# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

In recent years, increased emphasis has been placed on the importance of obtaining a college education. It is a common belief that the American dream can only be achieved by the acquisition of a college degree. In our society, political and social movements have created a belief system that all Americans should have equal opportunities. A component of this belief system involves the pursuit of a college degree; this has lured more and more high school students to postsecondary school programs. The drive to educate the vast majority of the American populace has contributed to college admissions being open to all applicants. This has created a flood of students entering colleges and universities (Browne-Miller, 1996).

College has not always been easily accessible to the general population and it took the enactment of two federal laws to open the doors of college to the typical American citizen. The Morrill Act of 1862 and the G.I. Bill of 1942 provided opportunities for the general population to attend college (Kiester, 1994). The federal Morrill Act, created the system of land-grant colleges and universities. The First Morrill Act of 1862 and the Second Morrill Act 1890 provided for the institutions to teach agriculture, military tactics, mechanical arts, and classified studies so members of the working class could obtain a liberal and practical education (Dooley, 1998). By providing a broader segment of the population with practical education throughout the nation, the Morrill Act revolutionized agricultural education in America and made college affordable for children of the farmers' and the workingmen (Good, 1970).

In the early 1940's, the government's concern for the postwar welfare of World War II soldiers arose in the form of public sentiment for legislation to help veterans during the period immediately after their release from active duty. But there were also other motives behind this concern. It was also perceived that the failure to enact legislation to assist able-bodied veterans returning to civilian life would have had negative impact on both the economy and the well being of the veteran. Moreover, the "college for everyone clauses" of the G.I. Bill were really a political ploy; the bill's real purpose was to "keep the boys off the streets" (Olson, 1974). Haunted by the gloomy warning of a postwar economic depression fueled by the potential of war veterans returning to civilian life with few employment opportunities, Congress presented the veterans with college as an option upon their return from war (Kiester, 1994).

President Roosevelt signed the G.I. Bill on June 22, 1944, thus providing millions of veterans with an opportunity to go to college, as well as providing them a means to build a better life (Zook, 1994). The social transformation that occurred challenged higher education to respond to new opportunities and problems. The unparalleled explosion of students matriculating to college and university campuses complicated the role of higher education (Dooley, 1998). As masses of veterans enrolled in American colleges, higher education became less like an ivory tower and more a part of mainstream American society. As a result, American higher education was irrevocably changed (Kerr, 1994).

The opportunity for a college education did not diminish after the initial influx of GIs into higher education. As recently as 1997, President Clinton in his State of the Union Address stressed the growing appeal of universal college education and declared that every 18 year old must be able to go to college. In Clinton's call to action for American education he established a goal to make two years of college as universal in America by the 21st century as a high school education is today (United States Capitol, 1997).

Unfortunately, many high school graduates lack adequate preparation to undertake college-level work. Instead of denying admission to unprepared high school graduates, colleges and universities typically have dealt with underprepared students by offering remedial college courses in subjects such as mathematics and English (Hamilton, 1992).

Students usually do not accrue credit for such classes. Rather, remedial classes only serve as prerequisites for credit-bearing classes in mathematics and English.

Several studies show that the number of college freshmen enrolled in remedial courses is one indication that many American high school graduates are not adequately prepared for college (Gaines & Musick, 1988; Hamilton, 1992; McCoy, 1991). Hamilton reported that 33% of first time freshmen are placed in remedial courses. McCoy reported 40% of students needed remediation in reading, 33% in English and 39% in mathematics upon college matriculation. A Florida State House of Representatives report (1996) revealed that 69% of high school graduates entering college in that state in 1990 were required to complete at least one remedial course.

Other state estimates are somewhat lower. In West Virginia, for example, 52% of high school graduates who enrolled in college needed remedial courses (West Virginia Association for Developmental Education, 1997). But even this statistic suggests that over 50% of the high school graduates need remediation, and that has prompted understandable concern among educators, legislators, and parents.

This concern is not expected to dissipate as high school graduation and college enrollment rates continue to grow. A review of statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics suggests that the number of high school graduates will increase 1.6% annually to a projected 2.7 million by the year 2007 (Gerald & Hussar, 1997). The projections for enrollment in institutions of higher education also are expected to grow through the year 2007, with the 18 - 24 year old age group accounting for the largest increase.

