To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Molly B. Freeman entitled "The Impact of Locus of Control and Achievement of Freshmen Students in a Special Program." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Educational Psychology.

Luther M. Kindall

Luther M. Kindall, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

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Vice Provost
and Dean of the Graduate School

THE IMPACT OF LOCUS OF CONTROL AND ACHIEVEMENT OF FRESHMEN STUDENTS IN A SPECIAL PROGRAM

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Molly B. Freeman

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To Rebecca and John P. Freeman

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I would like to thank Skip, Ruth, Missy, Greg, and the rest of the group in the Liberal Arts Advising Center for their loving support and sense of humor. I extend my appreciation to Margaret Garrett, my typist, for her willingness with this project. And to Dr. M. B. Sledjeski, my gratitude is felt for the perspective.

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the effects of a freshmen special program at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Students participating in the Volunteer Community special program were compared to a group of students not participating in the Volunteer Community. The two groups were compared on locus of control and achievement determined by grade point average.

Data on the two variables were collected. A significant difference was found relative to grade point average. The Volunteer Community demonstrated a higher grade point average than the non volunteer group. The results yielded no significant difference on the locus of control variable.

The information obtained in the study needs to be used in conjunction with a larger pool of information before conclusive results can be established. This study does provide a seed for future research.

INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me,
   Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
   for my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
   I have no wincel nor cried aloud:
Under the bludgeonings of chance
   My head is bloody, but unbowid.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
   Looms but the Horror of the Shade,
And yet the meanace of the years
   Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
   How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
   I am the captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since the early sixties, more emphasis has been placed upon interfusing academic objectives with living situations on college campuses. The concept of merging the two sectors enhances "growth in the social, cultural, physical, spiritual, and intellectual" areas of students' lives (Adams, 1974, p. 89). Residence halls have changed the traditional arrangements to include not only coeducational facilities, but classroom space. Adams further stated that "good students fail in college not due to lack of academic ability, but because they lacked the ability to cope with the transition from home and the high school to college and the residence hall" (p. 89). One outgrowth of this marriage has been the creation of special programs for college students. In addition to creating living-learning environments, these special programs include other components such as specifically planned activities. With the present concern of college administrators regarding student attrition, these special programs are viewed as a viable avenue toward retention. Most studies on special programs at the college level focus upon one distinct feature (e.g. a mentor/mentee relationship). There is a paucity of studies, however, that examine locus of control and achievement relative to freshmen in a special program. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore whether student participation in a special program influenced achievement as defined by cumulative grade point average and locus of control.

The null hypotheses of this study are:

1. There are no significant differences in grade point averages between Freshmen participating in the Volunteer Community and Freshmen Liberal Arts students not participating in the Volunteer Community.

2. There are no significant differences in locus of control between freshmen participating in the Volunteer Community and Freshmen Liberal Arts students not participating in the Volunteer Community.

Importance of this Study

Since the formation of the Volunteer Community informal feedback of a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature has been collected from time to time from program participants. Though grade point averages are reviewed periodically during the school year, no comparisons have been made between the Volunteer Community and a pool of similar students who have not been a part of the Volunteer Community.

Because of the concern by university administrators with the issue of retention, the first year of the collegiate experience is being closely scrutinized. Ensuring success of the freshman year is a goal of the Volunteer Community. The decisions which result in expansion or modification of the program can be made based upon data obtained. The data presented in this study could be helpful in making these adjustments but should be included in a much larger pool of information.

Unique to the study is the component of locus of control. These data could add an important dimension which has not been discussed

by the directors of the Volunteer Community. Information derived from these data might suggest that other aspects of the freshman experience are just as crucial as academic performance. Developmental skills such as self-awareness and decision making should be examined during that first year experience. Looking at these areas could be critical in setting the stage for a successful collegiate career.

In summary, if the results of this study are used in conjunction with other qualitative and quantitative data on the Volunteer Community, the study will contribute in two important ways to the freshman year at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville: (1) it will provide some of the first quantitative data on the Volunteer Community; (2) it will point out the significance of considering developmental skills as well as academic skills in the assessment of program effectiveness.

Definition of Terms

Volunteer Community (VC). This is a freshman special program developed in 1980 by Dean Harry Jacobson and housed in the College of Liberal Arts. The three criteria used in determining eligibility to the program are: (1) students must live outside a fifty mile radius of Knoxville, Tennessee; (2) students must be undecided in a major; (3) students cannot have a roommate selected upon entrance to the university; (4) students volunteered for the program.

