Education Dissertations and Projects   School of Education

2013

First-Generation Freshman College Students: Factors Impacting Retention for the Subsequent Year

Laura Colson McLean
Gardner-Webb University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education_etd

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, Educational Methods Commons, and the Higher Education Commons

First-Generation Freshman College Students: Factors Impacting Retention for the
Subsequent Year

By
Laura Colson McLean

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2013

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Laura Colson McLean under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

_____ _____
David Shellman, Ed.D.   Date
Committee Chair

_____ _____
Jane King, Ed.D.   Date
Committee Member

_____ _____
Deborah Bailey, Ph.D.   Date
Committee Member

_____ _____
Jeff Rogers, Ph.D.   Date
Dean of Graduate School

Abstract

First-Generation Freshman College Students: Factors Impacting Retention for the Subsequent Year. McLean, Laura, 2013: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, College/First-Generation/Low-Income/Retention/Student Support Services

Against all odds, first-generation college students continue to enroll in postsecondary schools with aspirations of obtaining a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, many have not successfully reached their goal, which in turn has affected retention rates of colleges and universities. There are programs that provide academic support and advising to increase retention for first-generation college students. However, there are academic and nonacademic needs of the students that colleges, universities, and public policymakers have neglected to address.

The purpose of this research study was to determine from 168 first-generation college students at 5 participating institutions, what factors impacted their enrollment after their first year in college. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1982) served as the study's theoretical foundation. Findings warranted the following conclusions: the academic factors that motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year were having a positive rapport with faculty and staff, personal goal of degree completion, and support services provided by the institution. Data analysis revealed that the non-academic factors that motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year were: family, peers, and a sense of community on campus.

This research provides data for Student Support Services (SSS) programs in reference to services their eligible freshman participants deem necessary in order to enroll in college the subsequent year. This information can be used by the programs to evaluate the services currently provided to participants and to focus and build upon those areas most addressed by the students in this study. Public and private postsecondary institutions alike may also use the findings to further enhance current support programs as well as develop new initiatives to work towards increasing their student retention rates, while parents, high schools, and pre-college programs can use the information gathered to assist with preparing students for college, thus providing measures working toward increasing college enrollment, attrition, and graduation rates.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Although the American system of postsecondary education may be among the most diverse, open, and accessible in the world, substantial inequities exist in educational attainment by race, income, and gender (Gladieux & Swail, 1999). College completion rates for low-income students are persistently low relative to the completion rates of more affluent students. By age 25, about 42% of 16-year-olds from affluent families earned bachelor's degrees in the mid-1990s compared to about 13% from low-income families (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). The college environment presents new academic, social, and personal challenges to many first-time students; but these challenges are often greater for students who are the first members in their families to attend college (Chen, 2005). According to a national study through The Pell Institute, Engle and Tinto (2008) found:

> As a result, low-income, first-generation students are nearly four times more likely to leave higher education after the first year than students who have neither of these risk factors. Across all institution types, low-income, first-generation students were nearly four times more likely—26 to 7 percent—to leave higher education after the first year than students who had neither of these risk factors. (p. 2)

Against all odds, first-generation college students continue to enroll in postsecondary schools with aspirations of obtaining a bachelor's degree. The American College Testing Program (2006) reported that the national completion rate of a bachelor's degree from 4-year colleges in 5 years or less was 39.6%, and the rate from a 2-year

college was less than 30%. In comparison to non-first-generation students, first-generation students are less likely to complete their education to earn a bachelor's degree (Chen, 2005). In 2003, 40.3% of first-generation college students obtained a bachelor's degree, falling behind their counterparts at 65.6% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). As a result, the U.S. Department of Education continues to look for ways to increase the retention rates of this particular group of students. To strengthen retention and success rates among disadvantaged students, the U.S. Department of Education Administration developed a strategy that included increased grant assistance and additional support for programs that target students who are the first in their families to obtain a 4-year degree.

Although colleges and universities strive to develop well-planned, comprehensive, and tailored retention programs and initiatives, retention is dynamic and involves a complex interplay between academic and non-academic factors. Thus, to ensure student persistence and success, retention programs should address both academic and non-academic factors (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

First-generation college students who start at 4-year institutions are more likely to earn their bachelor's degree than are those who start at 2-year institutions (NCES, 2000). However, according to Bui (2002), first-generation college students felt less prepared for college and were more concerned about financial aid, they feared failing in college, they reported knowing less about the social environment of campus, and they felt that they had to put more time into studying than did the other students. In a study conducted by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (2006), first-generation students overwhelmingly said, "it is much more difficult to stay in college than it is to get

in" (Engle, Beremo, & O'Brien, 2006, p. 6).

Academically, college retention rates are impacted initially by the student admitted to a postsecondary institution. In 2002, the national high school graduation rate was recorded at 78%, while the college readiness level was at a low of 40% (Greene & Winters, 2005). These numbers represent the disconnect between the expectations of college instructors and secondary teachers. As a result, students needed to enroll in remedial courses and take advantage of supplemental instruction. In the state of North Carolina, the total college readiness rate for high school graduates was 37%, which was 3% higher than that of the southeast regional average and national average (NCES, 2000).

In terms of affording college, students encounter issues with funding their education. Although some receive scholarships and grant aid, many students rely upon loans, which unfortunately may still have to be offset by additional unmet need through family contributions. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2004) found during the 2003-2004 academic year, about three-fourths (77%) of the in-state full-time, full-year undergraduates had some financial need, which is calculated as the price of attendance minus the expected family contribution (EFC). Regarding the EFC, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2011):

> EFC is a measure of the family's financial strength and is calculated according to a formula established by law. The family's taxed and untaxed income assets, and benefits are all considered in the formula. Also considered are the family size and the number of family members who will attend college or career school during the year. (pp. 6-7)

The average amount of financial need among those students was $11,300. Fifty-six

percent of those with need had an average remaining balance of $5,900 after subtracting all types of financial aid (NCES, 2004). Due largely to lack of resources, first-generation students are more likely to live and work off-campus and to take classes part-time while working full-time, which limits the amount of time spent on campus (Engle et al., 2006). These financial hardships in turn affect the student's ability to interact socially with students and faculty, thus causing difficulties with adapting to the unfamiliar environment.

Impacts are noticed in colleges and universities where they experience lower enrollment rates for low-income first-generation students than any other population of student attending. In 2000-2001, a little over 30% of low-income students were enrolled in or had attended a college or university; in comparison, over half of middle-income and 75% of high income students were enrolled or attended college, thus yielding a gap of 25 and 44 percentage points, respectively, compared to low-income students (O'Brien & Engle, 2005). O'Brien & Engle (2005) found that approximately one-fifth of all undergraduate students were low income, and they were more likely to be female and African American, Hispanic, or Asian. The study also found that these students from traditionally ethnic minority backgrounds were the first in their families to go to college and in need of remediation when they started college (2005). Though first-generation students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may enroll in a postsecondary institution, they are at a higher rate for not graduating with a degree, therefore, negatively impacting schools' persistence and retention rates. However, those first-generation students with higher family income levels are more likely to persist in college than their counterparts (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

First-generation college students are at a disadvantage relative to their peers with

regard to retention, especially during the first year of enrollment (Engle et al., 2006). While incoming college freshmen felt they received ample support from pre-college programs to help them get in, once they arrived on campus, they did not have the needed support—academic, social, financial—to help them stay (Engle et al., 2006). First-generation college students are likely to enter college with less academic preparation. As compared to their non-first-generation peers, Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) found that first-generation students enter college with weaker cognitive skills in reading, math, and critical thinking. In another study of a single institution sample, Riehl (1994) found that first-generation students had significantly lower SAT scores and high school grade point averages, reflecting weaker high school academic preparation. Chen (2005) found many first-generation students needed remedial assistance after they enrolled in college. Over half of the first-generation students in the study (55%) took some remedial courses during their college year in comparison with a little over a quarter of the students who were not first-generation and whose parents held a bachelor's or advanced degree.

Socialization is another issue that impacts first-generation college students. They are less likely to engage in the academic and social experiences associated with success in college, such as studying in groups, interacting with faculty and other students, participating in extracurricular activities, and using support services (Terenzini et al., 1996). An additional dilemma that these students encounter is cultural adaptation. A disconnect between home and school cultures limits the effects of classroom learning as underserved students see few connections to their world (The Education Resource Institute, 2004).

Rendon (1992) stated,

> First generation students often experience problems that arise from "living"
> simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in
> neither. At home, first-generation students report that relationships with family
> and friends who did not go to college often become strained and difficult to
> maintain as they are perceived as changing and separating from them, which
> causes intense stress for these students. (p. 56)

At the same time, these students must adapt culturally to a new environment, which may be extremely different compared to that in which they grew up. The experience of feeling like outsiders in both environments was documented well in Zwerling and London's 1992 edited volume, *First-generation Students: Confronting the Cultural Issues*. To understand cultural identity better, Orbe (2004) conducted a study involving interviews and focus groups with 79 first-generation college students in six colleges across the Midwest. His findings concluded that there is great variety in terms of first-generation students' identity. Relevant factors include: (a) the environment, including both "situational context" (home versus school) and the type of higher education institution that the student attends; (b) other aspects of an individual's demographic profile, particularly those associated with marginality; and (c) the students' ability to form community with other first-generation college students.

From a historical perspective, the Higher Education Act of 1965 allowed for federal funding of support programs at postsecondary institutions and for financial assistance for students (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2003). The Office of Postsecondary Education provided a number of programs aimed to assist with educating students at the collegiate level. Examples of these programs included Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Institutional Development and Undergraduate

Education Programs, International Education Programs, and TRIO Programs. These programs are U.S. federal programs specifically created to increase access to higher education for first-generation and low-income college students, as well as to serve students with disabilities. These programs provide academic support and advising as well as other services to assist first-generation college students with matriculation into the college environment. With all of the mentioned resources, there are remaining challenges among the success of first-generation college students specifically regarding support necessary for their continued attendance and graduation.

Purpose of the Study

Many academic support and advising programs exist to increase retention for first-generation college students. Academic support and advising are essential to retention efforts; however, are there other academic and non-academic factors that potentially influence the decision by first-generation college students to leave school? The purpose of this study was to determine from first-generation college students what factors had the most impact on their enrollment or retention after their initial year in college. During the first phase, surveys were conducted to identify the factors most strongly associated with retaining first-generation college students at six colleges and universities. In the second phase, focus groups were formed at the same institutions to provide students with a venue to discuss in-depth their thoughts on what influenced their enrollment for a second year at their respective schools. Interviews with Student Support Services staff members and retention coordinators were used to further examine the factors discovered from the survey responses. Additional information was obtained from archival records from each institution's admissions and institutional research departments.

This research provided data for Student Support Services in reference to services their eligible freshman participants deemed necessary in order to enroll in college the subsequent year. This information can be used by the program to evaluate the services currently provided to its participants and to focus and build upon those areas most frequently addressed by the students in this study. Public and private postsecondary institutions alike may also use the findings to further enhance current support programs as well as develop new initiatives to work towards increasing their student retention rates, while parents, high schools, and pre-college programs can use the information gathered to assist with preparing students for college, thus providing measures working toward increasing college enrollment, attrition, and graduation rates.

Research Questions

Studies have been conducted to see what factors most impact whether or not first-generation and low-income students attend college; however, it is important to determine from first-generation college students what factors have the most impact on attending and enrolling in college the subsequent year. This study answered the following questions:

1. What academic factors motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year?

2. What non-academic factors motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year?

3. What are the differences in motivational factors of research participants at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's) compared to that of other schools?

4. What are the differences in motivational factors of research participants at public institutions compared to that of students attending private schools?

Definition of Terms

Eligible participant. A student who meets the federal guideline requirements for admission into Student Support Services.

Federal Pell grant. Need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and certain post baccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education.

First-generation college student. Students whose parents have an associate's degree, some college, or no college or university experience.

Freshman block. A small cohort of freshman students linked through common classes.

Learning communities. Classes that are linked or clustered during an academic term and enroll a common cohort of students.

Low-income college student. A student whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount (www.ed.gov).

Table 1 presents the published poverty guidelines of The Department of Health and Human Services (2010).

Table 1

Poverty Guidelines

Family Size	48 Contiguous States, D.C., and Outlying Jurisdictions	Alaska	Hawaii
1	$16,245	$20,295	$18,690
2	$21,855	$27,315	$25,140
3	$27,465	$34,335	$31,590
4	$33,075	$41,355	$38,040
5	$38,685	$48,375	$44,490
6	$44,295	$55,395	$50,940
7	$49,905	$62,415	$57,390
8	$55,515	$69,435	$63,840

For family units with more than eight members, add the following amount for each additional family member: $5,610 for the 48 contiguous states, the District of Columbia and outlying jurisdictions; $7,020 for Alaska; and $6,450 for Hawaii.

Non-eligible student. A student who does not meet the criteria as neither a first-generation college student nor a low-income college student.

Program participant. A student who is enrolled in the Student Support Services program.

Retention. Usually a percentage measurement showing how many students re-enrolled at an institution that they attended the previous year.

TRIO programs. (referring to a number, originally 3 and now 8) Educational

opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes six outreach and support programs targeted to serve and assist low-income, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Summary

The low enrollment and low retention of first-generation college students is an ongoing and urgent problem that is indicative of wider trends. Due to the decline in need-based aid, many admissions offices still emphasize cognitive predictors like high school GPA and standardized tests. Giancola, Munz, and Trares (2008) concluded that first-generation college students

> tend to be less academically and psychologically prepared for college and tend to have lower SAT scores and grade point averages; lower math, reading and critical thinking skills . . . receive less family and peer support, choose colleges based on proximity and cost . . . and experience less social and academic integration. (pp. 216-217)

Vulnerable populations suffer a twofold setback as they have little means to afford college to begin with and then rank low in admission's scales.

> Glenn (2008), in a study for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, found Among students whose SAT scores were 1500 or higher, first-generation college students had a 65.1-percent graduation rate, while non-first-generation students had a 72.7-percent rate. Among students with high-school grade-point-averages of 4.0 or higher, first-generation college students had a 63.6-percent graduation rate, while non-first-generation students had a 71.6-percent rate. (para. 6)

The competition for "top students" among many institutions need not be at odds with the goal of admitting more first-generation students, but such unnecessary rivalry is difficult to realize if GPA and SAT are over-emphasized. A cohort of first-generation students is at risk because of the recent evolution of admissions and financial aid policies to reduce need-based aid and reward the traditional cognitive predictors with generous "merit" awards. Even at historically minority-serving institutions, it is important to understand and incorporate the best information obtainable about student success in order to avoid a counterproductive bidding war for students with the best SAT scores.

Drop-out rates are another tragedy, representing personal loss of time and large amounts of money, including debt. Once admitted, students of all characteristics benefit from orientation and intervention to prevent attrition. Even high SAT, high GPA students drop out for reasons that have nothing to do with grades. It is important for postsecondary schools to assist first-generation college students with ways to meet their social, emotional, and most importantly, academic needs. Educators have a moral imperative to ensure that all students succeed, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds (Fullan, 2003).

A college education is a goal for many high school graduates, including those students considered first-generation students. Academic preparedness, financial support, and cultural adaptation are a few barriers that confront these students. Unfortunately, these obstacles result in persons seeking opportunities within the workforce or delaying their enrollment; in other cases, those who are admitted stop out, meaning they take a period of time off from school, or dropout completely.

Engle & Tinto (2008) note,

Prior research has identified seven factors that put students at increased risk of

leaving college without attaining their degree. These areas of risk include: (1) being students who have delayed entry to college after high school; (2) attending part-time; (3) working full-time; (4) being students who are financially independent from parents; (5) having dependent children; (6) being single parent; and (7) being students who have received their GED. (p. 9)

Research has shown that many factors have been associated with enrollment and retention rates of first-generation college students ranging from the admission process to financing a college education to parents' education levels. To further understand attrition and persistence of this cohort of college students, it was important to determine from them, firsthand, what factors had impacted enrollment from freshman to sophomore year.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

In this chapter, the literature review provided background information on characteristics and statistics associated with first-generation students and their persistence rates in postsecondary education. Vincent Tinto (1993) identified three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, the ability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Thus, he unfolded both cognitive and non-cognitive factors that impact matriculation of first-generation college students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine directly from first-generation college students matriculating at institutions of higher education what factors had the most impact on their enrollment after their initial year in college.

Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, and Yeung (2007) found the proportion of first-generation students within the overall population of first-time, full-time entering college freshmen at 4-year institutions has steadily declined since 1971. Moreover, many low-income students were also first-generation college students. College completion rates for low-income students were persistently low relative to the completion rates of more affluent students. The odds against bachelor's degree completion for low-income youth were 7:1, as opposed to 1.4:1 for affluent families (Carnevale, Fry, & Turner, 2003). Therefore, it is important for colleges and universities to seek out ways to support and retain these students. The purpose of this study was to determine from first-generation college students what factors impacted their enrollment after their first year in college.

Characteristics of First-Generation Students

Research has shown that, for first-generation college students, the motivation to

enroll in college is a deliberate attempt to improve their social, economic, and occupational standing (Ayala & Striplen, 2002). Striplin (1999) found:

> Families of first generation college students sometimes discourage them from going to college and this can lead to alienation from family support. First generation college students are also susceptible to doubts about their academic and motivational abilities: they may think they are not college material. Overcoming these personal challenges is crucial to a successful transfer to a four-year college. (p. 2)

First-generation college students differ from their counterparts in both age and family background. According to Choy (2001), they are older: 31% were 24 or older compared to 13% and 5%, respectively, of students whose parents had some college experience or a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, they have lower incomes: 42% of those who were dependent were from the lowest family income quartile (less than $25,000/year), compared to 22% and 18%, respectively, of the other 2 groups. Beginning first-generation college students are more likely to be female (57% of first-generation college students are female versus 51% of their counterparts), and African-American or Hispanic (20% versus 13%) (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

First-generation students tend to be more concentrated in 2-year colleges but are found at all levels of postsecondary education (Thayer, 2000). They may transfer into a 4-year college after earning the required number of credits for transfer. While some first-generation community college students experience smooth transitions to 4-year institutions, others struggle during the acclimation process (Striplin, 1999). This group of students is less likely than their non-first-generation peers to attend school full-time: 44% enrolled full-time, full-year, compared to 52% and 62%, respectively, of students whose

parents had some college experience or a bachelor's degree (Choy, 2001). At 4-year public and private schools, 30% and 25%, respectively, of beginning students were first generation versus 44% and 53% who were students whose parents had a bachelor's degree (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Parental education is strongly related to students' likelihood of enrolling in college immediately after high school. Sixty-five percent of students who graduated from high school in 1992 whose parents had bachelor's degrees enrolled in 4-year colleges, compared with only 21% of students whose parents had a high school diploma or less (The Education Resource Institute, 2004).

