% 6/48	13% 6/48
Category: Worker			
Success Statements	Be successful, have success	15% 7/48	6% 3/48
General Career Statements	Help people, role model, work outside my comfort zone, own business, have a good job, get a good job	8% 4/48	6% 3/48
Specific Career Statements	Meteorologist, Doctor, Lawyer, Dentist, Teacher, Entrepreneur, Nurse, Military	15% 7/48	35% 17/48
Finances/Money	Support my family, make a 6-figure income, have a lot of money	2% 1/48	0% 0/48
Category: Person			
Travel	Travel the world	2% 1/48	8% 4/48
Family/Marriage/ Children	Have a family, have children, get married, be a wife/husband, take care of my mom	8% 4/48	29% 14/48

Table 11 (continued)

Theme	Example Statements	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Religion/Spiritual	Get closer to God, walk in faith	0% 0/48	4% 2/48
Specific "Be Like" statements	Be like my mom/dad, be kind, be a good person, be happy, be better, do good	15% 7/48	27% 13/48
Character Statements	Have more confidence, integrity, honesty, generous, positive, focused, motivated	21% 10/48	25% 12/48
Healthy Living	Exercise more, eat healthy, be healthy, have a nice home	0% 0/48	2% 1/48
Social	Be more approachable, make new friends, have more friends, social interactions	0% 0/48	2% 1/48

Note. Each student wrote a pre and post-mission statement, therefore the percentage is out of 48 statements, rounded to the nearest percentage.

Although future studies will be needed to validate this specific Teacher Observation Report, prior research with a similar measure by Maxwell (2001) supports this type of measure as a genuine source of information for recording and reporting student observations of learning outcomes in education settings.

Overall, given the quantitative nature of these data, results indicate that students favored engagement during instruction using appropriate materials and answered and asked questions for clarity when needed. However, even though results were favorable using the Teacher Observation Report for engagement during strategy instruction, these data do not conclude that students' overall academic engagement was influenced in general in their other college courses. To measure that outcome, data would need to be collected for a longer period of time outside the confines of the strategy instruction of the *About2Be* curriculum. Observation data do point to positive interactions among students and between the researcher and students. These data will help inform revisions for the next iteration of the strategy (see Figure 4).

Qualitative data were collected for question 2 (Did the strategy influence participant self-expressions of engagement?) using a focus group to provide context and insights for the quantitative data collected on the observation protocol.

Focus Group Questions

The focus group questions used for qualitative data collection consisted of the following:

1. What was your overall impression of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?

2. What would you change/not change about the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?

3. What was your favorite activity? Least favorite?

4. Did the *About2Be* strategy influence your overall academic engagement?

5. Any other comments/concerns about the strategy?
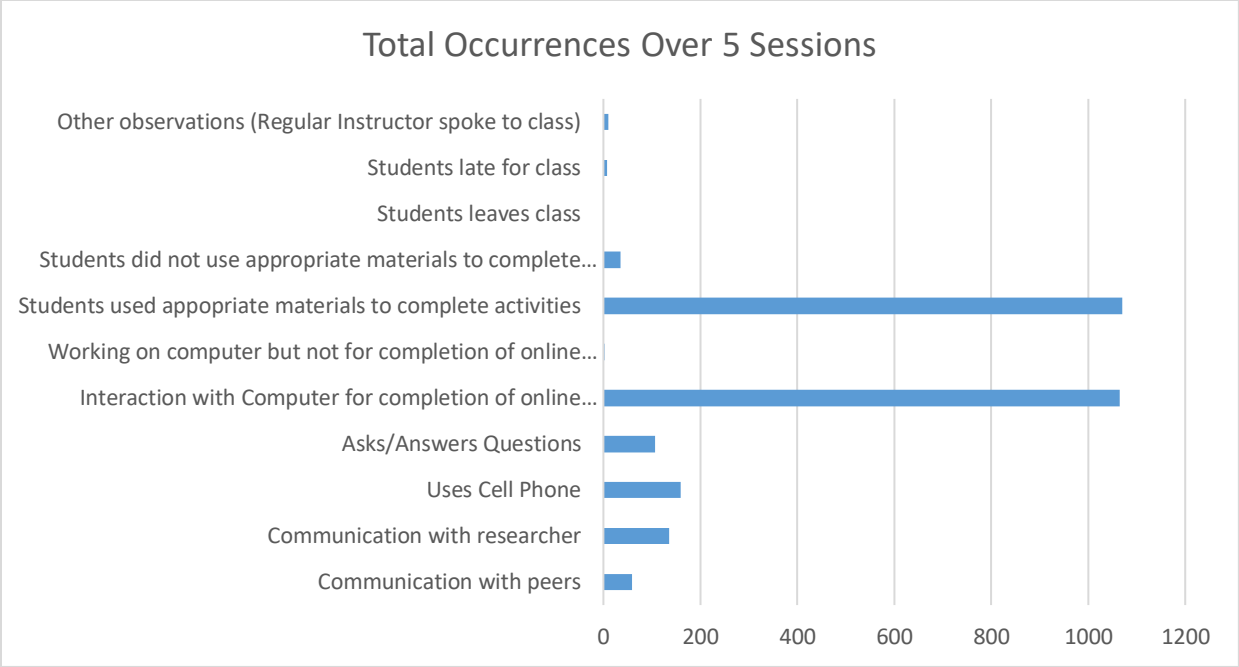
Figure 4. Total behavior occurrences over 5 sessions.

Student participant responses supported the observation data and further indicated favorable results toward student engagement. For example, students made comments such as "*I definitely realized that I need to manage my time better and prioritize my school work before other things that are less important.*" And *".... I came into this class feeling discouraged about school and college because the first semester was a huge change for me and more overwhelming then I realized at the moment... I'm excited to see where my future takes me and for my next years of growing up and getting my degree.*" Additional results for focus group questions are provided for Research Question four.

Research Question 3 Findings

Question 3 asked, Did male and female students respond differently to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy in their written mission statements? This question addressed language differences between gender (male, female). These data were analyzed descriptively. Percentages were calculated based on the number of occurrences of themes in male and female mission statements. Percentages were derived based on recorded themes compared to the total number of male and female student participants based on tallies of occurrences of each theme in male and female mission statements as compared to the total number of males and females in the study. Student data were divided among gender (male, female) and percentage occurrences were determined. Table 11 depicts the qualitative data split between comments from male and female students. In the learner category, the biggest split between percentages was in the specific major theme (M 19%, F 34%). Females from the strategy group were more likely to make statements about specific majors than males, but each made comments that aligned with the graduate school or advanced degree theme at the same percentage (13%). In the worker category, males (15%) were more likely than females (6%) to make statements about success. Yet, females (35%) were

more likely than males (15%) to make specific career statements. In the person category, women (29%) were more likely than males (8%) to make statements about family/marriage/children. Additionally, females (27%) were more likely than males (15%) to make specific *"be like"* statements.

