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A Study of Students' Perception of The Freshman Seminar Course Influence on Academic Persistence and Career Planning

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A STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE FRESHMAN SEMINAR COURSE
INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE AND CAREER PLANNING

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

BY

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION
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Course Influence On Academic Persistence And Career Planning BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL
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ABSTRACT

Dunn, Maura J. M.A., Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education and Human Services, Wright State University, 2008. A Study Of Students' Perception Of The Freshman Seminar Course Influence On Academic Persistence And Career Planning.

Freshman seminars have become standard in higher education programming. Although there is evidence that these programs are effective in helping the freshman-to-sophomore year persistence rate, there is little research into the specific components of such programs and how they affect academic persistence and career planning. There is also little research on how different students perceive the effectiveness of such programs. This research examined the perceived influence of a freshman seminar on academic persistence and career planning between two student cohorts, a business-major and an undecided-major, via a post-course questionnaire. The student responses between the two cohorts resulted in a significant difference in the overall perceived influence of the freshman seminar on academic persistence and career planning. Additionally, one question pertaining to career planning was found to be significantly different.

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the students who I taught and to all the students whose lives I've touched. They were the inspiration for this research. I wish them every success and joy during their journey through college.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

General Background

A common concern for universities across the country is student attrition. Most frequently, students who enter college leave before their sophomore year. The national five-year rate of baccalaureate completion is less than 50% (Astin & Oseguera, 2002). What was once a reflection of institutional status in the 1950s and 1960s, attrition is now a liability for universities and colleges across the nation. First-to-second-year retention and graduation rates have now been added as part of the method of ranking universities and colleges in *US News and World Report* (Barefoot, 2004). To mitigate the problem of student attrition, many universities have established a freshman seminar course to ease a student's transition from high school to college. A study by the Policy Center on the First Year of College shows that 94% of accredited four-year college and universities in the United States offer a first-year seminar to at least some students and over half offer a first-year seminar to 90% or more of first-year students (Policy Center on the First Year of College, 2002).

The increase of first-year seminars developed for a variety of reasons: 1) financial need, where universities either attempt to keep tuition-paying students enrolled at their institution or meet the demands of performance indicators mandated by state governments; 2) reputation enhancement, where institutions of higher education are ranked in such periodicals as *U.S. News and World Report* which are concerned with freshman retention rates; 3) the perceived advantage over other institutions concerning marketing, admissions, and fundraising where institutional quality is concerned; and 4) mission fulfillment when a university's purpose is to promote and graduate educated, productive citizens (Porter & Swing, 2006). Although colleges enroll various

age groups on campus, the target market for first-year seminars is the traditional-aged student who today is part of the Millennial generation.

Significance of the Study

With such programming increasing in popularity to the point where most universities have some type of freshman seminar, a purposeful investigation into the perceived influence of a freshman seminar on academic persistence and career planning will allow administrators and faculty to better serve the Millennial cohort. The perceived influence of the freshman seminar on specific, elected-major and non-elected major cohorts will provide feedback on the need to offer additional resources and focused curriculum to each cohort. This attention, in turn, will better facilitate student career choice via major selection and encourage graduation via academic persistence.

Statement of the Problem

There is much research into the effectiveness of freshman seminar programs which are often a product of learning communities. Often this programming is designed to meet the needs of first-year students. A large body of research demonstrates the positive impact of a student's academic persistence, social integration, and the manner in which the student's characteristics affect the outcomes of a freshman seminar. Frequently, research utilizes enrollment records connected to curriculum records to investigate the differences in persistence rates of those students who took a first-year seminar and those who did not (Porter & Swing, 2006). However, research on the specific components of the first-year seminars is limited. It is not clear which specific components have the greatest impact on student academic persistence or selection of a major (Porter & Swing, 2006) or how those students are affected by each component. Those students who do not choose a major or postpone their selection of a major have significantly

lower grade point averages, take fewer credit hours, and are less motivated academically (Chase & Keene, 1981). Students who are uncertain about their major at the start of their college career are less likely to choose more complex majors, such as the sciences, due to time constraints and the sequential nature of the curriculum (Porter & Umbrach, 2006). Some research suggests that students may come out of a freshman seminar more undecided in major selection and college in general than before the freshman seminar (Howard & Jones, 2000). This study will take two freshman seminar cohorts, undecided-major and business-major, and compare questionnaire responses as they relate to academic persistence and career planning to better evaluate the perceived effectiveness of a freshman seminar on first-year students.

Independent and Dependent Variables

In this study, the independent variables are those students who make up the five freshman seminar classes consisting of the business-major and undecided-major cohorts. The dependent variables are the questionnaire responses of the individual students in these cohorts.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined for this study:

First-Year Seminar: An introductory course at a university targeted at traditional, first-year students. The course takes on various themes to ease the transition from high school to college. The goal of the freshman seminar is to help students adjust to college, achieve academic success, develop and grow personally, and explore career development.

Groupthink: The phenomena where one thinks as the group instead of individually.

In loco parentis: Latin for "in the place of a parent;" refers to the legal responsibility of a person, an organization, or an institution of higher education to take on some of the functions and

responsibilities of a parent. For students at a college or university, faculty and administrators would act as their parent while they are attending school.

Learning Community: A small group of first-year college students who take a one to three classes together during their first year of college. These classes consist of a freshman seminar course and one to two general education courses. A learning community aims to facilitate the students' ability to make new friends quickly, learn success skills and strategies, connect with faculty and staff, share learning experiences with study groups, be a part of a supportive college family, and have fun.

Locus of Control: An aspect of personality where the source of one's control over life and decisions is seen as either internal or external. A person either believes he or she has control over his or her own life and decisions or that people or the environment around him or her has control over his or her life and decisions.

Millennial(s): Any person who was born in the late 1970s to early 1980s to mid-2000s. The generation who currently comprises the traditional college student aged 18 – 22 years.

Personalization: The state or process of being tailored to an individual's preferences or characteristics.

Peer Instructor: An upperclassman who teaches a freshman seminar section.

Staff Instructor: A staff member who teaches a freshman seminar section.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions were developed to focus this study:

RQ1: Is there a difference in perceived influence of a freshman seminar on academic persistence between a business-major cohort and an undecided-major cohort?

The null hypothesis for this research is as follows:

H_0 = There is no difference in perceived influence of a freshman seminar on academic persistence between a business-major cohort and an undecided-major cohort.

H_1 = There is a difference in perceived influence of a freshman seminar on academic persistence between a business-major cohort and an undecided-major cohort.

RQ2: Is there a difference in perceived influence of a freshman seminar on career planning between a business-major cohort and an undecided-major cohort?

H_0 = There is no difference in the perceived influence of a freshman seminar on career planning between a business-major cohort and an undecided-major cohort.

H_1 = There is a difference in perceived influence of a freshman seminar on career planning between a business-major cohort and an undecided-major cohort.

The research hypothesis is that there will be a significant difference between the medians using a $\alpha = 0.10$ level of significance. The null hypothesis states that there will be no significant difference between the medians.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were identified and accepted in this study:

1. Basing their syllabi on a master syllabus, the various freshman seminar instructors taught the freshman seminar topics equally and adequately.

Scope and Limitations

The following scope and limitations were identified in this study:

1. This study cannot use random sampling as a means of gathering data and must rely on self-selection and convenience as a means for choosing the members of the cohorts.
2. The study is being conducted at a medium-sized state university.

3. The study was unable to control for the differences in teaching style of the peer or staff instructors. However, instructors were required to use a master syllabus. All students should receive the same key aspects of the curriculum.

Summary

Student attrition is a major cause for concern amongst all universities. It is clear that there is evidence that freshman seminars increase student persistence through college, but there is little research on the actual components of the freshman seminar that influence academic persistence and career planning especially when comparing students who have elected a major and those who have not. The purpose and scope of this study is to investigate the manner in which institutions of higher education can provide targeted support and curricula to those students who have selected a major and those who have not. This research examined the perceived influence of a freshman seminar on academic persistence and career planning between business-major and undecided-major student cohorts.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Millennials

In general, Millennials were born between 1977 and 1994; 34% of this age group already has entered adulthood, while 30% are between the ages of 7 to 11 (Getting, 2001). One in five has at least one immigrant parent and prefers to learn on his or her own time and terms (McGlynn, 2005). They face the same pressures of entering college as the preceding generations but have grown up in a world vastly different than the cohorts before them.

Today the Millennials comprise the dominant cohort of traditional-aged students on campuses nationwide. Upon entering college, Millennials are more affluent, better-educated, and more diverse (Strange, 2004) with expectations of personalization when arriving on campus (Kruse, 2002). The spread of the Internet and the increase in technological advances enables this generation to access information quickly and whenever they want. Many times, their knowledge of this ever-evolving technology often surpasses that of their professors and parents (Newton, 2000).

Trends such as drunk driving, teenage pregnancy, violence in school, and suicide are decreasing (Howe & Strauss, 2000) while intimacy and social connectedness are transforming from couples paring off to group activities (Newton, 2000). Millennials often feel more comfortable in teams and are more group-oriented, preferring to work as a whole rather than as an individual. However, the Millennial propensity to prefer the group to the individual facilitates the tendency of groupthink, which decreases individuality, avoidance of confrontation, and difficult students (Lowery, 2004). This is a cause for concern for Millennials. Conceding to socially acceptable pressures, students can make decisions prematurely, thereby cutting short

their opportunity to work through normal developmental stages associated with decision making (Gordon, 1981).

However, Millennials look towards the future with more confidence. There has been a five-fold increase over the past thirty years of students predicting that they will graduate with honors (Lowery, 2004). Millennials are strong academic performers and are one of the most informed generations to date. However, although Millennials have more general knowledge, they have less experience in exercising the needed discipline and focus required to study any topic in depth (Newton, 2000). Student maturity, academic focus, and career focus are required for goal commitment (Tinto, 1993), but Millennials lack the needed skills, such as deferred gratification and long-term directed effort, to achieve the necessary goals for academic success (Newton, 2000). Upon enrolling in college, most Millennials enter as “A” average students. Yet, once met with a more rigorous curriculum and the reality of higher education where cramming and rote memorization is not as productive as in K-12, only 15% of students achieve an “A” average in college (Atkinson, 2004).

Likewise, many Millennial students are ambitious in their career aspirations but have unrealistic expectations concerning the needed commitment and time involved to accomplish their academic and career goals. Often, the desire to look good in person or on paper often supersedes their willingness to complete the necessary steps, including ability and effort, to achieve their goals (Newton, 2000).

As children, Millennials are given awards and trophies not for victory but for participation (DeBard, 2004). Society demonstrates a concern for this generation by attempting to protect it from every harm imaginable. Ironically, this concern comes primarily from their Baby Boomer parents who pushed to end *in loco parentis* on campuses when they were in

college (Shapiro, 2002). These Baby Boomer parents are often called “helicopter” parents for their tendency to hover around their children from the cradle to the college campus (Jayson, 2006). Millennial students know that their parents will be there whenever they are needed and will fight their battles for them. This is a concern as a factor that is associated with successful academic performance is a student’s locus of control. Excessive parental support causes students to remain complacent, preventing them from achieving their potential and realizing their dreams (Mansfield, Pinto, Parente, & Wortman, 2004).

As a result, most Millennial students do not follow any systematic method for managing their long-term goals. Although they can identify moments when they were confronted with a problem, many lack the necessary skills to develop a solution. Millennials often lack the hands-on experience and mentoring from their parents concerning confrontation or difficult issues (Newton, 2000). Often times, parents become heavily involved in their child’s issues at a university, which leads to complaints from university staff and faculty concerning the extent of the parents’ involvement. Even if the issue is simple in nature or remedy, Millennial students’ parents often jump to the president or vice-president for resolution instead of going through the chain of institutional hierarchy (Lowery, 2004). This special and sheltered treatment manifests itself in the closeness the Millennial generation enjoys with its parents, especially when discussing college. Universities now realize that a student is not the only one being accepted into its academic and non-academic environments, but also the student’s parents. Millennials get along with their parents, rely on their parents, and share their parents’ values and attitudes as can be seen in the Millennials willingness to accept parental notification policies for alcohol and drug violations on campus (Lowery, 2004). However, the unusual level of parental involvement in the Millennial students’ lives decreases their personal development, maturation, and independent

thinking (Strange, 2004). Where an important aspect of academic success relates to the student's ability to adapt (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005), the Millennial students' breaking away from their parents and becoming more autonomous when at college might prove to be the ultimate test for this generation (Strange, 2004).