Non Volunteer Community (NVC). Those freshmen students not involved in the special program. The three criteria for this group are: (1) students can live outside the fifty mile radius of Knoxville,

Tennessee; (2) students must be undecided in a major; (3) students cannot have selected a roommate upon entrance to the university; (4) students did not volunteer for the program.

Locus of Control. "The concept of locus of control was developed out of social learning theory wherein behavior is based on reinforcement and expectancies" (Friday, 1986). "Persons described as having an internal locus of control believe that reinforcements are contingent upon their own ability and effort. Externals, on the other hand, believe that reinforcements are controlled by external forces, such as luck, chance, or fate" (Breen, Prociuk, 1974).

Grade Point Average. "A student's grade point average is obtained by dividing the number of quality points the student has accumulated at UTK by the number of quarter hours attempted at UTK" (The University of Tennessee, Knoxville 1986-88 Catalog, p. 17).

Achievement as Defined by Grade Point Average. The cumulative grade point average obtained through the registrar's office in May 1988. The cumulative grade point average represents three quarters.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature will be divided into three sections: locus of control as a construct, locus of control and achievement, and freshmen special programs. Focusing upon the locus of control as a construct pertaining to the Rotter Internal-External Scale maintains the breadth of the definition in perspective for the purposes of this study. This researcher found little information in the present literature using the combination of variables of locus of control and achievement by grade point average of freshmen students participating in a special program.

Locus of Control as a Construct

Conceived from the social learning theory, locus of control is based upon those behaviors which are contingent upon reinforcements and expectancies. Locus of control lies upon a continuum of the perception of one's control over the outcome of life events. Individuals feeling that they have control over what happens in their lives are said to have an internal locus of control. External locus of control refers to individuals who feel life's events are controlled by fate, luck, or chance.

In surveying information on locus of control, Lefcourt (1976) described the term freedom of movement in his approach to the location of the locus of control construct. Freedom of movement is a "generalized

expectancy of success" which results from one's ability to self-remember outcomes of behavior (Lefcourt, 1976). Perceived control is defined as a "generalized expectancy for internal, as opposed to external, control of reinforcements" (Lefcourt, 1976). Both aforementioned terms are abstractions based upon specific expectancy behaviors or outcomes. Freedom of movement concerns the element of success. The generalized expectancy of internal control versus external control reinforcement involves a causal association of success and failure. Krovetz (1974) emphasized the value of the relationship in anticipating outcomes of the future. Early investigations of a person's perception of control regarding outcomes of success or failure provide a seed to the powerful locus of control construct.

Rotter (1966) defined the concept of locus of control in this way:

> When a reinforcement is perceived by the subject as following some action of his own but not being entirely contingent upon his action, then, in our culture, it is typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful other, or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. When the event is interpreted in this way, by an individual, we have labeled this a belief in external control. If the person perceived that the event is contingent upon his own behavior his own relativity is a belief in internal control (p. 1).

Concurrent with presentation of the monograph comes the 23-item Rotter's I-E scale, the most commonly used scale for assessing locus of control. In reviewing the research on assessment methods, Lefcourt (1981) acknowledged the success of this "unidimensional" scale. The

author discussed the "unfortunate consequence" of using this scale: viewing locus of control as a trait or typology. Characterizing an individual by this upsatic scale could easily be misinterpreted when assessing perceived control (Lefcourt, 1981). In their article on attitudes and components of locus of control, Levenson and Mahler (1975) urged researchers to continue looking at assessment using a multidimensional scale. Other theorists support this concern of developing scales which focus upon subscales or other dimensions. Reid and Wave (1974) took a look at the Fatalism factor describing luck, fate, or fortune and the social system control factor dealing with social and political influence. Tyler, Gatz, and Keenan (1979) argued that while Levenson and Collins insist on the difficulties of the forced-choice format of the Rotter I-E Scale, they miss a central point. "A person's choices in life are made in a type of forced choice context and involve the situational dispositional process" (Tyler, Gatz, and Keenan, 1979). These researchers go on to state that an individual may feel that things are controlled by chance while simultaneously feeling that one does possess control over one's own fate. This person must act upon one or the other depending upon one's belief about the extent control one has over ensuring success of one's plans. Other components of the Rotter I-E Scale have been explored in terms of "belief in a difficult world, a just world, a predictable world, and a politically responsive world" (Collins, 1974). Choosing a minuscale number of investigations supporting inconsistencies of research on locus of control, there exist an underlying more impressive

construct which continues to stimulate research of the term as a personality variable.

