

Running Head: Student First Program Evaluation

Student First Program Evaluation for the  
Lake Superior State University Learning Center

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### Abstract

We performed a program evaluation of the Student First program for the Learning Center at Lake Superior State University. Of interest was to determine if the early intervention program results in significant differences in student grade point averages for students who were active in the program compared to students who either signed up for the program and failed to attend or students who attended a meeting or so and who then became inactive in the program. The evaluation was conducted to determine the efficiency of the program and will assist the Learning Center in identifying the program's magnitude of success. Student GPA data was analyzed using SPSS and students who were active in the program resulted in higher mean GPAs compared to students who were not active in the program for the first year of undergraduate study at Lake Superior State University. With the addition of the fall semester of 2008, data became slightly insignificant which was due to significantly higher retention for active students compared to inactive students, determined by a chi square analysis. Gender was also analyzed but no significant results were identified.

## Introduction

The importance of both early and intensive undergraduate learning assistance programs, has been investigated somewhat but needs further exploration. Starting intervention early was addressed by Seidman (1996) in his article, *Retention Revisited*, in which he says, “Interventions must start early and be intensive enough to make a difference.” The Student First program at Lake Superior State University addresses the issue of early intervention by approaching and inviting selected incoming freshman to utilize this academic assistance program. These students are recognized as “academically disadvantaged” from insufficient ACT scores, below the requirements for admission, usually between 12 and 17 in subject fields (LSSU Proposal, 2006-2007). The program also accomplishes the goal of being intensive as students are connected closely to the university through a peer mentor who assists in guiding the student through academics and university life. (LSSU Proposal, 2006-2007).

### *Learning Center Programs at Lake Superior State University*

Lake Superior State University has created, altered, adopted, and implemented several supplemental learning assistance programs over recent years, to facilitate academic progress at the university. These services include: supplemental instruction (SI), Individual Plan for Academic Support and Success (IPASS), Student First, a relatively new program which provides assistance to academically disadvantaged students, as well as various other writing and mathematics assistance.

However, prior to the IPASS and the Student First programs there was not extensive assistance to disadvantaged students and therefore also no conclusive results to indicate rate of success. There was a program called the University Studies Program (USP) previous to 2005 which required students to participate in if they did not meet “customary admission standards.” The students were limited and could only take a certain amount of credit, were required to sign a

“Learning Contract”, and had their individual progress monitored by an advisor. However, this program was eliminated due to deficiency in budget. There is little information concerning this program’s success aside from the retention of students being somewhere between 40-60 percent.

LSSU first received the KCP-4S grant for instituting Supplemental Instruction (SI) in 1995,” (LSSU Proposal, 2006-2007). The SI program is now implemented at LSSU and has resulted in much student success with, “...students in SI score an average one letter grade higher than their classmates who do not participate in SI.” SI is a group study session led by an undergraduate who has successfully completed the course of focus. The classes which utilize SI are those of large class size and are mostly 100 and 200 level classes. SI study sessions help students prepare for upcoming tests, practice problem solving, and answer difficult conceptual questions. SI has proven to be quite successful for all students who use the services, not just students who are categorized as disadvantaged.

Ferris State University has also found success with its Service Learning Assistance program (SLA) which is similar to SI utilized at LSSU. Review of SLA has demonstrated student success in passing courses with at least a ten to fifteen percent greater passing rate for students in SLA in comparison to a control of students with comparable ACT scores and GPAs. Also, students in the program had about a twenty percent greater passing rate than all students within the population (Doyle & Kowalczyk, 2001).

### *Student First*

The IPASS program and Student First have been developed even more recently than has SI and therefore also require a degree of feedback and analysis. These two programs are similar in concept with the exception that Student First emphasizes approaching students prior to entering and beginning university study, whereas IPASS is offered to all academically struggling

students. Also, Student First has greater emphasis on one on one peer mentoring. The Student First program offers assistance outside of the classroom through the following:

- Creating a plan for managing the work load
- Creating a support group of people who have the same goals
- Creating a schedule for using study time productively
- Using tutoring
- Using SI (supplemental instruction)
- Using time management
- Using studying and test taking strategies
- Using a peer coach to help "learn the ropes" in the field of study

The Student First program attempts to increase student involvement, motivation, and a desire to succeed through ways mentioned above. These qualities of the program assist students in utilizing academic resources and create a sense of community between student and university.

Other universities have also found success with their supplemental assistance programs. For example, at Bowling Green State University there are learning communities that exist and in particular a program called "The Bowling Green Effect Mentoring Program" which assists students in their first year by pairing them with university faculty and staff "in order to facilitate students' social and academic transitions to campus life" (Knight, 2002). This mentoring program is similar to the Student First program with exception of the peer mentoring aspect. The conclusion of the study which reviewed several programs and aspects of the university beside solely the mentoring program, was that there were "significant impacts upon retention, graduation, grades, and credit hours earned" (Knight, 2002). The study, however, also touched on the fact that these were preliminary findings and that more assessment and feedback from various sources, including qualitative as well as quantitative sources, would be necessary in order to make definitive conclusions.

Student First addresses making connections and ties to the university to contribute to increasing the student's overall mental well being. Wilson, Mason, and Ewing (1997), found

that the more counseling sessions attended by students led to a greater proportion of retention of students as well as general student success. Students were divided into four groups, which increased in number of counseling sessions, and it was discovered that students had significant psychological assistance, aside from sole academic problems. From this it was determined that fears such as isolation, homesickness, etc. impacted students as greatly as academic challenges. Student First combats this problem through creation of a community atmosphere and ties to peers as well as staff.