Beginning postsecondary students who were first-generation college students were more likely than their counterparts to cite, in choosing an institution, cost-related reasons such as receiving financial aid and having a shorter time to finish. They were also more likely to cite location-related reasons such as the ability to live at home, the ability to go to work and school at the same time, and the ability to get a job at school (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

First-generation students are likely to lack knowledge of time management, college finances and budget management, and the bureaucratic operations of higher education (Thayer, 2000). Low-income, minority, and first-generation students are especially likely to lack specific types of "college knowledge." They often do not understand the steps necessary to prepare for higher education, which include knowing about how to finance a college education, to complete basic admissions procedures, and to make connections between career goals and educational requirements (Vargas, 2004).

Financial Aid

High school graduates continue to enroll in institutions of higher education, and

many are choosing to obtain degrees from 4-year colleges and universities instead of enrolling in community colleges. In 2009, 28% of high school graduates enrolled immediately in 2-year institutions compared to 42% at 4-year institutions (Aud, Kewal-Ramani, & Frohlich, 2011). Though enrollment rates are increasing, many students enrolling in postsecondary institutions do not remain enrolled beyond freshman year. Roughly four in ten (43%) first-generation students who entered postsecondary education between 1992 and 2000 left without a degree (Chen, 2005). Unfortunately, though a degree is not obtained, many students incur financial obligations that must be fulfilled, associated with the time a student was enrolled at an institution. Aud et al. (2011) found in 2007-08 the average annual price to attend a public 4-year institution was $19,300, and it cost $37,400 to attend a private not-for-profit 4-year institution.

Upon being accepted for admission comes the task of funding the education. The College Board reported that tuition and fees at public and private 4-year colleges and universities during the 2007-2008 academic years were up about 6% from the previous year (College Board, 2007a). In order to cover the cost of college, each year students search for financial aid in the forms of scholarships, grants, and loans, while also considering employment. Financial aid assists students with covering college expenses outside of any contributions made by the student's family. Some 4-year universities promise to "meet full need," which causes students to think of only grants and scholarships. But typically, a college's guarantee of meeting need is contingent on the student's ability to produce thousands of dollars through loans or work (Burdman, 2005). Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for scholarships and grants and even reading a financial award letter can be a challenging experience for the typical student. Ergo, it can definitely be an overwhelming and discouraging task for a

student who is the first in the family to attend college. First-generation students have lower average family incomes than their counterparts whose parents have a bachelor's degree—$26,645, compared to $39,783 (Frederico & Volle, 1997). On a continual basis, schools enroll first-generation students, many of whom are also low income.

Since the early 1980s, student financial aid has quietly been transformed from a system relying primarily on need-based grants to one dominated by loans. Fifty-six percent more of today's students have federally subsidized loans than 10 years ago (Burdman, 2005). Approximately 80% of students attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's) are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and are the first generation to attend college (Jackson & Nun, 2003). As a result, these students are tremendously impacted by an overwhelming amount of student loans. Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is the amount of money a student's family is expected to contribute toward the cost of education and is calculated according to the federally mandated formula (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). On average, after deducting scholarships, work-study, and grants from a student's tuition, he/she may have a remaining balance. Therefore, both students and parents apply for loans and/or make arrangements with their respective institutions to cover a remaining balance through repayment plans.

Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics found that up to 140,000 qualified students from low-income families are not attending college simply because they cannot afford it (Kepple, 2005). One out of every five dependent low-income students and one of every four independent low-income students failed to take advantage of financial aid programs simply because they did not submit a Free Application for

Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). They either did not understand the necessity of the forms

or were deterred by complexity of the forms (McPherson & Schapiro, 2005). In

academic year 1999-2000, 50% of undergraduates who were enrolled for credit at

institutions that participate in the federal Title IV student aid programs, or approximately

8 million students, failed to complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid

(FAFSA), the standard application used by the federal government, state governments,

and most colleges and universities to award financial aid (American Council on

Education, 2004).

According to the American Council on Education, approximately 850,000 low-

income students per year do not apply for federal aid at all, even though they would

likely qualify for Pell Grants (Burdman, 2005). Pell Grants are federal funds awarded to

help undergraduates pay for their education, and the money does not have to be repaid.

The amount that a student will receive depends on the EFC, which is generated by a

standard formula provided by the Department of Education (Johnson C. Smith

University, 2006). Grants have been found to have a positive effect on persistence in the

first year of college. Somers (1996) found that the type of student financial aid makes a

difference in persistence. Students who received a financial aid package made up of

grants or with a high ratio of grants to loans demonstrated a higher level of persistence

than student who received no grants or who had a low ratio of grants to loans. Work-

study showed its positive impact on retention in various studies suggesting that working

part-time on campus encourages social integration and positively impacts student

performance (Cuccaro-Alamin & Choy, 1998). The Federal Work-study Program

provides funds that are earned through part-time employment to assist students in

financing the costs of postsecondary education. Grant recipients (37%) and work-study

students (41%) are less likely to drop out of college in their first year (Ishitani, 2006). In order to assist some students, programs such as Student Support Services provide grant aid to its Pell Grant eligible participants; unfortunately, this offsets some of the costs but does not alleviate the problem.

Many parents may not fully understand financial aid and how loans can be a positive benefit, not negative, as loans are sometimes perceived. There are cases where parents simply do not want to divulge their financial information because they do not want their children to know how low-income they are, and that can prevent students from receiving both grants and loans. A reluctance to borrow on the part of some families, on the one hand, and an information gap about the possible benefits of student loans, on the other, combine to cement the role of the "shadow side" of financial aid (Burdman, 2005).

Though parents are elated about their children going to college, many lack awareness of financial-aid options. Parents with first-hand knowledge of postsecondary education may provide their children with better access to information about college, such as how to acquire the means to finance their children's college education (McDonough, 1997). Brouder (1987) found that most middle- and low-income parents without children in college lacked information about specific financial aid programs; the only parents in this category who appeared at all knowledgeable about financial aid were themselves current or former recipients of such aid. As a result, many students depend upon employment to assist with college costs. Three-quarters of 4-year students work while they are in school and one-quarter of them work full-time (Choy, 2002). According to a study released by the U.S. Department of Education, work-study is the only form of financial aid with a positive effect on degree completion (Adelman, 1999). Unfortunately, work-study programs comprise only one percent of student aid funding,

totaling about $1.0 billion (College Board, 2007b).

Institutional aid can have positive effects when the student perceives the aid as a reward for personal achievement, unlike need-based federal aid, which low-income students expect to receive (Muraskin, Lee, Wilner, & Swail, 2004). This type of aid consists of institutional grants to assist students with tuition and fees. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2005) found that the percentage of full-time undergraduates in 4-year colleges and universities who received institutional aid increased over the last decade. In contrast, in both the public and private sectors, no corresponding increase was observed during that time for those in the lowest income quartiles (NCES, 2004). Difficulty with financing a college education can have a negative impact on an institution's enrollment for first-year college students and those continuing to matriculate.

Academic Preparedness

Gullatt and Jan (2003), in research on pre-collegiate academic outreach programs, discovered

Exposure to college-level work on college campuses, as part of a college preparation program, gives disadvantaged students a vision of themselves undertaking and succeeding in postsecondary education. Three common types of pre-collegiate academic development programming are: Information Outreach—primarily information dissemination and advising, with little or no academic intervention in the way of actual instruction; Career-Based Outreach—academic, motivational, and informational interventions designed around students' career aspirations and intended to link those aspirations with college majors; and Academic Support—instructional services designed to increase student

performance in college preparation classes or to improve students' opportunities to enroll in such classes. (pp.15-23)

For this reason, programs such as Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math-Science have been funded through the U.S. Department of Education. Upward Bound provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their pre-college performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits. The program serves high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Similarly, Upward Bound Math and Science is designed to strengthen the math and science skills of participating students. Postsecondary enrollment rates for 20,740 Upward Bound and 2,936 Upward Bound Math-Science participants who had a 2004-05 expected high school completion date were examined overall by length of participation, program persistence, grade level at program entry, and gender. Evidence of postsecondary enrollment was found for 77.3% of Upward Bound participants and 86.1% of Upward Bound Math and Science participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2008.)

Another program, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), is a discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. In a performance report on GEAR UP, surveys showed that the percentage of students who spoke to school officials about college entrance requirements increased from 65% in 2004 to 66% in 2005. Additionally, the percentage of students who expected to earn a 4-year college degree or higher was 69% among 11th and 12th graders in 2004, 71% in 2005 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). "Today there are also more

structured interventions, such as summer bridge programs . . . to help ease first generation students with their transition to college"(Coles, Jager-Hyman, & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Some programs focus on helping students overcome the hurdle of accessing college but fall short on providing additional guidance once students are enrolled (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012).

Postsecondary admissions departments consider a number of factors when selecting students for enrollment. Academically, an applicant's grade point average, class ranking, and completion of specific English, mathematics, foreign language, and science courses are reviewed. Additionally, counselor/teacher recommendations, application questions and essays, a personal interview, alumni relationship, extracurricular activities, admission test results, and special talents and skills are taken into consideration when accepting students. Unfortunately, students in high schools populated by low-income students often have little information about what they will be expected to know and be able to do upon entry to college (McPherson & Schapiro, 2005). Upon acceptance at many institutions, each student is required to take placement tests. In the Southeast, there are nearly 125 combinations of 75 different placement tests, all devised by university departments without regard to secondary school standards (Kirst, 1998). In a study conducted by Chen (2005), a majority of first-generation students (55%) took some remedial courses during their college years, compared with 27% of students whose parents held a bachelor's or advanced degree. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board found that students who complete remediation earn a larger proportion of certificates and associate degrees, and they earn them sooner than students not requiring remediation (Nora, 2009). This shows that they either transfer to community colleges prior to completing coursework at a 4-year institution, or they resort

to 2-year colleges before even considering obtaining a bachelor's degree. Students who do not require any remediation continue their education through the baccalaureate degree at a much higher proportion (60%) than students who require and complete remediation (35%) (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). This may be due in part to being able to complete requirements on time, unlike their counterparts who may be delayed as a result of having to meet remediation prerequisites.

Colleges and universities conduct assessments during the beginning of semesters to discover information about students enrolled in their institutions for the first time. The Student Readiness Inventory (SRI) is a 108- item measure of motivation, academic skills, and social engagement (Cannady, 2008). Gore (2006) found significant correlations were observed between first-semester college GPA and commitment to college, goal striving, academic discipline, general determination, study skills, communication skills, and academic confidence. Another tool is the College Student Inventory (CSI), which is a component of the Retention Management System (RMS) created by Noel-Levitz, Inc. The Retention Management System refers to an early-alert, early intervention program derived from students' self-reported responses to items on the survey (Cannady, 2008). The CSI is administered to identify the strengths and needs of first-year students. The findings allow advisors, counselors, and administrators to intervene more quickly to help and solve issues and problems identified by the students. By completing this process, the proposed result is an increase in the university's overall retention rate due to advisor/counselor intervention per individual student (Rainey, 2008). The Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) was designed to assess general education student learning in 2- and 4-year colleges and universities in order to improve the quality of instruction and learning (Young, 2007). The MAPP focuses on academic skills that

have been developed rather than the knowledge that is acquired from general education courses (Cannady, 2008).

The aforementioned assessment tools provide results to colleges and universities to use for retention purposes. In conjunction with these assessments, many colleges and universities are depending upon retention programs found on their campuses to assist with the retention and persistence of students. A retention program refers to intentional institutional actions that devote college or university resources to the aim of increasing student persistence (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004).

Classroom and Curriculum

The classroom in postsecondary education is often overlooked when conversations arise in reference to supporting first-generation college students; in actuality, this is where conversations should begin (IHEP, 2012). Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) found that the educational context created by faculty influenced student learning. There is recognition that effective classroom-based practices are an important factor (Coles et al., 2009). These pedagogical approaches tend to encourage things like active/collaborative learning, peer teaching, supplemental instruction, and a variety of instructional methods (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek 2006). They move beyond simple student-faculty contact outside the classroom to a holistic effort to ground effective pedagogical practice at the core of student success efforts.

IHEP (2012) found the following:

> Four broad institution-based themes help capture the kinds of policies and practices that can contribute substantially to first-generation student success and improve the prospects of completion for first-generation students: (a) faculty are key allies and can serve as powerful change agents for bridging departmental

divides and generating opportunities for professional development and networks;

(b) curricular and pedagogical reforms are imperative to creating a more engaging

and dynamic classroom environment for first-generation student success; (c)

evidence-based and measured approaches to student success create a culture of

ongoing inquiry and support that lends itself to innovation and creativity to better

support first-generation students, and (d) partnerships and external allies provide

numerous benefits for long-term and sustained project success. (p.8)

Support Programs

The AASCU/Sallie Mae National Retention Project endeavored to help state

institutions create organizational change to improve their effectiveness. Strategies

focused on ways to provide access to and promote success of their students, particularly

those from underrepresented groups (Braxton et al., 2004). Thayer (2000) found that

"Students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds are less likely to enroll in

postsecondary education and less likely to persist through graduation, even when

controlling for levels of achievement" (p.7). As a result, colleges and universities work

collaboratively with support programs to assist students with success. Effective programs

affirm and help students understand that academic success is not attained through

individual achievement alone but through an axis of support (Gullatt & Jan, 2003).

The federal TRIO program, Student Support Services (SSS), provides academic

support, advising, and disability services to its participants. First-generation and low-

income students (as well as students with disabilities) voluntarily apply to receive

services provided by this federally-funded entity (Johnson C. Smith University, 2006).

SSS provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college

requirements, and serves to motivate students toward the successful completion of their

postsecondary education. Additionally, this program provides cultural and education enrichment activities, peer mentoring and tutoring, study skills workshops, community service opportunities, and grant aid (to a select number of participants) (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Also under the auspices of TRIO is the Ronald McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program. It is intended to prepare undergraduates from disadvantaged family backgrounds for doctoral study (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2003). However, if colleges and universities do not retain their undergraduate first-generation and low-income students, the need and support of this program will be null and void. According to a 'best practices' study, a common practice of high-performing Student Support Services programs is a "structured freshman year" program (Thayer, 2000).

In a variety of institutional settings and in a number of forms, learning communities have been shown to increase student retention and academic achievement, increase student involvement and motivation, improve students' time to degree completion, and enhance student intellectual development (Washington Center, n.d.). The Learning Community model allows freshman student cohorts to take academic classes and process their experiences together in the year-long orientation program under the mentorship of a faculty member (Johnson C. Smith University, 2006). Learning communities attempt to develop linkages among teachers and students, having a positive effect on social interaction (Tinto & Russo, 1994).

Additionally, learning communities facilitate learning across all curriculum areas and ages, improving self-esteem, social skill, and solidarity, in hopes of motivating students and encourage persistence. In a study conducted by

Henriques (2011), findings indicated that the introduction of learning communities improved academic performance, retention, persistence, and graduation rates so that at-risk students performed, persisted, and graduated at a rate similar to the rates found in the literature for non-at-risk populations. One such learning community concept is integrated course clusters. For example, a math course is linked with a study skills class and a tutorial that are team-taught, and all count for credit as can be found at Skagit Valley College, Washington. Another learning community may have a summer program where students interact not only with their course instructors but also with a peer mentor and an advisor, as is the case at Drexel University, Pennsylvania.

Not only are colleges and universities implementing learning communities, many have created first-year experience programs to assist with retention of first-year college students. The University of South Carolina's National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition serves education professionals by supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education A first-year experience program is larger than a single seminar course and represents an intentional and comprehensive program that consists of different components working together to increase academic performance, provide a cohesive learning experience, increase student persistence, assist in the transition to college, facilitate a sense of commitment to and community in the university, and increase personal development (Barefoot, Fidler, Gardner, Moore, & Roberts, 1999). Connected with the first-year experience initiative is the typical orientation first-year students participate in at their respective institutions. This orientation

consists of a time for students to get a feel for their new home away from home, learn about academic programs offered, register for classes, connect with faculty and students, and learn more about the institution (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013). To further enhance that experience, many institutions require freshmen to enroll in an orientation course, which is "designed to introduce entering freshmen and transfer student to campus life and provide them with the skills necessary for a successful college career" (JCSU, 2012, p. 68).

Cultural Adaptation

Socially integrating students during their first 8 weeks on campus may be the most important thing an institution can do in setting the foundation for a student's successful transition to college (Wawrzynski, 1999). A student's social and interpersonal environments, which include peers and faculty, are important factors in student persistence (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hibel, 1978). One key institutional segment that serves large proportions of first-generation students is Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). These institutions, which comprise Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), have a legacy of providing increased access to some of the nation's underserved students and often have innovative practices and strategies to support stronger student success (Harmon, 2012). MSIs historically enroll a disproportionate number of underserved student populations, likely because many MSIs support more open admissions policies and tend to enroll more students from the communities where they are located (Li & Carroll, 2007). About 42% of students enrolled at MSIs are first generation, as opposed to 33% of students enrolled at predominantly

White Institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

African American and Hispanic students are more likely to be first-generation college students (Davenport, 2012). In addition to adjusting to a new environment that puts many first-generation college students at a disadvantage, these students may also be subject to adjustment difficulties rooted in the experience of being a minority student within a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) (Fischer, 2007). Between 1969 and 1979, minority students enrolled in PWIs in increasing numbers, due in part to the greater access afforded by affirmative action programs (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Davenport (2012) reviewed and identified obstacles to the persistence of first-generation and non-first-generation minority students as the following: interaction with intra-racial relations, interracial relations, interaction with faculty, campus involvement, academic and non-academic facilities, usage of the cultural center, athletic facilities, and involvement in the community.

Two of the most documented stresses that impact how minority students adjust on campus are the psychological and sociocultural stresses they face during their academic careers (Smedley et al., 1993). The source of college student stress may be compounded by actual or perceived weaknesses in academic preparation due to limited educational opportunities relative to their White peers, doubts about their abilities, or concerns that faculty and peers may question their legitimacy as college students (Davenport, 2012).

Furthermore, it is important to also address the benefits that some students can accrue from "same-race" peers and environments, including social integration and comfort, in addition to learning and democratic skills (Hurtado, 2007). A

related difference in the social adjustment of minority versus White students was

that, unlike White students, minority students faced racial/ethnic accountability

that undermined their sense of belonging (Morley, 2007). Racial/ethnic

accountability refers to how students adhere to "preconceived notions" that

minority students are either not as good as White students or do not belong to

White social circles. Griffin, Nicols, Perez, and Tuttle (2008) found in order to

counterbalance these harsh realities at PWIs, some students of color have

developed their own subcultures within the larger communities.

When examining the character and impact of student-faculty interaction on

student learning and personal development, Kuh and Hu (2001) found that, compared

with White students, African American students had more interaction with faculty than

any other group of minority students, and Latino students had more contact with a faculty

member related to writing improvement. Next to peer relationships, student-faculty

relationships exert a major influence over a student's intellectual and personal growth

(Astin, 1993). Institutions interested in raising student persistent rates need to look at

ways to improve academic advising and ways to incorporate peer involvement (Bank,

Slavings, & Biddle, 1990). According to Thomas (1990), the single most important

student service schools can offer to increase student persistence is academic advising.