Locus of Control and Achievement

Lefcourt (1974) addressed the lack of evidence in the research to support a direct relationship between locus and achievement. Research done by Friday (1984) also suggests findings on locus of control in accordance with achievement to be inconclusive. Becoming involved in the pursuit of achievement is determined by the locus of control. Krovetz (1974) reported that internals tend to attribute their performance to skill, whereas externals tend to attribute their performance to chance. Edwards and Walters (1981) stated that the more externally oriented student is as capable and may perform as well as the more internally oriented student, but, the externally oriented student will attribute his performance to luck rather than ability or effort. Nowicki and Duke (1974) revealed in their research that locus of control and achievement for adults involving the Rotter I-E Scale has been less than impressive. Their research went on to explore the differences of externality and internality according to sex as reflected by academic achievement. When subjects were administered the scale designed by Nowicki, females were found to be more external and males were found to be more internal as relating to achievement.

Procuik and Breen (1974) examined the relationship of locus of control and two academic related variables: study habits and attitudes, and college academic performance. They stated, "Persons described

as internals believe that reinforcements are contingent upon their own ability and effort. Externals, on the other hand, believe that reinforcements are controlled by external forces, such as powerful others, luck, chance, or fate."

In most of the research on locus of control and achievement, perceived locus of control has been viewed as a unidimensional construct. Procuik and Breen (1974) defined perceived control as an individual "generalized expectancy" for reinforcement in being seen as either internal or external. These researchers feel this view is too simplistic. These findings are consistent with Levenson's investigations of locus of control and achievement. Furthermore, Procuik and Breen supported Levenson's differentiations of external control into dimensions of powerful others and chance. The Rotter I-E Scale has been extensively used in predicting academic performance but has yielded very generalized attitudes toward the relationship between locus of control and achievement (Powell, 1971). Research suggests that people who achieve do exhibit a degree of belief in their own ability or skill to determine the result of their efforts (Rotter, 1966).

Freshmen Special Programs

Nowack and Hanson (1985) stated that freshmen participating in programs couched within a residence hall achieved significantly higher grade point averages. Studies on special features in residence halls have similar results pertaining to academic achievement in the first year of college (Nuller and Brickman, 1982). Student living which

provides an interpersonal environment fosters greater scholastic achievement (Schrager, 1986). This finding is supported by the research on the theory of achievement motivation for freshmen students (DeBoer, 1983). Learning to assume responsibility is related to a first year student's ability to identify her living situation as a reference point or "anchor" (Chickering, 1974). Close associations with other students affect the personal development of the first year student (Brown, 1974).

Academic achievement is the most researched topic in higher education (Astin, 1974). Other development of skills through special planning can be more relevant to later life than the cognitive skills obtained in the classroom (Astin). Furthermore, Astin emphasized the importance of devising ways to stimulate academics and the residential experience for college students. A study of retention strategies elaborates the importance of an investment of programming, not just for the sole purpose of retention, but also for nurturing development (Dunphy, Miller, Woodruff, and Nelson, 1978). Walsh (1985) stated that students are more satisfied with their college experience, have higher grades, and experience a more healthy self-concept when participating in a student development program. Brown (1974) discussed a greater openness and acceptance of new ideas, but no greater gains in GPA are reflected in those students participating in special programs.

Terenzini and Pascarella (1980) found that increased frequency of student/faculty contact improved the student's academic, personal, and intellectual growth. Also, in this same study, more informal

contact between students and faculty showed increased academic performance during the freshman year. Miller and Brickman (1982) stated that the relationship between faculty and students personalizes services available to students. Minoring programs such as the one at Canisius College prove that the "caving attitude by faculty was ranked highest among factors relating to retention and academic performance" (Dunphy, Miller, Woodruff, and Nelson, 1987, p. 41). Other research indicates that college seminars and specific freshmen courses taught by faculty members make a difference in the first year.

Hoffman and Wartel (1980) determined that students value a special living area which includes special programs presented by faculty members and a designated place to study conducive to helping and learning from each other. This study indicates a slight effect on retention, but yields no significance in GPA. Pascarella and Terenzini (1981) reported more out-of-class contact with faculty when students live in a special program unit. Meaningful activities between students and faculty play another essential factor associated with special programs (Brown, 1974). A pilot program at Indiana University reported faculty members sharing a meal with students, participating in social activities, and engaging in a limited amount of tutoring (Kuh, Schuh, and Thomas, 1985).

In general, the Freshmen special programs are most conducive to improved attitudes toward the students' first year educational experience. The literature review exposes no positive correlation of participation in the program and an improved or exceptional grade point average.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study was to determine whether student participation in a special program influenced achievement as defined by a grade point average and locus of control. This chapter presents a description of the Volunteer Community, the special program. Included in this chapter is a description of the procedures used in this study.

Subjects

The subject population of the study consisted of 120 freshmen students at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. None of the students in this study were transfer students. All research for the study was approved by the Office of Compliance on Research Participation prior to the distribution of the Rotter I-E Scale. Of the 82 members participating in the Volunteer Community, 62 were given the instrument. Sixty of these students completed the scale. Of this number, 28 were male and 32 were female. The students in the Volunteer Community came from outside a fifty mile radius of Knoxville, Tennessee. The members live on one floor of a residence hall, take English Composition and University Studies together, and participate in a thoughtfully structured activities program. The students participated in the activities during the school term which were organized by the director of the program and include going to the theater, football games, and skating. Members of the Volunteer Community are advised through the

Liberal Arts Advising Center and have access to a pool of resource faculty and staff members. The Volunteer Community was formed on strictly a voluntary basis.

The participants in the non-volunteer group could live outside a 50 mile radius of Knoxville, Tennessee, could have selected a roommate before enrollment at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, but were undecided in their major. The students in this control group did not necessarily take either English Composition or University Studies together. Students in this group lived in a number of residence halls on campus. One hundred Rotter I-E Scales were handed out during a three week period and 64 were returned. Of these 64 scales, 60 were chosen to match the number of students participating in the experimental group. In the control group, 38 females and 22 males filled out the scale.

Procedures

The Rotter Internal-External (I-E) Scale was given to students during a floor meeting in the residence hall approximately six weeks prior to the completion of the school year. The students took the scale to their rooms to complete. A pizza party was held three weeks later in order to collect the instruments. The researcher visited the hall floor on two other occasions after the pizza party, at three week intervals, to finish collecting the scales.

A control group of students comprising the non-volunteer group was selected as advising appointments were scheduled in the Liberal

Arts Advising Center during the weeks of preregistration for Fall Semester. Pre-registration occurs approximately six weeks prior to the completion of the school year in the Spring quarter. The Rotter I-E Scales were given to students to complete during the waiting period to be advised. During the last week of pre-registration, appointments are made on a walk-in basis only. Some of the instruments were collected during this walk-in time.

The Mann Whitney procedure was used to obtain a μ statistic for this study. This non-parametric test was selected because there was no random assignment of subjects to the experimental and control groups. The Mann Whitney was also chosen because the μ statistic makes no assumption of the distribution of data, i.e., it makes no difference that the data are not normally distributed. The Mann Whitney ranks the entire data set by individual order of increasing size of the variable.

The cumulative grade point averages for both groups were obtained through the registrar's office at the end of Spring Quarter.

The Static-Group Comparison (Campbell and Stanley, 1966) design was used in this study because the participants involved were intact groups--groups that already existed. Examples of the use of this design include "the comparison of students in classes given speedreading training versus those not given it; the comparison of those who heard a certain TV program with those who did not, etc." (Campbell and Stanley, p. 12.)

The strengths of the Static-Group Comparison in this particular study are the factors of history, testing, instrumentation, and regression.

According to Campbell and Stanley (1966), maturation, in this design, indicates a "source of concern." The factors of age and maturity naturally occur; therefore, the effects of these factors have little to do with the results of participation in the program. Selection and mortality are weaknesses and these two factors have particular relevance to the study. The factor of selection is a critical element in this design because the groups might have differed without having participated in the special program. Matching the two groups based upon characteristics other than being freshmen could be misleading as recruitment to participate in the special program is voluntary. The other critical variable is mortality defined as the "selective drop-out of persons from the groups" (Campbell and Stanley, 1966). If both groups had initially been identical, the "selective drop-out of persons from one of the groups now makes a difference." Interaction of Selection and Maturation, etc., and Interaction of Selection and X "are areas of weakness in this design." The Interaction of Testing, Reactive Arrangement, and Multiple-X Interference are irrelevant factors to this design.