Consistent with the past, future college freshmen classes will be comprised primarily of students who have graduated recently from high school. Moreover, increases in college enrollment likely will be equally distributed between two-year and four-year institutions. Enrollment in two-year colleges is projected to increase by 8.5% while enrollment in four-year institutions is projected to increase by 8.2% by the year 2007 (Gerald & Hussard, 1997).

Based on a review of projected enrollment data and the number of students currently enrolled in college remedial classes, it is reasonable to conclude that students will continue to enter college unprepared to handle the academic rigors of higher education.

College remedial courses are only one of the alternatives available to address the needs of the underprepared college student (Culross, 1996). Another alternative to enhance the ability of high school graduates to meet the demands of higher education is to place increased emphasis on high school preparatory courses. Secondary schools have been encouraged to establish college preparatory courses of study, raise the level of course requirements in their college preparation programs, and/or improve the use of assessment programs to better prepare students for college (Southern Regional Education Board, 1988). In 1981 Ohio established an Advisory Council for College Preparatory Education to review the progress of college preparatory programs and issues that are related to the high school-college relationship. This council found that a lack of clearly stated academic college requirements and a college preparatory curriculum contributed to the significant number of incoming freshmen needing remedial college coursework (Bandy, 1985).

Other school districts have taken additional steps to better prepare students for college. For example, Swanson (1993) reported that San Diego's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program established high expectations for students by altering its curriculum and changing the framework for its core subjects. The AVID curriculum is designed to provide students with appropriate training to successfully achieve their post-high school goals, whether the goal is to attend college, enroll in additional vocational training, or enter the work force.

High schools have developed curricula that are expected to prepare students to achieve their postsecondary aspirations. However, an extensive review of the literature suggests that these curricula are not accomplishing that goal. Some studies have examined how student performance in high school predicts college preparedness (Boughan, 1995; Carter, 1992; Chernault, 1996; Culbertson, 1997). One study found high school students' GPAs, placement test scores and the completion of an Algebra I course were found to be good predictors of college success in mathematics (Chernault, 1996). In another study, high school students' performance in the core curriculum was a more accurate predictor of college performance than GPA, class rank, or ACT test scores (Carter, 1992).

Other studies contradict the notion of using high school performance to predict success in college. In a study by Culbertson (1997), the use high school GPAs, achievement test results, and writing samples were found to have little predictive value in terms of college success. Boughan (1995) reported results from a longitudinal study that suggested scores on a pre-registration developmental placement test were the most efficient method for identifying college students who were most likely to succeed in college.

These studies examined student’s preparedness for college from a review of the data collected from high school records and college records. But it would seem that one source of information about how well high schools prepare students for college has been overlooked. High school graduates who subsequently enroll in college classes are rarely asked about the effectiveness of their secondary academic programs. Surveying college students would provide valuable information on the effectiveness of the student's high school experience. Collecting information from the student's perspective on the role their teachers, guidance counselors, and parents played

in preparing them for college, as well as exploring steps they took themselves to get ready for college would reveal valuable information. Such data might suggest to practitioners the strategies that work well and those that warrant further attention when preparing high school students for college. Additionally, there is no extant data on the issue of remedial education from students enrolled in such classes nor is there existing data on how students' perceptions of high school preparation differ by gender and race.

This study addressed the gap in the existing body of work on developmental education by examining the perceptions of college students in remedial and regular English classes about their preparation for college-level work. The results were tabulated by gender, race, and type of class.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the high school experiences of freshmen college students enrolled in remedial and regular English classes by gender and race. The study investigated the students' perceptions of the factors that resulted in their enrollment in different types of English courses.

Data were collected by administering a survey designed specifically for this study. The instrument was developed to explore the roles played by four groups associated with preparing students for college: high school teachers; high school guidance counselors; parents; and the students.

## Research Questions

The present study was designed to examine the following statistical research questions:
1. Is there a significant difference in perceptions about the role high school teachers played in preparing students for college by gender, race, or type of class (developmental v. regular English)?
2.Is there a significant difference in perceptions about the role high school guidance counselors played in preparing students for college by gender, race, or type of class?
3. Is there a significant difference in perceptions about the role that parents played in preparing students for college by gender, race, or type of class?
4. Is there a significant difference in perceptions about the role that students played in preparing themselves for college by gender, race, or type of class?