However, when examining student-faculty interaction for minority students, concerns

about the lack of same-race/ethnicity faculty sometimes hinder interactions—students

were more comfortable with faculty members of their own race/ethnicity (Lundberg &

Schreiner, 2004).

Svanum and Bigatti (2006) conducted a study that examined social activities in

terms of hours of time students devoted to student clubs, organizations and sororities and

fraternities, and then assessed this in relation to other outside activities, course effort and course grades. The results revealed that outside activities did not directly influence course grades, but job activities negatively influenced course grades indirectly through reduced time to devote to course content.

For first-generation students, participating in an honors program, joining a fraternity or sorority, employment, and teachers' instructional skills have significantly more positive effects for academic success than those first-generation students that did not get involved (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Not only first-generation but African American students at PWI's, regardless of institutional environment, spent more time than White students utilizing campus facilities and participating in clubs and organizations (Watson & Kuh, 1996). Additionally, Arbodela, Wang, Shelley, and Whalen (2003) found that students who were more involved in their living community (residence halls), both academically and socially, tended to be more satisfied with their living environment and found it easier to study and collaborate academically with others in their community.

Living on campus can help foster a sense of belonging and retention. The positive effects likely occur through the opportunities for social integration that residence halls afford. Campus housing is important to help students make connections and, thereby, attain their goals (Skahill, 2002-2003). In addition to housing, a study by Patton (2006) revealed that [cultural] centers make a powerful difference in student learning because they foster an environment that promotes leadership development, a sense of community, cultural identity, and a sense of mattering.

Unfortunately, there are different factors that may hinder successful social and academic integration in student-athletes who are often under enormous pressures to satisfy the goals set by the athletic departments at the institutions (Hyatt, 2003) and limited time to integrate into the campus community. These problems, coupled with the students not being academically prepared, cause isolation and disassociation from campus resources and offices that could assist in balancing the dual roles (Martin, 2009). Similar to student-athletes, King (2002) found that students who work full-time jobs, and especially those who work full-time off-campus, have a lower rate of degree attainment and a decreased feeling of connection to the college or university than students who work part-time or not at all.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto (1975) developed a model that suggests withdrawing from college is like withdrawing from society, or in effect, is like committing suicide. The model maintains that students who withdraw from college have failed to successfully integrate either academically or socially in a college environment. College student departure poses a long-standing problem to colleges and universities that attracts the interest of both scholars and practitioners. Approximately 45% of students enrolled in 2-year colleges depart during their first year, and approximately one out of every fourth student departs from a 4-year college or university (American College Testing Program, 2001). Retention affects the entire campus community. All members of the college community need to commit to the welfare of the student and have a stake in the success of policies and practices that reduce student departure (Braxton et al., 2004). Students cannot succeed alone. It takes the collaborative efforts of engaged faculty, staff, and peers for

students to be successful, persist, and graduate from our country's higher education institutions.

Many factors impact the success of first-generation college students upon entry and during matriculation at 4-year colleges and universities. Both non-academic and academic factors alike result in students staying the course to obtain a college degree or stopping out before completing this goal. Terenzini et al. (1996) hypothesized that a shared set of common characteristics—being less prepared academically, being an ethnic minority, being female, and coming from a lower socioeconomic class—put first-generation students at a collective disadvantage and negatively impact their college experience in and out of the classroom, which in turn impacts their learning outcomes, retention rates, and graduation rates. For this reason, it is important to determine from these students what factors impact them continuing their studies after their freshman year of college.

In the 1990's a majority of the first-generation college student research was conducted at institutions as opposed to national data-base studies (Shultz, 2012). While there is not a great volume of national data-base research, the research and theory offered by Terenzeni et al. (1996) using a national data-base contributed significantly to the body of knowledge. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) conducted a review of 10 peer-reviewed, research studies that utilized Tinto's (1986) retention model as a theoretical framework. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory is very similar to Terenzini et al.'s (1996) model of college impact. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1982) sought to highlight the complex manner in which social interactions within the formal and informal academic and social systems of an institution impinge upon student dropout.

According to Tinto (1993)

Retention programs can be assessed according to the following three principles:
(1) Institutions are committed to the students they serve. The welfare of the
student is primary; (2) Individuals at the institution are committed to the
education of all students (not just some); and (3) Individuals at the institution are
committed to the development of supportive social and academic communities in
which all students are integrated as full members. It is the institution's obligation
(through its programs) to provide ways for students to integrate into the
community. (pp.146-147)

Bandura's social cognitive theory has been associated with research connected to first-generation college students. Bandura's (1997) primary objective for establishing the social cognitive theory was to rectify behaviorism's narrow approach to psychology by calling attention to the enormity of inner causes of behavior, which include thoughts, social experiences, expectations, self-perceptions, and beliefs (Ewen, 2003).

In 2000 and 2001, the National Center for Education Statistics published three reports focused on the plight of first-generation college students. Horn and Nunez's (2000) research outlined the differences in high school math curriculum for first-generation and continuing-generation students. Choy (2001) found that first-generation students are less likely to go to college and outlined reasons why. Horn and Nunez (2000) and Choy (2001) focused on the pre-college traits, part of Terenzini et al.'s (1996) model, while Warburton, Burgarin, and Nunez (2001) explored pre-college traits and outcomes. Warburton et al. (2001) compared first-generation students' college grade point averages, remedial course taking patterns, and persistence nationwide with continuing-generation students.

Qualitative research reveals unique details about individual students, and Rodriguez (2003) published research on the common phenomenon that encourages first-generation students to succeed and go on to help other first-generation students succeed. Rodriguez (2003) conducted in-depth interviews with first-generation student graduates from poor, undereducated backgrounds who are now activists for other first-generation students (Staley-Abney, 2011).

Rodriguez (2003) identified the following three unique phenomena that were significant in the experiences of first generation students' success to include: "special status," "positive naming," and "ascending cross-class identification;" Rodriguez defined these phenomenon as follows: "special status as an academic success promoting influence often granted by an uneducated family member . . . participants are singled out, in a positive way, even as young children, with advantageous effects on their self-confidence and on their willingness to take informed risks"; "positive naming occurred in most participants' lives when someone who cared about them or knew them well helped them develop their potential"; and "ascending cross-class identification occurs when a person from a lower socio-economic class gains deep understanding of what life is like in a higher class" (pp. 19-21).

Byrd and MacDonald (2005) conducted eight in-depth phenomenological interviews with first-generation college students; however, they were non-traditional and transfer students. They discovered from the participants that, in order to be ready for college, the student needs: "(a) skills in time management, (b) the ability to apply oneself and focus on a goal and (c) skills in advocating for oneself as a learner are essential" (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005, p. 28).

Brewer and Weisman (2010) found

In a phenomenological study in which participants were first generation graduate

students, (1) all nine participants stressed that they entered graduate school for

purposes associated with employment, either current or future; (2) the ability for

graduate education to be a good fit for lifestyle; and (3) for graduate study that

supported either personal development (including increased academic self-

efficacy) or personal goals. (pp. 11-14)

Similarly, Schaefer (2010) found that the baby boomer generation of

nontraditional students (a) were first generational college students who needed a better

understanding of the formal higher education process; (b) were primarily motivated by

career aspirations, not personal enrichment; and (c) experienced complex support needs

while transitioning into college.

There have been numerous studies conducted in reference to first-generation

college students. Some studies are focused on entering freshmen while others are based

upon mid-year of the first year of experience. Recently, Noel-Levitz (2013) published a

report that explored college readiness among entering freshmen. The report explored a

wide range of non-cognitive attitudes that influence college readiness of entering

freshmen students. Based upon the student survey responses drawn from a national

sample of entering undergraduates in 2012 data, over 90% of incoming freshmen bring a

strong desire to finish a degree compared to 91.8% of first-generation freshmen (Noel-

Levitz, 2013). However, only 42% of incoming freshmen indicated, "I have a very good

grasp of the scientific ideas I've studied in school"; almost 40% of the same group

indicated they had "very distracting and troublesome" financial problems (Noel-Levitz,

2013, p. 1).

A study conducted by Staley-Abney (2011) analyzed first-generation college

students through a phenomenological inquiry by exploring the changes and experiences they encountered during their freshman year. The results of the investigation revealed the achievements and hurdles participants faced through their first year in college.

Stephens (2009) found that

The culture of elite universities advantages students who have access to the middle-class cultural capital of an independent self, while it disadvantages students who come from contexts where interdependence is normative . . . Such an arrangement creates cultural obstacles for first-generation college students and for their students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. (p. 42)

Patron (2012) completed a study on first-generation college students enrolled in their last requirements leading toward the completion of their associate's degree. The findings concluded the reasons first-generation college students attended college was a result of receiving motivation from a loved one, teacher and/or school advisor; becoming a role model to someone else; avoiding the same hardships experienced by their parents; and being self-motivated to obtain a college education. (Patron, 2012).

Summary

It is clear that there are a number of factors that impact first-generation college students. As noted, studies have been conducted based upon theories associated with this group of students. However, to further study this group of students, the next chapter presents methods for conducting the mixed-method research design to determine firsthand from first-generation college students the factors that have impact on enrollment from freshman to sophomore year.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

For most of the 4.5 million low-income, first-generation students enrolled in postsecondary education today (approximately 24% of the undergraduate population), the path to the bachelor's degree will be long, indirect, and uncertain (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1982) sought to highlight the complex manner in which social interaction within the formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution impinge upon student dropout. The purpose of this study was to determine from first-generation students what factors have an impact on their enrollment after their first year in college.

The Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is "situationally determined, depending on the context, the identities of others, and your own personality and values" (Glesne, 1999, p. 41). Because this mixed-methods study involved qualitative techniques, it was expected that the investigator "enters into the lives of the participants" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 79); therefore, the researcher was mindful of her past experiences and proactively divulged any circumstances which could have created subjective interpretation of the data gathered. Such acknowledgements are imperative, and, according to Creswell (2003), "With these concerns in mind, inquirers [must] explicitly identify their biases, values, and personal interests about their research topic and process" (p.184).

IRB Approval was received from all institutions involved at the onset of the study. The researcher used triangulation in order to collect data from Student Support Services participants and university officials at each of the five institutions involved. To

enhance trustworthiness of the study, the names of the university officials and student

participants were withheld in order to protect their privacy.

To begin the data collection, each of the directors at Urban, Northern, Southern,

Eastern, and Western universities were asked to distribute a link to the online survey

(Appendix A) to their current participants via email, to exclude freshmen program

participants. The researcher obtained permission to use the survey (Appendix B), an

instrument developed by the Center for Community College Student Engagement

(CCSSE). Responses were automatically saved and tabulated through an online resource

setup by the researcher, separated by institution. Over the course of a 2-year period

(February 2011-July 2012), the researcher gathered survey data from 168 participants at

the participating institutions.

Concurrently, the researcher was able to schedule and interview each of the

directors at the institutions in order to gather information on their perspectives of first-

generation college students, as well as information about their respective colleges and

current programs and initiatives associated with this specific group. This information

was gathered using a questionnaire (Appendix C) developed by the ECMC Foundation.

Upon completion of gathering survey results from the five institutions and

conducting one-on-one interviews with the directors, students volunteered to participate

in focus groups at all institutions involved. The researcher made arrangements to conduct

the focus groups on the campuses involved for the convenience of the participants. Five

focus group discussions took place with research participants at the participating

institutions respectively. Data triangulation was accomplished by subjecting the data to

common theme analysis.

In this mixed-methods study, the investigator had to "unself" on several levels in

order to effectively conduct the research (Glesne, 1999). For starters, during the time the qualitative data were collected, the researcher worked at one of the participating institutions as the assistant director for the Student Support Services Program and then transitioned to an administrative position at the same institution upon completion of the study. As a staff member of the SSS program, the researcher allowed an evaluator to conduct the semi-structured interviews with the administrators and the focus group with the participating students. Data from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were transcribed by the evaluator and coded to protect the anonymity of the administrators and students before they were given back to the researcher for use as an extant data set.

Working at one of the institutions in which data were gathered was not the only obstacle that the researcher had to surmount to fully "unself" for this study. According to Dillard (1995), "our interests originate as much out of our personal biographical situations and previous and current life circumstances as out of a sense of what we are working to bring into being" (p. 543). Thus, the researchers' decision to study factors associated with first-generation college students was a natural extension of her past experiences in secondary and postsecondary education. As a middle school teacher and academic facilitator, the researcher worked in similar communities where many of her former students had become first-generation college students. Closer to home, her husband has shared his experiences as a first-generation college student.

Having prior experience as a teacher, facilitator, and employee in postsecondary education, the researcher could relate fairly easily to the subjects involved. As previously mentioned, these past experiences highly influenced the researcher's decision to study factors associated with first-generation college students. As a result, a higher level of

self-consciousness, which attended to the researcher's behavior and its consequences, had to be developed to ensure that these past experiences and present interests did not interfere with data analysis (Glesne, 1999).

Research Design

According to findings by Yin (1984) regarding methods of data collection, "Research design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions, and ultimately, to its conclusions" (p. 1). Understanding the importance of a structured approach to research and study was key; as Creswell (2003) asserts, "A framework for design is necessary to provide guidance about all facets of a study, from assessing the general philosophical ideas behind the inquiry to the detailed data collection and analysis procedures" (p. 3). A mixed-methods design was utilized in the study to view this social phenomenon holistically. In this particular mixed-method study, the researcher applied Tinto's (1982) framework to extant qualitative and quantitative data sets from five postsecondary institutions in the Piedmont region of North Carolina.

Qualitative and quantitative techniques were viewed as "complementary rather than as rival camps" (Jick, 1979, p. 602). Thus, this mixed-methods study allowed the strengths of each technique to be illuminated and the inherent weaknesses minimized. In this specific mixed-methods study, the strategies of qualitative interviews (i.e., semi-structured interviews and focus groups) and quantitative data analysis of population surveys were utilized. Informational adequacy, or completeness of data, was facilitated by research at multiple sites involving multiple stakeholder groups. Efficiency of time and effort were achieved by analyzing only the portions of extant data that were most pertinent to the research questions of the study.

Qualitative data played a primary role in the design, contrary to what many critics of mixed methods believe; as stated in the findings of Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark and Green (2006), "The assumption that qualitative research in mixed methods inquiry is always given secondary or auxiliary status" is false (p. 2). In this study, the data from qualitative interviews did not simply serve to "supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same setting" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Instead, it made "context explicit in explanations" (Creswell et al., 2006, p. 2) of the quantitative results to paint a fuller, more holistic picture. Without qualitative data, this study would have lacked the critical elements to understand what factors had an impact on the enrollment of first-generation college students after their first year of college.

Numerous strategies exist for designing mixed-methods research studies. Of the six major models that Creswell (2003) delineated, the concurrent nesting strategy is most similar to the design for this particular study. Though the data sets were not collected at the same time, one method (i.e., qualitative) predominated over the other, nested method (i.e., quantitative). As Creswell (2003) explained, "the embedded method addresses a different *question* than the dominant method . . . [and] the data collected from the two methods are mixed during the analysis phase of the project" (p. 218). In this study, the quantitative survey examined a different set of questions (i.e., inquiries about support services and advising) than the qualitative interviews and focus groups. Using the concurrent nesting strategy was advantageous because the "researcher can gain broader perspectives as a result of using the different methods as opposed to using the predominant method alone" (Creswell, 2003, p. 218).

In this mixed-methods study, the process and outcome questions were addressed

concomitantly by qualitative and quantitative methods, rather than separately as Yin (2006) described. The following research questions were answered by examining the extant data sets of semi-structured interviews and focus group transcripts and population survey results, along with the archived student data: (1) What academic factors motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year? (2) What non-academic factors motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year? (3) What are the differences in motivational factors of research participants at historically black colleges and universities compared to that of other schools? (4) What are the differences in motivational factors of research participants at public institutions compared to that of students attending private schools?

Participants

The participants for this study were selected from the federally-funded Student Support Services (SSS) programs who were first-time, full-time freshmen upon enrollment at five 4-year institutions in the piedmont province of North Carolina in the fall semesters of 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010. (Initially, six institutions were included; however, one school chose not to participate.) This allowed for currently enrolled students to participate in the study.

Each SSS program was funded to support a specific number of participants each year. The Director of each program assisted with identifying student participants who were currently enrolled at the institution. As a result, a single-stage sampling design was utilized rather than a multistage, clustering procedure (Creswell, 2003). An adequate portion of participants (i.e., a little less than 40 percent) at five of the institutions completed the survey.

Upon completion of surveys, focus groups were organized at each site to further

understand student experiences at each institution. Focus groups were composed of approximately seven to ten students to insure a sufficient number for a good discussion and engagement with the moderator. The focus group discussions provided a venue for students to discuss both positive and negative personal experiences associated with both academic and non-academic factors students encountered during their first year of college. The discussions were audiotaped to insure an accurate record of the conversation. The audio recordings were stored in a locked cabinet in an office and were available only to persons conducting the study. The audio recordings were destroyed at the end of one year, but tabulations and analysis of the data have been included in this written report.

Sites

The institutions involved in this research were referred to by the following pseudonyms: "Eastern University," "Northern University," "Southern University," and "Western University" designating four public universities, and "Urban College" and "Suburban College" designating two privately funded institutions; four of the schools were categorized as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Each of the universities was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and statistics provided reflect information available during the duration of the study.

Urban College. Urban University is a private liberal arts HBCU that serves a population of which is 99% African American. Its undergraduate enrollment is made up of 1,571 students, with the freshman class being composed of approximately 557 first-time degree-seeking students. It is nestled in an urban city with a population of over 500,000. Built in 1867, the present site contains 100 acres of land. This particular SSS department serves 175 participants who met the Federal SSS eligibility requirements as

undergraduates who demonstrated a need for services and academic support.

The Student Support Services department was composed of four staff members, which included the Project Director, Assistant Director/Tutorial Coordinator, an Administrative Assistant, and the Disabilities/Writing Specialist. Each staff member held a full-time position, except for the latter who had a half-time appointment with the SSS department and Academic Affairs. In addition to the departmental staff, seventeen (+/-) upper-class students were hired to work part-time as Peer Mentor/Tutors each academic year.

Suburban College. Suburban College is also a private liberal arts HBCU under the sponsorship of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Located in a town with close to 30,000 residents, this college is composed of 994 undergraduates of whom 94% of the students were African American.

This college maintained the common goals and objectives of the Student Support Services program; however, the composition of the staff was somewhat different from that of Urban College. This program's full-time positions included Director, Program Coordinator, Academic Counselor, Learning Specialist, and Program Assistant. Additionally, students were hired only as peer tutors for the program. Suburban College's SSS program provided services to 225 participants.