The Student First program gives individual attention to participating students. According to Sieveking and Perfetto (2000), approaching each student as individual is essential in giving students “a reason to stay.” Students, particularly from smaller universities which may face retention problems, are more likely to stay at a university when he/she feels valued as an individual and therefore is approached and assisted in a similar manner. Meeting with students on a personal level to talk about anxieties, fears, and strengths and weaknesses greatly impacts students (Sieveking & Perfetto, 2000). The Student First program at Lake Superior State University addresses this issue by assigning each student who signs up for the program a “peer coach” who works with the student to develop an individualized plan for success that may include tutoring, SI (Supplemental Instruction), time management, studying and test taking strategies that work best for the individual. The Student First program promotes the belief that having, “pro-active communication and goal setting” as well as the “development of intentional learning skills, study habits, and personal accountability” leads to student success.

Investigating the degree of success of the Student First program from the standpoint of differences in student grade point averages of students who were active in the program compared to a comparable control group of students who were inactive in the program was the aim of this

study. Also taken into account later in the study, were retention differences as well as the possibility of gender differences. Our hypothesis was that students who were active in the Student First program would result in a higher mean GPA for the first year of undergraduate study, Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 compared to students who were inactive with regards to the program, as well as with the addition of the third semester, Fall 2008. Our other hypothesis is that there would be no differences for semester or gender.

## Methods

### *Participants*

The data used in this study was archival data gathered by an Accutrack program in the Learning Center at Lake Superior State University. There was data from 92 freshman students at Lake Superior State University. In order to create comparable groups, data was compared between students who were asked and advised to participate in the program based on them being categorized as academically disadvantaged based on ACT scores, but who either failed to sign up for the program, signed up for the program but then failed to attend, or who attended a meeting or two and then became recognized as not active in the Student First program, to students who were active in the program. There was data from 34 students in the Student First program for the first two semesters and then data from 29 students following into their third semester at Lake Superior State University as there were 5 students who were not retained. In comparison there was data for 58 students for the first two semesters at Lake Superior State University and 28 were not retained. Also data was separated by gender and resulted in one dropped data point due to inability to access the individual's gender. For the analysis of Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 there were 47 females and 44 males, and with the addition of Fall 2008, there were 37 females and 30 males.

### *Materials*

The materials used in this study were mainly the SPSS program to analyze the student GPA data.

### *Research Design*

Various designs were used for separate portions of this study. In the beginning we completed a 2 x 3 repeated multifactor design. The first independent variable was the type of

investment. The second independent variable was semester. The dependent variable in the study was GPA data for each student per semester of attendance. The study had three levels for the first independent variable, type of investment, which were students active in the program, students who were invited to the program via letters but who failed to sign up, and students who signed up but failed to attend or attended for a short period and then became inactive in the program. The second independent variable, semester, had two levels, Fall 2007 and Spring 2008.

For the second analysis of the data a 2 x 4 repeated multifactor design was completed. Again the first independent variable was type of investment which was divided into students who were active, students who received letters but failed to sign up, and then the third category was divided further into students who signed up but who never attended the program and those who attended a meeting or so but who then became inactive in the program. The second independent variable was once again semester, Fall 2007 and Spring 2008.

For the third analysis of the data a 2 x 2 repeated multifactor design was completed. Again the first independent variable was type of investment, which was divided into students who were active in the program and all students who ultimately became inactive in regards to the program. The second independent variable was once again semester, Fall 2007 and Spring 2008.

For the fourth analysis of the data a 2 x 3 repeated multifactor design was completed. Again the first independent variable was type of investment, which was divided into students who were active in the program and students who were inactive. The second independent variable, semester, included the third semester of undergraduate studies of this targeted group of students and therefore had three levels, Fall 2007, Spring 2008, and Fall 2008.

The fifth analysis of the data included a 2 x 2 chi square analysis of the student retention data. The first independent variable was again type of investment, active or inactive. The second independent variable was whether the students were retained or not retained.

The analyses of gender were conducted with first a 2 x 2, then a 2 x 3 repeated multifactor design where gender and semester were the independent variables and GPA was the dependent variables. Also investigated were a within subjects design of gender and investment as well as a three way ANOVA of gender, investment, and semester.

### *Procedure*

The study began by retrieving student information from the Learning Center at Lake Superior State University. All information was archival data, collected originally by an Accutrack system provided by the Learning Center and transferred to the psychology lab with student names removed for confidentiality purposes. Student numbers, student GPA data, and gender were the only identifying information of focus for the study.

Following the collection of data, the information was originally broken down into three identifying groups, students who were regularly active in the program, students who were invited into the program but failed to take action after that, and students who signed up for the program but failed to attend or only attended a meeting or two, which were determined by the extent of their investment in the Student First program. An ANOVA analysis was conducted on this data for the three groups for the first two semesters, Fall 2007 and Spring 2008. Then for further investigative purposes the groups were broken down into four groups, which were the following groups, students who were active in the program, students who were invited into the program but failed to sign up, students who signed up but who failed to attend, and students who signed up and attended for a short duration and then who became inactive. Post hoc analyses were also

conducted to identify whether significant relationships existed between each group of investment, compared to overall significance of investment.

Once it was identified that the broken down groups showed no significant results, the investment sub groups were ultimately grouped into two groups, those who were active in the Student First Program and those students who were all ultimately inactive or non participants of the program. The data from these two groups was analyzed using an independent samples t-test.

Once these analyses were completed and data became available for the Fall of 2008, analyses were conducted for the three semesters for only the two groups, active and inactive, because once insignificance of investment was observed, then it was unnecessary to proceed to break down the groups further. The data was analyzed with an ANOVA for the two groups for the three semesters, Fall 2007, Spring 2008, and Fall 2008.

In order to further identify the reasons for the insignificance between the investment groups with the addition of the third semester, a comparison of the retention rates of the groups was analyzed with a 2 x 2 chi square analysis, in which retained/not retained was compared between the two groups, active/inactive.

Although it was observed from the breakdown of groups and also with the addition of the third semester that power was low, we investigated the data based on gender. Gender was investigated in relation to semester, investment and also in a three way analysis which combined the variables.