Research Question 4 and 5 Findings

Question 4 asks, What were student perceptions related to the usability of the online platform? Question 5 asks, What did participants state needs to be adopted, adapted, or adjusted for this strategy to be beneficial for other post-secondary students? As indicated in Figure 5, of the students who participated in the *About2Be* strategy via the online platform, 69% indicated that the overall website was very easy to learn and use. In terms of navigation and basic understanding, 74% indicated it was easy to navigate and understand. In terms of changes that were needed, students indicated minor observances such as *"allowing students to create their own passwords," "easier upload of images," "more design features; such as color and other esthetic visual elements,"* and *"a prompt that informs users when their work has been saved."* Additionally, 56% of students indicated that the pace in which the strategy was taught was a *"good"* pace, meaning it was not too fast or too slow. Overall, the most favorable portion of the strategy was the graphic tree activity, where 33% of students indicated that they liked it the most. In contrast, 33% indicated that the pre-mission statement and the current-self collage were their least favorite activities.

Thirty-six percent of students indicated that the *About2Be* strategy helped them think about and set goals for life *during* and *after* college. Finally, 39% of students indicated that they felt strongly that the *About2Be* strategy helped motivate them to be successful, and furthermore,

96

Usability of Online Platform for *About2Be* Strategy	1 (Not Very)	2	3	4	5 (Very)
Overall ease of learning and use of the online platform	0	3%	0	28%	69%
Ease of Navigation	0	3%	0	23%	74%
Easy to understand	0	0	8%	18%	74%
Pacing of Strategy	1 (too fast or slow)	2	3	4	5 (perfect speed)
Pacing too fast or slow	0	5%	13%	26%	56%
Activities	1 (Not Very)	2	3	4	5 (Very)
Overall difficulty of the goal setting strategy	69%	18%	8%	3%	3%
Favorite Activity	1 (Not Very)	2	3	4	5 (Very)
Pre-Mission Statement	33%	10%	23%	15%	10%
Strengths Postcard	31%	10%	23%	18%	10%
Current Selves Collage	33%	5%	15%	15%	23%
Graphic Tree Organizer	23%	10%	18%	10%	33%
Future Selves Collage	28%	5%	18%	15%	26%
Goal Setting/Action Steps	26%	10%	26%	13%	18%
Post-Mission Statement	23%	10%	23%	21%	15%
Goal Setting & Action Plans	1 (Not Very)	2	3	4	5 (Very)
How well did *About2Be* help you set goals and think about life *during* college?	5%	3%	8%	41%	36%
How well did *About2Be* help you set goals and think about life *after* college?	5%	3%	15%	33%	36%
Motivation	1 (Not Very)	2	3	4	5 (Very)
How well do you think the *About2Be* strategy motivated you to be successful?	8%	0	15%	39%	31%
Are there any behaviors that you now want to change so you can be more motivated to achieve success?	5%	3%	15%	33%	36%

Figure 5. Percentage results for student usability survey.

36% felt they wanted to change certain behaviors that might make them more motivated to achieve success.

For example, in terms of academics, students indicated that they wanted to *"work hard on everything," "do better in class," "improve work-ethic and habits," "go to class more,"* and *"study and prepare for tests."* They also had personal motivation goals to *"form better relationships"* and *"become more driven."*

A focus group was conducted with 20 of the student participants at the end of the semester. During this interview, students shared answers to the following questions:

1. What was your overall impression of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?

2. What would you change/not change about the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?

3. What was your favorite activity? Least favorite?

4. Did the *About2Be* strategy influence your overall academic engagement?

5. Any other comments/concerns about the strategy?

In accordance with question one (What was your overall impression of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?), student responses were positive in nature. They stated the strategy was *"put together well," "organized,"* and *"easily accessible."* For question two (What would you change/not change about the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?), students shared a few suggestions. First, regarding the appearance of the website, students wanted *"more vibrant colors," "a message that appears when you have saved some of your work,"* and *"to be able to upload your own profile picture."*

Additional changes were suggested regarding the way the strategy was taught. For example, students stated that *"class participation was not great,"* and if there was a way for the instructor to *"get students to talk,"* then they felt like the discussions would have been better. In

response to question three (What was your favorite activity? Least favorite?), students shared that the writing of their goals and action steps was their favorite activity. They also liked the collages, which gave them a "*break from typing*" and allowed them an "*opportunity to make the activity personal.*"

The students' least favorite activity was the pre-mission statements. The reason for this was "*it was hard to write the pre-mission statement because we weren't really sure what to say because we had just begun with the strategy.*" During the strategy implementation of the mission statements, my observations yielded that students "*dreaded*" writing the pre-mission statement and often wanted me to provide them with additional examples or ideas because they had either never written a statement or didn't know what to write about themselves.

In response to question four (Did the *About2Be* strategy influence your overall engagement?), one student shared "*I am very happy I participated in About2Be … and it made me even more excited and hopeful for the future. I am very confident and happy now knowing that the goal I have set out for myself is very possible.*" Another student stated "…*after finishing everything in the About2Be curriculum I was motivated to make everything that I wrote down come true. I know that things don't just come to people like that, so I am now more willing to work for what I want and make my dreams come true.*" There were many statements similar to these, which supports the theory that this strategy does influence academic engagement for some who participate.

In response to question 5 (Any other comments/concerns about the strategy?), the students shared that they really liked how the website allowed them to "*visualize*" their future, as well as "create *collages with their own personal pictures.*" They also stated that they felt like "*the instructor provided the perfect amount of information which allowed them enough examples*

where they could still make their own statements without needing too much assistance." Last, regarding the third question, students shared that the amount of information helped them not *"overthink"* their responses, giving them *"freedom to just write what they were thinking and feeling."*

Possible Selves Questionnaire

This qualitative measure was used to determine the stage at which a student has thought about and/or set goals for the upcoming year, and more specifically as a pre-test measure to determine the level at which students were thinking about their future selves before the *About2Be* goal setting strategy was administered. The assessment is broken into categories focusing on expected and feared "selves" in different areas of a person's life. For example, the assessment asked students to think about their Next Year Possible Selves in achievement, interpersonal relationships, and personality traits. It is used to try and determine which students may need to move forward with a goal-setting strategy based on their statements. Results indicated similar statements to the student participants' pre and post mission statements. For example, in the Expected Selves category of Achievement in School, students made statements such as, *"have a good job," "study abroad," "bring up my GPA,"* and *"live in an apartment next year."* For the Feared Selves category of Achievement in School, students made statements such as, *"dropping out," "getting in trouble,"* and *"moving back home."* Additional results in the Interpersonal Relationship category of Expected Selves, students mentioned, *"living with my boyfriend," "being a good mom,"* and *"being a good friend."* In the Feared Selves category of Interpersonal Relationships, students said they feared *"moving back home,"* and *"having negative people in their lives."* In the Personality Traits category of Expected Selves, students made statements like *"being independent,"* and *"helpful to others."* In the Feared Selves category, they mentioned

100

"depression," "self-doubt," and "bad habits." Overall, this questionnaire was similar to results found in the mission statements but may be valuable in the future in determining which students are in need of receiving the strategy and those that already have a good grasp on goal setting and their future selves (see Table 12).

Summary of Findings

This project centered on the focus of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy and its implementation with students experiencing postsecondary academic difficulty. The overarching goals were to determine whether the strategy (1) made a difference in the way students verbalized goals for the future and (2) was presented in such a way that students found engaging and easy to use. The strategy utilized five-lessons with online activities and face-to-face instruction to help guide students to determine tangible goals and action steps in the areas of a person, worker, and learner. Based on the findings from qualitative data in this study, results indicate that the *About2Be* strategy has the potential to help students begin a pattern of planning and reflection they can use to persist and adjust as needed to make steady progress toward their college and long-term goals, but further refinement of curriculum materials and assessment materials is needed.