## Significance of the Study

The present study had significance for both future professional practice and further research. In terms of practice, high school administrators, parents of high school students and high school students themselves may benefit from the results of this study. High school administrators could use the results to develop college preparation courses that would better prepare students for college. The results of this study may provide information that would enable high school administrators and teaching staff to evaluate the courses offered and teaching strategies used in

the classroom. Student results also may suggest instructional strategies that would enable students to function more successfully on the college level.

The results of the present study may provide parents with information to assist them in helping their children achieve the skills needed to succeed in college. Understanding what types of parental support students found helpful may enable parents to provide that positive support and to avoid behaviors that are perceived not as helpful.

High school students may use the results to increase their understanding of what skills are required to successfully complete college courses. Research that examines the preparation needed to successfully complete freshmen college courses might be helpful to high school students. This study suggested to high school students what types of study habits and organizational skills are important for college academic preparation.

The present study also might lead to future research. Scholars may wish to explore the relationship between students' high school grade point averages (GPAs) and enrollment in remedial classes in college. Such research might reveal whether a student's performance in prescribed high school course work alleviates the likelihood of having to take remedial courses in college.

The legislative concern for accountability and general public demand for public education reform has promoted greater interest in educational evaluation (Popham, 1996). This emphasis on gathering and interpreting information on student achievement has generated an interest in developing a national test to measure high school achievement. Shephard (1991) argued that by setting standards and measuring achievement, student learning would be equalized. Stake (1991) suggested that in order to have students become competitive in a world marketplace, the United States must have an effective education system that can determine the level of scholastic achievement for each student. The widespread use of standardized achievement tests and the potential for national testing of high school students is likely to fuel further research. Researchers may want to investigate the relationship between the results of standardized achievement tests and college preparation. Research of this nature might add to the body of knowledge on the relationship between standardized testing and post-high school preparation.

Universal high school curricula might also be an area of further study. The establishment of national goals for public school students is expected to raise educational standards for students (Cogan & Derricott, 1996). Researchers might explore the relationships that exist between the mastery of high school curricular objectives and students' postsecondary education preparation. This type of research may yield information that would be helpful to educators in preparing curricular objectives that are relevant to students’ post-secondary preparation.

## Definition of Terms

For purposes of the present study, the following definitions were used:

1. College Preparatory Course of Study: The high school curriculum that is designed to prepare the high school student for enrollment in credited college English courses.

2. College Remedial (Developmental) English Courses: Non-credit English courses offered to freshmen who demonstrate they are underprepared or lack prerequisite skills to perform successfully in credited college English and courses.
3. Regular English Courses: Beginning freshman level English courses required of all college students. Regular English courses are credited courses.
4. Minority Students: African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, other minorities as self reported by the students.

## Limitations of the Study

The present study did present some limitations for consideration. One limitation of the study related to the sample. Participants were enrolled in regular and developmental English classes at only two schools, one community college and one four-year college. It is possible that these students differed from students at other community colleges and four-year colleges. Inferences made from these findings were limited to students in remedial and general freshman English course who attended these schools.

A second limitation to the study was that it did not differentiate between full-time or part-time students. It is possible that differences in enrollment status skewed the results in some manner.

An additional limitation to the study involved the high school course of study. Participants represented students who had completed a variety of high school programs; therefore, there were inconsistencies in the types of high school courses completed. Such differences might have influenced the results of the study.

Another limitation to the study involved the tests the colleges used for course placements. Each college had its own set of entrance tests and results criteria; therefore, participants may have been placed in a developmental course at one school and a regular course at the other school depending on the test results. If this occurred the results of the study might have been influenced.

No data were collected on students' socio economic status (SES); therefore, it is possible that the SES of the participants may have influenced the results of the study.

A final limitation to this study involved the teacher scale on the instrument used to collect data. Generally, high school students have a different teacher for each subject; up to perhaps seven teachers per day. It is possible that some participants generalized their responses on the instrument to their high school teachers in general while others based their responses on a single teacher. If this occurred, the results might have been skewed. Despite these limitations, however, the present research offers some introductory insights into how students perceive their high school scholastic experiences and whether high school prepared them for college level academic work in English.

## Organization of the Study

This study is organized around five chapters. Chapter One provides the background and the significance of the study. This chapter also describes the research questions investigated. Chapter Two provides an extensive review of the literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three outlines the methodology employed in the study including sample selection techniques and the procedures used to collect and analyze the data. Chapter Four reports the results of the investigation, while Chapter Five discusses those results and their implications for future practice and research