A primary source of pressure for Millennials comes from the ability to pay for college (Lowery, 2004). Two-thirds of the incoming freshmen worry about paying for their education and plan on working while in college (Sax, 2003). Student-aid programs are not able to keep up with rising fee charges and tuition while a shift in political and social philosophy places the responsibility of paying for higher education from the public sector to the individual (Swail, 2002). The price of goods and services purchased by colleges has increased 154% over the past two decades where inflation in the general economy has increased by only 118%. This rise in cost is primarily due to health-benefit costs, technology costs, deferred maintenance (Lee & Clery, 2004), and the ever-increasing specialization of the curriculum (Suh, 1997).

Compounding the problem is the steady decrease of state support. These factors have forced many public research universities to pass the burden of increase cost onto their students (Yudolf, 2002). As a result, financial difficulties prove to be the main cause for Millennial students to take a term off from school in order to save money. These students cite tuition as a major cause for their break but also cite rent, house payments, car payments, and medical bills as contributing factors (Hoyt & Winn, 2004). Ironically, even though these students must bear most of their tuition and college expenses, the spending habits of the Millennials and the upkeep of their appearance also are cited as a major contributor to this generation's debt (Newton, 2000).

In an effort to pay for these rising costs, students take part-time employment to mitigate heavy debt (Newton, 2000). Millennials who borrow money today will be between 52 and 55

years old on average when their loans are fully paid (Akasie, 2006). In 1998, 47% of full-time students worked compared to 34% in 1970. This trend has major implications for those who encourage student involvement and engagement on campus (Kuh, 2003) as working students are naturally less engaged at the university (Porter, 2006).

As a result, Millennials' commitment to studying and homework appears to be diminishing (Newton, 2004). While it is assumed that part-time work will motivate the students to better manage their time, more are likely to skip class and search for ways to pass with minimal effort than previous generations. Millennials are well aware of the regulations and rules governing the college and community. However, these regulations and rules are often perceived without personal or moral commitment. Students create a politically correct façade, while hiding unacceptable behavior, creating corresponding philosophies to justify their behavior. An example of such a philosophy is the fact that cheating is acceptable if they do not get caught (Newton, 2004). The enhanced pressure to succeed combined with the self-esteem tied to academic performance is one explanation of such a philosophy, especially when plagiarism is involved. The same technology that Millennials have mastered to communicate with each other and retrieve information is also one that has allowed them to cheat and plagiarize (Lowery, 2004). For Millennials, explicit rules and regulations must be in the student policy handbook or in the course syllabus for it to be enforced (DeBard, 2004). The Millennial culture tends to have no clear sense or understanding of who created intellectual property or the value of such property (Lowery, 2004).

Academic Persistence and the Freshman Seminar

For universities, attrition means difficulty in projecting class sizes and scheduling course offerings (Hayden & Holloway, 1985). The importance of a steady or growing freshman class is

important for universities due to recent decreases in state and federal funding (McIntire, Pumroy, Burgee, Alexander, Gerson, & Sadoris, 1992). It is more cost effective to retain those students who enter as freshman rather than to recruit more students to take the places of those who withdrew (Schultz, Dickman, Campbell, & Snow, 1992).

For students, poor academic performance is often a manifestation of difficulties in adjusting to college and often ends in attrition (Gillock & Reyes, 1999; Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999). In college, many students face for the first time the responsibility of waking themselves for classes, getting along with roommates, making new friends, and making decisions regarding drinking and dating (Karp, Holmstrom, & Gray, 1998). It is estimated that 30% of first-year students drop out of college during their freshman year and less than 55% remain in college to successfully see graduation (Starke, 1994). The period between the freshman and sophomore year is the period of greatest attrition (Beal & Noel, 1980). Initially, ability and past-performance are the only significant predictors of freshman-to-sophomore persistence. However, after acclimation to college, outcome expectations and performance goals are a bigger predictor of persistence (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Therefore, a student's decision to leave school can be attributed to the lack of success in the school setting. This is especially true for those first-year students who are unprepared academically or personally for the transition from high school to the university (Howard & Jones, 2000). Students who withdraw from college before attaining a degree yields great untapped human potential and a low return on investment in college (Card & Kruger, 1992; Jaeger & Page, 1996).

To encourage retention and preparation, many universities have created learning community and freshman seminar programs. Learning communities take on several models including coordinated studies, federated learning communities, linked or clustered courses,

freshman interest groups, living-learning communities, gate-way courses, and general education (Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, & Gabelick, 1996; Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gebelick, 2004). However, there is no clear cut manner in which universities determine the structure of the learning communities or how to execute their programs. Thus, institution-specific models are more commonplace as universities take these models and adapt them to their own campus culture (Ellertson & Thoennes, 2007). Learning communities are especially successful in primarily commuter institutions. They facilitate interaction amongst students and encourage involvement during the actual classes. Attending a few classes with the same group of 20 – 25 students facilitates the development of friendships and a sense of belonging to the university. Large, residential universities benefit from learning communities as well, as smaller groups of students make for a more manageable, approachable, and friendlier campus (Barefoot, 2004).

Clearly, freshman seminars facilitate student development, which is fundamental to a student's persistence to graduation. Dropout rates for freshman seminar participants are significantly lower than non-participants (Cone, 1991). Of the various interventions used to improve persistence and academic success in first-year students, the freshman seminar is the most successful, with higher rates of persistence from freshman to sophomore year (Fidler & Hunter, 1989). The freshman seminars' non-cognitive cocurricular experiences contribute to the intellectual development of students including peer relationships, living arrangements, employment, and involvement in student organizations (Magolda, 1992) as well as short-range planning and time management skills (Britton & Tesser, 1991).

Major Selection and Career Planning

It is estimated that 20% to 50% of freshman enter their first year without having decided a major and are still unsure about their future career goals. This is reflected by the fact that 50%

to 70% of all undergraduates change their major, and thus their career goals, during their college years. Students' limited knowledge of academic major requirements and job relationships often result in idealistic initial choices and anxiety over choosing a major (Gordon & Steele, 2003). A list of various characteristics studied that contribute to the undecided and uncommitted student encompasses many aspects (Table 1):

Table 1

Some Variables Studied by Researcher to Determine	
WHO ARE THE UNDECIDED?	
Interests	Influence on significant others
Values	Sex
Abilities	Social and moral attitudes
Needs	Risk taking
Self-concept	Parents' income
Maturity	High school grades
Motivation	Extracurricular activities
Energy level	Work experiences
College rank	Parents' educational levels
Dependency	Life goals/aspirations
Dogmatism	College grades
Anxiety	Achievement test scores
Socio-economic status	Avoidance behavior
Size of high school class	Occupational information deficits
Attrition/retention	Decision making skills/patterns/styles

Gordan, V. N. (1981). The undecided student: A developmental perspective. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 59, 433-439.

A student's undergraduate major not only impacts the student's learning and satisfaction while in college but also is correlated significantly to job satisfaction and stability (Choy, Bradburn, & Carroll, 2008). A student's choice in major is largely due to that student's self efficacy--their belief that he or she will be successful in the chosen major (Eccles, 1987). Knowing how students select a major can be more effective in creating programs to educate undecided students, specifically, and to be better able to counsel students, generally (Lepre, 2007).

Typically, college promotes a specialized set of vocational skills, or preprofessional training, specifically for a particular vocational field, equipping the student with the job-related competencies for entry into a specific career field such as business (Goyette & Mullen, 2006). For the business major, economic reasons, such as employment availability and potential earnings, are important motives for the student to major in a business discipline. Additional motives are influential factors such as perceived job satisfaction, aptitude, and interest in the specific subject areas (Auyeung & Sands, 1997). Students normally decide their major within the first two years of college (Maudlin, Crain, & Mounce, 2000). Studies show that some students, especially those who major in accounting, decide on their career choice and subsequent major as early as the last two years of high school (Karnes, King, & Hahn, 1997; Jackman & Hollingworth, 2005). This decision is often influenced by economics, social issues, work environment, aptitudes, and other personal characteristics (Hermanson & Hermanson, 1995). Heavy influence of future earnings is the most important influence for choices in accounting, finance, and management majors (Lowe & Simons, 1997). However, it is difficult to determine how many first-year students commit themselves to unrealistic or uninteresting choices due to parental influence or societal pressure (Gordan, 1981).

As the reason behind the selection varies, academic major may be correlated to college persistence. Those students who select a major tailored to a specific profession, such as business, health, engineering, or education, have persistence rates higher than those students with other majors. Their selection of a profession-orientated major may demonstrate greater goal commitment. However, the non-profession majors may have picked their discipline because they enjoy the classes. These students place greater importance on the job-related benefits of college and may persist at a greater rate. If the student thinks the courses within the major are

boring, the student may take longer to persist to graduation and have higher non-monetary costs. Non-accounting majors, for instance, have an unfavorable perception of the accounting field in some studies, stating that the work is too quantitative and boring (Cohen & Hanno, 1993) and is excessively time consuming and unpleasant (Maudlin, Crain, & Mounce, 2000). The intrinsic appeal of the job itself, the job satisfaction level, the opportunity to be creative, the job's level of autonomy, the job's use of intellect, and a challenging and dynamic work environment may have heavy influence the students' choice in a given major as well (Tan & Laswad, 2006).

Summary

Millennials are now the predominant traditional student cohort on campus. Their unique characteristics and needs can be addressed with freshman seminars to help them persist academically and choose a major for their intended career. However, research suggests that students who have not selected a major upon entering college are at a greater risk for attrition than those who have selected a major. Yet, if a student picks a major based on salary potential but finds the classes boring, he or she may take longer to persist to graduation. Either case calls for concern from both students and universities.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND DESIGN

Target Population

The target population of this study is the traditional college freshman enrolled in the university's First Year Learning Community Program Freshman Seminar during the 2007 Fall Term in the undecided-major and business-major cohorts.

Sample

The sampling procedures relied on convenience and self-selection. All members of the sample were enrolled at a medium-sized state university in one of the freshman seminar courses. They were either in an undecided-major or business-major class. For this study, there were two undecided-major freshman seminar classes and three business-major freshman seminar classes. The two undecided-major classes consisted of 43 students with one Asian student, six Black/non-Hispanic, one Other, two Unknown, and 33 White students. There were 25 females and 18 males. Eighteen students were Commuters while 25 were Residents. The business-major classes consisted of 69 students with one Asian, one Black/non-Hispanic, two Unknown, and 64 White students. There were 30 females and 39 males. Thirty-six students were Commuters while 33 were Residents. These classes encompassed the entire population of undecided-major and business-major classes taking the freshman seminar course during the 2007 Fall Term. However, as specified in Chapter 5, an undecided-major class was unaccounted for in the data collection. Either the questionnaire was not distributed or the students did not participate.

Treatment

The treatment came in the form of a modified post-course, Likkert-scale questionnaire (Appendix D) from a freshman seminar instructor's manual (Carter, Bishop, & Kravits, 2006).

The questionnaire included 20 questions. Three questions were related to career planning and major selection while the remaining 17 questions were related to academic persistence. The academic persistence questions dealt with topics that affected academic persistence such as knowledge of available resources, relationships with peers and staff, time management, financial management, and personal development. The career planning questions dealt with future career plans and goals as well as major selection and development.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were delivered to the individual instructors for disbursement to their respective classes. The class instructors distributed the questionnaires during the last two weeks of the 2007 Fall Term. The researcher was a peer instructor of one of the business classes. After the disbursement, the completed questionnaires were delivered to the researcher for analysis.

Data Analysis

The raw responses were grouped according to class section and entered into spreadsheets. Class sections were divided into undecided major and business major classes. The raw responses then were placed in frequency tables to prepare for the chi-square analysis. Chi-square analysis was executed for all the questions pertaining to academic persistence (Appendix A) and career planning (Appendix B) as well as on an individual question-by-question basis (Appendix C). Histograms of the responses were also created (Appendix A, B, & C). For both overall academic persistence and career planning questions as well as each individual question, a null hypothesis was evaluated using chi-square test for independence using a $\alpha = 0.10$ level of significance.

Summary

This study targeted two cohorts of first-year students taking the freshman seminar course at medium-sized state university during the 2007 Fall Term. Responses to a post-course,

Likert-scale questionnaire were compared between business-major and undecided-major cohorts to ascertain the perceived influence of the university's freshman seminar on academic persistence and career planning.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived influence of the freshman seminar components that influenced academic persistence and career planning between business-major and undecided-major cohorts. The study was designed to offer an introductory investigation into the need for increased attention to one or more components of the freshman seminar as it relates to academic persistence and career planning in order to better serve first-year students taking the freshman seminar. It was not intended to be conclusive but rather to garner attention to underserved students with unique needs and bring about further research into specific tracks for freshman seminar curricula.

Research Question 1

RQ1: Is there a difference in perceived influence of a freshman seminar on academic persistence between a business-major cohort and an undecided-major cohort?