Northern University. Similarly, Northern University is another HBCU whose population is composed of 92% African American; however, it is a public university. Located within the piedmont triad of North Carolina, the urban city's population is approximately 250,000. Northern University offers bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. With over 10,000 students, almost 9,000 were enrolled as undergraduates; and a little over 1,600 were first-time degree seeking students. The staff for the Student

Support Service program at Northern University included a Director, Counselor, Tutor Coordinator, and Secretary. As with Suburban College, this program had students who served only in the capacity of peer tutors. This SSS program provided services to 200 participants.

      Southern University. Southern University is also a public university which offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees. Located in close proximity to Urban College, its undergraduate enrollment is approximately 5,000; almost 3,100 students were first-time degree seeking students. This particular university was composed of a more diverse population. Seventy-three percent of the students were White, 15% African American, and persons of other ethnic backgrounds made up 12%. The Student Support Services grant provided support to 144 participants and salaried five staff positions, which included a Director, two Associate Directors, two Program Assistants, and upper-class students who served as both tutors and mentors for their peers.

      Eastern University. Eastern University is a university comparable to that of Southern with an undergraduate population of almost 2,500 students. Located in the same area as Northern University, 64% of the undergraduates enrolled at the time of the study were White, 22% Black, and 14% of other ethnicities. The staff for this institution's SSS program was somewhat different from those mentioned previously. Consistent with the others, this program had a Director and an Office Assistant; however, there were three Assistant Directors, each with a particular focus within the department. One was responsible for the counseling services provided to the participants, another focused on coordinating tutorial services, while the third worked with students to assist with academic skills needed for individualized learning of its 200 participants.

      Western University. Western University is a college of health sciences situated

in the Piedmont Triad of North Carolina. Offering bachelor's and master's degrees, its undergraduate enrollment for degree seeking students at the time was almost 6,000. Unlike its fellow Historically Black Colleges and Universities mentioned previously, this particular school had a student body which was 87% African American, 4% White, and 9% Other. Its Student Support Services program served 160 students, with a staff composed of a Director, Counselor, Tutorial Coordinator, and Program Assistant. Dissimilar to the other five programs, this particular SSS program did not employ students as peer tutors.

Sample

Patton (1990), in a book on research methods, stated, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169). Since the intent of collecting qualitative data is to gather perceptions from first-generation college students in reference to what factors had an impact on their enrollment after their first year in college, purposeful sampling dictated that various institutions needed to be studied. For qualitative data collection, both within-case and multiple-case strategies were employed. Within-case sampling required university retention coordinators and Student Support Services staff members to be interviewed to gain a full picture of stakeholder perspectives. In addition, multiple-case sampling necessitated that all participating sites were visited to "strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29). Applying both strategies of purposeful sampling created a robust data set of information from which the research team described its findings.

In order to achieve what Zelditch (1962) described in his article, "Some Methodological Problems of Field Studies," as "goodness" criterion of efficiency, the researcher conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with university retention coordinators and Student Support Services staff members, while focus groups were organized to further explore student perceptions. A university official was interviewed, and students participated in focus groups at each of the participating institutions. All interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. Participating subjects were questioned regarding their perspectives on what factors impacted their enrollment as first-generation college students after their first year in college.

Semi-structured Interviews

When researchers interview others, they aim to gather behavior, feelings, or interpretations of the world that cannot be observed simply by watching others (Merriam, 1988). These qualitative data can then serve as a "source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.1). Such an approach to research methodology is imperative since, according to Glesne (1999), "The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry" (p. 69).

For this particular study, semi-structured interviews with university officials and student participants offered multiple benefits. For starters, narrative content derived from the interviews helped the researcher paint a more detailed picture of the institutions and support services for first-generation students. Stakeholders desire a rich, robust understanding that quantitative data alone cannot provide. Semi-structured interviewing combines the formalized, orderly framework of structured interviewing with the

naturalistic quality of ethnographic research. An interview schedule (or protocol) of questions may be developed by the researcher in advance of the interview; however, follow-up probes for clarification and deeper understanding may also be interjected (Glesne, 1999). The semi-structured interviews also allowed for deeper personal interactions with the university officials and student participants to be fostered by the research team members while meeting with them in their natural settings (i.e., their institutions), thus creating a more relaxed interview environment for them to speak openly and honestly. The instrument used to guide the interviews was adapted with permission from *Persist: A Comprehensive Guide for Student Success in Higher Education* (2006, p.19) developed by the ECMC Foundation. To facilitate the interview process, a tape recorder was used with participants' permission. According to Glesne (1999), recording "provides a nearly complete record of what has been said and permits easy attention to the course of the interview" (p. 78). Full transcripts of the recordings were completed following the site visits.

Surveys

The quantitative data was collected using an online survey of Student Support Services student participants at each of the research institutions. The instrument, *Survey of Entering Student Engagement* (Appendix A), was adapted with permission by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2009b), and contained a total of 41 questions. Students were informed of an opportunity to take part in the study by the director at their institution. Each director emailed a link to the online survey to the sophomores, juniors, and seniors within their program. The survey link provided an informed consent statement for the students to read and agree to, in order to proceed. This resulted in a single-stage sampling design, rather than a multistage, clustering

procedure (Creswell, 2003). An adequate portion of participants (i.e., a little less than 40%) at five of the institutions completed the survey.

Through analyzing items on a survey, researchers can make "inferences about a large group of people from data drawn on a relatively small number of individuals from that group" (Marshal & Rossman, 1999, p. 130). While qualitative research may be characterized as in-depth, time-intensive work, quantitative surveys are often viewed as an efficient means to compile massive quantities of information.

Yet, surveys have "little value for examining complex social relationships or intricate patterns of interaction" (Marshall & Rossman, p. 131). For example, many surveys simply ask respondents to select one answer from among multiple choices, with no option to explain why or how the decision was made. Researchers can then only make assumptions about the factors that contributed to the participants' judgments. For this reason, focus groups were developed to allow a sample of participants to elaborate on their experiences as first-generation students.

Focus Groups

Focus-group interviewing was the second method of data collections utilized for this study. The focus groups were guided by the researcher, using an adapted version of the *Focus Group Materials Moderator's Guide*, as permitted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2009a). In qualitative research, using non-random purposive sampling method allowed the researcher to select participants who could shed light on a particular topic (Patton, 2002). The purposive non-random sampling method ensured that first-generation students who could provide rich information about their experiences were included (Patton, 2002). The intended sample included 11 participants—three males and eight females, with ten traditional-aged students and one

non-traditional. These groups were formed at the following participating institutions: Urban University and Eastern University; students at Northern and Southern Universities declined. One student from Western University agreed to a one-on-one interview due to lack of participation by her peers. These sessions provided students with a venue to discuss in-depth their thoughts on what influenced their enrollment for a second year at their respective schools. Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a world view. It rests on an assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experience that can be narrated (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112). Phenomenological interviewing allowed the researcher to identify both academic and non-academic factors associated with retention and persistence that the individuals in the study shared, thus producing information for stakeholders to use for restructuring, enhancing, or developing retention initiatives on each campus. Glesne (1999) noted the use of a tape recorder, with the permission of the participants, helps to capture the insightful comments and allow conversation to flow more naturally as the researcher will not need to focus on writing. The recorded focus-group conversations were transcribed at the completion of the site visit. The transcribed information was reviewed by the participants for accuracy.

The researcher trained two evaluators to assist in conducting interviews and to serve as proxies for the researcher to avoid bias. One evaluator was a higher education administrator while the other served as an area public school administrator, both from the same community.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the six common phases of analytic procedures were followed to facilitate the evaluation of the qualitative data. These six phases include: "(a) organizing

the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 152).

To organize the data, information from the written transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, with each school having its own worksheet. The data analysis of the qualitative data was completed by content analysis for themes. The researcher looked for common themes that emerged both from the interviews and focus groups; these data helped validate the survey results. The transcribed information from the recorded sessions was color coded by the themes that emerged and the strength of the theme was determined by the frequency of the occurrence.

Due to the ease of administration, management, and analysis, quantitative survey data from Student Support Services participants supplemented the qualitative interview data collected at all participating sites. The survey was distributed to participants at five institutions online through an email link. While qualitative research may be characterized as in-depth, time-intensive work, quantitative surveys are often viewed as efficient means to compile massive quantities of information. The "economy of the design and rapid turnaround in data collection" make this research strategy useful for studies of large-scale (Creswell, 2003, p. 154). In addition to convenience, surveys also offer the benefit of accuracy in measurement, which is "enhanced by quantification, replicability, and control over observer effects" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 130). Descriptive statistics, in quantitative research, measure the characteristics of a sample or population on prespecified variables (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). In this study, descriptive statistics were used to organize, summarize, and display numerical data associated with

survey results in reference to percentages.

Reliability and Validity

Triangulation of data sources offered a strategy to ensure qualitative trustworthiness (Glesne, 1999; Creswell, 2003). According to the studies of Creswell and Miller (2000), "Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). In this study, within-case and between-case sampling techniques provided a myriad of data from separate stakeholder groups at five participating institutions; the "in-depth interviews with multiple informants at each site . . . allow [the researcher] to triangulate findings across sources and test issues of reliability and validity" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 60). In other words, the data from the semi-structured interviews helped to triangulate the information from the focus groups. In turn, these qualitative data were also triangulated by the secondary analysis of the quantitative survey results. Glesne (1999) said it well: "The more sources tapped for understanding, the richer the data and the more believable the findings" (p. 31).

However, as Creswell (2003) points out, "There are several threats to validity that will raise potential issues about experimenter's ability to conclude that the intervention affects an outcome" (p. 171). In this research study, the quantitative internal validity threat was subverted because one standard survey instrument was utilized for all qualitative case sites. Inadequate procedures (e.g., changing the instrument during the experiment) therefore did not interfere with the analysis of data.

Summary

Much research exists about first-generation college students regarding the pre-college characteristics and risk factors that are associated with attrition and persistence

rates; however, the firsthand account of these students' first year experience is scarcely found. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine from first-generation college students what factors impacted their enrollment after their freshman year. Chapter 4 will provide a data analysis of the information obtained from the participants at the five institutions involved in the study. The results may prove crucial for secondary and postsecondary parents, educators, administrators, and support programs that so desperately want to increase enrollment and retention rates of first-generation students in college.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of analysis is to define, structure, and order data in a research study (LeCompte, 2000). Interpretation requires an eye for detail, focus, and openness to subtlety (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This becomes particularly important for the mixed-methods researcher who must not only delve into quantitative statistics but also dig out of the mounds of amassed qualitative data. Van Maanen (1988) described this process as telling the "tales of the field" by translating what has been learned into a body of textual information that communicates understanding to the reader.

Chapter 4 presents data that illuminate the motivational factors of first-generation college students. The respondents in this study attended five institutions in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Three of the universities involved were historically black colleges and universities, and two were predominately white institutions. One of the institutions initially included, Suburban College, did not participate as a result of administrative changes within its Student Support Services program during the time of the study. The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What academic factors motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year? (2) What non-academic factors motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year? (3) What are the differences in motivational factors of research participants at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) compared to that of other schools? (4) What are the differences in motivational factors of research participants at public institutions compared to that of students attending private schools?

The study included 168 participants who were students within the Student Support Services programs at institutions involved and who completed an online version

of *Survey of Entering Student Engagement* (2009b), adapted with permission by the

Center for Community College Student Engagement (2009). Of those participants, 11

students participated in focus groups guided by an adapted version of the *Focus Group*

Materials Moderator's Guide, as permitted by the Center for Community College

Student Engagement (2009a). Along with information obtained from the semi-structured

interviews conducted with Student Support Services directors, Chapter 4 attempts to

illustrate the academic and non-academic factors that impacted first-generation freshman

students and their enrollment the subsequent year.

After careful analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data that was compiled

for this study, Tables 2 through 4 provide a global perspective of the research

participants. Table 2 provides the gender for the 168 first-generation college student

respondents in the study.

Table 2

Gender of Respondents of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)

Gender	HBCU	PWI	Total
	N	N	
Male	17	9	26
Female	81	61	142
Total	98	70	168

Note. The respondents were 15.5% males (26) and 84.5% female (142).

Table 3 provides data related to the respondents' ethnicity. Ninety percent of the

students at HBCUs were African-American while 56% were of the same ethnicity at

PWIs. Interestingly, there was at least one respondent for all ethnic categories at the

PWIs; the HBCUs had no respondents who were Asian American or Pacific Islander.

Table 3

Ethnic Identification of Respondents of HBCU and PWI

Ethnicity	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
American Indian/Native American	1	.01	2	2.82
Asian American or Pacific Islander	0	0	1	1.41
Black/African American Non-Hispanic	88	90.00	40	56.34
White Non-Hispanic	1	1.02	21	29.58
Hispanic Latino Spanish	2	2.04	2	2.82
Other	6	6.12	4	5.63
Total	98		70	

Table 4 presents the data for respondents' ages for both Historically Black

Colleges and Universities in the study and Predominately White Institutions in the Study.

Table 4

Age of Respondents at HBCU Versus PWI

Age	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
18 to 24	91	92.86	52	74.29
25+	7	7.14	18	25.71
Total	98		70	

Note. Table 4 shows percentages of respondents.

Eighty-five percent of the first-generation college students ranged in age from 18 to 24, while 15% were considered non-traditional students, 25 years of age and older (Table 3). In general, the typical HBCU respondent was an African-American female between the ages of 18 and 24. The typical PWI respondent was also an African-American. As evident, most of the respondents for the study were considered traditional students. However, non-traditional students provided pertinent information to the study as well. One focus group participant at Eastern University disclosed his age of 52 and discussed how college was a whole new experience as a result of the fact that he was not the traditional age; "There was a little awkwardness for me getting used to school. . . . I was very self-conscious. It was difficult getting back into the routine of reading, writing and studying, but I'm not self-conscious about it anymore." Table 5 presents information pertaining to the educational background of the respondents' family members. The respondents were allowed to provide multiple responses to this particular question.

Table 5

Family Member(s) of Respondents Who Attended Some College

| | HBCU | | PWI | |
	N	%	N	%
Mother	51	27.89	32	29.91
Father	21	14.29	16	14.95
Brother/Sister	46	31.30	28	26.17
Child	2	1.36	5	4.67
Spouse/Partner	0	0.00	3	2.80
None of the above	26	17.69	23	21.50

Note. Table 5 shows percentages of respondents whose family member(s) attended at least some college. Though the respondents in the study were categorized as first-generation students (whose parents had an associate's degree, some college, or no college or university experience), it was determined that students had parents who attended some college, as seen in Table 5.

Forty-nine percent of the respondents' mothers (83) and 44% of their siblings (74) attended some college. On the contrary, only 29% of respondents' had family members (49) who had not attended college at all.

Participants in the focus groups spoke about wanting to do well and be the first in their families to graduate from college. A student at Eastern University shared that her motivation came from her family: "Neither of my grandparents finished high school and neither of my parents were fortunate enough to go on to college. They [parents] hated their jobs, but worked to save money for me to be here . . . and I don't want to disappoint

them." A non-traditional-aged student at the same institution provided a different

perspective about obtaining a degree: "I feel like I am stuck between a rock and a hard

place. I don't see where there is much of a future in the work that I currently do where I

live. So, it's either [I] go back to school or continue with what is not appealing

financially and physically." He continued, "I get a lot of self-satisfaction being in school

. . . and realizing the enrichment education has to offer." As supported by the data

gathered about participants in the survey and focus groups, there is an agreement between

data in Table 5 and students having the goal of being the first in their families to

complete a college education found in the focus group data.

Tables 6 through 8 provide the educational background information in reference

to those involved in the study, prior to their enrollment at their respective institutions.

The overall high school grade point average of respondents for HBCUs and PWIs can be

found in Table 6.

Table 6

Overall High School Grade Average of Respondents at HBCU Versus PWI

	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
A	8	8.16	17	24.29
A- to B+	41	41.84	24	32.29
B	20	20.41	16	22.86
B- to C+	22	22.45	8	1.14
C	7	7.14	4	5.71
C or lower	0	0.00	1	1.42
Total	98		70	

Note. Table 6 shows percentages of respondents.

The data in Table 6 show that approximately 84% of the respondents who entered HBCUs had an average between A- to C+; at PWIs, only approximately 55% were in the same range. Seven percent of the respondents (12) had an average of C or below. Data was not found from the focus groups in reference to students and their grade point averages in high school.

Table 7 shows information in reference to respondents who earned college credit while in high school. This question allowed respondents to provide multiple responses; therefore, the total N in the table will be greater than the number of respondents. None of the students who participated in the focus groups received college credits while enrolled in high school.

Table 7

Earned College Credit While in High School of Participants

| | HBCU | | PWI | |
	N	%	N	%
No	71	68.93	37	48.68
Yes at this college	3	.91	7	9.21
Yes at a different college	12	11.65	18	23.68
Yes at my high school	17	16.50	14	18.42
Total	103		76	

Note. Table 7 shows percentages of responses.

Seventy-one of 103 (68.9%) responses from HBCUs did not earn college credit while in high school, compared to 37 of 76 respondents at PWIs. None of the focus-group participants spoke about having earned college credit prior to attending college;

however, one participant from Eastern University highlighted her experience with an

Upward Bound Program (which provides fundamental support to participants in their

preparation for college entrance) while she was in high school. She asserted, "I joined

the program in high school and was determined to go to college."

Table 8 provides information in reference to respondents' enrollment in college

immediately after graduating from high school.

Table 8

Enrollment in College Immediately After Graduation from High School

Enrolled in college immediately after graduating from high school	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	90	91.84	57	81.43
No	8	8.16	13	18.57
Total	98		70	

Approximately 87.5% of respondents (147) enrolled in college immediately upon

graduating from high school; only 12.5% (21) did not. During the focus group held at

Urban University, one female participant informed the researcher, "I took a year off

[from school] before enrolling in Urban University." The non-traditional student from

Eastern University highlighted, "I once attended junior college, but did not finish."

Conversely, the qualitative data support the information provided in Table 8.

Table 9 denotes the highest academic certificate or degree earned by the

respondents, at the time of this study. While the study was being conducted, some of the

respondents completed their undergraduate studies, thus explaining the responses

associated with bachelor's degrees in the table below.

Table 9

Highest Academic Certificate or Degree Earned by Respondents

	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
GED	1	1.02	0	0.00
High School Diploma	78	80.00	54	76.06
Vocational/Technical Certificate	3	3.06	2	2.82
Associate Degree	3	3.06	12	16.90
Bachelor's Degree	13	13.27	2	2.82
Total	98		70	

Note. Table 9 shows percentages of respondents.

Approximately 80% of the HBCU respondents entered college with a high school diploma; 76% of the PWI respondents earned a high school diploma. Nineteen percent of respondents from HBCUs had earned more than a diploma at the time of the study, similar to the 21% of respondents of PWIs. As previously mentioned, the non-traditional student at Eastern University did attend junior college; however, a certificate was not obtained. According to all other focus group participants, this was their first experience in postsecondary education. These findings show agreement with those presented from the survey in Table 9.