## Results

The first stage of the study which separated the type of investment into three groups, active, letter sent, and inactive found active students, ( $M = 2.755$ ,  $SD = 0.147$ ) to have higher GPA values compared to students who were sent a letter but failed to sign up, ( $M = 2.333$ ,  $SD = 0.165$ ) as well as students who were inactive, ( $M = 2.298$ ,  $SD = 0.154$ ). When divided into each semester the mean GPA values were higher for the active group, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.753$ ,  $SD = 0.710$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.758$ ,  $SD = 0.668$ ) compared to the letter sent students, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.386$ ,  $SD = 0.880$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.279$ ,  $SD = 0.822$ ) and students who were inactive, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.386$ ,  $SD = 1.076$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.214$ ,  $SD = 1.047$ ) as seen in Figure 1. However, this relationship was not found to be significant,  $F(2, 89) = 2.87$ ,  $p = 0.062$ .



Figure 1. Mean GPA for fall and spring semester for active students, students who were invited to the program but failed to sign up, and students who either signed up and failed to attend or

students who attended only a meeting or two and then dropped the program. The solid line represents students who were active in the Student First program. The dash line with the square marker represents students who did not sign up for the program. The dash line with the circle marker represents students who signed up and failed to attend or only attended one or two meetings.

Following this analysis it was of interest to further break down the group previously labeled as inactive into those who signed up but never showed for the program and those who attended a few meetings or less and then were inactive. The other groups, students who were active and those who never signed up remained the same with the same number of students and the same analyzed data. The only change which was implemented was the division of the inactive group. With the addition of a fourth group, even though it was previously recognized that power was low and investment was not significant, the active group had a higher mean GPA, ( $M = 2.755$ ,  $SD = 0.147$ ), than the letter sent students, ( $M = 2.333$ ,  $SD = 0.165$ ), as well as students who signed up but who never attended the program, ( $M = 2.281$ ,  $SD = 0.176$ ) and students who only attended a meeting or so, ( $M = 2.355$ ,  $SD = 0.325$ ). The same trend was observed when broken down into each semester, with the active students, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.753$ ,  $SD = 0.710$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.758$ ,  $SD = 0.668$ ) having a higher mean GPA than the letter sent students, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.386$ ,  $SD = 0.880$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.279$ ,  $SD = 0.822$ ) as well as the no show up students, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.390$ ,  $SD = 1.058$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.172$ ,  $SD = 1.081$ ) and the students who showed up a few times and became inactive, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.351$ ,  $SD = 1.220$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.358$ ,  $SD = 0.982$ ) as seen in Figure 2. However, once again this relationship was not found to be significant,  $F = (3, 88) = 1.903$ ,  $p = 0.135$ .

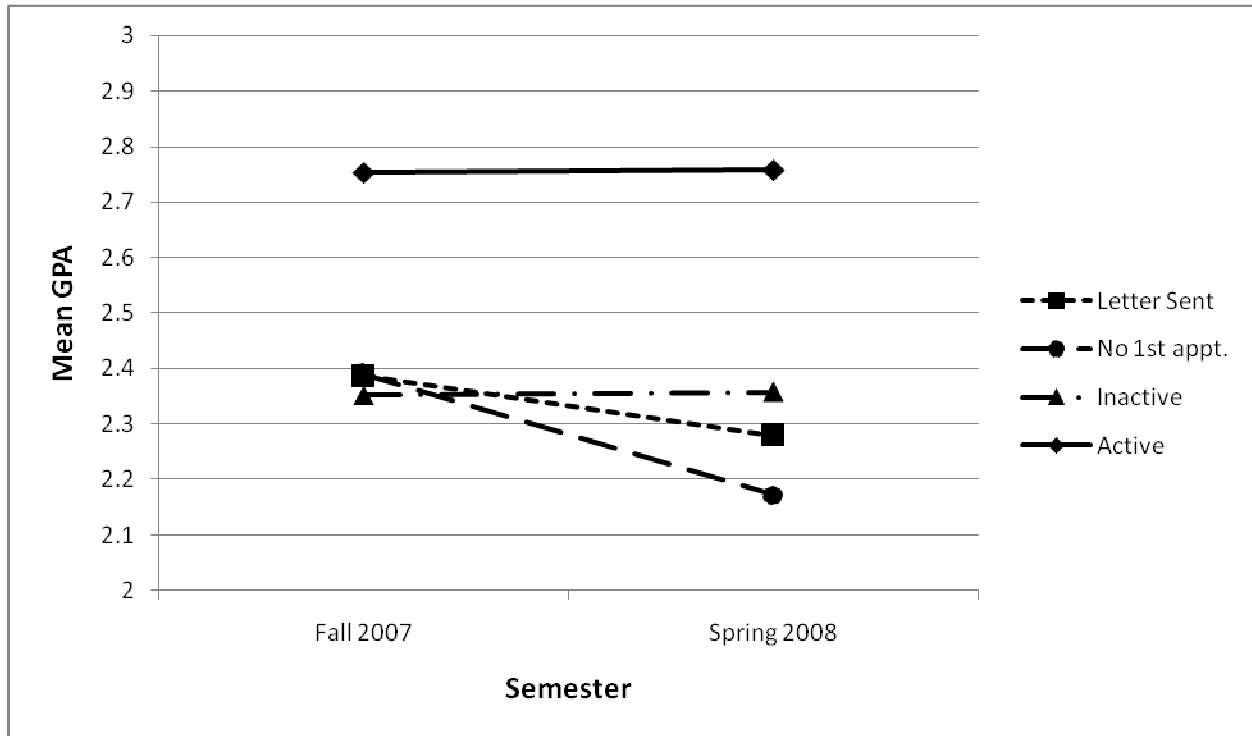


Figure 2. Mean GPA for fall and spring semester of freshman year for active students, students who were invited to the program through letters and failed to sign up, students who signed up but who did not show up, and students who attended a meeting or two and subsequently became inactive . The solid line represents students who were active in the Student First Program. The dash line with the square marker represents students who did not sign up for the program. The dash line with the circle represents students who signed up but who never attended the program. The dash line with the triangle marker represents students who attended the program for a short period of time but who then became inactive regarding the program.