When perceived influence on academic persistence was evaluated between the undecided major and business major cohorts, $\chi^2(4, N = 1326) = 21.08, p = 0.0003$. This suggests a strong level of significance using a $\alpha = 0.10$ level of significance (Figure 1).

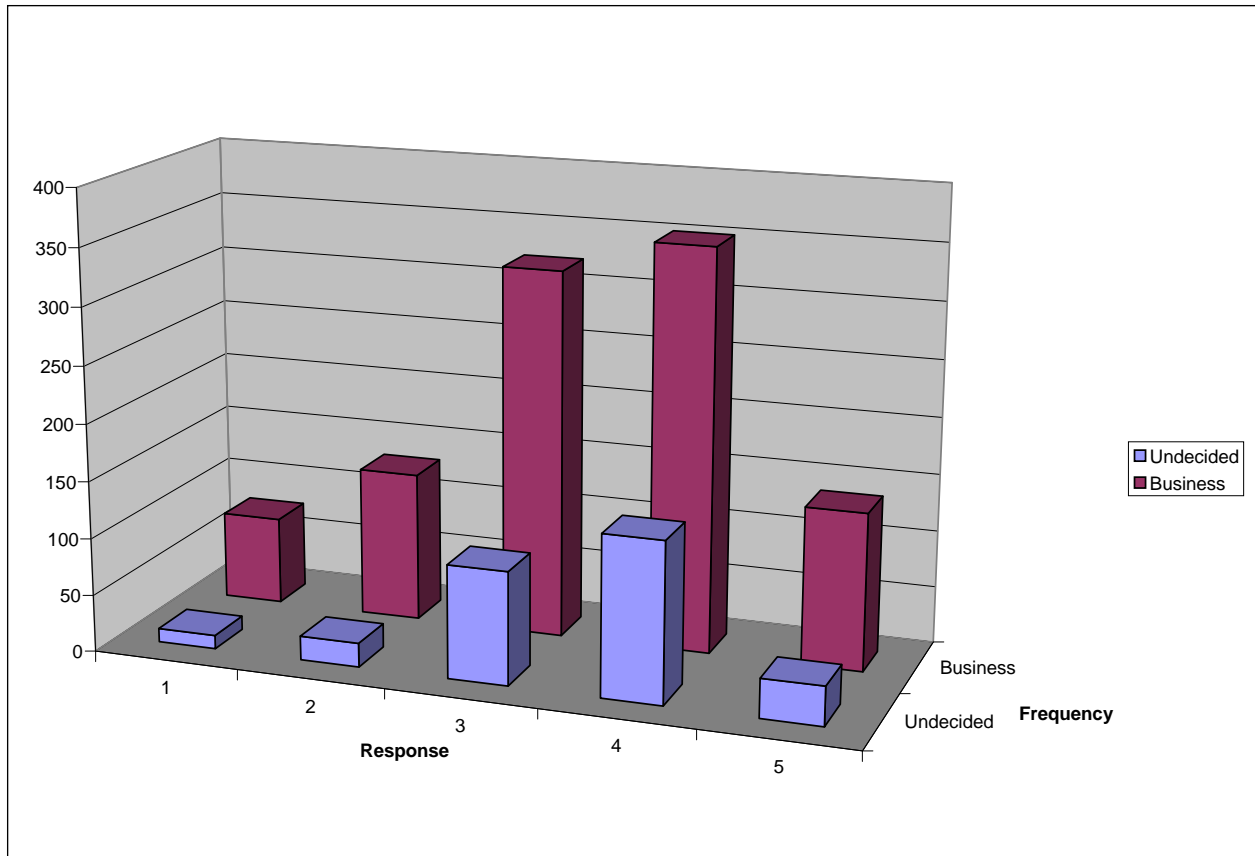


Figure 1. Academic Persistence of Business and Undecided Responses

Research Question 2

RQ2: Is there a difference in perceived influence of a freshman seminar on career planning between a business-major cohort and an undecided-major cohort?

When perceived influence on career planning was evaluated between the undecided major and business major cohorts, $\chi^2(4, N = 234) = 8.77, p = 0.0671$. This suggests a strong level of significance using a $\alpha = 0.10$ level of significance (Figure 2).

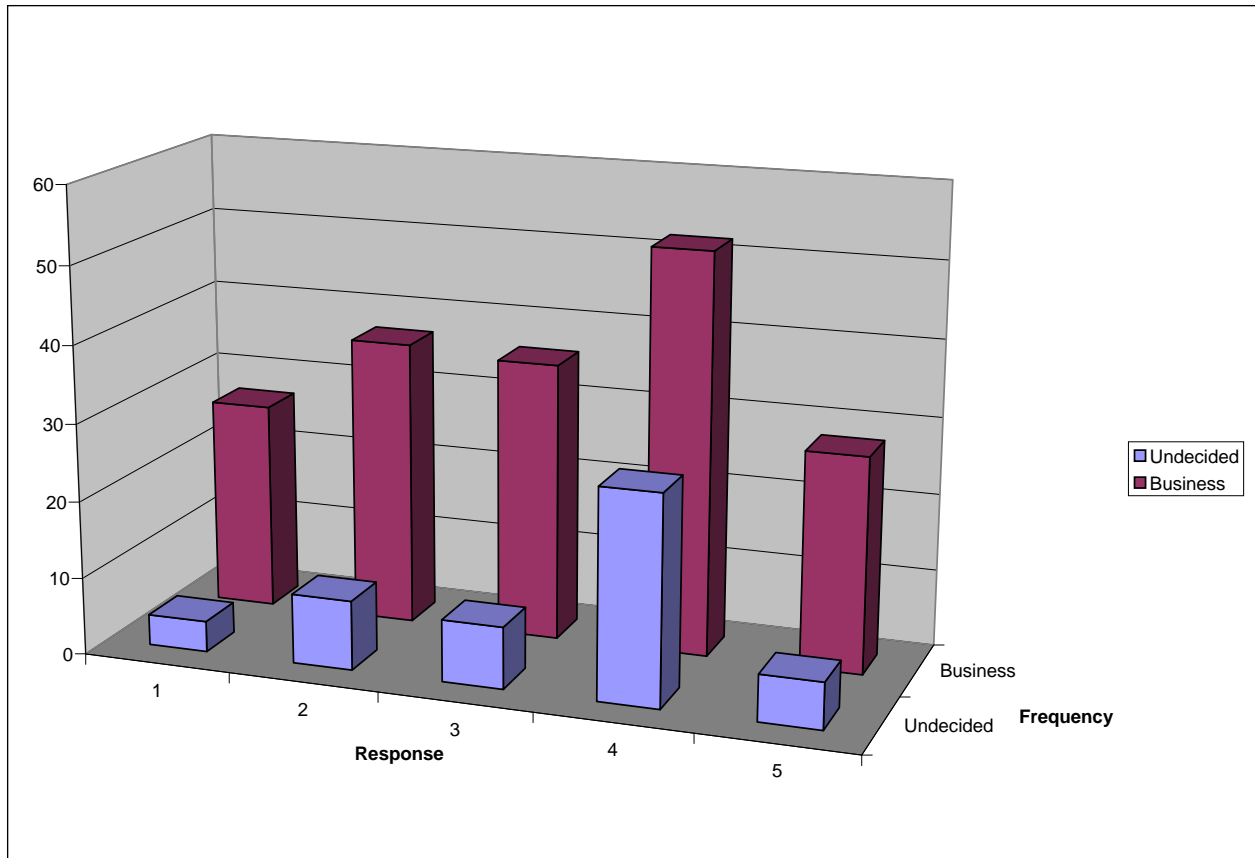


Figure 2. Career Planning of Business and Undecided Responses

Additional Analysis

To further study the student responses, each question was analyzed to determine if there is a significant difference between the cohorts on a question-by-question basis. This method analyzed the specific components of the freshman seminar.

Analyzing the remaining 17 questions, the only statistically significant difference in the question-by-question comparison was Question 3 concerning change in the idea of the student's career path. When perceived influence on the change in the student's career path was evaluated between the undecided major and business major cohorts $\chi^2(4, N = 78) = 10.36, p = 0.035$. This suggests a strong level of significance using a $\alpha = 0.10$ level of significance (Figure 3).

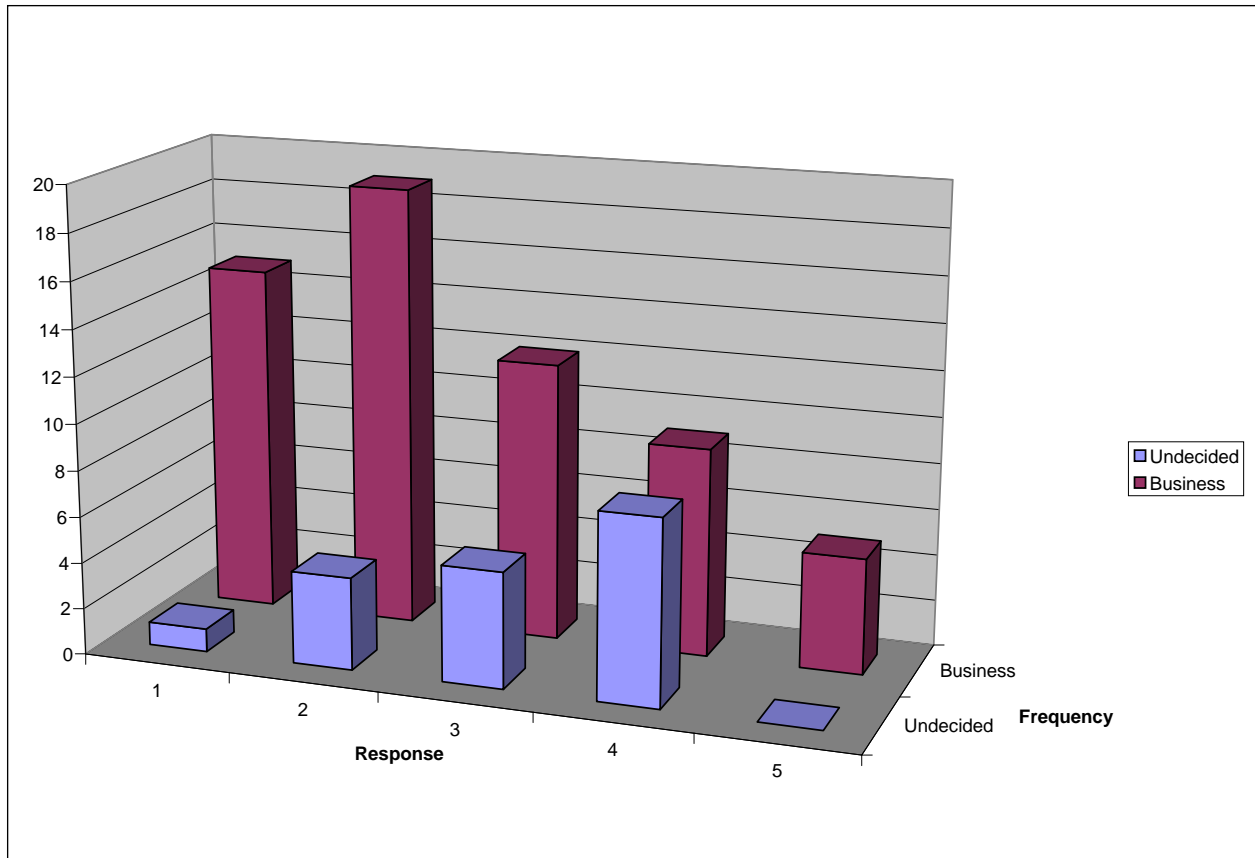


Figure 3. Question 3 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Question 16, although not significant, was very close to being statistically significant. The question concerned the student's perceived influence of having become a better problem solver/decision maker after having taken the freshman seminar. When the perceived influence of change in the student's career path was evaluated between the undecided major and business major cohorts $\chi^2(4, N = 78) = 7.05, p = 0.1333$. The p score is slightly higher than 0.10, suggesting a fairly strong level of significance using a $\alpha = 0.10$ level of significance (Figure 4).