As determined through the qualitative and quantitative data, not all respondents began their college careers at the institutions involved in the study, which is shown in Table 10. These data account for the associate degrees and certificates earned as

discussed within Table 9, as well as freshman classification responses found in Table 12. When transferring to another institution, some students are categorized as advanced freshmen; therefore, students may have responded accordingly.

Table 10

Institution Respondents Attended During Freshman Year

First year of college	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
Current Institution	93	94.90	45	64.29
Another Institution	5	5.10	25	35.71

Note. Table 10 shows percentages of respondents.

At the time the study was conducted, approximately 82% of the respondents began their postsecondary education at their current institutions; 18% were in attendance at a different institution. Only 5% of the respondents attending an HBCU began at another institution. Approximately 36% of respondents from PWIs attended another college prior to their current institution. The data from the survey are supported by the information determined from the focus group conducted at Eastern University (a PWI). In addition to the non-traditional student, two other individuals—an African American female and a White female participant—had actually transferred into the participating institution. The White female disclosed the following information about her freshman year experience at a private institution also in the state of North Carolina but not involved in this study.

The student stated,

The campus was very much like home—well-kept and beautifully landscaped. It

was well secured; we never had to worry about safety. I still maintain connections with professors I had [at the institution]. I developed professional relationships with professors and some departments on campus, which established references for jobs, grad [uate] school, etc. The college's weaknesses . . . private school and highly priced. I had a scholarship my first year, but after I had mainly loans and it was very hard on my parents; that was my reason for transferring.

The African American female provided the following dialogue about her experience, also at a private institution in the state of North Carolina but not involved in this study.

The student stated,

During my freshman year, college was like a fresh start. Life started all over, and I was closer to what I wanted to become . . . There was a since of community . . . everyone there not only made an effort to connect with me, but they [professors] were concerned about my grades and wanted me to further my potential. Its strengths were the fact that it was small and its faculty. The college's weakness was it was private, so it cost a lot. I had to transfer because I couldn't afford to stay.

The following tables (11 and 12) display the enrollment status of respondents at participating institutions during the time of the study.

Table 11

Enrollment at Time of Study

Current Classification	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
Full-time	95	96.94	66	94.29
Less than full-time	3	3.06	4	5.71
Total	98		70	

Note. Table 11 shows percentages of respondents.

Ninety-five percent of respondents were enrolled full-time during this study; less than 5% of the respondents (7) were enrolled part-time. No participants involved in the focus group were enrolled part-time. Table 12 provides the classification of the respondents to this study.

Table 12

Current Classification of Respondents

	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
Freshman	10	10.20	3	4.29
Sophomore	14	14.29	20	28.57
Junior	37	37.76	28	40.00
Senior	21	21.43	16	22.86
5th Year Student	7	7.14	3	4.29
Other	9	9.18	0	0.00
Total	98		70	

Note. Table 12 shows percentages of respondents.

Some of the respondents in the study began their college careers at other institutions and were categorized as (advanced) freshmen at their current institutions. For this reason, some respondents selected "freshman" as their current classification in Table 12. Furthermore, approximately 9% of the respondents were matriculating beyond the fifth year at their respective institutions. Some of the respondents completed their undergraduate studies during the time of the study, thus explaining the responses associated with "other" in the table above.

Across historically black colleges and universities as well as predominantly white institutions, directors in the semi-structured interviews spoke highly about the importance of freshman year academic advising experiences for students. Information gathered from interviews conducted with members of Student Support Services staff is found below.

The director of the SSS program at Urban University stated, "It is critical that you have professors that are student friendly their first year, who can understand that the student may not be at a point in which the professor thinks that the student is prepared." The director from Western University reiterated, "When staff and faculty show they care individually about each student it gives them a sense of wanting to succeed and continue their education here."

Students agreed with the directors about the relationships that they built with their professors and staff members on campus; however, very few spoke about receiving advising. In all focus groups conducted, a majority of the students recommended that institutions ensure that freshmen receive advising. In the words of one student, "For freshmen coming in, I would suggest that after getting acquainted, the school should have someone sit down to go over their career at school . . . what classes you are going to take . . . get the plan laid out—not just haphazardly."   Data found in Tables 13 and 14 in

reference to advising for HBCUs and PWIs respectively, highlight student responses in

reference to advising during their freshman year.

Table 13

Advising of Respondents at HBCUs During Freshman Year

	Agree		No Opinion		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Q1: I was able to meet with an academic advisor at a convenient time	59	86.77	5	7.35	4	5.88
Q2: An advisor helped me select a major	52	76.48	3	4.41	13	19.12
Q3: An advisor helped me to set academic goals	48	70.59	2	2.94	18	26.47
Q4: An advisor helped me to identify the courses I needed to take during my first semester	54	79.41	5	7.35	9	13.23
Q5: A college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to determine course load	39	57.35	8	11.77	21	30.89
Q6: I was aware of academic advising from the time of my decision to attend college	58	92.06			5	7.94
Q7: I used advising	57	90.47			6	9.51
Q8: I was satisfied with academic advising	50	81.97	8	13.12	3	4.92
Q9: A specific person as assigned to me	50	84.75			9	15.25

Ninety-two percent of the HBCU respondents were aware of academic advising

form the time of their decision to attend college, and 90% actually used advising during their freshman year at their respective institutions. Though many of the respondents stated an advisor helped them to set academic goals, a significant percentage (26.47) disagreed with the statement. An interesting finding was associated with responses pertaining to a college staff member talking with the participants about their commitments outside of school to determine course load; 39 respondents (57.35%) agreed with the statement; 21 respondents (30.89%) disagreed; and 8 respondents (11.77%) had no opinion. Moreover, 33 respondents (66%) stated a specific person was assigned to them for advising, whereas 17 respondents (34%) disagreed with the statement.

Contrary to information received from most participants in the focus groups, an African American female at Eastern University (a PWI) spoke about her freshman experience at a private institution (also a PWI) not included in this study: "The school did a very good job with helping me achieve my educational goals during my freshman year. My professors did individual meetings at least twice a month, and I met with my advisor at least two times a week." In Table 14, data also reveal mainly positive responses about students' experience with advising. Forty-one respondents (70.69%) agreed that an advisor helped them select a major, while fifteen (25.86%) disagreed. Furthermore, 32 respondents (55.17%) confirmed an advisor helped them set academic goals; conversely 17 respondents (29.31%) disagreed. Similarly to respondents at HBCUs, only 21 respondents (36.21%) stated a college staff member talked with them about their commitments outside of school to determine course load; on the contrary, 41 respondents (53.45%) disagreed and 6 (10.35%) had no opinion. Likewise, 33 respondents (66%) noted that a specific person was assigned to them for advising, while 17 (34%)

respondents disagreed.

Table 14

Advising of Respondents at PWIs During Freshman Year

	Agree		No Opinion		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Q1: I was able to meet with an academic advisor at a convenient time	44	75.87	4	6.89	10	17.24
Q2: An advisor helped me to select a major	41	70.69	2	3.45	15	25.86
Q3: An advisor helped me to set academic goals	32	55.17	9	15.52	17	29.31
Q4: An advisor helped me to identify the courses I needed to take during my first semester	44	75.86	2	3.45	12	20.69
Q5: A college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to determine course load	21	36.21	6	10.35	41	53.45
Q6: I was aware of academic advising from the time of my decision to attend college	45	90.00			5	10.00
Q7: I used advising	43	86.00			7	14.00
Q8: I was satisfied with academic advising	39	78.00	6	12.00	5	10.00
Q9: A specific person was assigned to me	33	66.00			17	34.00

Note. Table 14 shows percentages of respondents.

Ninety percent of the respondents from PWIs were aware of academic advising

from the time they made a decision to attend college; 86% used advising. In reference to

advising for respondents at HBCUs and PWIs, 80% were satisfied with academic advising, stating they were able to meet with an academic advisor at convenient times and that advisors helped the students determine their major and set academic goals. Moreover, 88% used advising during their freshman year.

To the contrary, a large percentage of students agreed that college staff members did not talk with them about their commitments outside of school to determine course load. Some of the responses from the focus group participants included: "I worked full-time . . . it made it hard to pay attention [in class] so I had to quit." "I had to keep a job and my grades up while working to support my family." All participants (traditional and non-traditional) were involved in extracurricular activities ranging from volunteering to class office positions.

As with academic advising, most of the respondents in the study were satisfied with the financial aid advising they received during their first year of college. Table 15 provides data associated with respondents at HBCUs.

Table 15

Financial Aid During Freshman Year for HBCU Respondents

	Yes		No Opinion		No	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I applied for financial assistance	79	98.75			1	1.25
I was notified of my eligibility	75	92.59			6	7.41
I received financial assistance	73	90.12			8	9.88
The college provided me with adequate information about financial assistance	43	63.23	10	14.71	15	22.06
I was aware of financial aid advising	54	85.71			9	14.29
I used financial aid advising	52	82.54			11	17.46
I was satisfied with financial aid advising	41	67.22	12	19.67	8	13.12

Note. Table 15 shows percentages of respondents.

More than 90% of the respondents at HBCUs applied for financial aid, were notified of their eligibility, and received financial assistance during their freshman year. Forty-three (63.23%) respondents agreed that their college provided them with adequate information about financial aid; however, 15 (22.06%) disagreed, and 10 (14.71%) expressed no opinion. Additionally, 41 (67.22%) respondents were satisfied with their financial aid advising, whereas 8 (13.12%) were not and 12 (19.67%) had no opinion.

Similarly, Table 16 provides data associated with financial aid during freshman year for PWI respondents.

Table 16

Financial Aid During Freshman Year for PWI Respondents

	Yes		No Opinion		No	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I applied for financial assistance	68	100.00				
I was notified of my eligibility	60	95.24			3	4.76
I received financial assistance	61	96.83			2	3.18
The college provided me with adequate information about financial assistance	34	58.62	4	6.90	20	34.48
I was aware of financial aid advising	36	72.00			14	28.00
I used financial aid advising	32	64.00			18	36.00
I was satisfied with financial aid advising	29	58.00	16	32.00	5	10.00

Note. Table 16 shows percentages of respondents.

One-hundred percent of the respondents applied for financial aid; over 90% were notified of their eligibility and received financial assistance during their freshman year. Interestingly, though 34 (58.62%) respondents stated the college provided them with adequate information about financial aid, 20 (34.48%) disagreed while 4 (6.90%) had no opinion. Also, 36 (72%) of the respondents stated they were aware of financial advising, while 14 (28%) were not aware. Additionally, 32 (64%) of the respondents confirmed that they used financial advising, but 18 (36%) did not during their freshman year.

Only 1% of the students surveyed did not apply for financial aid in the study. Nonetheless, students from all focus groups conducted shared their frustrations about funding their college education during their freshman year. Participants in the focus

group at Urban University expressed having loans for a semester in excess of $20,000.

One female highlighted, "Initially I had no financial aid." Therefore, she did not

immediately enroll in college after graduating from high school. However, she went on to

state, "Student Support Services provided me with information and gave me money

[grant aid] so that I could come." Students enrolled in private institutions agreed that the

costs associated with their freshman year were extremely high and difficult to manage

without large sums of loans for them and their parents. A female at Western University

spoke about her difficulties with financial aid during her freshman year: "Through my

freshman year, I had a lot of high times and low times. It was up and down because I was

trying to adjust to new things and being on my own. I had issues with my financial aid.

Paperwork was lost and I had to resubmit. As a result, I had to move out of my dorm

until the issue was resolved."

As mentioned previously, two individuals from Eastern University attended

private institutions (not included in this study) during their freshman year of college

before transferring. The White female participant disclosed the fact that her freshman

year tuition and fees were covered by a scholarship and loans. Unfortunately, "the

scholarship only lasted freshman year and financially it was out of my parents' range. . . .

I wondered how I was going to pay. . . . I transferred to Eastern University because it was

a better financial decision to attend a public over private university." To that end, she

stated she would have stayed if she didn't have to worry about cost.

Likewise, the African American participant at Eastern University, who also

transferred from a private institution (not included in this study) after her first year in

college, had a similar scenario. She explained, "It was private, so it cost a lot. The grants

and loans I received were only adequate for the first semester. . . . I had to apply to

Eastern University because I could not afford the next semester. This made me cautious of applying anywhere else. I couldn't attend [school] my next semester and that hurt. But I did get into Eastern University the following fall. . . . I worked [during my second semester of my first year in college]."

Correspondingly, the male at Eastern University provided a similar perspective as the traditional aged individuals within the focus group, but from the perspective of a non-traditional student: "I can't afford to live on campus . . . so I commute. During my freshman year I got the Pell Grant, but without working I would not be able to make it. Everything I made went to tuition and bills. . . . I didn't know about work-study during my freshman year, and I was just offered it this year. I went to an open house during my freshman year . . . and didn't get anything from it. I had to seek out financial aid on my own."

Many participants in the focus groups believed the cost of school was discouraging but were happy that they didn't have to repay the loans until after graduation. As a result of unmet need, students sought ways to bridge their financial gaps through employment during their freshman year. Some focus-group participants stated that they worked during their freshman year. Table 17 illustrates the responses of participants regarding employment during their freshman year.

Table 17

Employment of Respondents During Freshman Year

HBCU	Yes N %		No Opinion N %		No N %	
I was aware of job placement	33	52.38			30	47.62
I used job placement assistance	24	38.09			39	61.91
I was satisfied with job placement assistance	22	36.06	37	60.66	2	3.28
PWI	Yes N	%	No Opinion N	%	No N	%
I was aware of job placement	22	44.00			28	56.00
I used job placement assistance	10	20.00			40	80.00
I was satisfied with job placement assistance	12	24.00	38	76.00		

Note. Table 17 shows percentages of respondents

Only 36% of HBCU respondents were satisfied with job placement assistance provided by their respective institutions; moreover, only 38% reported using job placement assistance at all during their freshman year. Correspondingly, as few as 24% of the respondents from PWIs were satisfied with job placement assistance, and merely 20% used job placement assistance.

Survey results show that a majority (94%) of the respondents registered for classes before the start of the semester as reported in Table 18.

Table 18

Registration Timeframe for Respondents During Freshman Year

	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
More than one week before classes began	72	81.82	61	91.05
During the week before classes began	12	13.64	5	7.46
During the first week of classes	4	4.55	5	7.46
After the first week of classes	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	88		71	

Note. Table 18 shows percentages of respondents.

A majority of the respondents completed registration more than one week before classes began during their freshman year. Less than 5% of respondents at HBCUs registered during the first week of classes. Likewise, 7% of respondents at PWIs registered during the first week of classes.

Table 19 shows data in reference to schedule changes during the first three weeks of respondents' freshman year.

Table 19

Adding or Dropping Courses During First Three Weeks of Freshman Year

	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
Without discussing decision with staff/instructor	3	3.41	7	10.45
After discussing decision with staff/instructor	9	10.23	10	14.93
Did not add or drop courses	76	86.36	50	74.63
Total	88		67	

Note. Table 19 shows percentages of participants.

Majority of the respondents at HBCUs (86%) and PWIs (75%) did not add or drop courses during the first three weeks of their freshman year.

In conjunction with registration, Table 20 provides responses in reference to respondents' experience with orientation at their particular institutions. This question allowed respondents to select more than one response.

Table 20

Orientation During Freshman Year

| | HBCU | | PWI | |
	N	%	N	%
I took part in an online orientation prior to the beginning of classes	3	2.75	4	4.65
I attend an on-campus orientation prior to the beginning of classes	58	53.21	62	72.09
I enrolled in an orientation class	40	36.70	17	19.77
I was not aware of freshman orientation	3	2.75	3	3.49
I was unable to participate	5	4.59		

Note. Table 20 shows percentages of respondents.

Only three respondents at both HBCUs and PWIs stated they were not aware of

freshman orientation, thus showing that most respondents participated in some form of

orientation: online, on campus, and/or enrolled in an orientation course.

Tables 21 through 23 provide specific details about placement testing and

enrollment in developmental courses as a result.

Only 14 respondents (17%) of HBCUs were exempt from taking a placement test;

15 respondents of PWI's were exempt.

Table 21

Placement Testing During Freshman Year

		HBCU		PWI	
		N	%	N	%
Required to take placement assessment prior to registration	Yes	55	67.90	28	44.44
	No	26	32.10	35	55.56
I took a placement test	Yes	55	68.75	36	57.14
	No	25	31.25	27	42.86
I was exempt from taking a placement test	Yes	14	17.50	15	23.81
	No	66	82.50	48	76.19

Note. Table 21 shows percentages of respondents

Data in reference to placement testing results are presented in Table 22.

Table 22

Placement Testing Results

	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
Didn't take a placement test	25	28.41	25	35.21
My scores were not reviewed with me	16	18.18	4	5.63
Placement in Developmental Reading	11	12.50	2	2.82
Placement in Developmental Writing	6	6.82	3	4.23
Placement in Developmental Math	4	4.55	10	14.08
No Developmental Course	26	29.55	27	38.03

Note. Table 22 shows percentages of respondents.

Twenty-five respondents from HBCUs (28%) and PWIs (35%) respectively did not take a placement test. Eighteen percent of respondents from HBCUs did not have their scores reviewed with them during their freshman year. More respondents from HBCUs placed in Developmental Reading, while more respondents from PWIs placed into Developmental Math. Table 23 provides details about Developmental Course Enrollment.

Table 23

Developmental Course Enrollment

		HBCU		PWI	
		N	%	N	%
Developmental Reading	Enrolled	18	26.47	4	6.90
	Not Enrolled	50	73.53	54	93.10
Developmental Writing	Enrolled	14	20.59	4	6.90
	Not Enrolled	54	79.41	54	93.10
Developmental Math	Enrolled	12	17.65	10	17.24
	Not Enrolled	56	82.35	48	82.76
English(ESL/ESOL)	Enrolled	4	5.88	0	0.00
	Not Enrolled	64	94.12	58	100.00
Student Success	Enrolled	17	25.00	22	37.93
	Not Enrolled	51	75.00	36	62.07
Learning Community	Enrolled	13	19.12	11	18.97
	Not Enrolled	55	80.88	47	81.03

Note. Table 23 shows percentages of respondents.

Approximately 17% of respondents at both types of institutions enrolled in a Developmental Math course during their freshman year.

Finally, information was obtained from students in reference to transfer credit, which is found in Table 24. Forty-one percent of respondents from HBCUs did not know about transfer credit assistance, similar to that of 42% of respondents from PWIs. Only one focus group participant discussed matters associated with transfer of credit. The Caucasian female from Eastern University expressed difficulty in obtaining a copy of her transcript from her previous institution once it was discovered that she was transferring.

Table 24

Transfer Credit Assistance

	HBCU		PWI	
	N	%	N	%
I knew about it	37	58.73	29	58.00
I did not know about it	26	41.27	21	42.00
I never used it	50	79.37	31	62.00
I used it	13	20.65	19	38.00
I was satisfied with it	14	22.95	22	44.00
I was not satisfied with it	2	3.28	1	2.00

Note. Table 24 shows percentages of participants.