Research Questions

To answer the following research questions, this project implemented qualitative and quantitative measures:

1. Were students who learned the *About2Be* strategy more likely to identify specific goals in each of the 3 goal categories of a worker, learner, and person?

2. Did the strategy influence participant self-expressions of engagement?

Table 12

Student Statements of Next Year Possible Selves

Possible Selves	Categories	Examples of Possible Student Statements
Achievement/School-Expected Selves		
	Job/Career	in a good job, have a good job, a well-paying job, working at a store or Restaurant, in a particular career, earning an income
	Activities in College	Exec board of fraternity/sorority, more involved, studying abroad, playing basketball
	College Academics	Figuring out my major, back at ECU for sophomore year, on dean's list, higher GPA, applying to a nursing program
	Independent Living	Living in my apartment, living with my boyfriend
Achievement/School – Feared Selves		
	Job/Career	Being unemployed, not having a job
	Activities in College	Getting in trouble, going to jail, partying too much.
	College Academics	a college dropout, skipping class, GPA dropping, 8:00 AM classes, procrastinating
	Independent Living	Being home all the time, bad habits, drinking, doing drugs, sleep deprivation, living with my parents
Interpersonal Relationships – Expected Selves		
	Family	Living with my boyfriend, a great mother to my child, mutually supportive relationship
	Peers	Have friends, be a good friend

Table 12 (continued)

Possible Selves	Categories	Student Statements
Interpersonal Relationships – Feared Selves		
	Family	Having to move back in with my parents, leaning on my parents too much, being homesick, kicked out at home, being a bad mother
	Peers	Being without friends, negative people
Personality Traits – Expected Selves		
	Independence or Maturity	Independent, responsible, relieving stress, exercising, healthy
	Attitude	Happy, helpful to others
Personality Traits – Feared Selves Independence or Maturity		
	Independence or Maturity	Wasting time, playing video games all the time, not sleeping, letting my ADD beat me, depression, going back to the way I used to be, bad habits, staying in my comfort zone
	Attitude	Bad vibes, stress, self-doubt

3. Did male and female students respond differently to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy in their written mission statements?

4. What were student perceptions related to the usability of the online platform?

5. What did participants state needs to be adopted, adapted, or adjusted for this strategy to be beneficial for other post-secondary students?

In research question one, quantitative measures were used to determine results for a comparison of pre and post-mission statement scores of student participants. Results showed that these scores did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference between the pre/post mission statements. Observations and qualitative data suggested that the pre/post mission statements were useful activities in the strategy-training process. However, the results of this research will inform how the presentation, wording, and rubric are used to evaluate the mission statements, in order to help make the process more meaningful to students and sensitive to student learning in future implementations of the strategy.

In determining results for research question two, an instructor Observation Protocol and focus group questions were utilized as a qualitative approach to help determine whether student participants engagement was influenced during instruction and practice with the *About2Be* goal setting strategy. For those who participated in the strategy, results showed that, overall, students were engaged during instruction using appropriate materials and answered and asked questions for clarity when needed. Focus group responses also suggested favorable student engagement during the strategy instruction process.

Research question three addressed language and statement differences based on gender (male, female) collected in the pre/post mission statement. Results showed that in the learner category, females from the strategy group were more likely to make statements about specific

majors than males in the leaner category. In the worker category, males were more likely than females to make statements about success, yet females made more statements about specific career goals. In the person category, women were more likely than males to make statements about family/marriage/children and more likely to make "be like" statements.

Research question four addressed student perceptions related to the usability of the new online platform for the *About2Be* goal setting strategy, and research question 5 sought to determine what needed to be adopted, adapted, or adjusted for this strategy to be beneficial for future post-secondary students. Results were favorable to the electronic format using the Usability Survey measure and focus groups. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of student participants indicated the overall website was very easy to learn and use, and (74%) indicated the site was easy to navigate and understand. The revisions suggested by students related mostly to aesthetic improvements for the website. Approximately a third of the students reported that the *About2Be* strategy helped them think about and set goals for life during and after college, and many students indicated that they felt strongly that the *About2Be* strategy helped motivate them to be successful and to make positive behavior changes for the future.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This research project was part of a series of studies designed to inform the development of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy. This particular study focused on evaluating the program's impact on the engagement and achievement of probationary college students in the second semester of their freshman year. The results of this study will be used to plan the next iteration of a resource that will help college students in transition set goals and take proactive steps toward achieving those goals.

The *About2Be* strategy is grounded in the theory of Possible Selves and goal setting research and is being developed to help further a connection between goal setting and self-discovery in a valuable resource for postsecondary institutions or organizations. Providing opportunities for individuals to visualize future-oriented representations of themselves allows young adults to evaluate their current self in line with the idea of their future self and plan to engage behaviors that lead toward their goals (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). Goal setting theory is the concept that individuals who set goals are more likely to perform at higher levels than those who don't set goals (Friedman & Mandel, 2009; Latham & Locke, 1991; Lunenburg, 2011). In this study, the *About2Be* goal setting activities were designed to help students form connections among motivation, performance, and outcomes.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

An analysis of pre and post mission statements written by the students did not yield statistically significant differences in the number of comments in the categories of a worker, learner, and person. A more qualitative review of the mission statements did reveal some interesting patterns, and some student comments suggested that the strategy was a meaningful

activity for students. These results have implications for future iterations of (a) the intervention

materials themselves and (b) the measurement tools and processes to be used in future studies.

<div align="center">**Implications for Content and Design of the About2Be Strategy**</div>

Themes in Student Comments

The findings from this project and prior research depict themes in the students' voices

that align closely with goals and possible selves for students "specific major," "specific career,"

"family/marriage/children," and "be like" statements. Research on the self-concept and

regulation of behavior tells us that Possible Selves can serve as a channel between a person's

self-concept and their motivation (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Therefore, based on the students'

statements in this study, these findings do align with the research. It will be important in future

studies to find, create, and/or validate measures both qualitative and quantitative in nature to help

researchers capture important and hopefully significant data from student statements.

Engagement

The Teacher Observation report was used to assess student engagement and provided one

source of data from observations of student behaviors during strategy implementation. Results

indicated that students were engaged during instruction of the strategy as defined by the use of

appropriate materials, answering, and asking questions pertaining to the strategy. This type of

protocol is helpful in evaluating engagement during strategy instruction itself (Maxwell, 2001),

but it does not determine whether students overall academic engagement increased in other areas

of their college experience. For example, there is no way to know whether participating in the

About2Be goal setting strategy influenced a student's engagement and/or motivation in their

English or Psychology course. That said, prior research does suggest that students in

probationary academic situations, when directly taught strategic behaviors, can improve their performance in academic settings (Holzer et al., 2009; Reid et al., 2009; Richman et al., 2014).

Focus groups were also used to better understand student engagement with the *About2Be* strategy. During the focus groups, participants often responded with positive anecdotes about how "… *the strategy made them feel excited and hopeful for the future*…" For example, one student commented, "…*I was motivated to make everything I wrote down come true*…." These quotes bring psychological constructs that align with literature that suggest that motivation, goal commitment, and mattering are important when demonstrated by first-year college students (Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011; Upcraft et al., 2004). It is important to note that students are individuals who have different emotions, life issues, and thoughts about the importance of goals. These factors make it difficult to truly pinpoint engagement and motivation for struggling college students overall. Therefore, engagement and motivation are difficult areas to study and assess, and more research is needed to answer the difficult question of what motivates college students to be successful. This study alone was unable to do that, yet results do suggest that the strategy may be tapping into positive ideas of motivation through goal setting as a possible area of intervention.

Gender

The broad notion of Possible Selves has been applied to young adults to help create a better understanding of gender differences (Brown & Diekman, 2010; Buday et al., 2011; Fetterolf & Eagly, 2011; James et al., 2018; Lips, 2004). Mission Statement data in this study did suggest differences in the way male and female students thought about goal setting. For example, in the learner category, females made more statements than males about a specific college major, whereas males made more general sweeping statements. Similarly, in the category of worker,

males were more likely to make statements about *success,* while females made more specific *career goal* statements. In every instance relating to the person category, females made more statements regarding topics such as travel, family/marriage, religion, "be like" statements, character statements, healthy living, and social statements than males. While only a descriptive level of review for sub-group differences was appropriate in this study, a summary is provided in Table 12 for implications for future research and the use of the strategy.

Usability of Online Resource: *www.About2Be.me*

Research in a previous iteration of the strategy suggested that an online platform for *About2Be* would be beneficial for college students (James et al., 2018). The Possible Selves project on which the strategy is based included no online activities or resources, but instead utilized worksheets, handouts, and a student folder. Given today's marketplace for online resources and learning, and the need for college students to be able to access and modify their action plans throughout the college experience, we felt the development of a website would be a critical outlet for the strategy activities. We hoped that these online materials would help with the ease of learning and use, navigation, understanding, and pacing. Participants provided input about the usability of the online resource (*About2Be.me*) through responses to a survey at the conclusion of the project. The overall findings from the survey were positive. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of student participants thought the website was easy to use, and (74%) felt the website was easy to navigate and understand. Additionally, when students were asked if the strategy helped motivate them to be successful, (70%) selected either a 4 or 5 (very much) on a Likert scale. Sixty-nine percent (69%) indicated a 4 or 5 on a Likert scale identifying behaviors that they wanted to change to help them achieve success.

In past iterations of design for this study, online materials were favored as a means for delivery, learning, and participation of strategy activities as opposed to the former use of hard copy materials (James et al., 2018). Student comments not only reinforced the general need for an online model, but they also provided valuable and specific feedback that will help with future revisions to the aesthetic design elements of the program. These findings will be important in the further development of the *About2Be* website and online resources.

Students stated that changes to appearance, image quality, and messaging may help to influence engagement and usability during instruction. Specific suggestions that the students offered regarding color will potentially help brighten the site and make it more visually appealing. Students also suggested places for improvement with communication on the site. Examples included the request for confirmation messages to indicate when work had been saved and pop-up boxes to provide reasons why images did not upload to the site. These suggestions were minor in the overall big picture of the strategy and will be excellent edits for future strategy materials.

Implications for Studies with Future Iterations of About2Be

Both the clear and inconclusive findings of the project will inform plans for future studies in the iterative development process for *About2Be*. For example, the pre/post mission statement analysis was a key part of determining the impact of the strategy. While the lack of significant differences may indicate that the strategy did not have a significant impact on student planning for their future, it also may indicate the need for improvement of design and procedures related to the mission statement. For example, the rubric used provided more information about the specificity of statements but still did not measure a difference between pre and post. That said, the measure has been revised, and the quality and meaningfulness of information received as

110

improved. Additionally, during the next iteration of the project, I plan to revise the directions given to students. Some of the student responses read as if they were using the post-mission statement as an addition to the content of the previous mission statement, or within the context of the electronic portfolio, they had created. This not only did not serve to produce more detailed post-statements, it actually had the opposite result. A future study will give the students the opportunity to revise their pre-mission statement rather than starting from scratch.

While student perception data is helpful, it is difficult to develop or find measures sensitive enough to detect a change in such a large construct based on a very short-term intervention. Future studies will continue to explore dependent variables that can be assessed in the short term but that have also already been shown to correlate the long-term issues that *About2Be* seeks to address.

Study Limitations

While this research project proved to be a valuable learning experience, several limitations of the current study call for adjustments to be made for future iterations of this project. Specifically, future studies can address limitations in website design, data measures, criteria for student participants, and the potential length and implementation of the strategy. Additionally, it is important to consider that when working with first-year students in college transition, they have multiple opportunities to make decisions with long-term implications. It is only natural for students entering college to not have a clear understanding of what they want to "be when they grow up," and these years can be a time for them to explore and learn more about themselves. Research suggests that transformative learning is a time for exploring new roles, relationships, and activities (Mezirow, 2000). These transformative years can be an ideal opportunity for students to build patterns of reflection and decision making that can not only

inform a student's choices but also provide an opportunity for those choices to be examined and revisited as students learn and grow. This is an important consideration when conducting research with students at this point in their academic career.

Measures

As stated in Chapter 3 this strategy is relatively new, and scoring measures are still being refined to ensure they are designed and used in such a way to provide valid and reliable information about the overall impact of the strategy. Some of the measures used in this study were not sensitive enough to pick up on changes in 5 weeks, and others may provide more information is used long-term. For example, the Possible Selves Questionnaire provided useful information, but in its current form wasn't aligned enough with the research questions to be addressed here. In future studies, it will be valuable to have an instrument that helps us know where students are when they begin the goal setting process.

The Teacher Observation Report, while it revealed helpful information in the area of engagement, was administered by the researcher. This opened the possibility of researcher-held influences and bias. That was necessary for the time and resource constraints of this project, but this iteration enabled the researcher to test the usability and relevance of the items included on the protocol. Future projects will utilize a trained objective observer to collect observation data with a revised observation protocol based on what I learned with this study.

The qualitative data provided some of the most helpful information in this project, and findings were aligned with literature related to recording and reporting student demonstrations of learning outcomes (Maxwell, 2001). Though seen not necessarily as a limitation, the qualitative themes and insights will provide valuable information to inform the revision of both quantitative instruments and the structure of qualitative data collection in the future.

A rubric was used to evaluate the difference in pre and post mission statements to assess the impact and use of the strategy by participants. Mission statement rubric data for both pre and post statements were inconclusive during this stage of design. It has been challenging to develop an assignment description and rubric that are both sensitive enough to detect the impact of a strategy delivered in a short period of time but aligned enough with the goals of the project to be meaningful. Each student's mission statement is personal and individualized, yet the idea students have of themselves during the pre-mission statement activity is likely to change during the post-mission statement activity if the strategy has made an impact students' thinking about the future. The current measure was not sufficient to pick up on these differences. As this assessment is central to evaluating the impact of the intervention, the iterative development process being used is critical. This project yielded valuable information about ideas for revising the rubric and assignment description for another study. For example, analyzing the nature of student responses made through mission statements in this project will help to inform language to use when explaining to student participants what a mission statement requires at both the pre and post statement phases. The results from this round of implementation will help us in determining a more targeted approach to finding students strengths and interests that guide them toward success. What the qualitative review of both pre and post mission statement did yield was insight into potential ways of thinking for students who are experiencing early academic difficulty in the college setting, potential differences in sub-groups that could help inform development of an intervention that is inclusive to reach a wide variety of learners (e.g., considerations for Universal Design for Learning), and critical information about how to meet students where they are in the goal setting process and help them move forward.