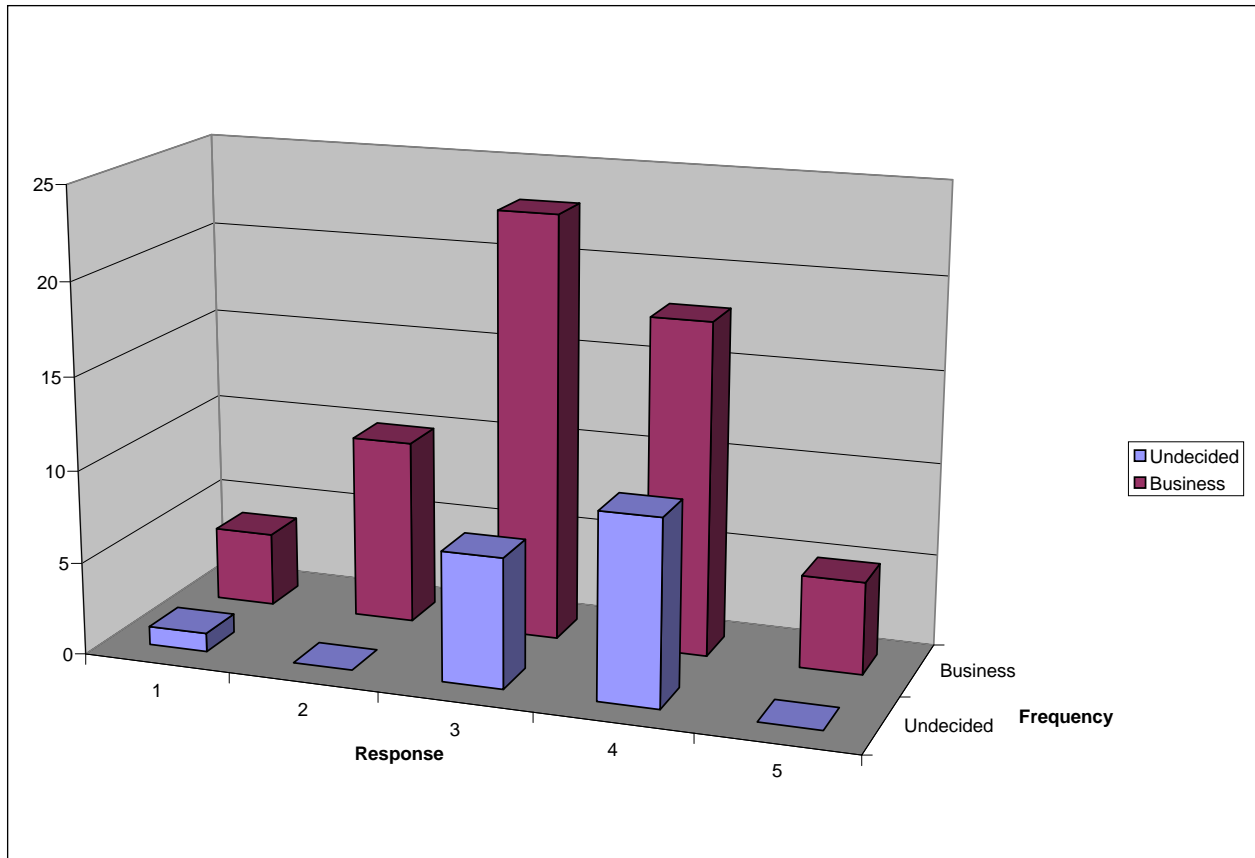


Figure 4. Question 16 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Summary

Through chi-square analysis, the results demonstrate a significant difference in the perceived influence of the freshman seminar on academic persistence and career planning between undecided-major and business-major student cohorts. When taken on a question-by-question basis, Question 3 regarding the change in the student's career path was significant. The perceived difference of the freshman seminar influence on becoming a better problem solver/decision maker as stated in Question 16 was close to being significant.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUMMARY

Introduction

Millennial students possess many characteristics and tendencies that could benefit from a freshman seminar. Level of maturity, preparedness for college, or perceived sense of belonging in college determines if a student will return to college, transfer to another college, or take time off to assess academic and career decisions (Barefoot, 2004). As can be seen in this research, a blanket approach to a freshman seminar curriculum is not sufficient even when students are divided into degree cohorts. Differences within these Millennial cohorts must be addressed, especially when the differences pertain to academic persistence and career planning.

Conclusions

The difference in perceived influence of a freshman seminar between undecided-major and business-major Millennial cohorts on academic persistence and career planning is significant. Clearly, business-major students and undecided-major students perceive the influence of the freshman seminar very differently as can be seen in the p values of the overall questions concerning academic persistence and career planning (Appendix A & Appendix B). This reiterates the necessity of tailoring the freshman seminar to each cohort's unique characteristics as it pertains to academic persistence and career planning. Although not ascertained via chi-square analysis as used in this research, the direction of the perceived differences can best be seen in Question 3 (Appendix C). The opposing trends of the histograms of the two cohorts' responses reveals the difference in perceived influence between the business-major and undecided-major student cohorts and justifies a reexamination of the freshman seminar curriculum.

Limitations

This study did have limitations. Most notably was the absence of the scores of one of the two undecided-major classes. The instructor was on leave the week of the questionnaire disbursement and gave instructions to a student employee to distribute the questionnaires. Because of the failure to distribute the questionnaires by the student employee or non-participation of the students, the questionnaires were not completed. Additionally, not all of the remaining classes who did participate had their students take the questionnaire due to absence or non-participation. Although the remaining classes did not have full participation, enough were represented to have a valid sample.

This study did not control for differences in teaching style. Although the instructors did follow a master syllabus, it is nearly impossible to control the delivery of such syllabi to the individual classes. However, this is mitigated by the requirement for all instructors to cover topics outlined in the master syllabus.

Additionally, this study was limited in the amount of students selected to participate in the study. Although there were several sections of students grouped by major, only business-major classes and undecided-major classes were selected to be in the study.

Recommendations

The study was limited in its nature and its evaluation of the freshman seminar program and first-year students. Its preliminary nature warrants great potential for further study with several areas of focus. This research includes a qualitative research design. As the research presented did not specifically articulate the direction of positive or negative gain from the seminar's influence on the two cohorts, a qualitative research design could garner better results

for the direction of perceived influence of the freshman seminar on the two student cohorts. Currently, the histograms only suggest the direction of perceived influence.

In addition, a longitudinal research design could be utilized to check for long-term consistency of the responses from the students who participated. This design could assess the accuracy of the responses when compared to the students' persistence to graduation as well as degree-choice variations over the students' college career.

Sampling all major groups participating in the freshman seminar could also lead to additional assessment. Comparing data of all the cohorts could lead to further evaluation of the perceived influence amongst all majors concerned as well as the non-majors. This could lead to additional major-focused curriculum design and more specific instructor training delivery.

However, the current research presented demonstrates the immediate need for better focus on curriculum design and delivery for the two cohorts studied. Students in the business-major and non-major cohorts perceived the seminar's influence differently overall, especially when considering career planning. Although the delivery of the seminar is similar where content is concerned, a more focused approach may better serve the needs of the students. The difference in perceived influence of the freshman seminar between the cohorts suggests additional training of the student and staff instructors as well. This method may be appropriate in order for the instructors to be more sensitive to the differences between the needs of the two freshman student cohorts and target their content delivery according to the needs of the specific cohort. This in turn may call for more specific student and staff instructor recruiting practices whereby those instructors selected have the capacity to understand the special needs of the students, have a background in the major, and have the ability to deliver the needed content to better satisfy the

expectations of the students. This could better assist the students in making better major and career decisions and succeed in persisting academically.

Summary

As Millennials continue to fill classrooms on college campuses nationwide, it is imperative that universities continue to offer better freshman seminar courses tailored to their students' needs to ensure they persist academically and have solid career plans. This research was designed to study the perceived influence of the freshman seminar on academic persistence and career planning taking in consideration various components of a freshman seminar via a post-course questionnaire. The results between the two cohorts studied, business-major and undecided-major, were significant, demonstrating that first-year students may not be receiving the content, resources, and tools that they need to realize their potential. However, with adjustments in curriculum, training, and delivery as recommended, the freshman seminar offers great potential for incorporating the desires of higher education while providing the specific assistance that first-year Millennial students need.

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Appendix A

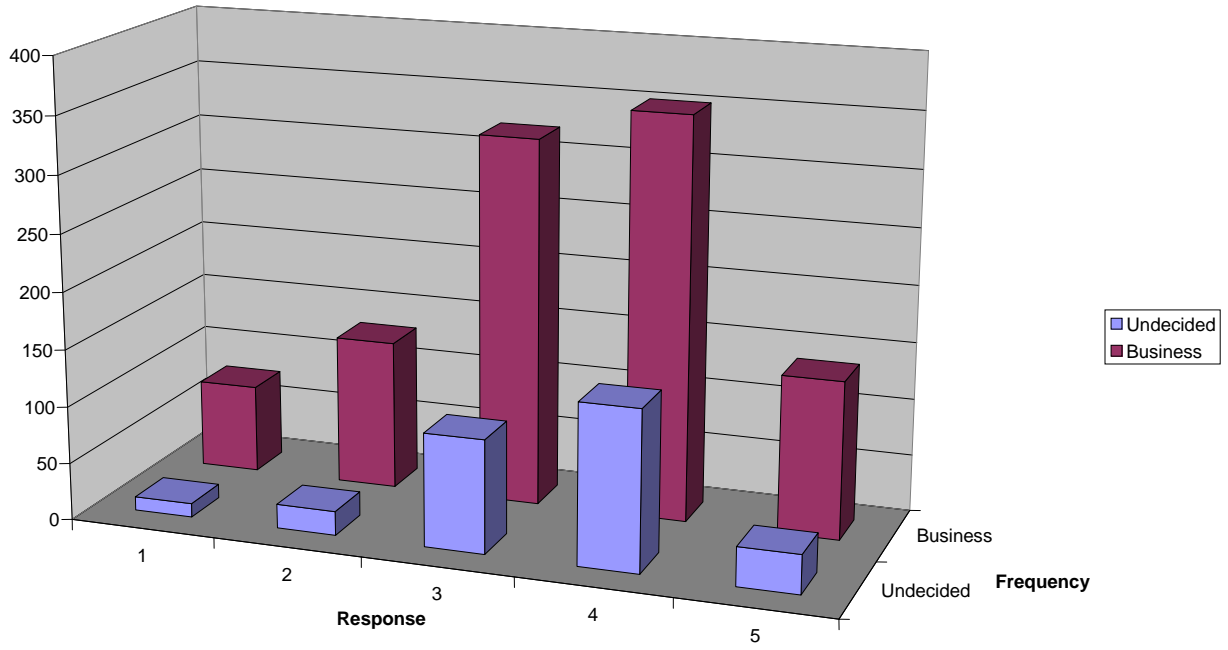


Figure 5. Academic Persistence of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 21.08, p=.0003$

Appendix B

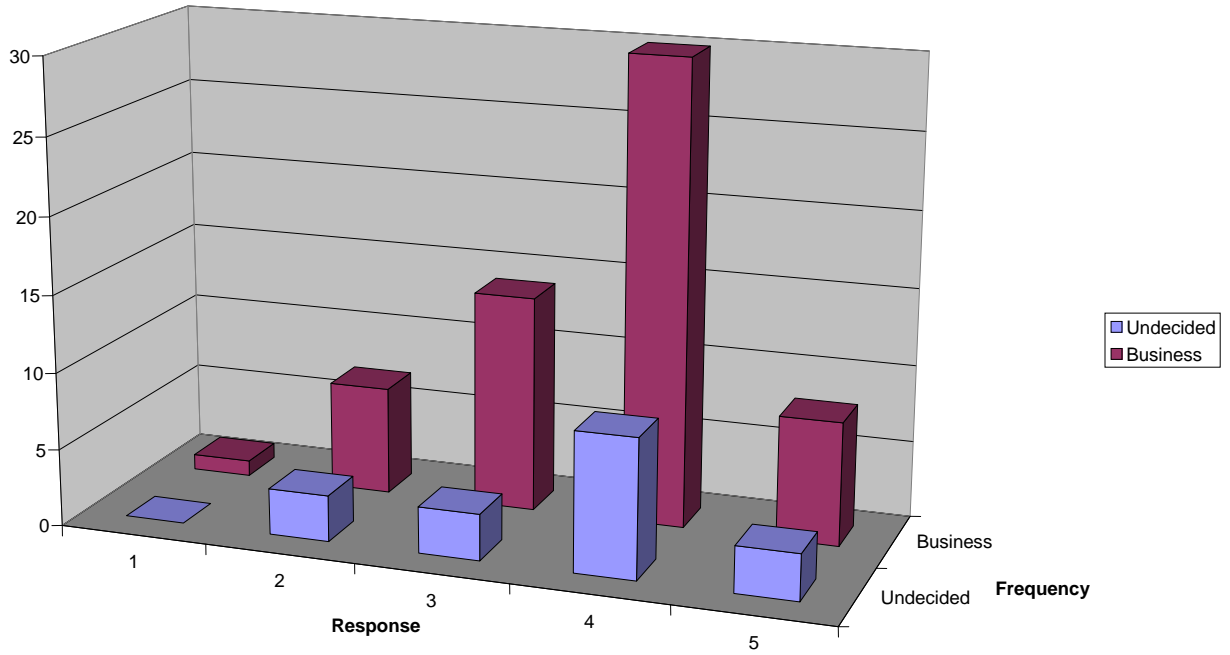


Figure 6. Career Planning of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 8.77, p=0.0671$