Following the further breakdown it became practical to group all students who were ultimately not active in the program under the label of inactive. After completing an independent samples t-test in SPSS, it was discovered that for the first two semesters of attendance at Lake Superior State University, students who were actively in the program, ( $M = 2.755$ ,  $SD = 0.146$ ) compared to students who were grouped into being inactive, ( $M = 2.314$ ,  $SD = 0.112$ ) had

significantly higher mean GPA's as seen Figure 3. The difference in mean GPA for the two groups was significant. When those differences in type of investment, active or inactive, were broken down into individual semesters, Fall 2007 and Spring 2008, the mean difference was still significantly greater for students active in the program, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.753$ ,  $SD = 0.153$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.758$ ,  $SD = 0.146$ ) compared to students who were inactive, ( $M_{\text{Fall 2007}} = 2.384$ ,  $SD = 0.117$ ,  $M_{\text{Spring 2008}} = 2.244$ ,  $SD = 0.112$ ),  $F(1, 90) = 5.769$ ,  $p = 0.018$ , as seen in Figure 4.

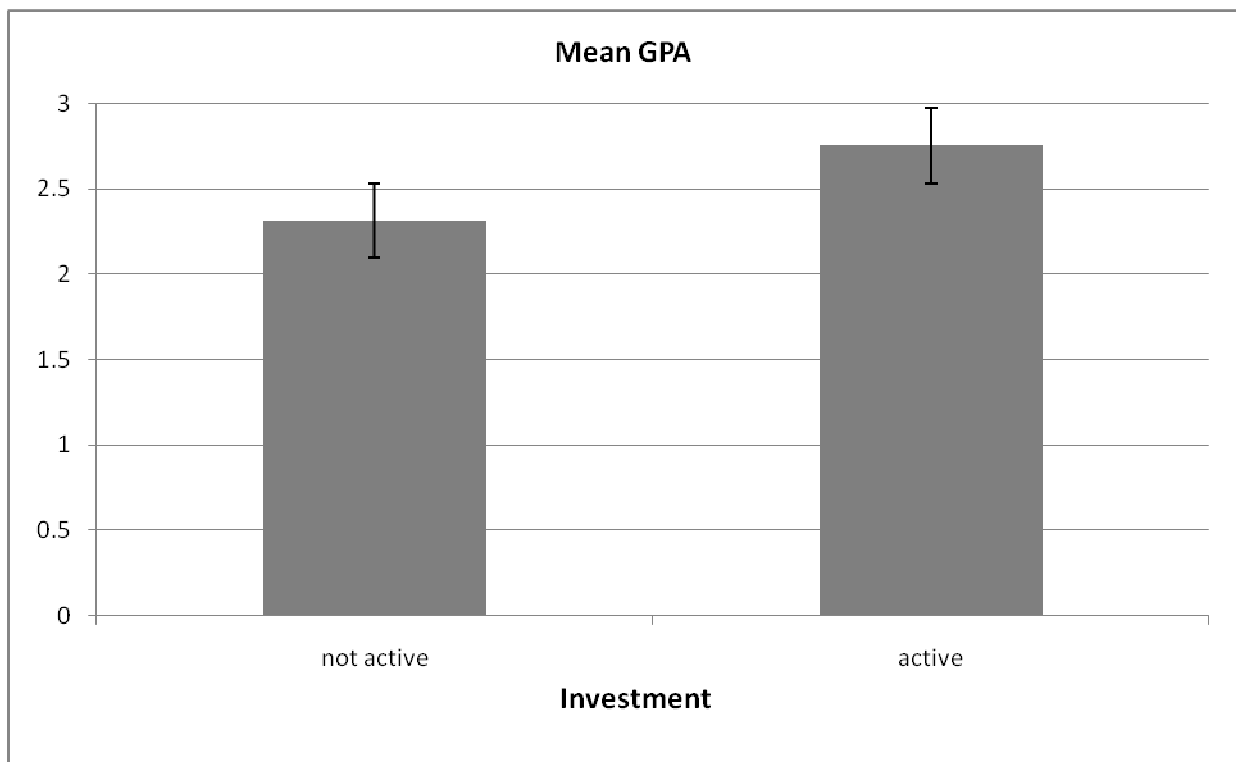


Figure 3. Overall mean GPA for freshman year for students active and not active in the Student First program. The active student bar indicates that students who actively participated in the program displayed a greater mean GPA than students not active in the program.