Instrument

The assessment tool used in this study was the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale.

Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale I-E Scale) (Rotter, 1966)

Rotter's I-E Scale is a 29-item scale in which the subject chooses a statement reflecting agreement or disagreement. There are six filler items and the score for the scale is the number of items scored in the direction of externality. The possible range is 0-23.

The I-E Scale measures the degree to which people feel that control of their successes and failures depends on chance determined factors (external locus of control) or the degree to which they attribute their successes or failures to personally controlled factors (internal locus of control).

"Rotter (1966) refers to the scale as an additive one because the items represent an attempt to sample I-E beliefs across a range of situations, such as interpersonal, school, government, work, and politics, and may be considered a generalized expectancy scale" (Friday, 1983, p. 38).

Internal consistency coefficients reported by Rotter are estimated to range from .65 to .79. Rotter felt that since one could not compare the items on a scale of this type, it would be difficult to achieve a high estimate of internal consistency. The test-retest reliability reported by Rotter varies from .49 to .83 depending on the length of time between testing (Friday, 1984).

The Rotter I-E Scale was selected for this project because it is the most often used assessment in locus of control studies, and has been validated primarily on a college population. This researcher recognizes the limitations of using a scale lacking dimension.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of this study using the Rotter I-E Scale and achievement as determined by grade point average will be presented in this chapter.

The Mann-Whitney μ test was used to determine whether there were any significant differences between the Volunteer Community and the non volunteer group on locus of control and achievement. A significance level of .05 was selected for this study.

When large samples of data are used (n_2 larger than 20), the SPSS program uses the following formula to arrive at a μ score:

$$\mu = n_1 n_2 + \frac{n_1 (n_1 + 1)}{2} - R_1$$

When the above formula was applied to the locus of control data, the resulting μ score was 1661.5

The μ score was then converted to a Z score, using the following formula:

$$Z = \frac{\mu - \frac{n_1 n_2}{2}}{\sqrt{\frac{(n_1 - n_2)(n_1 + n_2 + 1)}{12}}}$$

The Z score was -0.7296. This score was not significant at the .05 level. Thus, the hypothesis on locus of control was accepted.

When the previously mentioned formula to obtain a μ score was applied to the grade point average data, the resulting μ score was 1391.0.

The μ score was then converted to a Z score, using the earlier mentioned formula. The Z score was -2.1468. This score was significant at the .05 level. Thus the hypothesis on grade point average was rejected

Figures 1 and 2 show histograms indicating scores on the Rotter I.E. Scale for both groups. As stated earlier in this chapter, no statistical significance exists between the groups on locus of control. Thirty-five percent of the Volunteer Community scored from 8 to 10 on the Rotter I-E Scale. Twenty-seven percent of the non volunteer group scored from 8 to 10 on the same scale. There appears to be more homogeneity with the Volunteer Community around the median score of 10.

Reviewing Figures 3 and 4, the histograms show the differences in grade point averages between both groups. Eighty-five percent of the Volunteer Community made 2.0 or above on a 4.0 scale as opposed to the non volunteer group in which 76 percent made 2.0 or above. Approximately 12 percent of the non volunteer group scored less than 1.5 while none of the Volunteer Community group scored below a 1.5.

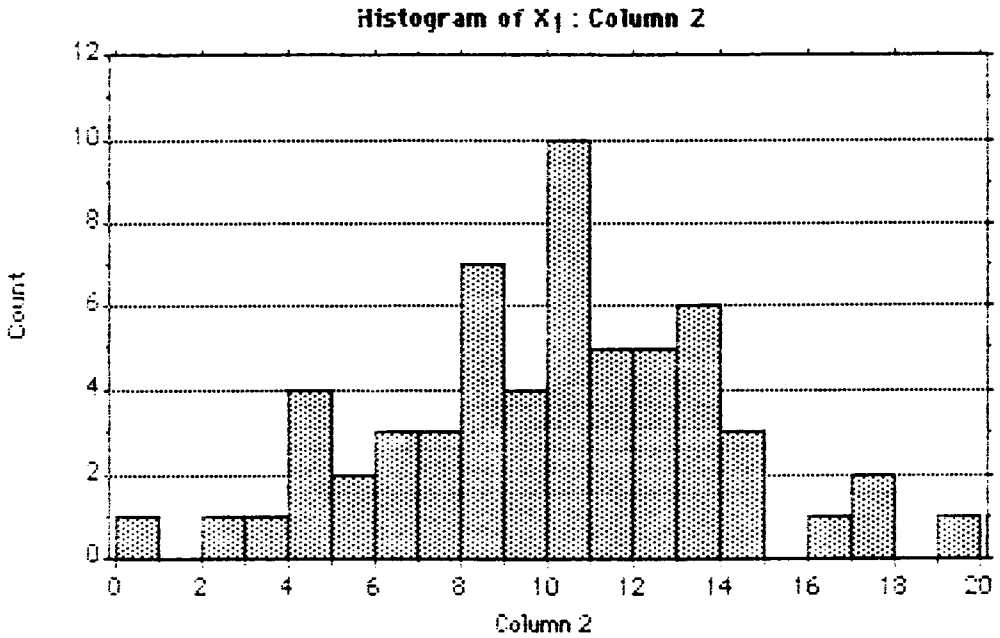

Figure 1. Volunteer Community: Rotter I-E Scale Histogram

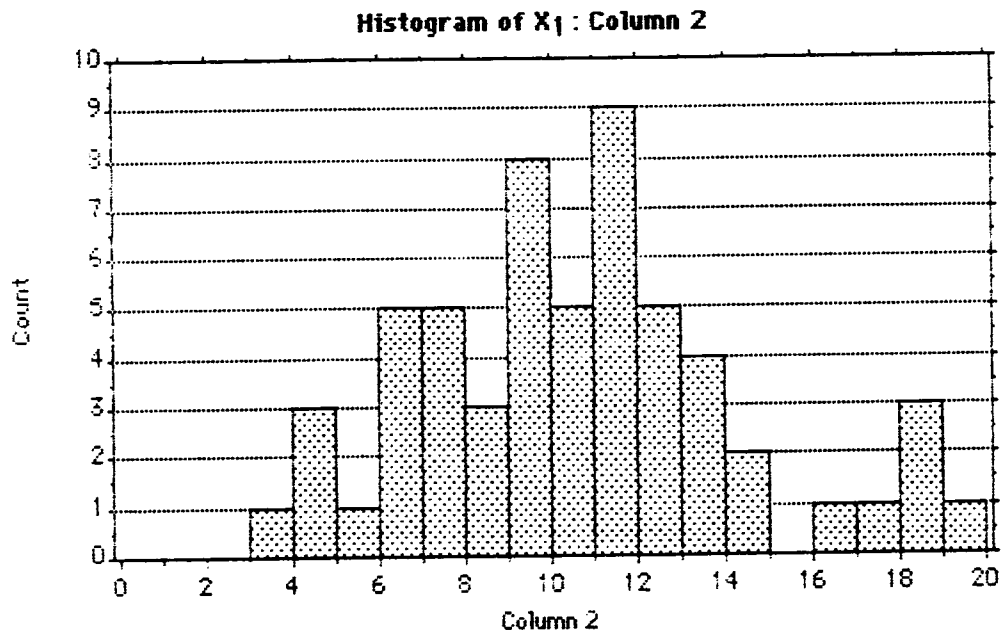

Figure 2. Non Volunteer Community: Rotter I-E Scale Histogram

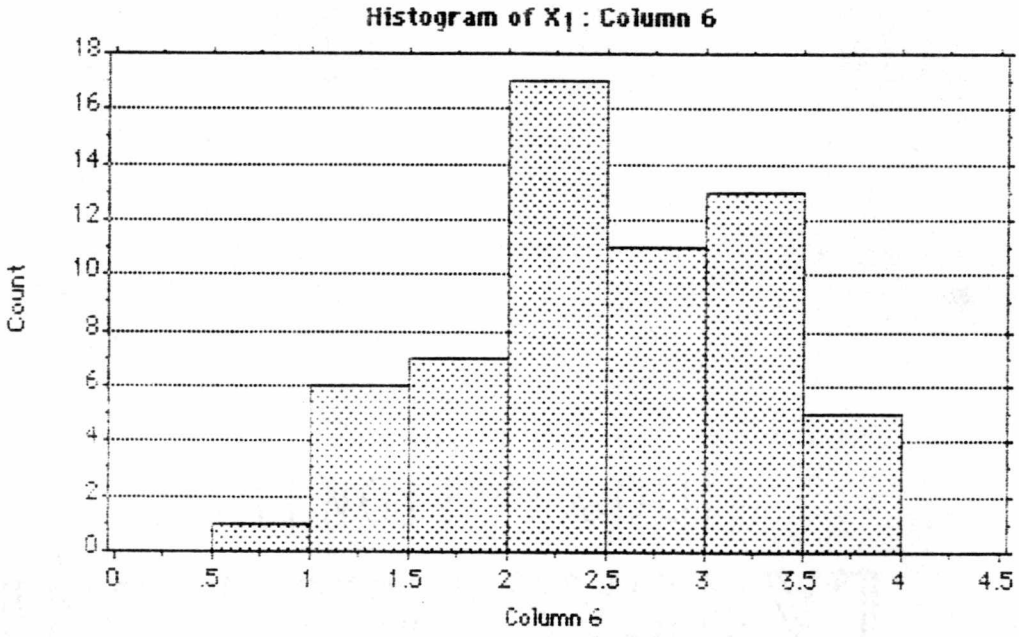

Figure 3. Volunteer Community: Grade Point Average Histogram

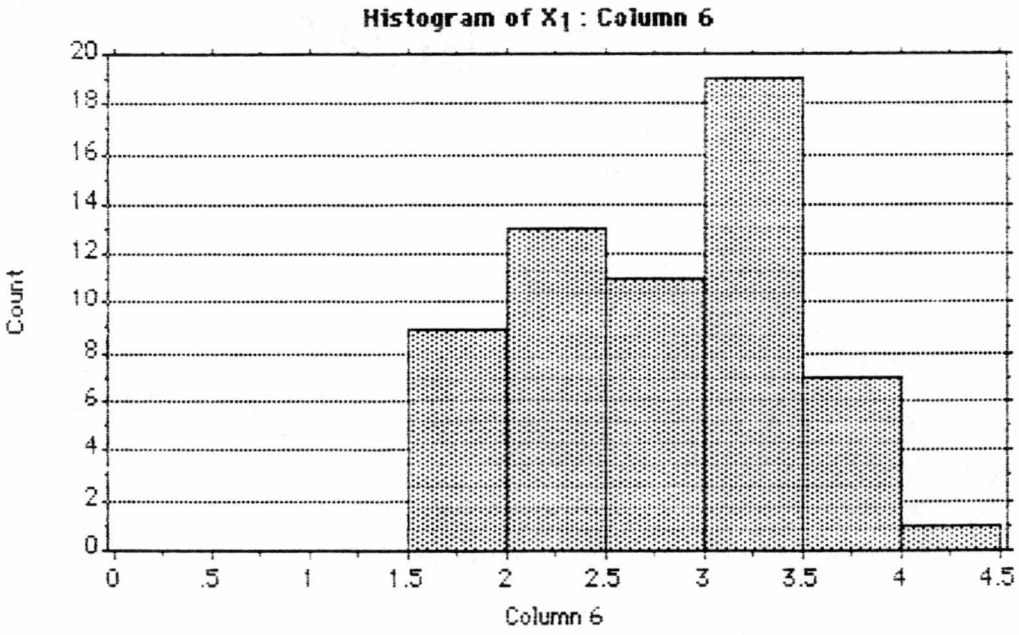

Figure 4. Non Volunteer Community: Grade Point Average Histogram

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The intent of this study was to determine if freshmen students participating in a special program would significantly differ from freshmen Liberal Arts students not participating in a special program. Locus of control and achievement as determined by grade point average were the variables that were examined.

There exist several limitations to the study: (1) the Volunteer Community took English Composition and University Studies together while this was not true for the non volunteer group. (2) At the beginning of the school year, no data were examined to determine if the two groups were equal on measures such as college entrance examination scores, grade point averages, SES level, etc. (3) The program could not be evaluated as the data were limited.

Taking the aforementioned coursework together could have been a strong factor affecting the Volunteer Community's sense of achievement. Nowack and Hanson (1985) concluded in their research that students participating in special programs achieved higher grade point averages. Brown (1974) described a greater openness of new ideas, but determined no greater gains in grade point averages of those students in these programs. The data used in the study demonstrate the differences, but cannot account or explain these differences.

The results of the study suggest that participation in the Volunteer Community may affect a freshman's grade point average. Because of

the inconclusive nature of the data, no sound evaluation of this program can be made.

Universities and colleges nationwide are concerned with the issue of student attrition. A better understanding of the freshman experience is important if educators are to make decisions relative to the retention of students throughout the collegiate career. The results of this study could be used in conjunction with more data in effectively aiding this decision-making process at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

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VITA

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