Appendix C

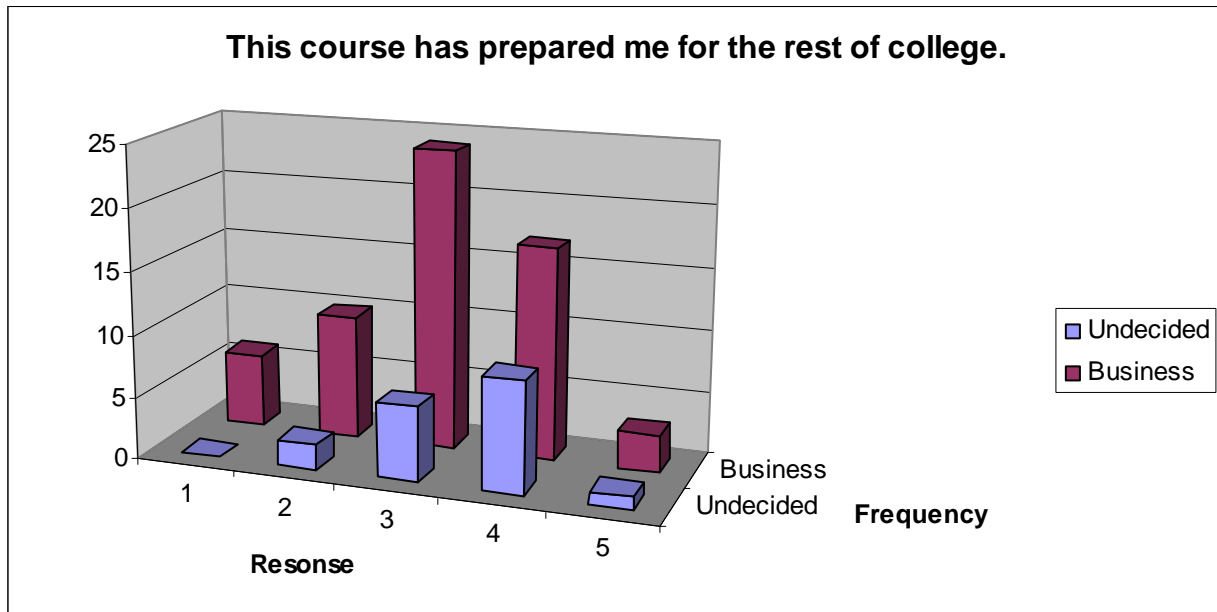


Figure 7. Question 1 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 4.2, p=.3796$

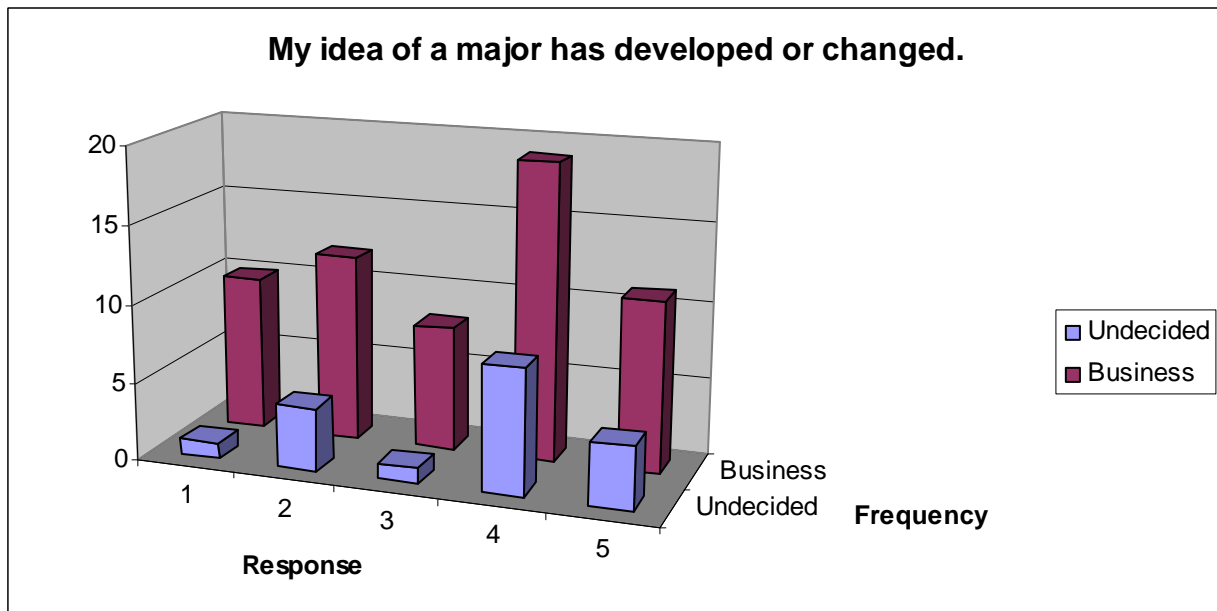


Figure 8. Question 2 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 2.73, p=.604$

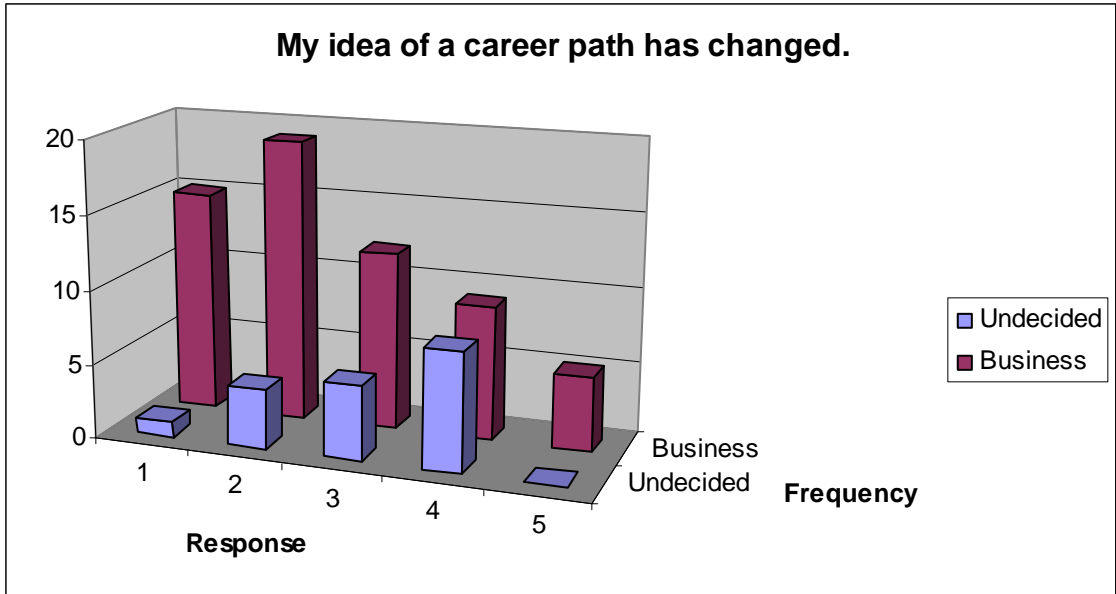


Figure 9. Question 3 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 10.36, p=.0348$

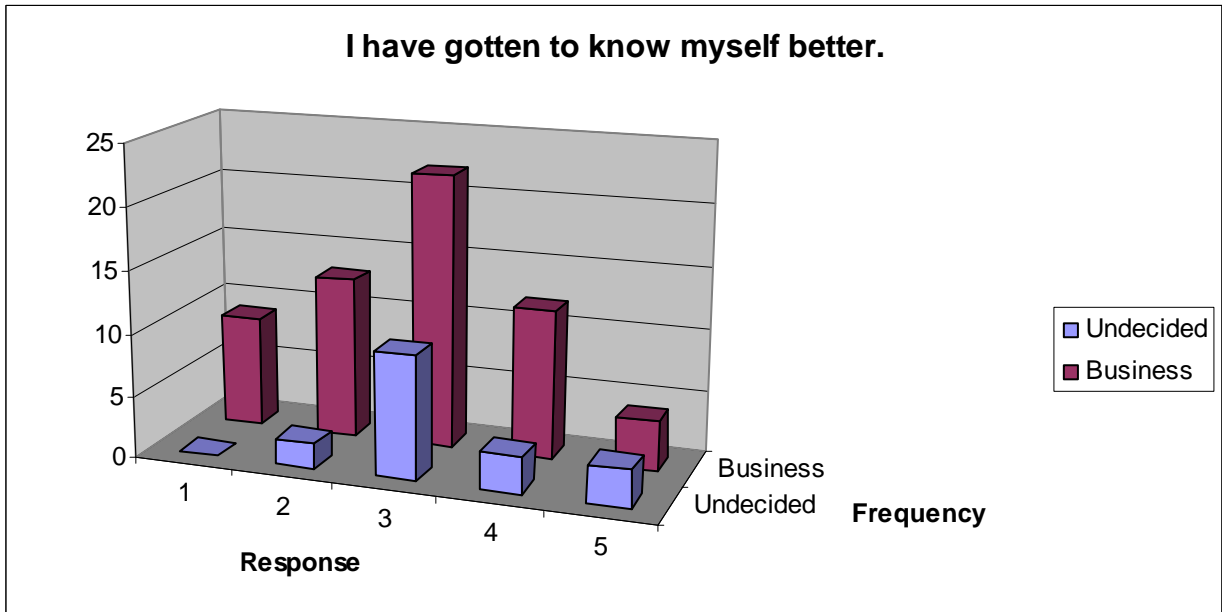


Figure 10. Question 4 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 6.33, p=.1758$

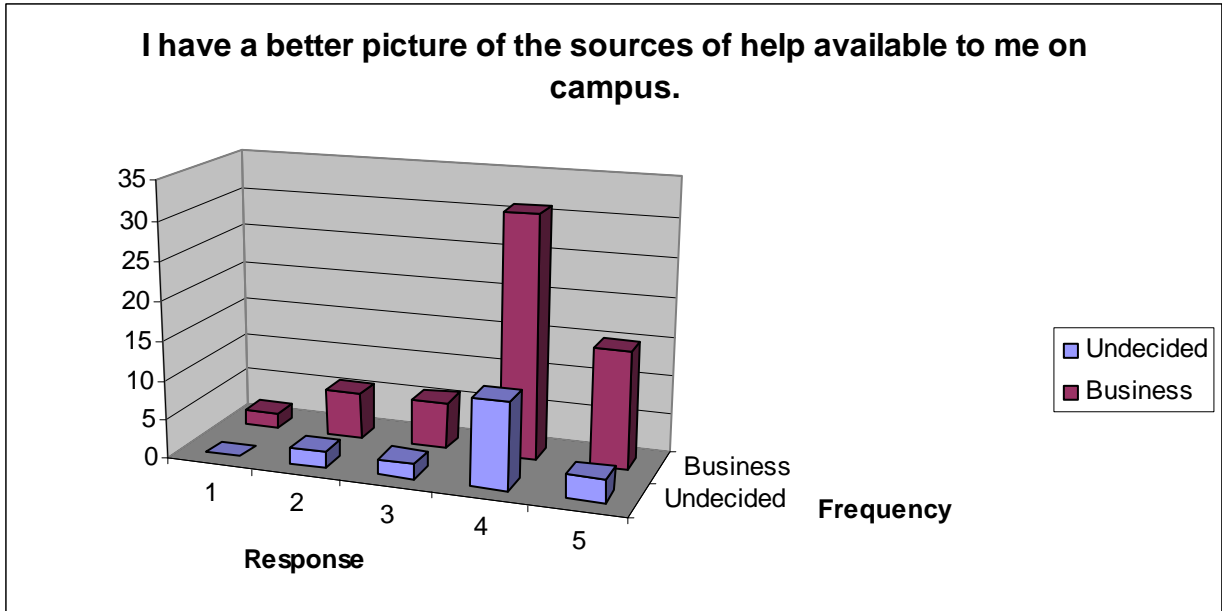


Figure 11. Question 5 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 1.28, p=.8648$