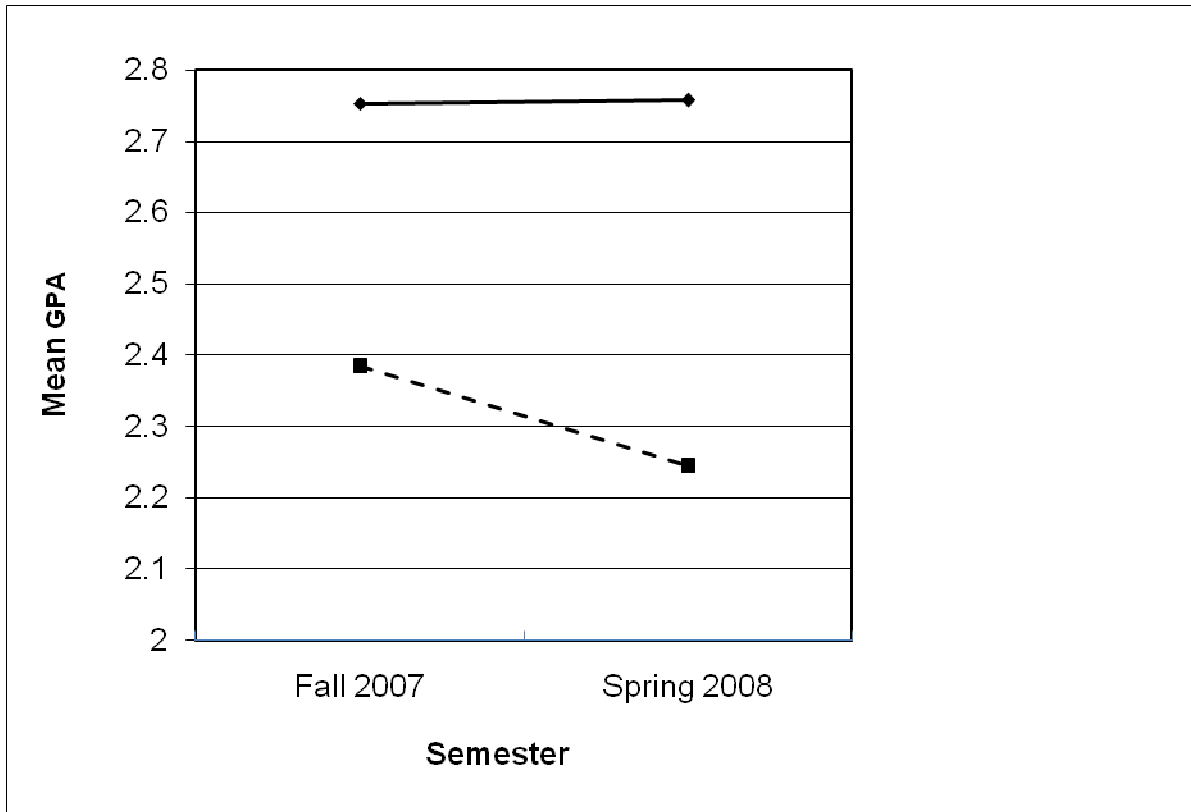


Figure 4. Mean GPA for fall and spring semester for active and not active students. The dash line represents students who were not active in the Student First program. The solid line represents students who were active in the Student First program for the two semesters.

The analysis shows that for the first two semesters students who were active in the program displayed a higher overall GPA than the not active group of students. The degree to which the active group was greater than the not active group was equivalent to about half a letter grade resulting in about a high C for the active group and a low C for the not active group. These two graphs portray strong empirical evidence for the success of the Student First Program. In general, Figure 3 indicates that students who were active in the program resulted in higher mean GPA than students who were not active in the program. Then when the data was separated into the two semesters, active students displayed higher mean GPAs compared to the inactive

students for both semesters, and even indicates that active students maintain their GPA and slightly increase whereas inactive students are lower and continue to decrease in GPA.

However, when the third semester, Fall 2007 student GPA data at the university was added to the previous semesters' data, the once significant data of the active participants in the program compared to those not in the program became insignificant. The overall mean GPA for the active group was higher, ( $M = 2.862$ ,  $SD = 0.107$ ) than for the not active group, ( $M = 2.683$ ,  $SD = 0.093$ ) although this was found to be not significant. When broken down into each semester, after removing student data whom were not retained, the active group still had higher mean GPAs, ( $M_{\text{fall2007}} = 2.882$ ,  $SD = 0.119$ ,  $M_{\text{spring2008}} = 2.855$ ,  $SD = 0.115$ ,  $M_{\text{fall2008}} = 2.850$ ,  $SD = 0.107$ ) for each semester compared to the not active group, ( $M_{\text{fall2007}} = 2.809$ ,  $SD = 0.104$ ,  $M_{\text{spring2008}} = 2.662$ ,  $SD = 0.100$ ,  $M_{\text{fall2008}} = 2.578$ ,  $SD = 0.093$ ), even though once again these values were not found to be significant as seen in Figure 5.

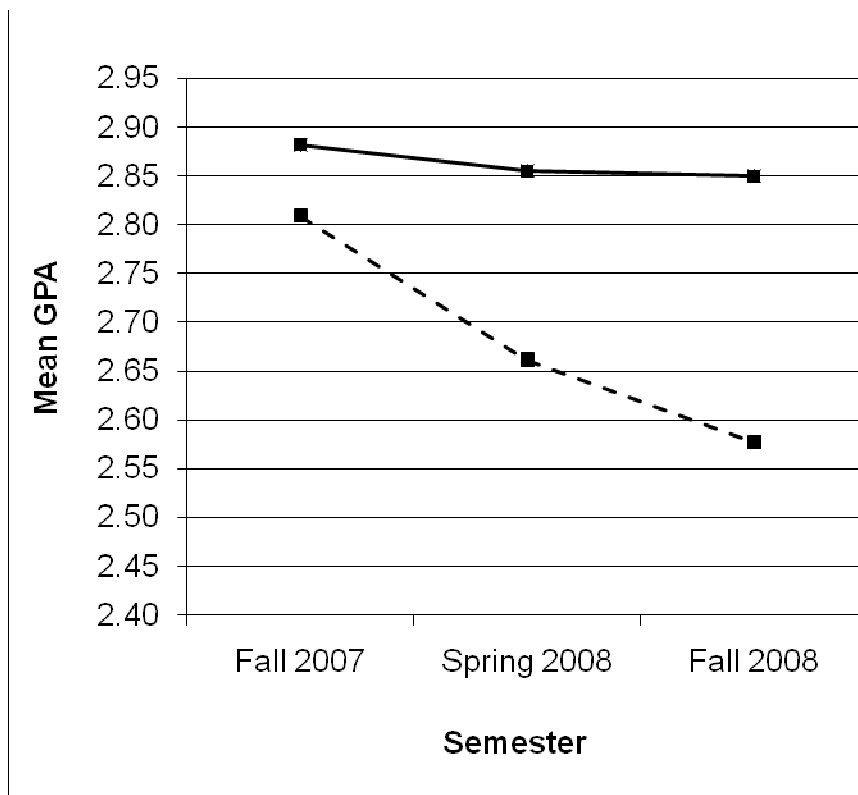


Figure 5. Mean GPA for first three semesters of university study for students active and not active in the Student First program at Lake Superior State University. The dash line represents students who were not active in the Student First program. The solid line represents students who were active in the Student First program for the three semesters.

Students in the active group had higher GPAs for each semester compared to inactive students. Active students displayed a leveling off of GPA which indicates maintenance of GPA whereas inactive students displayed a dropping and a decrease in GPA over time although this was not significant.

The reason for this change in significance was due in part to retention differences between the two groups of students, see Table 1. After completing a chi square the difference in retention of students in the program compared to students not in the program showed a significant difference,  $\chi^2(1, N = 92) = 4.236, p = .04$ .

Table 1. Student Retention Rates for Fall 2008 Based on Investment

			Fall 2008 retention		Total
			Not retained	retained	
Investment	Active	Count	5	29	34
		% within investment	14.7%	85.3%	100.0%
	Inactive	Count	20	38	58
		% within investment	34.5%	65.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	25	67	92
		% within investment	27.2%	72.8%	100.0%

Significantly more students who were active in the Student First program were retained compared to students inactive in regards to the program. This is quite telling in that perhaps the program facilitates student retention.

The semesters, fall 2007 and spring 2008, did not result in a dramatic difference from one another, with the first semester, fall 2007, having a slightly higher GPA, ( $M = 2.568$ ,  $SD = 0.096$ ) compared to second semester, spring 2008, ( $M = 2.501$ ,  $SD = 0.092$ ) which was not significant  $F = (1, 90) = 2.753$ ,  $p = 0.101$ . Also with the addition of the third semester and the drop in retention, Fall 2007 had a higher mean GPA, ( $M = 2.854$ ,  $SD = 0.079$ ), than Spring 2008, ( $M = 2.759$ ,  $SD = 0.076$ ) as well as Fall 2008 ( $M = 2.714$ ,  $SD = 0.071$ ) which was significant,  $F = (2, 130) = 4.535$ ,  $p = 0.012$ .

Following these data analyses, the data was divided by gender. For the first analysis, which looked at gender for Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 for the active and inactive groups, there were 47 females and 44 males. The females had a slightly higher overall mean GPA, ( $M = 2.599$ ,  $SD = 0.126$ ), compared to the males overall mean GPA, ( $M = 2.435$ ,  $SD = 0.138$ ) although this was not found to be significant,  $F = (1, 87) = 0.776$ ,  $p = 0.381$ . When the interaction between gender and investment was investigated, it was discovered that again the females had higher mean GPA than did males for the active group ( $M_{\text{female}} = 2.843$ ,  $SD = 0.191$ ,  $M_{\text{male}} = 2.630$ ,  $SD = 0.228$ ) as well as for the inactive group ( $M_{\text{female}} = 2.356$ ,  $SD = 0.164$ ,  $M_{\text{male}} = 2.239$ ,  $SD = 0.156$ ) although once again this interaction was not found to be significant,  $F = (1, 87) = 0.067$ ,  $p = 0.797$  as seen in Figure 6.

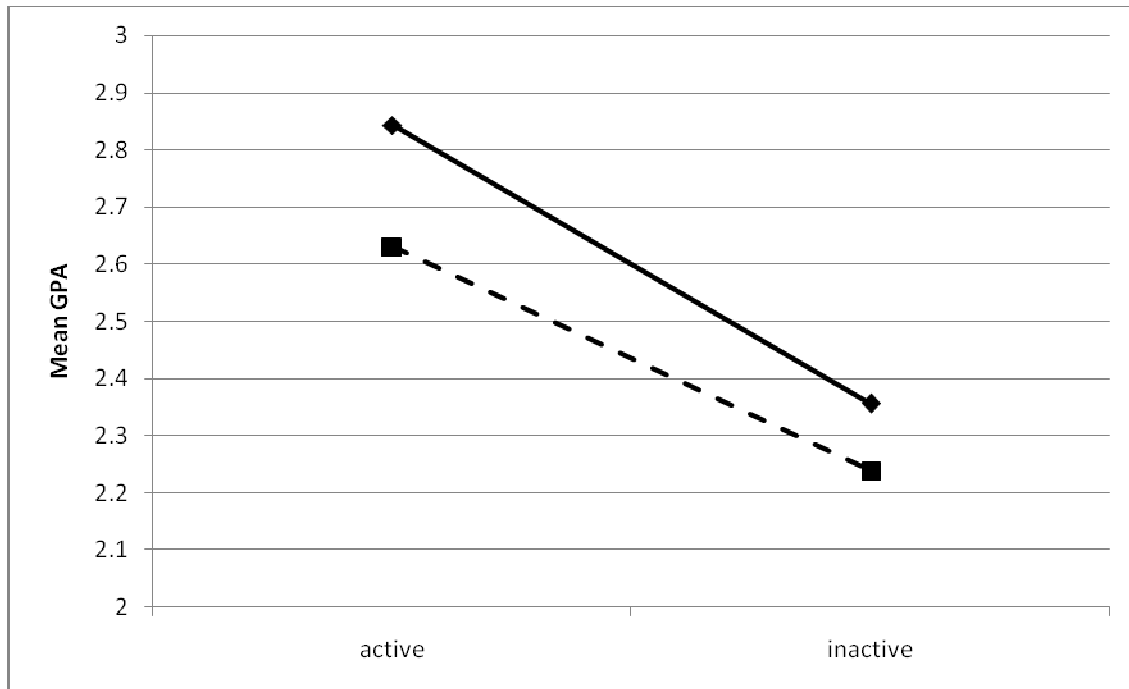


Figure 6. Mean GPA for females and males who were active or inactive in the Student First program. The solid line are females and the dashed line are males.

Although not significant the study displays higher mean GPAs for both genders of the active group compared to the not active group and that perhaps with a larger cohort of individuals some significance may result.

Following these analyses there were analyses of the data, taking into account the third semester or Fall of 2008 with the new gender division. Due to the retention differences previously discussed, the gender groups were even smaller with the addition of the third semester of undergraduate studies, as there were 37 females and 30 males. Females continued to have a slightly higher overall mean GPA, ( $M = 2.831$ ,  $SD = 0.095$ ) than did males, ( $M = 2.703$ ,  $SD = 0.110$ ) however this was not significant,  $F(1, 63) = .784$ ,  $p = 0.379$ .

When the interaction between gender and investment was investigated, it was discovered that again the females had slightly higher mean GPA than did males for the active group ( $M_{\text{female}} = 2.898$ ,  $SD = 0.137$ ,  $M_{\text{male}} = 2.804$ ,  $SD = 0.175$ ) as well as for the inactive group ( $M_{\text{female}} = 2.764$ ,

SD = 0.133,  $M_{\text{male}} = 2.601$ , SD = 0.133), although once again this interaction was not found to be significant,  $F(1, 63) = 0.056$ ,  $p = 0.814$ .

A three way analysis was also conducted for gender, investment, and semester and it was observed that active females had higher mean GPAs compared to inactive females, for all semesters, Fall 2007, ( $M_{\text{active}} = 2.912$ , SD = 0.152,  $M_{\text{inactive}} = 2.852$ , SD = 0.148) for Spring 2008, ( $M_{\text{active}} = 2.860$ , SD = 0.146,  $M_{\text{inactive}} = 2.792$ , SD = 0.142), and for Fall 2008, ( $M_{\text{active}} = 2.923$ , SD = 0.136,  $M_{\text{inactive}} = 2.650$ , SD = 0.133) as seen in Figure 7. A similar trend was observed for males with those who were active compared to inactive having higher mean GPAs for both semesters, Fall 2007, ( $M_{\text{active}} = 2.833$ , SD = 0.195,  $M_{\text{inactive}} = 2.765$ , SD = 0.148) for the Spring of 2008, ( $M_{\text{active}} = 2.849$ , SD = 0.187,  $M_{\text{inactive}} = 2.532$ , SD = 0.142) as well as for the Fall of 2008, ( $M_{\text{active}} = 2.730$ , SD = 0.174,  $M_{\text{inactive}} = 2.507$ , SD = 0.133) as seen in Figure 8.

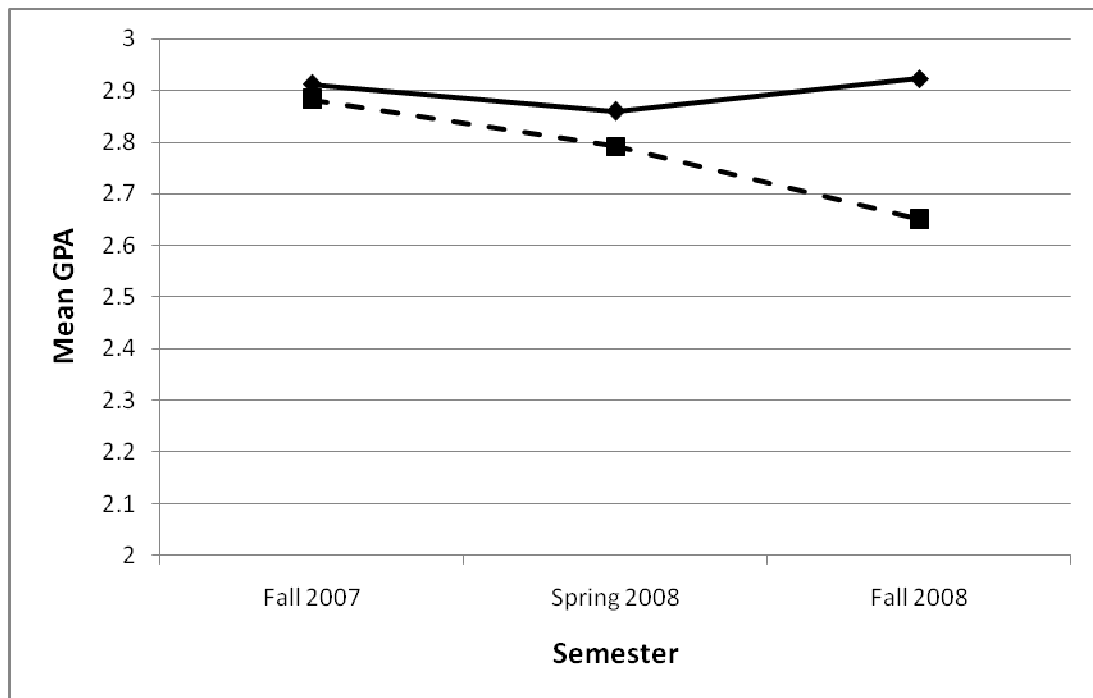


Figure 7. Mean GPA for females who were active and inactive in the program for three semester. The solid line represents active females and the dashed line represents inactive females.

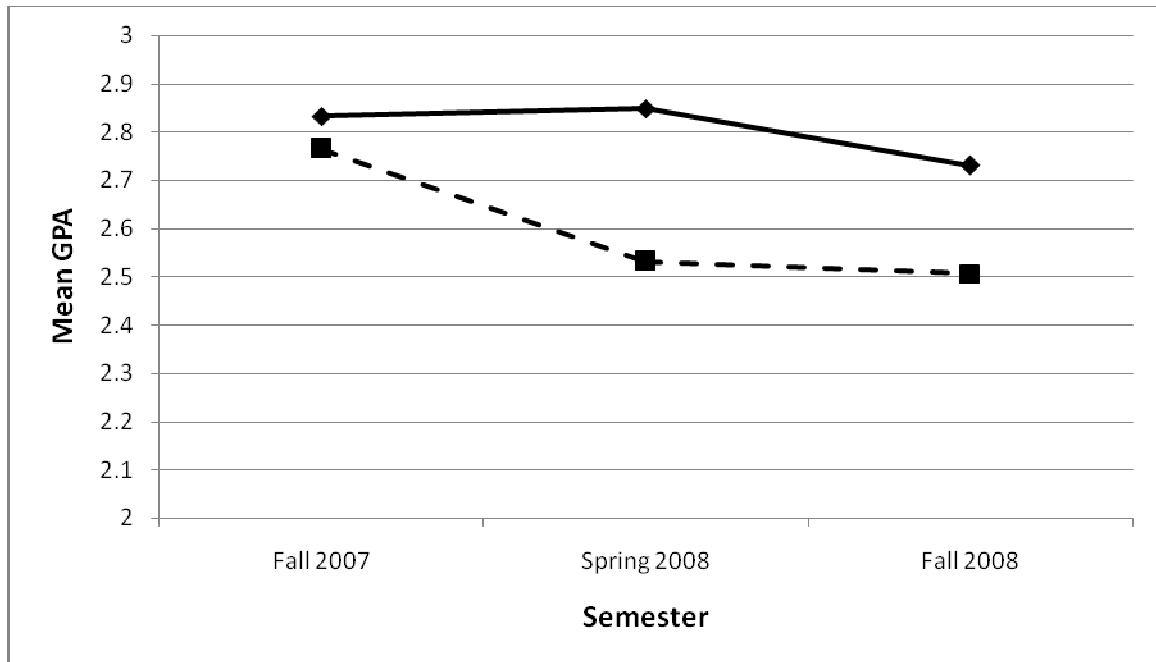


Figure 8. Mean GPA for males who were active and inactive in the program for three semesters. The solid line represents active males and the dashed line represents inactive males.

Once again both graphs portray higher mean GPAs for the active compared to inactive group of students and in particular for females those who were active in the program appear to be increasing in mean GPA by the third semester whereas female inactive students seemed to be dropping in GPA by the third semester. For males there seemed to be more of a leveling off of GPA by the third semester, however, the active group remained to have a higher mean GPA throughout the semesters. Once again this was not significant but illustrates a promising effect of the program if the cohorts were larger, particularly for the female trend.

## Discussion

Students who were active in the Student First program at Lake Superior State University had significantly higher mean GPAs for Fall of 2007 and Spring of 2008 compared to a control group of inactive students. With the addition of the third semester the data became not significant due to more students being retained in the active group whereas the number of students in the not active group dropped more drastically. This suggests that the greater loss of students from the inactive group compared to the active group lead to an overall higher GPA score for the inactive group as much of the student data, those with lower GPAs, were removed from the third semester cumulated totals and also that the sample size was decreased which lowered the study's power.

There were no significant differences that resulted from gender or semester with the exception that GPA was greatest for Fall 2007, next greatest for Spring 2008, and lowest for Fall 2008, which could be expected at least in part with increasing difficulty of course content as well.

Due to the fact that LSSU has a considerable proportion of students categorized as "academically disadvantaged" and also has a low competitive enrollment standard, it is imperative that programs such as Student First are made available to incoming students. Student First addresses two main problems of approaching and assisting students early and also being able to connect with students one on one through a peer mentor. These aspects have been viewed as successful traits. Heverly (1999) found that students who were more likely to be helped and who felt that they were connected to the university, were more likely to be retained by the university. Students who were positively involved in the academic processes were more likely to be persistent and thus likely to succeed.

A model for student success developed by Tinto (2005) identifies several factors which are believed to contribute to student success. These consist but are not limited to the following, commitment, expectation, support, feedback, and involvement. The Student First program addresses these issues in different manners. The program helps to further student involvement by meeting with mentors, staff in the learning center, and possibly faculty. Student First therefore establishes a support and feedback network where worries and needs can be openly communicated and remedied. Expectations of the university can also be made known up front so that alienation and confusion can be combated early on. Ultimately the Student First program is helpful in bridging the often difficult gap between the student and the unknown world of university life.

Bowling Green State University found success with its “Bowling Green Effect Mentoring” program and suggested that further investigation of student programs would be needed to collect adequate feedback of programs. The Student First program, too, will need further investigation as it is a newly formed and implemented program. Both further quantitative and qualitative information will need to be collected in order to make definitive assumptions regarding the program. We attempted to conduct several focus groups regarding the Student First program, however, only one resulted with participants and from that group only one student ended up being an actual participant of the program. That individual, however, did suggest that the program was helpful and better prepared her for the university so that she was less surprised of certain expectations from the university. Therefore it will be necessary to gather further qualitative information from perhaps both mentors and participants of the Student First program (Knight, 2002).

Aside from further gathering of qualitative data, more quantitative data will need to be collected as well. A possible consideration for further data analysis would be to group each incoming year into year 1, year 2, etc. in order to achieve a larger cohort of students. This may be helpful in finding more significance as there would be a more adequate number of both participants and those who were designated as inactive in the program. Also, due to the fact that when analyzing the data with an ANOVA test, empty data points would automatically drop all other gathered data, a better test which could keep some data while overriding empty data cells may need to be utilized.

The Student First program appears to be a promising program for students, particularly those who may need extra assistance early on upon entering the university. It is hoped that with greater research into this program as well as similar programs, results will indicate improved student success and therefore improved retention of students.

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