Both students and staff members spoke about support services provided by the institution being an academic factor which motivated first-generation college students to enroll the subsequent year. The director for the Student Support Services Program at Southern University stated, "My role is to be a part of the retention efforts campus wide

with retention and graduation. And to that end, we work with students and support them from the time they get on campus until they actually graduate." Eastern University's director quoted, "The study skills instruction and workshops, tutoring and review sessions have a major impact on our freshman students' success. Typically, 50% of our students return for additional services during the following semesters." To that end, all students involved in the focus groups agreed that support services are vital for freshman success. "I would rate them [support services] 10 out of 10. They [Urban University] have all the resources you need; you just have to know how to use them. Professors actually help you find them," stated a participant.

In conjunction with the directors, participants in the focus groups spoke highly of the support they received from their respective Student Support Services programs. However, the student participants agreed that support services mainly came from the relationships they established with particular faculty, staff, and peers.

A student from Eastern University's focus group session further elaborated about her first year experience at another institution during her freshman year. The student stated:

> College was like a rollercoaster ride. I had tons of anticipation, anxiousness, and nervousness. The college's strengths were the fact that it was mandatory for freshmen to live on campus; this created a tight-knit community. Also, there were mandatory seminars mainly for freshmen where you had to work together with people, making it easier to make friends. I developed many friendships with people in my dorm, classmates, and through my rotoract and karate groups. That helped me get by in my freshman year. I was never lonely and still have those connections . . . and that helped me get by in my freshman year. Every single one

of those people is a great reason why I stayed enrolled.

A male participant from Urban University noted, "The SSS assistant director had a big impact on my life. She basically took care of me; she knew everything. She was like a mother on campus. . . . She made it comfortable to talk to her about personal matters and academic issues." Another female participant added, "The janitors and cafeteria workers push us . . . and the alumni cheer me on in the community." A different female stated, "The block system (Learning Communities) during my freshman year helped me." All of the group participants from Urban University agreed that a family-like atmosphere had been established. A male participant talked about how alike he and his roommate were, and another student spoke about how her "dorm mom" helped her get through family issues and encouraged her to strive for a 4.0 grade point average; she credits the relationship for the reason she achieved it.

More importantly, all students spoke of at least one faculty or staff member and one peer they built a close (if not) personal relationship with during their freshman year. These fostered relationships provided avenues for students to discuss both academic and non-academic matters. The student interviewed at Western University explained, "My friends and I mostly helped each other out. I feel like they [the university] could have helped out a little more with tutoring and help in classes." Related comments were made from all focus group sessions in reference to administration at the institutions involved. For example, participants agreed that the business aspect of college was a hassle, and they felt they always got "the run around." Equally, there was a lot of miscommunication on the behalf of administration. One participant stated, "We would receive communication that a situation called for us to respond within two days . . . or sometimes we were notified after deadlines." Majority of the participants agreed that customer

service within administrative departments (e.g., financial affairs, financial aid) was poor and needed improvement.   Even though the nontraditional participant was in agreement with most matters previously mentioned, he had somewhat of a different perspective on his freshman year experience and stated, "The school as a whole is really encouraging me to continue on."

Summary

The researcher has revealed the academic and non-academic factors that motivated first-generation college students to enroll the subsequent year as determined through this mixed-method study. Information was gathered through surveys distributed to student participants, through collecting and analyzing the data presented in student focus groups and staff interviews, and by presenting the findings. In Chapter 5, the researcher presents recommendations and conclusions based on the data analysis and discussions detailed in this chapter. The recommendations are based on the findings discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

Introduction

Many colleges and universities are encountering a time when budget space is at a premium, and these institutions of higher education do not have campus programs to help first-generation students matriculate (Housel, 2012). In today's culture, first-generation college students are a noticeably large and growing section of the collective undergraduate population at colleges and universities across the United States of America (Staley-Abney, 2011). For this reason, secondary schools must continue to assist students with both cognitive and non-cognitive skills with preparation for college, while institutions of higher learning prepare for ways to increase enrollment and retention rates for this cohort of undergraduates.

Nearly one in six freshmen at American 4-year institutions are first generation, according to a study facilitated by the University of California at Los Angeles's Higher Education Research Institute (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Korn, 2007). Twenty percent of students whose parents did not attend college withdraw, and the attrition rate of students whose parents attended but did not complete college remains a high 17% (Warburton et al., 2001). However, it is important to recognize that not all first-generation college students enter college from non-traditional, disadvantaged backgrounds. Some come from families with considerable "cultural capital" that, in the absences of a college education, still provide significant support for first-generation college students (Orbe, 2004). Nonetheless, data revealed that in addition to academic preparedness, non-academic reason for first-generation students not returning to school after their freshman year were associated with personal adjustment, financial reasons, and environmental reasons (Ohio University, 2012). As high school graduation rates and

college participation rates increase, how will colleges and universities continue to increase the graduation rates of their first-generation students? Educators must recognize what factors can be attributed to first-generation status and then target those students' specific needs (Housel, 2012).

Research Questions

According to Tinto (1990), "Students are more likely to stay in schools that involve them as valued members of the institution. The frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff and other students have repeatedly been shown to be independent predictors of student persistence" (p. 5). With this information at the forefront of this study, first-generation students at five institutions of higher education provided data to answer three main questions for investigation: (1) What academic factors motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year; (2) What non-academic factors motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year, and (3) What are the differences in motivational factors of research participants at historically black colleges and universities compared to that of predominately white institutions? Through the voices of the students and support staff interviewees as well as the survey responses, Chapter 4 attempted to illustrate the motivational factors which impact first-generation college students from freshman to sophomore year.

Findings

After careful analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data compiled for this study, it was found that the academic factors that motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year were having a positive rapport with faculty and staff, personal goal of degree completion, and support services provided by the institution. Data analysis revealed that the non-academic factors that motivated first-generation students to

enroll the subsequent year were family, peers, and a sense of community on campus.

Triangulation formed through student surveys, focus groups, and staff interviews, as well descriptive statistics, did not show a significant difference in motivational factors of research participants at historically black colleges and universities compared to that of predominately white institutions, nor participants at public versus private institutions.

Academic Factors

Positive rapport with faculty and staff. The results of this study revealed a few significant findings in reference to first-generation college students and motivational factors that impact their retention from freshman to the subsequent year. One motivational factor that impacted participants' retention was the positive rapport they established with faculty and staff. A student's social and interpersonal environments, which include peers and faculty, are important factors in student persistence (Pascarella et al., 1978). Contrary to this study, the literature review revealed that first-generation college students are less likely to engage in the academic and social experiences associated with success in college, such as studying in groups, interacting with faculty and others, participating in extracurricular activities, and using support services, as concluded by Terenzini et al. (1996).

All focus-group participants emphasized a relationship they had established with at least one faculty and/or staff member during their freshman year of college. The students commented as to how these relationships provided a constant support system for them. The faculty and staff members (in most cases) made an academic and a personal connection with the participants. Some spoke about professors sharing their personal experiences of college, which allowed the student to feel comfortable with discussing their personal matters. Others made a correlation between a faculty or staff member

playing a motherly/fatherly role, exhibiting a nurturing and welcoming approach for the first-generation college students. Participants did speak of less favorable interactions with some faculty and staff members; however, personal relationships that these students developed with institutional employees—from custodian and cafeteria workers to professors and support services staff—motivated this group of first-generation college students to continue persisting at their respective institutions.

Personal goal of degree completion. The data for this study revealed that, unanimously, participants were striving for their personal goal of degree completion as the first in their family. The literature review made known that, in comparison to non-first-generation students, first-generation students are less likely to complete their education to earn a bachelor's degree (Chen, 2005). The participants in this study each mentioned their goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree. Their commitment to their personal goal is evident through the positive measures they are taking towards degree completion. Though some students encountered financial issues during their first year of college, they persevered and found opportunities to continue their education at another affordable institution based upon their individual financial situations. One participant, as a non-traditional student, endured community, working full-time, and taking care of an elderly family member, while working towards his degree. Despite the fact that the focus-group participants had not reached their personal goals of degree completion at the culmination of the study, survey results revealed that some of the respondents had successfully done so—against all odds. As an administrator at one of the institutions involved in the study, I can confirm for a fact that two focus group participants obtained their degree, and one is successfully matriculating in graduate school.

Support services. Colleges and universities work collaboratively with support

programs to assist students with success. Effective programs affirm and help students understand that academic success is not attained through individual achievement alone but through an axis of support (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). A first-year experience program represents an intentional and comprehensive program to increase student persistence and increase personal development (Barefoot et al., 1999). Learning communities attempt to develop linkages among teachers and students, having a positive effect on social interaction (Tinto & Russo, 1994). Henriques (2011) found that the introduction of learning communities improved the academic performance, retention, persistence, and graduation rates so that at-risk students performed, persisted, and graduated at a rate similar to the rates found in literature for non-at-risk populations. Moreover, the federal TRIO program Student Support Services provides academic support, advising, and disability services to its participants.

The participants involved in the study were all participants within the federal TRIO Student Support Services program at their universities. Each individual spoke emphatically about the positive impact the program and its staff had on their freshman year of college. A transfer student who participated in the study felt it would have been nice to know whether or not her previous institution had a Student Support Services program during her first year of college. As a result of the university being so big, she was not aware of all resources available. In addition to student participants' emphasis on SSS, some spoke about their interactions with other service entities, such as residence life and organizations. A student expressed the personal relationships she was able to establish with her residence life coordinator, or in her words, "dorm mom," as well as her roommate, who served as a confidant and study partner. Students from one particular institution also discussed their experiences with learning communities. Even though they

did not care for them during their freshman year, as upperclassmen they were able to see the benefits of the experience as it correlated with their success as students.

Non-academic Factors

Family. This study revealed that family was a non-academic factor that motivated first-generation students to enroll the subsequent year. The literature review disclosed that families of first-generation college students sometimes discourage them from going to college, and this can lead to alienation from family support (Striplin, 1999). Rendon (1992) found that first-generation students reported that relationships with family and friends who did not go to college often become strained and difficult to maintain, as they are perceived as changing and separating from them.

Student participants in the study expressed the desire to break the cycle within their families. An interviewee from Urban University commented, "I'm paving the way for my little brother. If he sees me quit [school], he's going to want to quit too, and I can't have him doing that. So I have to stay in school for him." Most students emphasized the fact that their parents and/or guardians were sacrificing for them by exhausting savings and taking out large sums of loans. As a result, they felt obligated and indebted to ensure they obtained a degree, not just for themselves—but for family. Others discussed how their church families provided financial support through scholarships and donations, and as a result they were obliged to graduate from college.

Sense of community. Staff members who participated in the interview phase did not mention family as being an important factor; however, they did agree strongly with students about the importance of having a sense of community on campus. The director at Eastern University remarked, "Campus assimilation or finding your niche is important for the success of first-generation college students during their freshman year." The director

from Northern University agreed, adding: "Social support and social involvement all have a positive relationship to retention [of first-generation students]."

The literature review revealed that first-generation students often experience problems that arise from "living" simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in neither (Rendon, 1992). They are less likely to engage in the academic and social experiences associated with success in college, such as studying in groups, interacting with faculty and other students, participating in extracurricular activities, and using support services (Terenzini et al., 1996). In correlation with this study's finding, Arbodela et al. (2003) found that students who were more involved in their living community (residence halls), both academically and socially, tended to be more satisfied with their living environment and found it easier to study and collaborate academically with others in their community.

Students interviewed highlighted the relationships they built with their peers, staff members who serve within the residence halls on their respective campuses, as well as with alumni. One student spoke about how important the relationship she had with her dorm mom was during her freshman year when her parents filed for divorce: "I wanted to quit school . . . so having someone to talk to that wasn't a peer, who had some experience, helped me to keep a level head and continue on." Another commented, "The single most important factor that kept me enrolled after my freshman year was the sense of community the school created. Everyone there not only made an effort to connect with me, but they were concerned with my grades and wanted me to further my potential." A student interviewee at Eastern University affirmed, "Definitely the relationships that I had with people kept me enrolled . . . professional, peer, and even a romantic relationship kept me in school." At each of the institutions, it was evident that the students had a

sense of belonging as found through the survey results, responses from staff members within the interviews, and information shared through the focus group sessions.

      Peers. According to the literature review, socially integrating students during their first eight weeks on campus may be the most important thing an institution can do in setting the foundation for a student's successful transition to college (Wawrzynski, 1999). For first-generation students, participating in an honors program, joining a fraternity or sorority, gaining employment, and gleaning from teachers' instructional skills have significantly more positive effects for academic success than those first-generation students that did not get involved (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The findings in this study directly align with those presented in the literature review. Throughout each focus-group session, students highlighted their fellow peers who serve as physical, emotional, and academic and, in some cases, spiritual support. A few students attested to their roommates displaying characteristics similar to their own and/or a sibling; thus making their living environment comfortable while away from home. Many of the participants also discussed how they receive more peer tutoring than they do from instructors. Additionally, many students found themselves involved in groups and organizations, which assisted with their adjustment to college and further enhanced their reason for remaining focus on their academic goals. Such interactions also encouraged them to seek leadership positions and desire to remain academically competitive among their peers.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

      This study confined itself to Student Support Services program participants at five participating institutions in the state of North Carolina. Therefore, the ability to generalize beyond the piedmont province of North Carolina was limited. As a result of sampling only Student Support Services participants within those parameters, other

information from eligible non-participants was not included in the study. The subjects were limited to students who enrolled as first-time, full-time freshmen at their respective institutions during the fall semesters of 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009. Due to lack of participation, focus groups were not conducted at two of the participating institutions; Southern University (a PWI) and Northern University (an HBCU). One subject agreed to an individual interview as a representative of Western University.

The truthfulness of the participants related to the motivating factors that inspired them to move forward at their respective institutions is a limitation within this study. As a result of the researcher being an administrator at one of the institutions involved, students may not have been completely candid in the focus group (though proxies were used) for fear of negative repercussions, or, if they had a personal relationship with the researcher, an assumption may have been made that the researcher would receive accolades if positive information was provided on her behalf. Additionally, the findings of this study may have been negatively impacted by students who may have transferred to another institution. By probing, the researcher was able to decipher which focus group participants in fact were transfer students; however, such information could not be concluded from the survey. Finally, three of the participating institutions are categorized as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs); therefore, a large percentage of the findings were based on first-generation minority students.

Recommendations

While this mixed-method study questioned the motivational factors that impact first-generation freshman college students on attending and enrolling in college the subsequent year, there are a number of recommendations for future study that would deepen the knowledge base of understanding of this growing population of students.

Since this study was restricted to first-generation college students associated with the Student Support Services programs, additional information could be gathered to collect the same data from other first-generation college students who are not participants in the SSS program at the institutions to determine if their motivational factors were similar. Using the information revealed in this study, it would be interesting to go back to the participating institutions, since time has lapsed, and look at the retention and graduation rates of the focus-group participants. From there, information could be gathered to construct further research on postgraduate studies of first-generation college students. Comparable to this study, additional research could be gathered within the other regions of North Carolina, as well as other states, to compare and contrast findings.

For Urban University and Western University, it is definitely recommended to implement a financial literacy plan to educate both parents and students about costs associated with college, especially a private institution such as Urban University. Additionally, an initiative to build and/or locate financial sources such as grants and scholarships, would definitely aid not only first-generation students but also all students at the institution. From other findings in the study, it is highly recommended that administration develop a task force to review current practices associated with student engagement. The focus-group participants from Urban University and the individual who provided information from Western University had very negative perspectives of administrative offices and the service received. Most importantly, it is recommended that whatever these two institutions are currently doing to establish such a family atmosphere should definitely continue; however, ensure that administration is included, showing that they are servant leaders for their student body moving forward.

Eastern University should continue to assist its Student Support Services

participants in the manner in which they are currently servicing. The focus group

participants for this college had most unfavorable comments in reference to institutions

they attended prior to enrolling in Eastern University. As a result, it is recommended that

Eastern University evaluate programs, processes, and initiatives associated with its

transfer students. It is important to ensure that these students are aware of what the

college has to offer in detail—not as an overview. Additionally, it is critical for this

institution to review and further develop support and transition initiatives associated with

its non-traditional population. Areas to focus on should include (but not be limited to)

financial aid for this specific group, because some may be reaching their maximum of

funding for undergraduates as a result of attending other institutions, and support

services, such as Student Support Services and other entities which assists students with

the transition into and their journey through their undergraduate studies.

Due to the fact that only survey results and the Student Support Services

director's interview were obtained from Northern University and Southern University

respectively, no recommendations were made.

Summary

First-generation college students will continue to enroll in postsecondary

education, whether at the community college level or 4-year institutions. Hence, it is

important to continue to prepare the next generations to attempt to minimize the obstacles

they may encounter as a result of being characterized as such. For this reason, the

following recommendations should be explored, as they were prominent concerns and/or

reoccurring themes not specifically associated with the research questions posed and data

analyzed: (1) financial literacy; (2) dedicated advising, with a focus on academics and

financial aid; and (3) Federal TRIO Student Support Services Program initiative for all

public and private (not-for-profit) institutions. By taking an initiative to explore these

areas, colleges and universities, and more specifically, support services programs, can

continue to seek ways to support and retain first-generation college students. Information

in this study will also provide high school administrators, counselors, and parents with

information to assist future college students with success prior to enrolling in an

institution of higher education.

References

Adelman, C. (1999). *Answers in a toolbox: Academic intensity, attendance patterns, and bachelor's degree attainment*. Washington, DC: Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

American College Testing Program. (2001). *ACT newsroom* [chart]. Retrieved from ACT website: http://www.act.org

American College Testing Program. (2006). National collegiate retention and persistence to degree rates. Retrieved from ACT Institutional Data File: http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/retain_2006.pdf

American Council on Education. (2004). *Missed opportunities: Students who do not apply for financial aid* [Report]. Retrieved from Lieutenant Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth website: http://www.cherrycommission.org/docs/Resources/Participation/Student_Financia lAidArticle.pdf

Arboleda, A., Wang, Y., Shelley II, M. C., & Whalen, D. F. (2003). *Predictors of residence hall involvement, 44*(4), 517-531.

Astin, A. W. (1993). What matters in college? *Liberal Education*, *79*(4), 4-15.

Aud, S., Kewal-Ramani, A., & Frohlich, L. (2011). *America's Youth: Transitions to Adulthood* (NCES 2012-026). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Ayala, C., & Striplen, A. (2002). A Career introduction model for first-generation college freshmen students (ERIC ED469996). In G. R. Walz, R. Knowdell, & C. Kirkman (Eds.), *Thriving in challenging and uncertain times* (pp. 57-62). Greensboro, NC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services. Retrieved from: www.eric.ed.gov

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control.* New York, NY: W.H. Freeman.