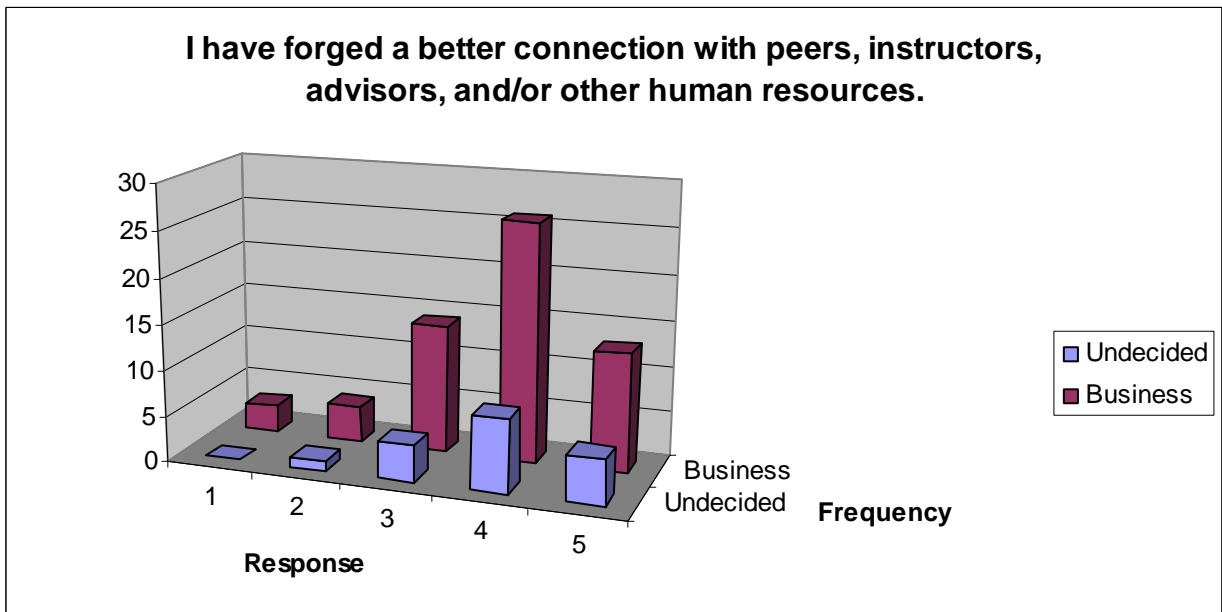


Figure 12. Question 6 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 1.16, p=.8846$

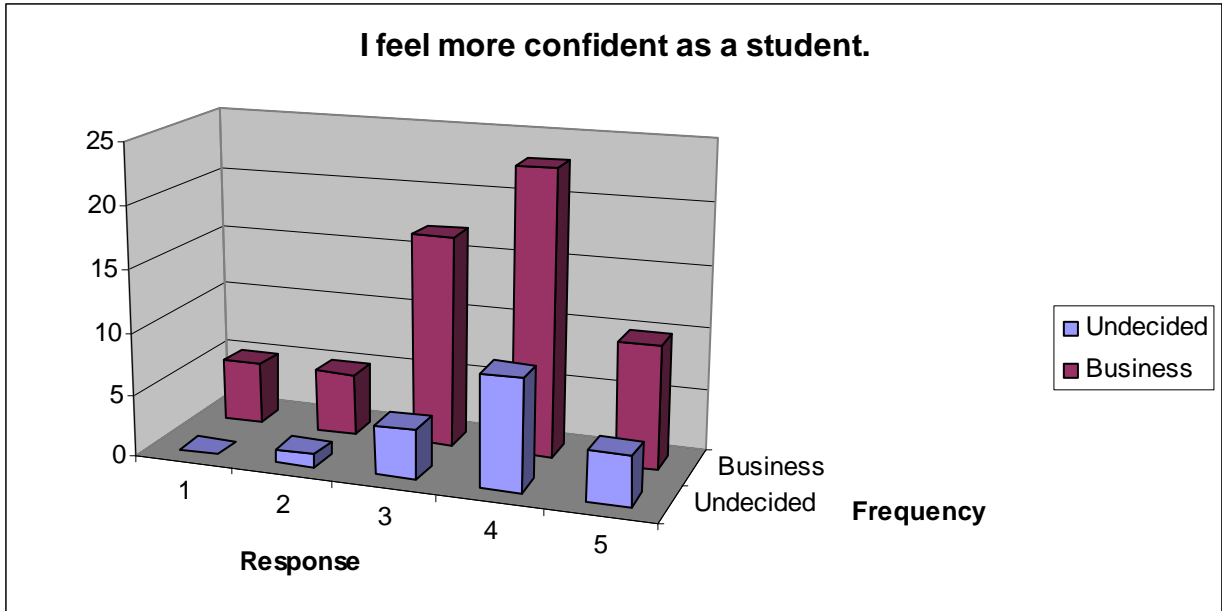


Figure 13. Question 7 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 2.53, p=.6393$

QUESTION 8

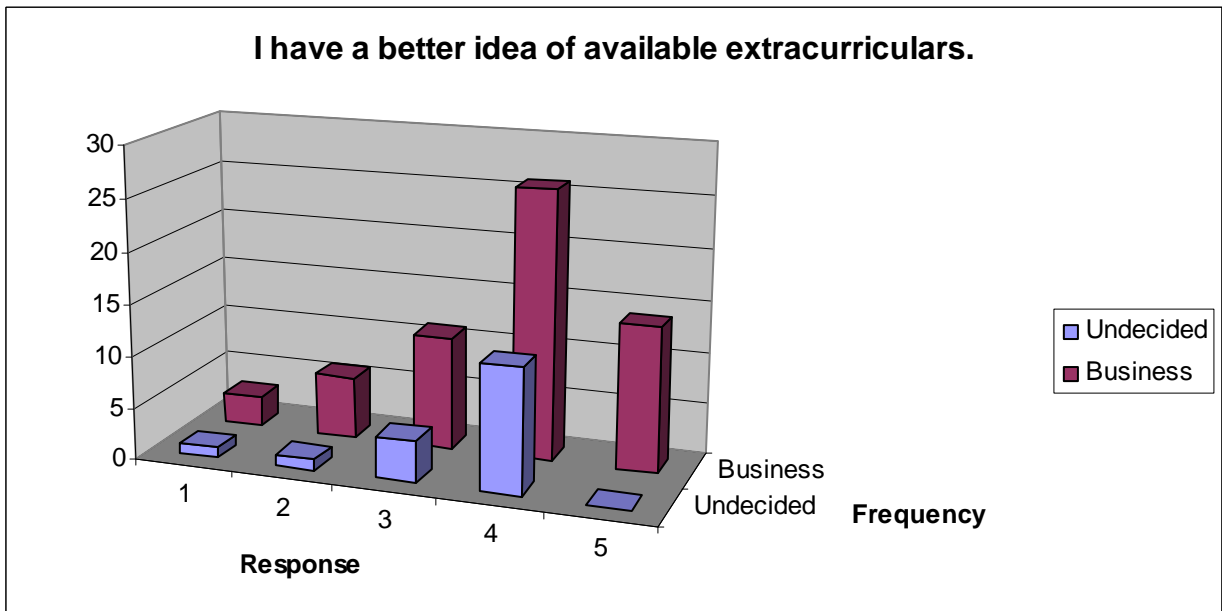


Figure 14. Question 8 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 6.17, p=.1868$

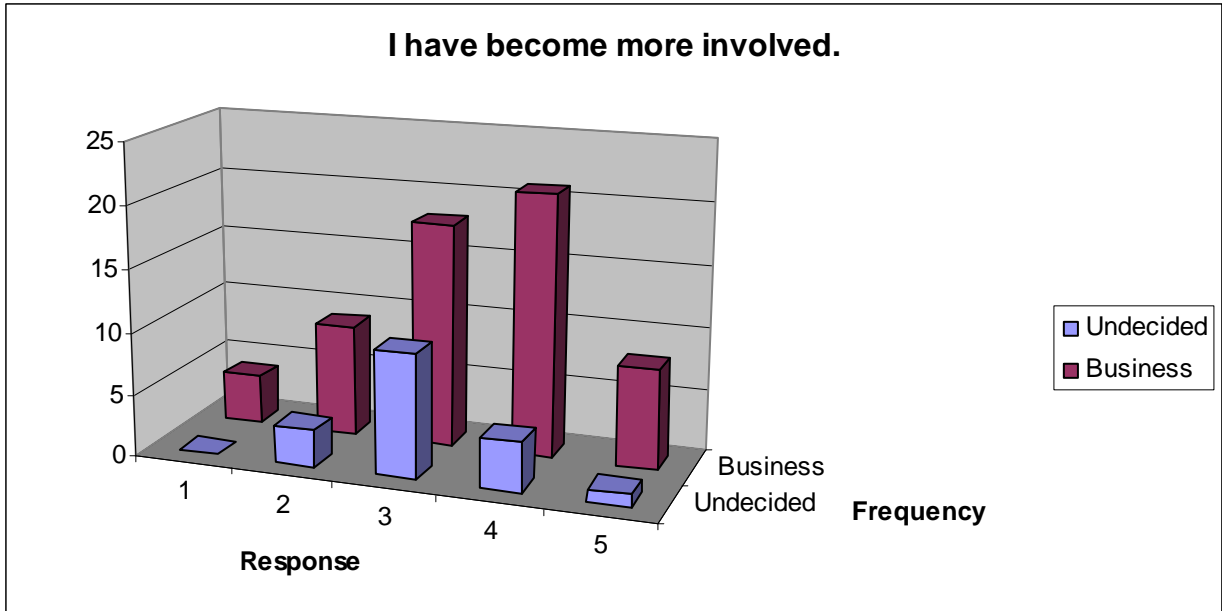


Figure 15. Question 9 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 5.18, p=.2693$

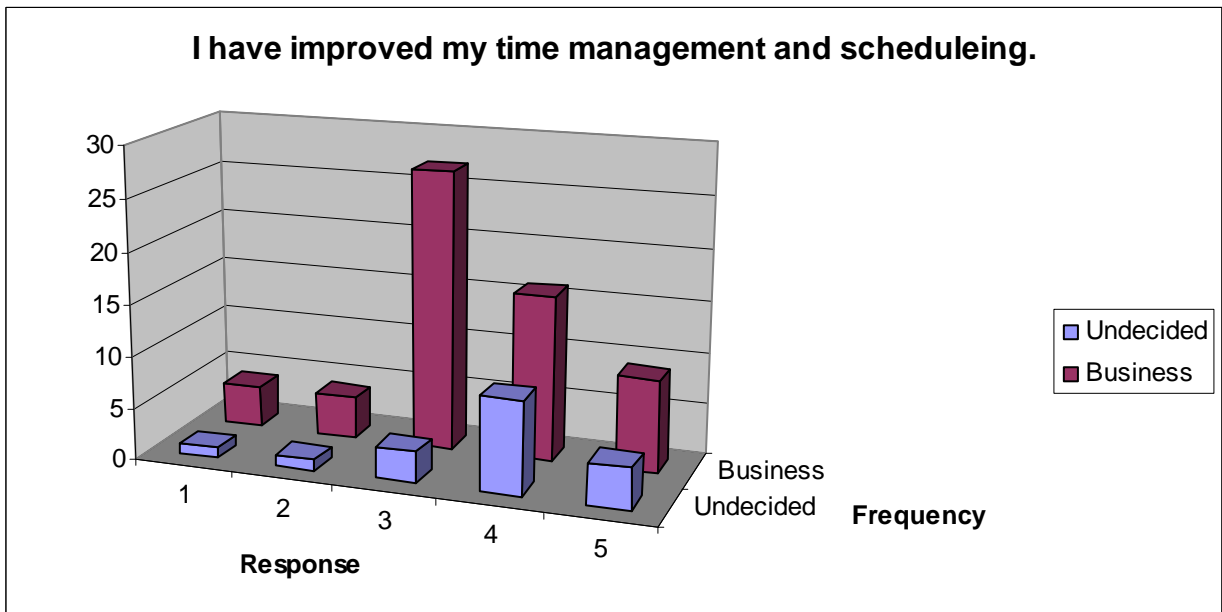


Figure 16. Question 10 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 5.73, p=.2202$