Student Participants

The number of student participants who actually completed all of the activities in the study was a limitation of the project. While working on the study design, I chose 6 classes due to the number of students on each roster (roughly 20). During Session 1 of strategy implementation, only about 10 out of the 20 students were consistently attending each class, thus reducing the potential number of student participants available for consent. Once the students were presented the strategy overview and informed consent in Session 1, only about 8-10 students per class agreed to participate in the study. Of those, roughly half completed all of the assessments and activities required. Therefore, at the conclusion of the study, only 24 students actually participated in the strategy, completing all activities and assignments and 15 in the control group for a total of 39 participants. This was not the number that I had originally envisioned for the project. I was hoping to work with a larger sample size that had the potential to yield more significant results; however, that was not the reality of the situation when working with probationary college students at this time in their college career.

Given the nature of the content, students experiencing academic difficulty are an ideal group to target with this type of strategy, but the very nature of the population makes retaining participants difficult. In some respects, this was an ideal sample of students in terms of the nature of the population, but it was also a sample of convenience using existing courses for this group of students with restraints on the number of students who could be included.

Additionally, the probationary group of student participants in this study were likely shadowed by their past academic performances, and it is difficult to tease out where this one instructional strategy fits in the larger context of student experiences. Control theory may help explain this as it pinpoints a person's identity stability over time (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001).

114

During this project, students may have undergone an identity disruption during their previous semester and therefore were working to overcome their academic challenges. When situations like this occur, the student may try to verify to themselves that they are able/capable to repair the identity (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001). Goal setting and academic coaching, like what was intended in the *About2Be* strategy, may help to bring an intentional view of planning for college students. Thus, at times this probationary group were difficult to measure due to attendance issues and overall at-risk factors. Even with effective planning, there are many variables the researcher cannot control, which often creates barriers and unwanted issues while conducting a research study. This was a valuable learning experience in quasi-experimental research design in an effort to establish a cause-effect relationship between the strategy and student's engagement and goal setting efforts.

Another limitation which stemmed from student dropout rates and attendance was the consistency of strategy instruction. During the implementation of the strategy, on average there were 3-5 students absent during each class. This somewhat disrupted the flow of instruction. The design of the strategy is very sequential, and each activity builds upon a previous activity. Therefore, if students miss even one class, they have the potential to get off track with the pace of the strategy. Since several students missed multiple class sessions, it was difficult to collect data on those students and made the flow of teaching patchy at times. I spent a lot of time catching up with students who had missed the session prior to the one I was teaching, which took time away from other students who were present in each class. One out of five of the instructors made the *About2Be* curriculum activities mandatory for their students to complete (they were not mandated to participate in the research element of the project, but all students completed the activities for a grade in her course – see Chapter 3 for details about student informed consent).

This did help motivate some students (who wanted to pass the course) to reach out to me when they didn't understand something or if they missed an activity, thus fostering a positive interaction between the researcher and participant; however, it was difficult to plan accordingly and follow the curriculum when I knew I was going to have to make on-the-spot edits and changes to help those who had missed assignments.

In the future, it will be important to build moments for review into the curriculum to help students stay on track with each activity. It would have been difficult to do that in this situation due to the class time that was afforded (pre-determined 5 class sessions) to me from the course instructors. Asking them to allot any additional days or times may have created a disruption to what they had planned to cover after the strategy was completed. These challenges are to be expected in social science research held in authentic education settings and speaks to the valuable nature of multiple research projects used in an iterative design process for the development of effective classroom interventions. As we refine the curriculum resource and the evaluation measures, we will be able to implement the strategy with larger groups of students for longer periods of time.

Length and Implementation

One of the valuable pieces of information we learned that should be assessed in future studies is the overall length of time needed for the strategy for this setting and student population. Given the limited access to participants during this particular project, we had to measure relatively short-term outcomes. While those measures were selected based on previous correlation with long-term outcomes, the ultimate aims of the strategy are long-term. As found in earlier studies using Possible Selves, students who were tracked long-term showed an increase in graduation rates compared to those who did not receive the strategy (Hock et al., 2003). As the

116

last activity in the *About2Be* goal setting strategy, "How is the Journey," suggests, students are advised to visit their goals often and make modifications as their lives change over time. Assessing long-term impact was not possible in this particular study, but future research should include a longitudinal element monitoring a process where students alter their goals over time.

Additionally, a limitation that stemmed from the short nature of this study was the potential consequence of the researcher/instructor acting as a guest instructor and not the regular instructor for the course. In this instance, it was difficult to build a strong rapport with student participants since I was only with them for 5 class sessions. In this study setting, I did not have prior relationships with students like in previous studies involving *About2Be* and Possible Selves. I believe this impacted the ability for students to build trust and potentially limited the depth of information they felt comfortable sharing during the strategy activities. Lunenburg's model of Goal Setting Theory (2011) suggests 6 stages of how the goal setting relationship is formed relative to a person's Values, Emotions & Desires, Goals, Attention Effort Persistence, Behavior & Performance, and Outcomes (see Figure 3). In the *About2Be* curriculum timeline for this project, stages 1-3 (Values through Goals) are portrayed; however, stages 4-6 (Attention Effort Persistence through Outcomes) are not realized. Stage 4, Attention Effort Persistence, is presented in the final stage of the strategy, yet during this study, it was impossible to interact with the student participants past what Lunenburg (2011) suggests through Behavior & Performance and Outcomes. These final stages will be revealed as students journey through their college career and life accomplishing and/or not accomplishing their goals. This group of probationary college students was a valuable group to research, given their past experiences, yet given the nature of this dissertation, it is impossible to measure future long-term impacts of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy.

Another potential limitation of the short-term nature of the project is grounded in the idea that students change in college and undergo a process known as identity exploration during their late adolescence. During this time, students can often go through different phases of "trying-on" different personalities in an effort to explore ideas of love, work, and beliefs (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1994). Even when students claim to have a firm realization of their identity, research suggests that during college, students' commitments are often questioned (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001). During this study, there were multiple instances where this seemed to be at play. Some student participants were unsure about their goals in the areas of a person, worker, and learner, which affected their ability to look ahead and set tangible action steps. This also affected my ability as a researcher to show gains between students pre and post mission statements. Future research could be designed to determine whether and how the *About2Be* curriculum could be a useful resource for exploring this phenomenon more fully.

Implications for Research and Practice

The research on goal setting for college students is limited, but what we do know is that when goal setting occurs, it is believed to influence students to perform at higher levels (Friedman & Mandel, 2009; Latham & Locke, 1991; Lunenburg, 2011). This study did not yield significant findings of the impact of the current iteration of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy but did help to provide valuable insight for future iterations of the strategy design and for the design of future research. For example, further refinement of measures focused on the areas of motivation and engagement will be important for assessing short-term outcomes. These are critical factors in helping students be successful in college (Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011; Upcraft et al., 2004). Additional measures that are sensitive enough to yield quantitative, yet meaningful, results will be important for higher education leaders to find strategies that are

efficient and effective in the higher education setting. That is true for this particular intervention and many others.

Goal setting is an integral part of a college student's life yet taking time to sit down and actually write goals is something many don't take the time to do. This strategy helped students think about their lives in three different areas, as worker, learner, and person. It is often difficult for college students to think about their personal lives 5, 10, or 15 years from now. This strategy provided an opportunity for students to do that in an intentional and structured way using activities, discussions, and assessments. In future iterations of the curriculum, it will be important that programs, counselors, academic coaches, and others work closely with students through their journey of goal setting beyond the conclusion of the strategy activities suggested in this study.

The life of a college student today is busier than ever, and educators in public college settings are working with increasingly more students and fewer resources (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & Dupont, 2009). Therefore, it will be valuable to learn through future iterations of research which students truly need to work through all of the assessments and activities involved in a curriculum resource such as *About2Be* curriculum. In each of the designs of this curriculum, there have been students who score very high on pre-assessments, thus yielding post assessments that show no gain. As with any educational resource, it will be important not only to determine how to best design and deliver the curriculum, but also the student populations that can benefit the most.

In future practice, I believe the focus should be on implementing *About2Be* with students who are first identified to have minimal experience and knowledge with setting goals and then taking deliberate steps to work with those students through the decision-making process from

their first year of college through graduation. Coaching techniques and strategies similar to the *About2Be* goal setting strategy have proven to be beneficial in helping students visualize and internalize positive and negative assessments of themselves (Berzonsky, 1998). This strategy has the potential to be used as a coaching tool, and portions of the curriculum can be implemented with students at different stages of their college experience.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the right setting, student population, and time frame, research with *About2Be* has the potential to become more robust if the students are engaged with the strategy and research team for a longer period of time, rather than for just one semester or even one year. Moreover, helping students revisit and revise their short and long-term goals may have implications for retention and graduation rates that can often be challenging for colleges and universities to pinpoint (James et al., 2018). Additionally, having a clearer understanding of college student's strengths and values may lead researchers to an understanding of what to measure when trying to evaluate what motivates them to be successful.

Measuring motivation, engagement, and overall success for college students is difficult and takes time. Future research is needed to continue to find, develop, and implement measures that are both valid and reliable for this specific student population in order for educators and stakeholders to move forward in answering difficult questions. The iterative design process has enabled us to continuously improve the scoring rubric being used for the pre/post mission statements. Each time the information gained is more meaningful, and as the instrument is becoming more refined we are able to see elements of the curriculum and assignment itself that need revision.

Upon completion of this dissertation, new findings aimed at improving the *About2Be* goal setting strategy have begun. New measures in the area of self-determination, grit, and self-efficacy are being evaluated based on validity and fidelity and may be implemented as soon as the Fall of 2019. Additionally, I am seeking to find or develop an indicator of which students find the strategy most beneficial so that I can match the strategy, (or specific activities within the strategy) with those who would gain the most. This strategy may not be a "one size fits all" type of curriculum. There may be deficits and gains that students exhibit in different areas of their life where certain activities in this strategy may help.

Another implementation to consider for future research will be testing the strategy at other institutions or conducting multi-campus research with similar populations. This may help researchers in determining more of what first-year students are thinking in regard to goal setting and academic engagement/achievement. College student retention is something that administrators and campus personnel are constantly working towards, and if goal setting is a way to provide students a look into their future potential, then this strategy could have a large impact on retaining students from year one to year two. I am currently working with student support providers at one other North Carolina institution to begin this process.

Conclusion

Given the recent findings from this project, I'm hopeful that we will be able to enhance the *About2Be o*nline website and curriculum to reflect a design that is more aesthetically pleasing in such a way that is informed by student voices after using the strategy. Additionally, we will seek funding to potentially offer the strategy completely online and possibly in a self-paced, asynchronous format, increasing the flexibility with which college professionals can incorporate it into student support routines.

Qualitative measures used for this study, (pre/post mission statements and the specific goals and actions step lists) provide important insights and thinking patterns for students during their first couple of semesters in college. These ideas are beneficial in helping researchers understand how to meet students where they are during the development of the *About2Be* strategy. Additionally, similar types of goal setting interventions like *About2Be* may help provide valuable resources for students to use in an effort to not only reach their college goals but their life goals.

As a researcher who is passionate about working with first-year college students and developing support systems and interventions to help them be successful in the college setting, it will be important to partner with other colleges and universities across the country to work together to provide support for these students in the future. As an author of the curriculum and each of the cycles of research, I feel there is still a great deal to learn about college students and goal setting. I'm willing and excited to continue with the iterative design process and gradual scale-up of research until we have a well-designed resource that is engaging for college students in authentic education settings and produces empirically validated results.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · **www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb**

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: Morgan James

CC: Morgan James

Date: 2/6/2018

Re: UMCIRB 17-002645
        Strategy of Evaluation of the About2Be Goal Setting Program for Probationary College Students

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 1/29/2018 to 1/28/2019. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
COAD Instructor Informational Flyer	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
COI Summary	COI Disclosure Form
Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form	COI Disclosure Form
Hope Scale	Surveys and Questionnaires
Informed Consent About2Be	Consent Forms
Interview/Focus Group Questions	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Student Usability Survey	Surveys and Questionnaires

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: MISSION STATEMENT SCORING RUBRIC

Directions: Please give one tic mark in each box for each mention of a role/goal or action step. Each check mark = 1 point.

Objectives	Worker	Learner	Person	Total
A. ROLES/GOALS: Student identifies themselves as filling multiple roles (e.g., athlete, professional, family member, friend, etc.) Student identifies specific goals related to their roles				
B. ACTION STEPS: Student identifies action steps necessary for achieving goals				

C. Put one point in each category addressed above by the student (maximum 3 points for this section)

_____ Worker _____ Learner _____ Person

D. Determine the Specificity of Roles/Goals in the Mission Statement

Vague/General Statement	Specific Statement	Very Specific Statement
"good education"	"college degree"	"degree in biology"
"learn all I can"	"knowledgeable college grad"	"an expert in microbiology"
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
1 point each	2 points each	3 points each

Total Points: A+B+C+D = _____

APPENDIX C: PRE MISSION STATEMENT
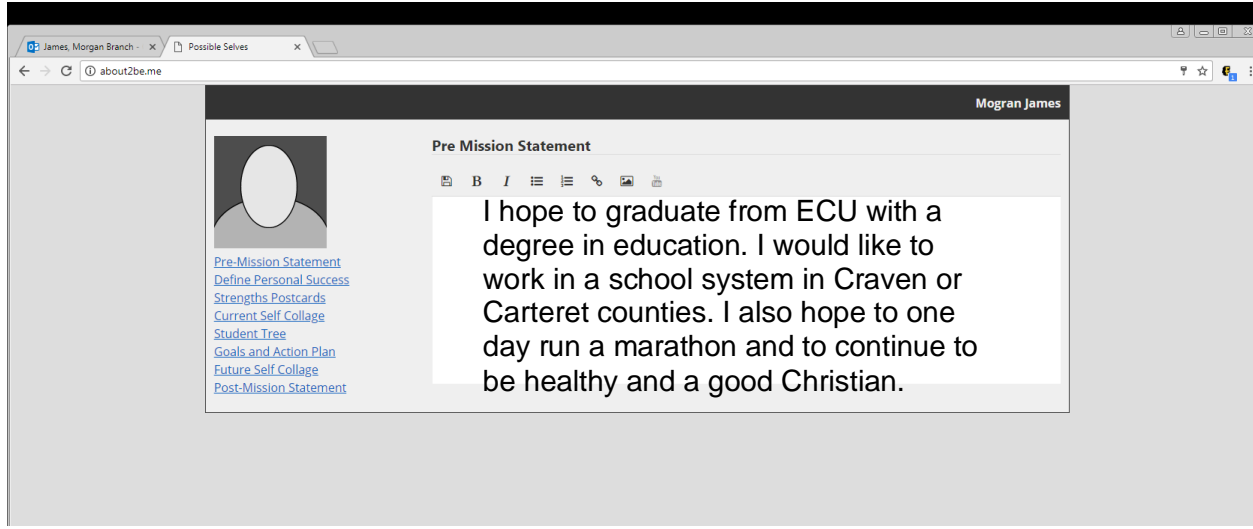
Personal Mission Statement Prompt

A personal mission statement includes ideas about what one would like to be, to do, and to be like. Usually, mission statements are short (25-50 words), concise, and express the values one currently holds.
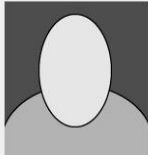
APPENDIX D: CURRENT SELF COLLAGE

APPENDIX E: STRENGTHS POSTCARD

APPENDIX F: GRAPHIC TREE ORGANIZER
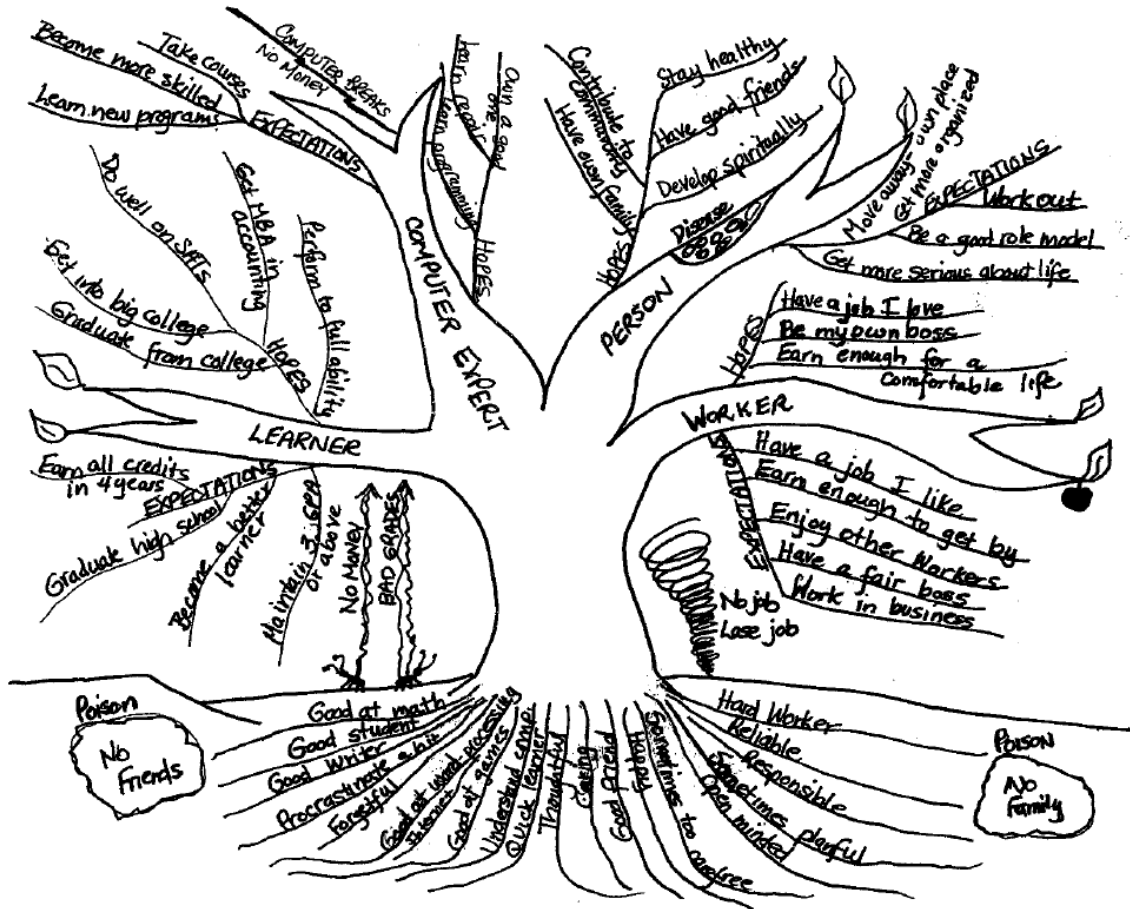
APPENDIX G: GOALS AND ACTION PLAN

Mogran James

Goals and Action Plan

Person Goals

Add Goal

Worker Goals

Add Goal

Learner Goals

Add Goal

Pre-Mission Statement
Define Personal Success
Strengths Postcards
Current Self Collage
Student Tree
Goals and Action Plan
Future Self Collage
Post-Mission Statement

---

and-action-plan

Mogran James

Goals and Action Plan

Person Goals

Stay Healthy and Physically fit

Action Step	With Whom?	Due Date
Run 3 x a week and eat good foods	Me, Peers	May 26th 2020

Add Goal

Worker Goals

Get a job in school system after graduation

Action Step	With Whom?	Due Date
Have good GPA upon graduation	Me, Professors	May 5th 2021

Add Goal

Learner Goals

Graduate from college with education degree

Action Step	With Whom?	Due Date
Good GPA	Me, Professors, Advisors, Parents, Peers	May 5th 2021

Add Goal

Pre-Mission Statement
Define Personal Success
Strengths Postcards
Current Self Collage
Student Tree
Goals and Action Plan
Future Self Collage
Post-Mission Statement

APPENDIX H: FUTURE SELF COLLAGE
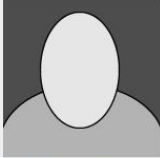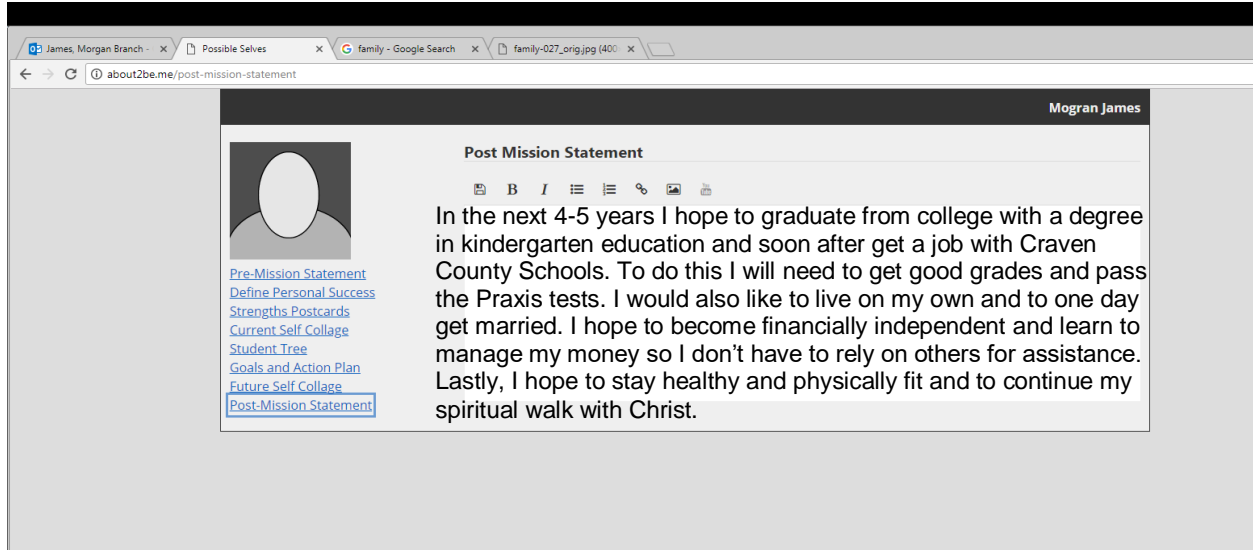
Mogran James