Bank, B. J., Slavings, R. L., & Biddle, B. J. (1990). Effects of peer, faculty, and parental influences on students' persistence. *Sociology of Education*, *60*, 208-225.

Barefoot, B. O, Fidler, D. S., Gardner, J. N., Moore, P. S, & Roberts, M. R. (1999). A natural linkage: The first year seminar and the learning community. In J. H. Levine (Ed.), *Learning communities: New structurers, new partnerships for learning* (Monograph No. 26). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina National Resource Center for the First Year Experience & Students in Transition.

Berkner, L., He, S., Cataldi, E. (2002). Descriptive Summary of 1995-1996 beginning postsecondary students: Six years later. Retrieved from nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/pdf/2003151_es.pdf

Braxton, J. M., Hirschy, A. S., & McClendon, S. A. (2004). *Understanding and reducing college student departure* [Report]. Retrieved from Educational Resource Information Center website: http://www.eric.ed.gov

Braxton, J. M., Shaw Sullivan, A. V, & Johnson, R. M. Jr., (1997). Appraising Tinto's theory of college student departure. In J.C. Smart (Ed.) *Higher Education Handbook of Theory and Research Volum XII.* New York, NY: Agathon Press.

Brewer, P. R. and Weisman, I. (2010). *Uncovering the experiences of first-generation college students in limited residency graduate programs (dissertation).* Retrieved from Adult Higher Education Alliance website: www.ahea.org/files/pro2010brewer.pdf

Brouder, K. (1987). Parental attitudes toward pre-college planning. *Journal of Student Financial Aid, 17*(2), 5-13.

Bui, K. V. (2002). First-generation college students at a four-year university: Background characteristics, reasons for pursuing higher education, and first-year experiences. *College Student Journal, 36*(1), 3.

Burdman, P. (2005). *The student debt dilemma: Debt aversion as a barrier to college access.* Retrieved from http://www.infotrac.galegroup.com

Byrd, K. L., & MacDonald, G. (2005). Defining college readiness from the inside out: First-generation college student perspectives. *Community College Review, 33*(1), 22-37.

Cannady, S. (2008, Fall). *Summary report*. Charlotte, NC: Johnson C. Smith University.

Carnevale, A. P., Fry, R. A., & Turner, S. E. (2003). *Forthcoming: Against the odds...Is college graduation declining for low-income youth?* [Report]. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Carnevale, A. P., & Desrochers, D. M. (2003). *Standards for what? The economic roots of K-16 reform*. Retrieved from Educational Testing Service website: www.ets.org/research/publeadpubs.html

Chen, X. (2005). *First-generation students in postsecondary education: A look at their college transcripts* (NCES 2004-171). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Choy, S. P. (2001). Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from the NCES website: http://nces.ed.gove/pubs2001126.pdf

Choy, S. P. (2002). *Access and persistence: Finding from 10 years of longitudinal research on students*. Washington, DC: Eric Clearinghouse on Higher Education. ED466105.

Coles, A., Jager-Hyman, J., & Savitz-Romer, M. (2009). Removing the roadblocks to rigor: Linking academic and social supports to ensure college readiness and success. *Pathways to College Network.* Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

College Board. (2007a). *Trendsin college pricing* [Annual report]. Retrieved from College Board website: http://www.collegeboard.org

College Board. (2007b). *Trends in student aid* [Annual report]. Retrieved from College Board website: http://www.collegeboard.org

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (2009a). *Retention toolkit: Focus group material's moderator's guide.* Austin: University of Texas at Austin.

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (2009b). *Survey of entering student engagement.* Austin: University of Texas at Austin.

Council for Opportunity in Education (2003). *Do You Know TRIO? A TRIO History Fact Sheet. The Early History of the Higher Education Act of 1965.* Retrieved from The Pell Institute Clearinghouse: http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/ trio_clearinghouse-The%20Early%20History%20of%20the%20Higher%20 Education%20Act%20of%201965.pdf

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000, Summer). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39(3),* 12-130.

Creswell, J. W., Shope, R., Plano Clark, V. L., & Green, D. O. (2006, Spring). How interpretive qualitative research extends mixed methods research. *Research in the Schools, 13*(1), 1-11.

Cuccaro-Alamin, S., & Choy, S. P. (1998). *Postsecondary financing strategies: How undergraduates combine work, borrowing and attendance.* Washington, DC: Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Davenport, M. (2012). Examining involvement as a critical factor: Perceptions from first-generation and non-first-generation students. In T. Hicks & A. Pitre (Eds.), *Research Studies in Higher Education: Educating Multicultural College Students* (pp. 189-222). Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.

Department of Health and Human Services (2010). Poverty guidelines. Found on the ASPE website: www.aspe.hhs.gov

Dillard, C. B. (1995). Leading with her life: An African-American feminist (re)interpretation of leadership for an urban high school principal. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 31(4)*, 539-563.

Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) Foundation (2006). *Persist: A comprehensive guide for student success in higher education.* Oakdale: ECMC Foundation.

Education Resource Institute (2004). *A Shared Agenda: A Leadership Challenge to Improve College Access and Success.* Retrieved from Boston, MA: Pathways to College Network Clearinghouse: www.pathwaystocollege.com

Engle, J., Bermeo, A., & O'Brien, C. (2006). Straight from the source: What works for first-generation college students. Retrieved from http://www.pellinstitute.org

Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students*. Washington, DC: The Pell Institute.

Ewen, R. B. (2003). *An introduction to theories of personality.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Fischer, M. J. (2007). Settling into campus life: Differences by race/ethnicity in college involvement and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education, 78*(2), 126-161.

Frederico, A., & Volle, K. (1997). *Missed opportunities: A new look at disadvantaged college aspirants*. Retrieved from The Education Resource Institute website: http:www.teri.org

Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Giancola, J. H., Munz, D. C., & Trares, S. (2008). First- versus continuing-generation adult students on college perceptions: Are differences actually because of demographic variance?. *Adult Education Quarterly, 58*(3), 214-228.

Gladieux, L. E., & Swail, W. S. (1999). Financial aid is not enough: Improving the odds for minority and low-income students. In J. King (Ed.), *Financing a college education: How it works, how it's changing* (pp.177-197). Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press & ACE.

Glenn, D. (2008). Study finds graduation gap for first-generation students, regardless of preparation. Retrieved from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* website: http://chronicle.com/article/Study-Finds-Graduation-Gap-/841/.

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. NY: Addison Wesley Longman.

Gore, P. A. (2006). *Predicting the performance and persistence of first-year college students: The role of non-cognitive variables* [Presentation]. Retrieved from University of South Carolina website: http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/presentation/ annual/2006/presentations/P-93.pdf

Greene, J. P., & Winters, M. A. (2005, February). *Public high school graduation and college readiness rates* [Education Working Paper 8]. Retrieved from Manhattan Institute for Policy Research website: http://www.manhattan-institute.org

Griffin, K. A., Nichols, A. H., Perez, D. H., & Tuttle, K. D. (2008). Making campus activities and student organizations inclusive for racial/ethnic minority students. In S. R. Harper (Ed.), *Creating inclusive college environments for cross-cultural learning and engagement* (pp.121-138). Washington, DC: National Association.

Gullatt, Y., & Jan, W. (2003, January). *How do pre-collegiate academic outreach programs impact college-going among underrepresented students?* Washington, DC: Pathways to College Network Clearinghouse.

Harmon, N. (2012). The role of minority-serving institutions in national college completion goals. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Henriques, D. I. (2011). Testing the efficacy of learning communities for underprepared first-semester college students. *Proquest.* Weidner University. 3515469.

Higher Education Policy Institute at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2009, February). *Remediation of college students: A summary of empirical findings on developmental education* [Commissioned paper]. Retrieved from Higher Education Policy Institute website: http://www.highereducationpolicyinstitute.org

Horn, L., & Nunez, A. (2000). *Mapping the road to college: First-generation students' math track, planning strategies, and context for support* (NCES 2000-153). Jessup, MD: National Center for Education Statistics.

Housel, Teresa H. (2012). First generation focus. *Inside Higher Ed.* Retrieved from: www.insidehighered.com.

Hurtado, S. (2007). Linking diversity with the educational and civic missions of higher education. *The Review of Higher Education, 30*(2), 185-196.

Hyatt, R. (2003). Barriers to persistence among African American intercollegiate athletes: A literature review of non-cognitive variables. *Journal of College Student Development, 37*(2), 260-276.

Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) (2012). *Supporting first-generation college students through classroom-based practices* [Report]. Washington, DC: Author.

Ishitani, T. T. (2006, September/October). Studying attrition and degree completion behavior among first-generation college students in the United States. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *77*(5), 862-885. Retrieved from http://muse.jhu.edu

Jackson, C. L., & Nun, E. F. (2003). *Historically black colleges and universities* [Reference Handbook]. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc.

Jick, T. D. (1979, December). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *24*(4), 602-611.

Johnson C. Smith University. (2006, Spring). *Freshman Academy* [Bulletin]. Charlotte, NC: Author.

Johnson C. Smith University (2012). *Academic Catalog 2012-2013. Johnson C. Smith University,* Charlotte, NC.

Kepple, Jr., T. R. (2005, January). *Colleges drop the ball in aid to poor student: Wealthy institutions should do more to educate needy students* [January report]. Retrieved from Gale Virtual Reference Library website: http://www.infotrac.galegroup.com

King, J. E. (2002). How students' financial decisions affect their academic success. *American Council on Education*. Retrieved from http://www.acenet.edu/

Kirst, M. W. (1998, September). Bridging the remediation gap. *Education Week*, *18*, 76. Retrieved from http://plinks.ebscohost.com

Kuh, G. D., & Hu, S. (2001). The effects of student-faculty interaction in the 1990's. *The Review of Higher Education, 24*(3), 309-332.

Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J., Bridges, B., & Hayek, J. (2006). *What matters to student success: A review of the literature.* Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

LeCompte, M. D. (2000, Summer). Analyzing qualitative data. *Theory in Practice*, *39*(3), 146-154.

Li, X., & Caroll, D. (2007). Characteristics of minority-serving institutions and minority undergraduates enrolled in these institutions. *Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report.* Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Lohfink, M. M., & Paulsen, M. B. (2005). Comparing the determinants of persistence for first generation and continuing-generation students. *Journal of College Student Development, 46,* 409-428.

Lotkowski, V. A., Robbins, S. B., & Noeth, R. J. (2004). *The role of academic and non-academic factors in improving college retention* [Policy Report]. Iowa City, IA: American College Testing.

Lundberg, C. A., & Schreiner, L. A. (2004). Quality and frequency of faculty-student interaction as predictors of learning: An analysis by student race/ethnicity. *Journal of College Student Development, 45*(5), 549-565.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Martin, B. E. (2009). Redefining championship in college sports: Enhancing outcomes and increasing student-athlete engagement. In S. Harper and S. Quale (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse students* (pp.283-294). New York, NY: Routledge.

McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

McPherson, M. S., & Schapiro, M. O. (2005). Opportunity in American higher education. (Ed.), *Reflections on college access & persistence* (pp. 18-39). Washington, DC: Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. Retrieved from www.inpathways.net/ipnclibrary/ViewBiblio.aspx?aid=1811

Merisotis, J. P., & Phipps, R. A. (2000, Fall). Remedial education in colleges and universities: What's really going on? *The Review of Higher Education, 24*(1), 67-85.

Merriam, S. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Morley, K. M. (2007). Fitting in by race/ethnicity: The social and academic integration of diverse students in a predominately white university. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *Minority student retention: The best of the journal of college student retention: Research, theory, and practice* (pp.243-270). Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc.

Muraskin, L., Lee, J., Wilner, A., & Swail, W. S. (2004, December). *Raising the graduation rates of low-income college students*. Washington, DC: The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity In Higher Education.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2000). *Digest of education statistics 1999* [Fact Sheet]. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *2003-2004 National postsecondary student aid study.* Retrieved from http://ncsec.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006158.pdf

Noel-Levitz (2013). Eight Annual National Research Study. *2013 National freshman rttitudes report: Exploring college readiness among entering freshmen.* Retrieved from https://www.noellevitz.com/documents/gated/Paper.

Nora, A. (2009). *Remediation of college students: A summary of empirical findings on developmental education.* Houston, TX: National Center for Student Success.

Nunez, A., & Cuccaro-Alamin, S. (1998). *First generation students: Undergraduates whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

O'Brien, C., & Engle, J. (2005). *Indicators of opportunity in higher education* [Report]. Retrieved from The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education website: http://www.pellinstitute.org/files/6_Indicators.pdf

Ohio University (2012). *Factors associated with first-year student attrition and retention at Ohio university athens campus.* Athens, Ohio: Office of Institutional Research.

Orbe, M. P. (2004). Negotiating multiple identities within multiple frames: An analysis of first-generation college students. *Communication Education, 53*(2), 131-149.

Pascarella, E. T., Terenzini, P. T., & Hibel, J. (1978). Student-faculty interactional settings and their relationship to predicted academic performance. *Journal of Higher Education, 49*, 450-463.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patron, I. M. (2012) *Exploring the experiences of successful first-generation community college students in Florida: A qualitative study(dissertation)* 3512970. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses: 2012.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative & research evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

Patton L. D. (2006, May-June). Black culture centers: Still central to student learning. *About Campus, (May-June),* 2-8.

Pryor, J., Hurtado, S., Saenz, V., Santos, J., & Korn, W. (2007). *The American freshman: Forty year trends.* Cooperative Institutional Research Program. University of California, Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute.

Rainey, K. (2008). *2008 CSI preparation, administration, and results summary report.* Charlotte, NC: Johnson C. Smith University.

Rendon, L. I. (1992). From the Barrino to the academy: Revelations of a Mexican American "scholarship girl". In L.S. Zwerling and H.B. London (Eds.), *First generation college students: Confronting the cultural issues.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Riehl, R. (1994, Fall). The academic preparation, aspirations, and first-year performance of first-generation students. *College and University*, *70*(1).

Rodriguez, S. (2003). What helps some first-generation students succeed. *About Campus, (September-October).* 17-21.

Saenz, V., Hurtado, S., Barrera, D., Wolf, D., & Yeung, F. (2007). *First in my family: A profile of first-generation college students at four-year institutions since 1971.* Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Schaefer, J. L. (2010). Voices of older baby boomer students: Supporting their transition back into college. *Educational Gerontology*, *36*(1), 67-90.

Shultz, A. M. (2012). *A comparative study of first-generation and continuing generation college students at a single four-year public university* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota) Retrieved from http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/ 139439/1/Schultz_umn_0130E_12651.pdf

Skahill, M. P. (2002-2003). The role of social support network in college persistence among freshman students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, *4*, 39-52.

Smedley, B. D., Myers, H. F., & Harrell, S. P. (1993). Minority-status stresses and the college adjustment of ethnic minority freshmen. *The Journal of Higher Education, 64*(4), 434-452.

Somers, P. (1996, Fall). The freshmen year: How financial aid influences enrollment and persistence at a regional comprehensive university. *College of Student Affairs Journal*, *16,* 27-38.

Staley-Abney, C. L. (2011) *First-Generation college students: A phenomenological inquiry (dissertation).* Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses: 2012.

Stephens, N. M. (2009). *A cultural mismatch: The experience of first-generation college students in elite universities* (dissertation) 3395857. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses; 2010.

Striplin, J. J. (1999) *Facilitating Transfer for First-Generation Community College Students* (ERIC ED430627). Retrieved from ERIC Digest, June: www.eric.ed.gov

Svanum, S., & Bigatti, S. M. (2006). The influences of course effort and outside activities on grades in a college course. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(5), 564-575.

Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education*, *37*(1), 1-22.

Thayer, P. B. (2000). Retention of students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds. *The Council Journal: Opportunity Outlook*, May, 2-8.

The Pell Institute. (2008). Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students. Retrieved from faculty.soe.syr.edu/vtinto/Files/ Moving%20Beyond%20Access.pdf

Thomas, R. O. (1990). Programs and activities for improved retention. In Hoissler, Bean, & Associates, *The strategic management of college enrollments* (pp. 186-201). San Francisco, CA: Jossy-Bass.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, *45*, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1982). Limits of theory and practice in student attrition. *Journal of Higher Education*, *53*(6), 687-700.

Tinto, V. (1986). Theories of student departure revisited. In J.C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research Volume II* (pp.359-384). New York, NY: Agathon Press, Inc.

Tinto, V. (1990). Principles of effective retention. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience, 2*, 35-48.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1996). Reconstructing the First Year of College. *Planning for Higher Education*, *25*(1), 1-6.

Tinto, V., & Russo, P. (1994, Fall). Coordinated studies program: Their effect on student involvement at a community college. *Community College Review*, *22*, 16-25.

Umbach, P. D., & Wawrzynski, M. R. (2005). Faculty do matter: The role of college faculty in student learning and engagement. *Research in Higher Education, 46*(2), 153-184.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2013). *2013 New First-Year Student Orientation*. Retrieved from the New Student and Carolina Parent Programs website: www.nscpp.unc.edu/first-year-students/orientation.

U.S. Department of Education (2013). *Student support services program.* Retrieved from the Office of Postsecondary Education website: www2.ed.gov/programs/ triostudsupp/index.html

U.S. Department of Education (2008). National postsecondary student aid study. *NPSAS: 08.* National Center for Education Statistics, Data Analysis System.

U.S. Department of Education (2011). *Funding Your Education: The Guide to Federal Student Aid, 2012-2013.* Washington, D.C.: Federal Student Aid, Customer Experience Group.

U.S. Department of Education (2012). *The condition of education 2011*. Retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics website: http:/nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/dll/tables/dt11_347.asp

U.S. Department of Education (2013). *Upward Bound Program.* Retrieved from the Office of Postsecondary Education website: www2.ed.gov/programs/ trioupbound/index.html

U.S. Department of Education (2004). , *The Impacts of Regular Upward Bound: Results from the Third Follow-Up Data Collection, Washington, DC.* Office of the Under Secretary, Policy and Program Studies Service. Retrieved from www2.ed.gove/rschstat/eval/highered/upward/upward-3rd-report.pdf

U.S. Department of Education (2006). *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) Grantee-level Performance: 2004-05 and 2005-06.* Washington, DC. Retrieved from www2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/gu-analysis-narrative.pdf

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vargas, J. H. (2004). *College Knowledge: Addressing Information Barriers to College.* Boston, MA: College Access Services: The Education Resources Institute (TERI). Retrieved from the TERI website: www.teri.org

Warburton, E. C., Burgarin, R., & Nunez, A. (2001). *Bridging the gap: Academic preparation and postsecondary success of first generation students* (NCES 2001-153). Jessup, MD: National Center for Education Statistics.

Washington Center. (n.d.). What are learning communities? And other frequently asked questions. Retrieved from http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/lcfaq.htm

Watson, L. W., & Kuh, G. D. (1996). The influence of dominant race environments on student involvement, perceptions, and educational gains: A look at historical black and predominantly white liberal arts institutions. *Journal of College Student Development, 37(*4), 415-424.