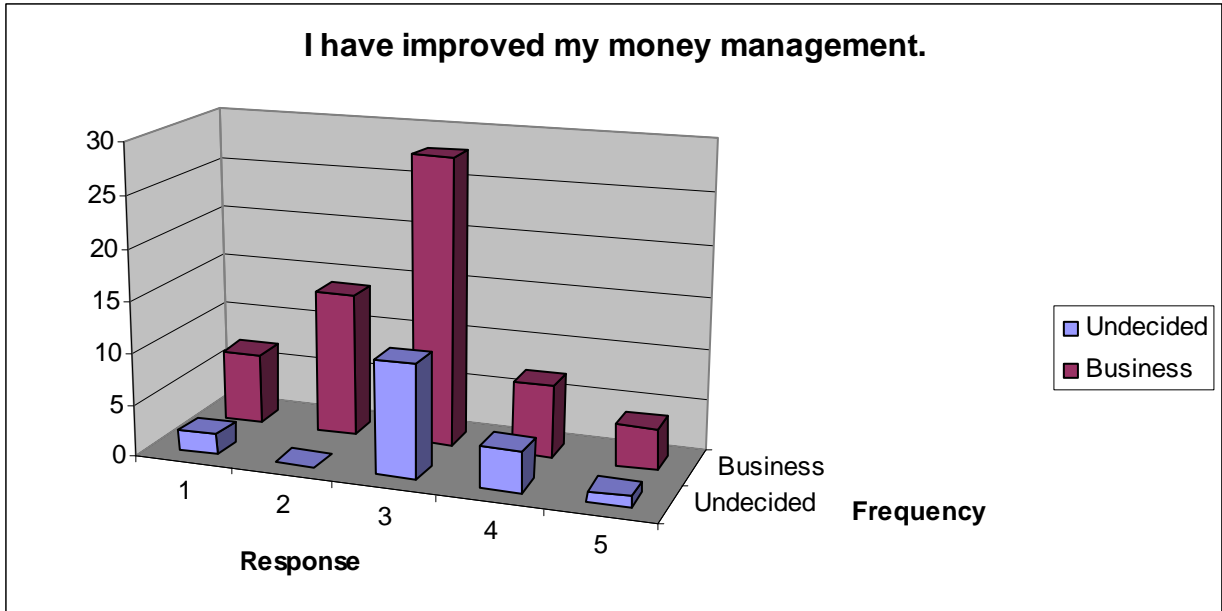


Figure 17. Question 11 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 5.9, p=.2067$

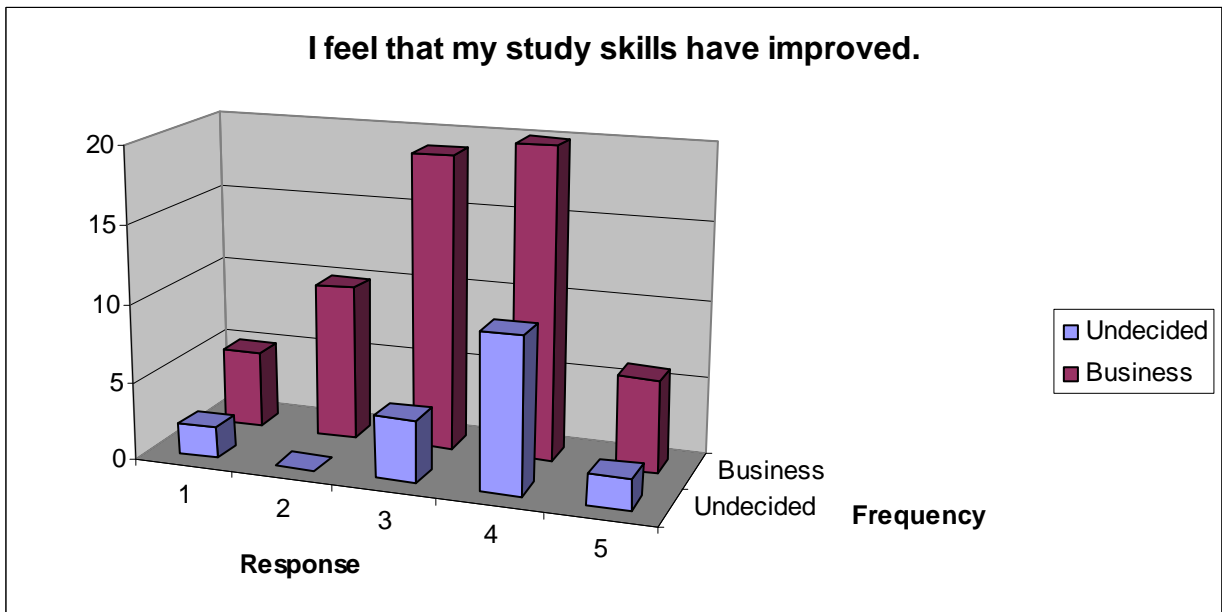


Figure 18. Question 12 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 5.33, p=.2551$

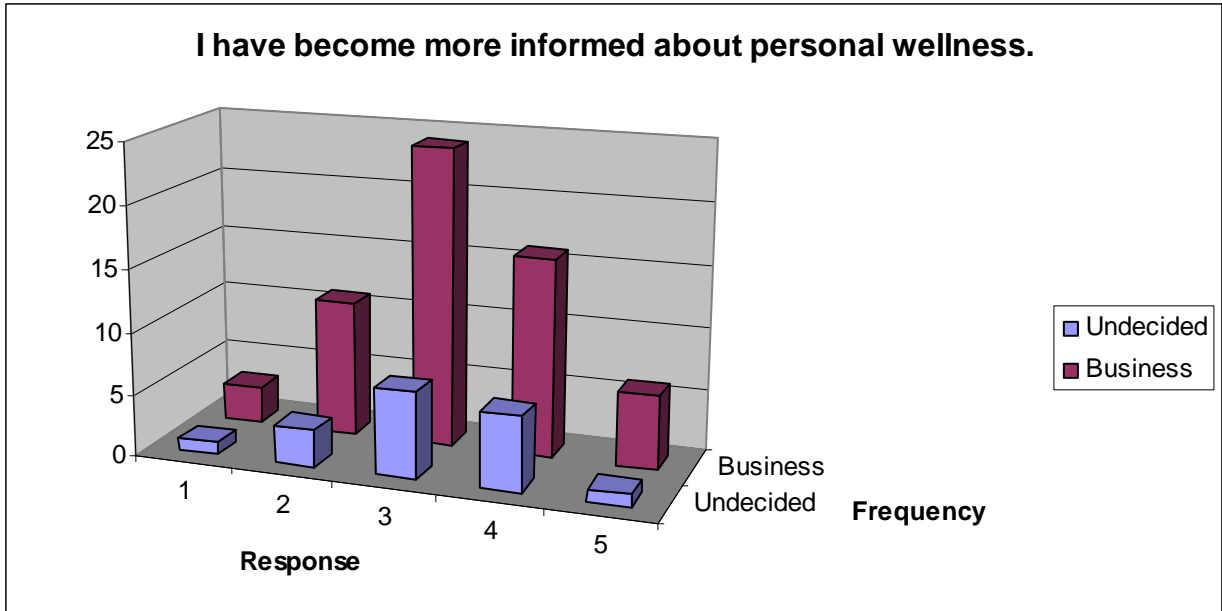


Figure 19. Question 13 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = .56, p=.9674$

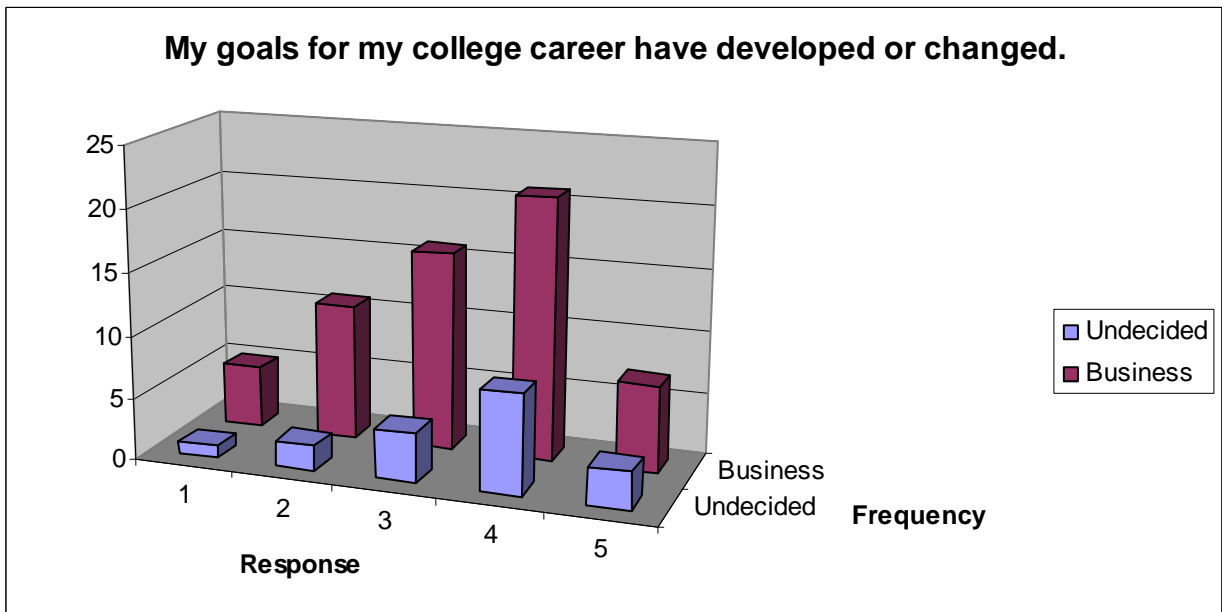


Figure 20. Question 14 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 1.28, p=.8648$

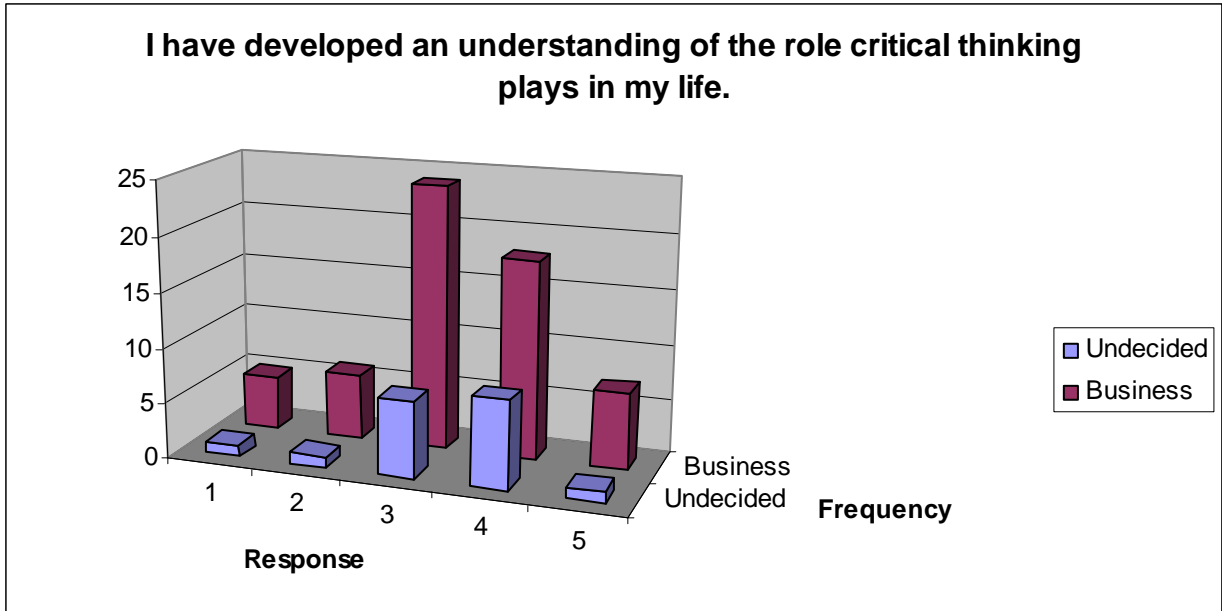


Figure 21. Question 15 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 1.82, p=.7688$

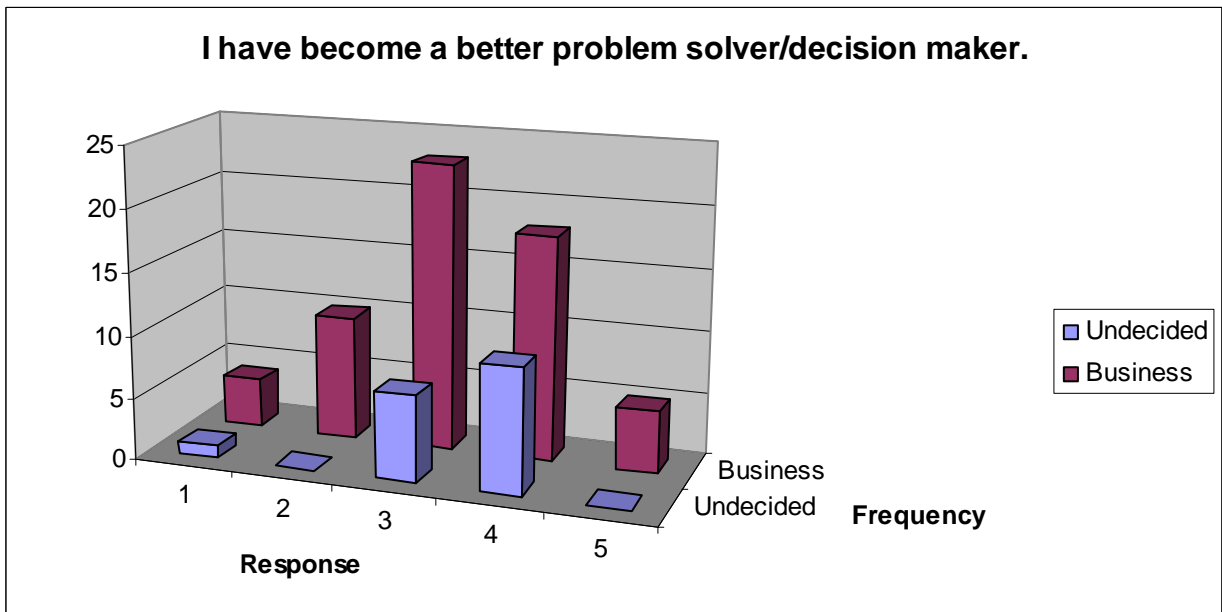


Figure 22. Question 16 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 7.05, p=.1333$