Future Self Collage

Pre-Mission Statement
Define Personal Success
Strengths Postcards
Current Self Collage
Student Tree
Goals and Action Plan
Future Self Collage
Post-Mission Statement

My future self collage depicts what I hope and expect to reach for in the future. I strive to have a career in education, to travel, have a beautiful place to live, and a loving family.

APPENDIX I: POST MISSION STATEMENT

Mogran James

Post Mission Statement

Pre-Mission Statement
Define Personal Success
Strengths Postcards
Current Self Collage
Student Tree
Goals and Action Plan
Future Self Collage
Post-Mission Statement

In the next 4-5 years I hope to graduate from college with a degree in kindergarten education and soon after get a job with Craven County Schools. To do this I will need to get good grades and pass the Praxis tests. I would also like to live on my own and to one day get married. I hope to become financially independent and learn to manage my money so I don't have to rely on others for assistance. Lastly, I hope to stay healthy and physically fit and to continue my spiritual walk with Christ.

APPENDIX J: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What was your overall impression of the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?

2. What would you change/not change about the *About2Be* goal setting strategy?

3. What was your favorite activity? Least favorite?

4. Did the *About2Be* strategy influence your overall academic engagement?

5. Any other comments/concerns about the strategy?

APPENDIX K: STRENGTH-FINDING INVENTORIES

Holland Code Career Test
- https://www.truity.com/test/holland-code-career-test

Holland Test of 6 different categories of occupations based on the RAISEC
- http://personality-testing.info/tests/RIASEC/

Onet interest Profiler
- https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip

APPENDIX L: POSSIBLE SELVES QUESTIONNAIRE

Who will you be next year? Each of us has some image or picture of what we will be like and what we want to avoid being like in the future. Think about next year -- imagine what you'll be like, and what you'll be doing next year.

- In the lines below, write what you expect you will be like and what you expect to be doing next year.
- In the space next to each expected goal, mark NO (X) if you are not currently working on that goal or doing something about that expectation and mark YES (X) if you are currently doing something to get to that expectation or goal.
- For each expected goal that you marked YES, use the space to the right to write what you are doing this year to attain that goal. Use the first space for the first expected goal, the second space for the second expected goal and so on.

Next year, I expect to be	Am I am doing something to be that way		If yes, What I am doing now to be that way next year
	NO	YES	
(P1) _____			(s1)_____
(P2) _____			(s2)_____
(P3) _____			(s3)_____
(P4) _____			(s4)_____

In addition to expectations and expected goals, we all have images or pictures of what we don't want to be like; what we don't want to do or want to avoid being. First, think a minute about ways you would **not** like to be next year -- t*hings you are concerned about or want to avoid being like.*

Next year, I want to avoid	Am I doing something to avoid this		If yes, What I am doing now to avoid being that way next year
	NO	YES	
(P5) _____			(s5)_____
(P6) _____			(s6)_____
(P7) _____			(s7)_____
(P8) _____			(s8)_____

- Write those concerns or selves to-be-avoided in the lines below.

- In the space next to each concern or to-be-avoided self, mark NO (X) if you are not currently working on avoiding that concern or to-be-avoided self and mark YES (X) if you are currently doing something <u>so this will not happen</u> next year.
- For each concern or to-be-avoided self that you marked YES, use the space at the end of each line to write <u>what you are doing this year to reduce the chances that this will describe you next year</u>. Use the first space for the first concern, the second space for the second concern and so on.

APPENDIX M: TEACHER OBSERVATION CHECKLIST: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Recorded behaviors were observed every 5 minutes. Each tick mark represents one behavior observed from a student participant.

Section 101-105 – Time of Class: _____ Date: _____

Time in minutes	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
Communication with peers										
Communication with the researcher										
Uses Cell Phone										
Asks/Answers Questions										
Interaction with Computer for completion of online activities										
Working on the computer but not for completion of online activities										
Students used appropriate materials to complete activities										
Students did not use appropriate materials to complete activities										
Students Leave Class										

Students Late for Class											
Other observations:											

APPENDIX N: STUDENT USABILITY SURVEY

Student Usability Survey

Student: _____Date: _____

Directions: Please read the following survey. There are no right or wrong answers. I would like your honest opinion. Thank you!

	Not Very				Very
USABILITY OF ONLINE WEBSITE					
How easy was it for you to learn and use the online *About2Be* goal setting strategy?	1	2	3	4	5
Was the *About2Be* website easy to navigate?	1	2	3	4	5
Was the *About2Be* website easy to understand?	1	2	3	4	5
What was your favorite thing about the website? Least favorite?					
What would you change about the *About2Be* strategy to make it easier?					
PACING					
Was the pace or speed of instruction too fast?	1	2	3	4	5
What would make the *About2Be* strategy easier to understand?					
ACTIVITIES	1	2	3	4	5
How difficult was the strategy as a whole?	1	2	3	4	5
Were there any activities (listed below) that were too hard or difficult to understand or complete?					
Pre-Mission Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Strengths Post Cards	1	2	3	4	5
Current Selves Collage	1	2	3	4	5
Graphic Tree	1	2	3	4	5
Future Selves Collage	1	2	3	4	5
Goal Setting/Action Steps	1	2	3	4	5
Post-Mission Statement	1	2	3	4	5
What would make the activities easier to understand?					

What was your favorite activity?					
Pre-Mission Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Strengths Post Cards	1	2	3	4	5
Current Selves Collage	1	2	3	4	5
Graphic Tree	1	2	3	4	5
Future Selves Collage	1	2	3	4	5
Goal Setting/Action Steps	1	2	3	4	5
Post-Mission Statement	1	2	3	4	5

LEARNABILITY

What would have helped you learn more or better?

GOAL SETTING & ACTION PLANS

How well did the *About2Be* strategy help you set goals and think about life **during** college?	1	2	3	4	5
How well did the *About2Be* strategy help you set goals and think about life **after** college?	1	2	3	4	5

MOTIVATION

How well do you think the *About2Be* strategy motivated you to be successful?	1	2	3	4	5
Are there any behaviors that you now want to change so you can be more motivated to achieve success?	1	2	3	4	5

What are some things you want to change to achieve success?

Adapted from: Seffah, A., Donyaee, M., Kline, R., & Padda, H. (2006). Usability measurement and metrics: A consolidated model. *Software quarterly journal, 14,* 159-178.