Wawrzynski, M. R. (1999). *The student in the university: A longitudinal study of the relationship between a first-year student seminar and the student persistence process*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland.

Yin, R. K. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Yin, R. K. (2006, Spring). Mixed methods research: Are there methods genuinely integrated or merely parallel? *Research in the Schools*, *1,* 41-47. Retrieved from www.msera.org

Young, J. W. (2007). *Validity of the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) test.* Retrieved from the Educational Testing Service website: http://www.ets.org

Zelditch, Jr., M. (1962). Some methodological problems of field studies. *American Journal of Sociology*, *67*(5), 5-19.

Zwerling, L. S., & London, H. B. (1992). *First-generation students: Confronting the cultural issues.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Appendix A

Survey

Note. From: *Survey of Entering Student Engagement*, by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCSSE), 2009, Austin: University of Texas at Austin: Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCSSE). Adapted with permission.

Please answer each of the following questions according to your best judgment or knowledge. There is no right or wrong answer, and your name will not be associated with your responses. Your responses will remain confidential.

1. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
2. How old are you?
   a. 18-21
   b. 22-24
   c. 25-44
   d. 45 or older
3. Did you enroll in college immediately after graduating from high school?
   a. Yes
   b. No
4. Thinking about this semester, how would you describe your enrollment at this college?
   a. Full-time
   b. Less than full-time
5. Did you begin your first year of college at this college or elsewhere?
   a. Started here
   b. Started elsewhere
6. What is your current classification at this college?
   a. sophomore
   b. junior
   c. senior
   d. 5th year student

Please answer each of the following questions according to your best judgment or knowledge based upon your freshman year of college.

7. How many courses did you enroll in for your first semester during your first year of college?
   a. four
   b. five or more
8. How many courses did you enroll in for your second semester during your first year of college?
   a. four
   b. five or more

9. Of the courses you enrolled in during your first year of college, how many did you drop after the first day of class and before the end of the term?

      a. None
      b. one
      c. two
      d. three
      e. four or more

10. Of the courses you enrolled in during your first year of college, how many did you drop after the first day of class and before the end of the term?
      a. None
      b. One
      c. Two
      d. Three
      e. Four our more

11. Did you add or drop any classes within the first three weeks of a semester during your freshman year at this college?
      a. Yes, without discussing my decision with a college advisor, staff member, or instructor
      b. Yes, after discussing my decision with a college advisor, staff member, or instructor
      c. No, I did not add or drop any course

12. When did you register for your courses for your first year at this college?
      a. More than one week before classes began
      b. During the week before classes began
      c. During the first week of classes
      d. After the first week of classes

13. The following statements are about your freshman orientation experience. (Mark all that apply)
      a. I took part in an online orientation prior to the beginning of classes
      b. I attended an on-campus orientation prior to the beginning of classes
      c. I enrolled in an orientation course as part of my course schedule during my first year
      d. I was not aware of freshman orientation
      e. I was unable to participate in orientation due to scheduling or other issues

14. This set of items asks you about your freshman year of college. To respond, please think about your experience from the time of your decision to attend the college through the end of your first year as a freshman.
      a. Before I could register for classes I was required to take a placement test to assess my skills in reading, writing, and/or math
          i. Yes
          ii. No
      b. I was exempt from taking a placement test at this college
          i. Yes
          ii. No

15. My placement test scores indicated that I needed to take a Developmental course (also referred to as Basic skills, College Prep, etc.) in the following areas. (Mark all that apply)
      a. Didn't take a placement test

      b. My placement test scores were not reviewed with me
      c. Developmental Reading
      d. Developmental Writing
      e. Developmental Math
      f. Didn't place into and Developmental courses

16. The college required me to enroll in classes indicated by my placement test scores during my first year
      a. Yes
      b. No

17. With regard to financial assistance (scholarships, grants, loans, or work-study, etc.) to help with your college costs during your freshman year, mark a response for each of the following items.
      a. I applied for financial assistance through FAFSA (scholarships, grants, loans, or work-study, etc.)
      b. I was notified I was eligible to receive financial assistance (scholarships, grants, loans, or work-study, etc.)
      c. I received financial assistance funds (scholarships, grants, loans, or work-study, etc.)
      d. I did not apply for financial assistance through FAFSA

18. When did you first apply for financial assistance through FAFSA for your freshman year? (Mark only one)
      a. 3 or months before classes began
      b. 1 to 2 months before classes began
      c. Less than 1 month before classes began
      d. After classes began
      e. I did not apply for financial assistance

19. Which of the following did you use to pay your tuition during your freshman year of college? (Please mark all that apply)
      a. My own income or savings
      b. Parent(s) income or savings
      c. Grants and scholarships
      d. Public Assistance
      e. Spouse/significant other's income or savings
      f. Employer's contributions
      g. Student Loans (bank, etc.)
      h. Other

20. In which of the following types of courses were you enrolled during your freshman year? (Respond to each item)
      a. Developmental Reading (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
            i. Enrolled
            ii. Not enrolled

    b. Developmental Writing (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
        i. Enrolled
        ii. Not enrolled

    c. Developmental Math (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
        i. Enrolled
        ii. Not enrolled
    d. An English course taught specifically for students whose first language is not English (ESL, ESOL)
        i. Enrolled
        ii. Not enrolled
    e. A course specifically designed to teach skills and strategies to help students succeed in college (e.g., a college success or student success course)
        i. Enrolled
        ii. Not enrolled
    f. An organized "learning community" (two or more courses that a group of students take together
        i. Enrolled
        ii. Not enrolled

21. This set of items asks you about your experience during your freshman year. To respond, please think about your experiences from the time of your decision to attend college through the end of your freshman year. (Respond to each item) (SA, A, Neutral, D, SD)
    a. The very first time I came to the college I felt welcome
    b. The instructors at the college wanted me to succeed
    c. All the courses I needed to take during my freshman year were available at times convenient for me
    d. I was able to meet with an academic advisor at times convenient for me
    e. An advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major
    f. An advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them
    g. An advisor helped me to identify the courses needed to take during my freshman year
    h. A college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school (work, children, dependents, etc.) to help me figure out how many course to take
    i. The college provided me with adequate information about financial assistance (scholarships, grants, loans, work-study, etc.)
    j. A college staff member helped me determine whether I qualified for financial assistance
    k. All instructors had activities to introduce students to one another
    l. All instructors clearly explained academic and student support services available at the college
    m. All instructors clearly explained grading policies
    n. All instructors clearly explained course syllabi (syllabuses)

  o. I knew how to get in touch with my instructors outside of class
  p. At least one college staff member (other than an instructor) learned my name
  q. At least one other student whom I didn't previously know learned my name
  r. At least one instructor learned my name
  s. I learned the name of at least one other student in most of my classes
  t. I had the motivation to do what it took to succeed in college my freshman year
  u. I was prepared academically for my freshman year

22. During your freshman year of college, about how often did you do the following? (Respond to each item) (Never, Once, Two or three times, four or more times)
  a. Ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions
  b. Prepare at least two drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
  c. Turn in an assignment late
  d. Not turn in an assignment
  e. Participate in supplemental instruction (extra class sessions with and instructor, tutor, or experienced student)
  f. Come to class without completing readings or assignments
  g. Work with other students on a project or assignment during class
  h. Work with classmates outside of class on class projects or assignments
  i. Participate in a required study group outside of class
  j. Participate in a student-initiated (not required) study group outside of class
  k. Use an electronic tool (e-mail, text messaging, Facebook, MySpace, class website, etc.) to communicate with another student about coursework
  l. Use an electronic tool (e-mail, text messaging, Facebook, MySpace, class website, etc.) to communicate with an instructor about coursework
  m. Discuss an assignment or grade with an instructor
  n. Ask for help from an instructor regarding questions or problems related to a class
  o. Receive prompt written or oral feedback from instructors on your performance
  p. Receive grades or points on assignments, quizzes, tests, or papers, etc.
  q. Discuss ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class
  r. Discuss ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family, co-workers, etc.)
  s. Skip class

23. This set of items asks you about your freshman year experiences. To respond, please think about your experiences from the time of your decision to attend college through the end of your freshman year. Respond to each item of the following by indicating Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.

 Within a class, or through another experience in college:
  a. I learned to improve my study skills (listening, note taking, highlighting readings, working with others, etc.)

       i.   Strongly Agree
      ii.   Agree
    iii.   Neutral
    iv.   Disagree
     v.   Strongly Disagree

b. I learned to understand my academic strengths and weaknesses
       i.   Strongly Agree
      ii.   Agree
    iii.   Neutral
    iv.   Disagree
     v.   Strongly Disagree

c. I learned skills and strategies to improve my test-taking ability
       i.   Strongly Agree
      ii.   Agree
    iii.   Neutral
    iv.   Disagree
     v.   Strongly Disagree

24. Thinking about your freshman experiences from the time of your decision to attend college through the end of your freshman year, what was your main source of academic advising (help with academic goal-setting, planning, course recommendations, graduation requirements, etc.)? Mark only one)
    a. Instructors
    b. College staff (not instructors)
    c. Friends, family, or other students
    d. Computerized degree advisor system
    e. College website
    f. Other college materials

25. Was a specific person assigned to you so you could see him/her each time you needed information or assistance?

26. During your first semester as a freshman, about how many hours did you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?
    a. Preparing for class (in a typical 7-day week)
       vi.   None
      vii.   1-5 hours
    viii.   6-10 hours
      ix.   11-20 hours
       x.   21-30 hours
      xi.   More than 30 hours
    b. Working for pay (in a typical 7-day week)
    c. None
    d. 1-5 hours
    e. 6-10 hours
    f. 11-20 hours
    g. 21-30 hours
    h. More than 30 hours

27. Do you have children who live with you and depend on you for their care?
    a. Yes

      b. No

28. Is English your native (first) language?
      a. Yes
      b. No

29. Are you an international student or nonresident alien?
      a. Yes
      b. No

30. What is your racial/ethnic identification?
      a. American Indian or Native American
      b. Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
      c. Native Hawaiian
      d. Black or African American, Non-Hispanic
      e. White, Non-Hispanic
      f. Hispanic, Latino, Spanish
      g. Other

31. What is the highest level of education your mother completed?
      a. Middle School/Jr. High
      b. High School
      c. Some College
      d. Associate's Degree
      e. Bachelor's degree or higher
      f. Other/Unknown

32. What is the highest level of education your father completed?
      a. Middle School/Jr. High
      b. High School
      c. Some College
      d. Associate's Degree
      e. Bachelor's Degree or higher
      f. Other/Unknown

Appendix B

Permission to Use Instrument

The image part with relationship ID rId8 was not found in the file.
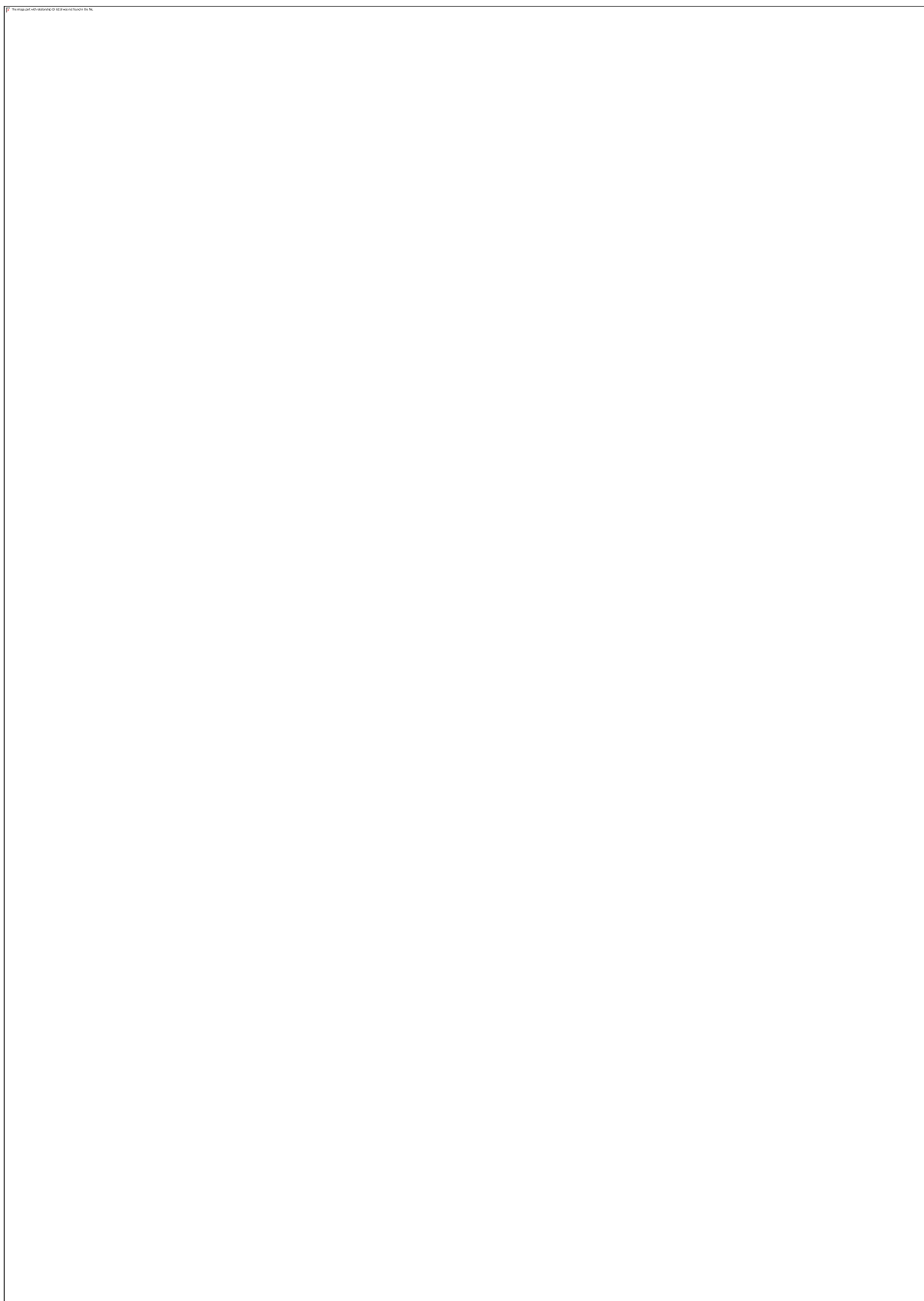
Appendix C

Interview Questions

Please answer each of the following questions according to your best judgment or knowledge. There is no right or wrong answer, and your name will not be associated with your responses. Your responses will remain confidential.

1. What is your role on this campus?

2. Does your program or department currently have retention goals in place? If yes, how are these goals defined? How were these goals developed?

3. Do your current program or departmental goals and activities address the specific goals for first-generation college student?

4. If so, please discuss. If not, what modifications need to be made to meet the need of first-generation students?

5. Which current university programs/policies/strategies do you feel are most effective in retaining first generation college students and why?

6. What techniques does your institution use to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its programs and services associated with assisting first generation college students? Do you think they have been used effectively? Explain

7. What academic factors do you believe motivate first-generation college students to continue matriculating upon completion of their freshman year?

8. What non-academic factors motivate first-generation college students to continue matriculating upon completion of their freshman year?

Appendix D

Focus Group Questionnaire

Please answer each of the following questions according to your best judgment or knowledge. There is no right or wrong answer, and your name will not be associated with your responses. Your responses will remain confidential.

1. What were your goals when you started college? What did you hope to gain as a result of your college experience?
2. Have your goals changed since you've been in college? What are they now? What caused your goals to change?
3. Tell us how you would complete this sentence: **"During my freshman year, college was like a _____."** Tell us more about your response.
4. In your opinion, what were the college's strengths?
5. In your opinion, what were the college's weaknesses?
6. How good a job do you think the college did in helping you achieve your educational goals?
7. What responsibilities or activities did you have outside of school during your freshman year?
8. How did these responsibilities/activities affect your ability to stay in school during your freshman year?
9. Did the college offer any support services to help you with your nonacademic responsibilities? If so, what were they? If so, did you use any of those services? What, if anything, was helpful to you?
10. If the college did not offer any such services, what type of services would you have liked to see?
11. (*if childcare has not been mentioned*) Do any of you rely on childcare services either at the college or elsewhere in order to attend classes? If so, where? Is the cost of this childcare manageable for you? Were the hours convenient for your class schedule? Did any issues surrounding childcare (*cost, location, hours, other*) ever make it difficult or impossible to attend classes during your freshman year?
12. What type of programs, offices, or services did the college offer to help you reach your academic goals?
    a. Of the services you used, describe your experience (helpful, not helpful)
13. Are there additional programs or services that you would have liked to see your college offer that you believe would have helped you academically?
14. How did you finance your education during your freshman year? What type of financial aid did you receive during your freshman year? Was it adequate?
15. What type of financial support services did the college provide? Did you use the services? If so, describe how the experience went. If not, why not?

16. Describe how the cost of college influenced or affected your decision to attend college after your freshman year.

17. What additional financial support services would you have liked the college to provide?

18. Did you find any difference in the quality of your day, evening, weekend, or online classes or the quality of the instruction you received? If so, describe.

19. How would you describe the quality of the classes you took?

We'd like to hear about the types of classroom experiences you had, what experiences you got the most out of and what types of experiences aren't as helpful to you.

- Think about a class where you really did well. How would you describe it? What made it work for you?

- Think about a class where you struggled. How would you describe it? What made it hard? What would have made it work for you?

20. Quality of instruction – In general, how would you describe the quality of your instructors?

- Think about an instructor who you would say is one of the best you have had. What are the qualities or characteristics that individual has that help you learn?

- When you contacted an instructor, what kind of an issue did you usually contact him or her about?

21. Online classes – For those who have taken online classes, describe your experience in accessing information presented in those classes and learning the content.

- What specific required courses did you have to take? Did you have to repeat the class one or more times in order to move ahead into credit classes? Did the college offer enough help so that students could pass these courses as quickly possible? What more do you believe the college should be doing to help students pass these courses as quickly as possible?

22. If you ever consider not continuing school because of these classes, explain why.

23. When you think about your freshman year experience at this college outside of the time you spent in class, were there particular relationships you developed that come to mind?

24. Who were these relationships with?

25. How important would you say these relationships were to your freshman year? Which ones in particular? How were they important to you? Describe what impact they had on your success here.

26. If there were times when you considered whether to continue attending this college, did any of those relationships have any impact on your decision? In what way(s)?

27. Describe a time or an experience you had during your freshman year that was not favorable, and in your opinion, how could the college have made this experience more positive?

28. What advice would you give the college about one or two things the college could do to help students succeed during their freshman year?

29. In your opinion, what does the college do well that helped you stay in school?

30. What is the single most important factor that kept you enrolled the subsequent year?

Summary and Close of Focus Group
Thank you for participating

Appendix E

Permission to Use Instrument

The image part with relationship ID rId18 was not found in the file.