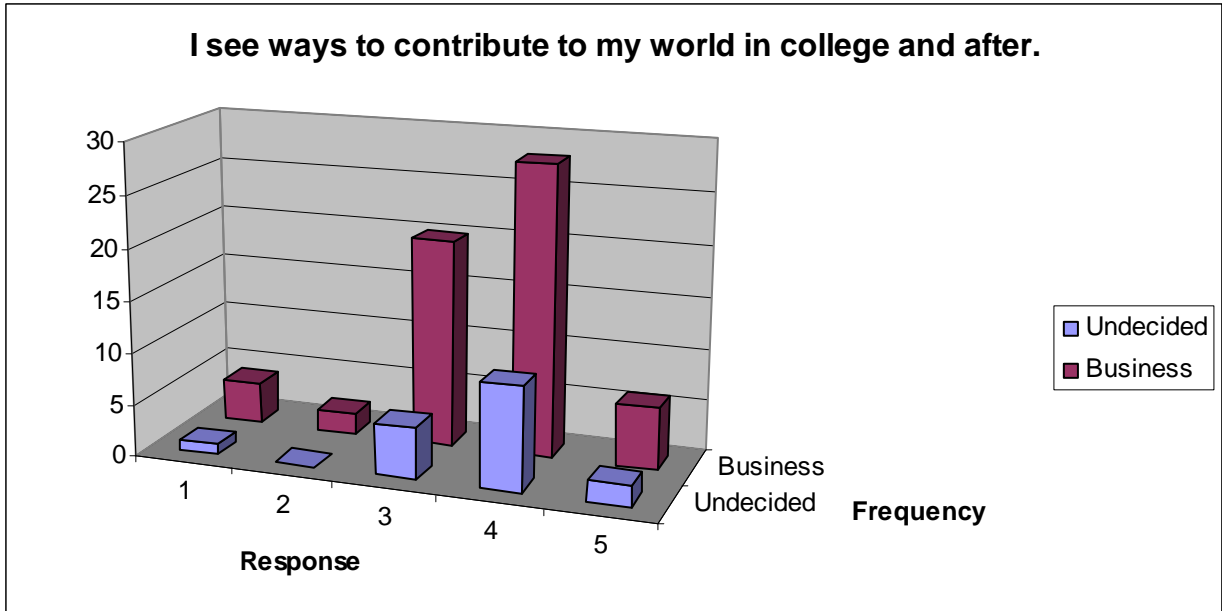


Figure 23. Question 17 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 1, p=.9098$

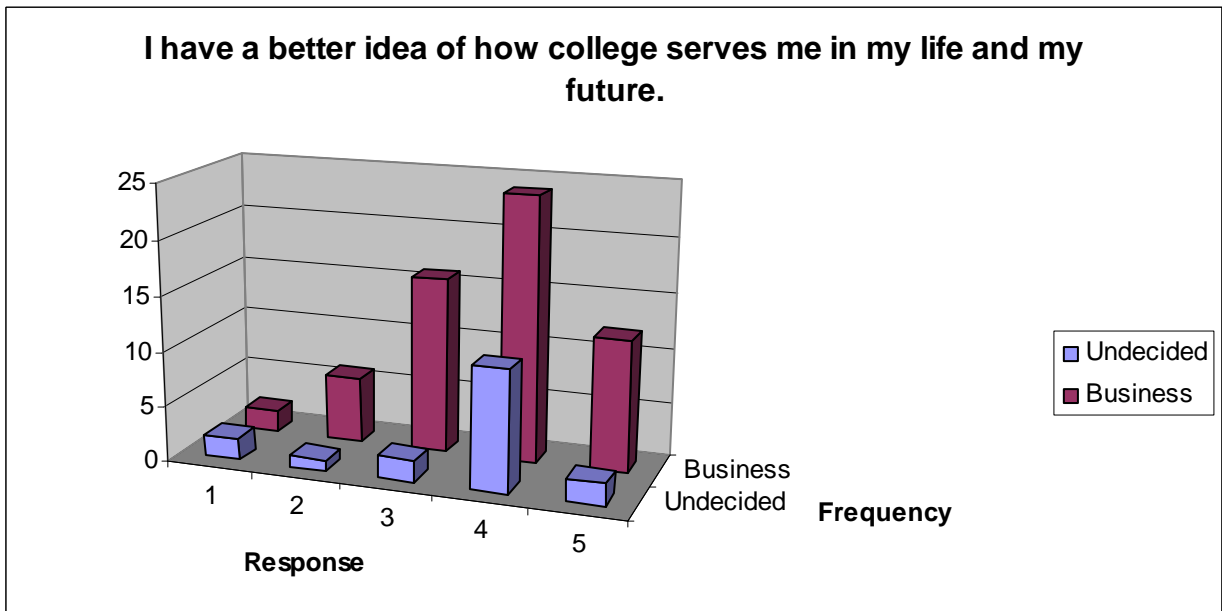


Figure 24. Question 18 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 5.37, p=.2514$

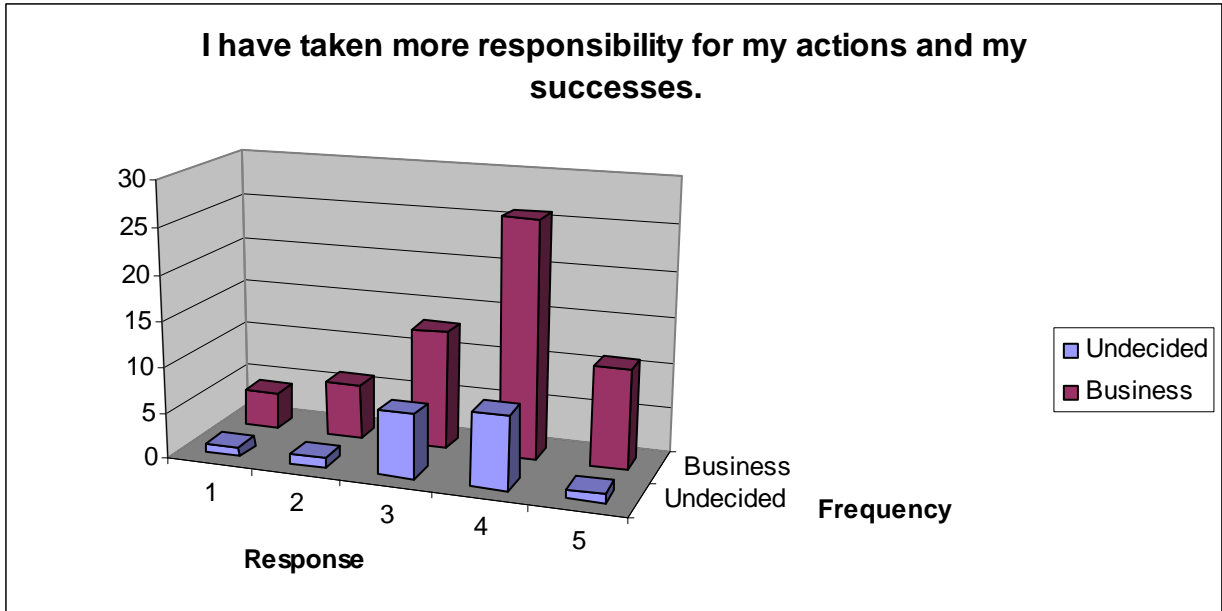


Figure 25. Question 9 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 3.41, p=.4917$

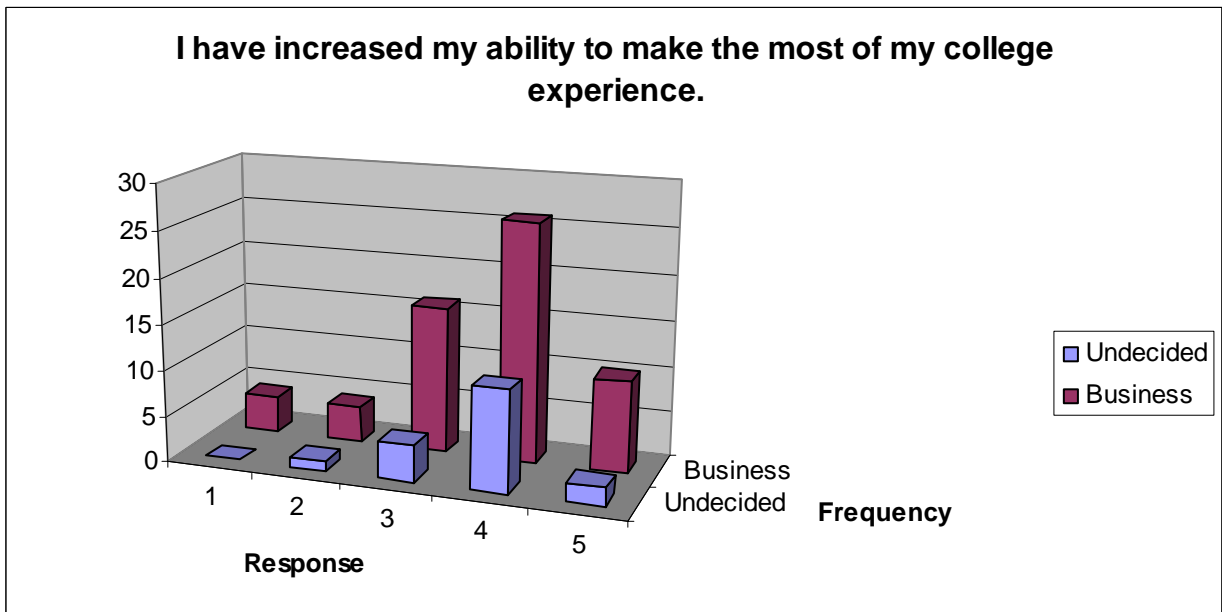


Figure 26. Question 20 Responses of Business and Undecided Responses

Note: $\chi^2 (4, N=78) = 2.53, p=.6393$

Appendix D

SELF-EVALUATION: POST COURSE

Although changes may have come about in your life for various reasons, please answer each one of these questions in terms of **YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THIS COURSE**. For each question, please rate yourself according to the following scale:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. This course has prepared me for the rest of college.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
2. My idea of a major has developed or changed.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
3. My idea about a career path has changed.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
4. I have gotten to know myself better.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
5. I have a better picture of the sources of help available to me on campus.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
6. I have forged a better connection with peers, instructors, advisors, and/or other human resources.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
7. I feel more confident as a student.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
8. I have a better idea of available extracurriculars.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
9. I have become more involved.	1	2	3	4	5
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10. I have improved my time management and scheduling.	1	2	3	4	5

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree		
11. I have improved my money management.			1	2	3	4	5
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12. I feel that my study skills have improved.			1	2	3	4	5
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13. I have become more informed about personal wellness.			1	2	3	4	5
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14. My goals for my college career have developed or changed.			1	2	3	4	5
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15. I have developed an understanding of the role critical thinking plays in my life.			1	2	3	4	5
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16. I have become a better problem solver/decision maker.			1	2	3	4	5
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17. I see ways to contribute to my world in college and after.			1	2	3	4	5
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18. I have a better idea of how college serves me in my life and my future.			1	2	3	4	5
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19. I have taken more responsibility for my actions and my successes.			1	2	3	4	5
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20. I have increased my ability to make the most of my college experience.			1	2	3	4	5

Modified Source: Carter, C. J., Bishop, J., & Kravits, S. L. (2006) Keys to Successful Teaching: Instructor's Manual and Test Item File to Accompany Keys to Success Brief. (4th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall