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An Exploration of Factors Influencing First-Generation College Students' Ability to Graduate

College: A Delphi Study

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the PhD in Leadership and Change Program at Antioch University

in partial fulfillment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Leadership and Change, Graduate School of Leadership and Change, Antioch University.

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And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Hebrews 12:1b–2a

My relationship with God grew stronger and deeper during this marathon. There were times when I did not feel I could complete the marathon, but God whispered in my ear, “I am with you.” I am thankful that God held me up and took over when needed. I am certain completion would not be possible without God. All the glory belongs to you!

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to every ancestor who worked hard and fought so I could get to this point.

Also, this dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents—Marzella Grimes and Bobby Gray (paternal) and Henry and Susie Caldwell (maternal) and Daphne (the slave my friend came from). I stand on the shoulders of giants and could not be where I am in this life without your courage.

Abstract

This dissertation serves as a counter-narrative to the standard deficiency model in published research that characterizes most first-generation college students as feeble and unequipped when it comes to thriving in, persisting in, and graduating from college. This is one of the few studies that examines the success of first-generation college students from the students' perspective. First-generation college students who graduated from college participated in a Delphi study that addressed this question: What factors influence first-generation college students' ability to graduate college? Three rounds of data collection resulted in ten themes, roughly in order of importance based on feedback from study participants: Self Starter, Financial Support, Finding a Passion, Social Network, Self-Development, Cultural/Identity Development, Family, Campus Resources and Programs, Work, and Service. The dissertation concludes with three sets of recommendations for improving outcomes of first-generation college students, aimed respectively at secondary school personnel, college officials, and first-generation college students themselves. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA: Antioch University Repository and Archive, <http://aura.antioch.edu/> and OhioLINK ETD Center, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/etd>.

Keywords: Higher Education, persistence, educational opportunity, community cultural wealth, psychological safety, retention, positive psychology, college students, TRIO

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Chapter I

Introduction

The creation of higher education was to advance the agenda of the elite. Initially, admissions requirements at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, prestigious ivy league schools, did not involve scholastic aptitude but instead were based on gender, religion, social status, character, and athleticism (Guinier, 2015), setting the stage for exclusive enrollment criteria in favor of the elite. After a change in admissions requirements at Harvard and other institutions, the number of Jewish students—often discriminated against throughout history—increased steadily. In response, Harvard’s new president in the 1920s quickly changed admissions requirements a third time to control who could be admitted into the school because he did not like the budding demographic. Eventually, national college entrance exams became the focus to increase selectivity with admission requirements, establishing a basis for discrimination against those who are less affluent and non-white (Guinier, 2015).

In the 1940s, the United States began a conversation about college access for American soldiers arriving home after World War II, which led to the implementation of the GI Bill, also known as The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (Olson, 1973). The GI Bill helped numerous military veterans enroll in college—many doing so as first-generation college students—to the dismay of colleges and universities around the country (Guinier, 2015; Olson, 1973). The GI Bill proved to be an excellent experiment for higher education that resulted in over 2 million soldiers enrolling in college, excelling in the classroom, and graduating (Guinier, 2015; Olson, 1973). The GI Bill “epitomized our country’s dual commitments: to open opportunity across the economic spectrum and to invest in people who will give back to society”

(Guinier, 2015, p. 24). The GI Bill was proof that less affluent college students, more specifically first-generation college students, could handle the rigor of college and graduate.

In modern times, education is considered the great equalizer when it comes to wealth and opportunity in America. For that reason, institutions of higher learning are supposed to have a welcoming environment that encourages scholarship, as well as personal and intellectual growth; however, the system is not structured for everyone to succeed because it was not created for all and sundry. It is difficult to embrace higher education when facing obstacles such as limited finances, uncertain living arrangements, troubling family dynamics, and unwritten rules of higher education—obstacles encountered by many first-generation students. For many such college students, obtaining a degree is more a struggle than an opportunity. Despite all they experience, first-generation college students persevere while working, caring for family members, paying bills at home, and experiencing culture shock on campus, among other things.

Literature focused on higher education portrays first-generation college students as being ill-equipped for college level work. My experience working with first-generation college students has been different. Through my work with TRIO¹ programs, a set of federally funded programs that serves low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities, I have seen first-generation college students thrive in the collegiate environment and graduate from college. This dissertation study focuses on the experiences of first-generation college students who graduated college. My research question seeks to answer: What factors influence first-generation college students' ability to graduate college? This chapter provides a basic overview of the dissertation that follows.

¹ Not an acronym

Why First-Generation College Students

My interest in first-generation college students developed for two reasons—my parents’ experience as first-generation college students and my work with TRIO programs. Growing up, I often heard stories about my parents’ experiences as first-generation college students and how my grandparents did not know the best ways to support my parents while in school, which meant my grandparents lacked an understanding of expectations and requirements for college. I did not fully grasp the full nature of their experiences until I started working with first-generation college students in the TRIO Student Support Services program. As I supported students through a variety of situations, I began to see my parents’ stories manifested in the students I worked with. My passion for first-generation college students grew as I saw some students graduate and some stop out. I began to wonder why some graduated and others did not, even when their circumstances were similar.

Definitions

Scholars have defined “first-generation” in a variety of ways; for the purposes of this research, first-generation college students are defined as students whose parent(s) did not graduate with a bachelor’s degree (Jehangir, 2013). As a former director of a TRIO program, I am familiar with this definition since TRIO programs use it to guide program admission. This definition of “first-generation” does not exclude students whose parents attempted college or earned a certificate or associate degree. Other terms used to describe first-generation students are working-class, under-resourced, at-risk, or, as I like to call them, at-promise students (Nix, Lion, Michalak, & Christensen, 2015; Oldfield, 2007, 2012; Stuber, 2011).

For the purposes of this dissertation, success is defined in terms of college graduation, because my own experience within higher education has shown that colleges and universities

define student success based on achievement of graduation, which is evidenced by institutions' focus on persistence and retention data. This definition assumes that a student's enrollment in college is because they want to graduate with a degree and anything different is nonsuccess.

Background

Much of the research on first-generation college students is deficit-focused. This dissertation adds to scholarship on first-generation college students by shifting the discourse: research focused on deficit thinking depicts first-generation college students as inept, further implying that first-generation college students "are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). An article in the Washington Post states that within six years, "40 percent of first-generation students will have earned a bachelor's or associate degree or a certificate, vs. 55 percent of their peers whose parents attended college" (Cardoza, 2016, para. 6). Since research shows that 40 percent of first-generation college students are completing some sort of academic program, scholarship should focus on why and how students successfully completed their academic programs, not just on first-generation students' inability to graduate college. Deficit-focused research of course has its place in the literature as does research focused on student success. However, an emphasis on the positive can be encouraging to future first-generation college students, parents, colleges, and universities alike. Hence, this study seeks to address the following question: What factors influence first-generation college students' ability to graduate college?

For colleges and universities to serve first-generation college students better, they need to have a clearer understanding of the population and the obstacles they encounter. Chapter II provides readers with context on the experiences and outcomes of first-generation college

students. Furthermore, the chapter explores culture shock; attrition, persistence, and graduation; and areas of positive scholarship such as thriving, strengths, sense of belonging, and resilience. Using Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth Model as a theoretical framework, this dissertation addresses the negative discourse expounded in higher education literature to address concerns about deficit-focused research on first-generation college students. The community cultural wealth Model has six forms of capital developed through the Critical Race Theory framework and cultural capital precept: aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, and resistant capital.

The concept of deficit thinking is rooted in "dominant thinking in higher education" that makes the assumption that students are "*lacking* the academic, cultural and moral resources necessary to succeed in what is presumed to be a fair and open society" (Smit, 2012, p. 370). The current format of higher education fails to sufficiently include first-generation college students, which explains the willingness to focus on the population's "limitations" rather than focusing on their assets. Presenting some of the deficit dialogue pertaining to first-generation college students demonstrates the need to change the discourse within higher education, ultimately aiding in improved outcomes for first-generation college students. Some of the deficit discourse includes:

- First-generation college students have low year-to-year persistence especially from year one to year two (Ishitani, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004);
- First-generation college students are not likely to graduate from college (Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Petty, 2014);

- First-generation Latinx² and other underserved students are more likely to drop out of college (Ishitani, 2006);
- First-generation students have issues making connections on campus and adjusting to the collegiate environment (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliott, & Pierce, 2012; Collier & Morgan, 2008; McKay & Estrella, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012);
- First-generation students have anxiety about their collegiate classes and within the greater university environment (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Harackiewicz et al., 2014);
- Time management is difficult for first-generation college students which means students are failing to spend enough time focused on academics and graduation (Petty, 2014);
- First-generation college students struggle to work through the barriers they experience while in school and in their personal lives (Carpenter & Peña, 2017; Petty, 2014);
- First-generation college students do not adjust well socially or emotionally in the college environment (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Carpenter & Peña, 2017; Jehangir, 2010);
- First-generation college student college completion is linked to family income (Hand & Payne, 2008; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014);
- The majority of the issues first-generation students experience are in “four distinct domains: 1) professional, 2) financial, 3) psychological and 4) academic” (Banks-Santilli, 2015, para. 11);
- Nearly 20% of first-generation and low-income students speak English as a second language as well (Cardoza, 2016, para. 110);

² Latinx is a gender-neutral term used to identify individuals of Hispanic descent. For more information on the term visit the following link: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-history-latinx>

- Characterization of first-generation college students include being low-income, female, minority, non-native English speakers, employed full-time, parents, not living on campus, and an immigrant to the United States (Dynarski, 2016; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Ishitani, 2006; Jehangir, 2013; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Mamiseishvili, 2010; Nix et al., 2015);
- First-generation college students lack the social and cultural capital needed to adjust well in a college environment (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Carpenter & Peña, 2017);
- First-generation college students have low persistence rates from fall semester to fall semester with persistence from year one to year two being the worst statistically when viewed over a six-year period (Ishitani, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004); and
- First-generation college students have been deemed unlikely to graduate from college when compared to non-first-generation college students (Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Petty, 2014).

This negative discourse is the very reason for choosing to shift focus concerning dialogue on first-generation students. Shifting the paradigm enables first-generation college students to view themselves more positively, and higher education professionals to address the barriers more constructively. Furthermore, the research reported above reveals an important gap in our understanding of the success of first-generation college students from college entrance through college graduation.

It is important to note that this dissertation is not the first study focused on changing the conversation concerning first-generation college students, and it may not be the last; however, the use of positive scholarship as the underpinning of this research will provide an encouraging direction for scholarship on first-generation college students. If higher education truly intends to improve attrition and persistence rates, as well as graduation numbers for first-generation

students, it is necessary to change the conversation to discover what has worked for college graduates who are first-generation college students in addition to understanding the barriers they face daily.

In order to address the gaps in the discourse on first-generation college students, this dissertation includes a discussion on positive scholarship and how it can address the lack of positivity concerning first-generation college students. Positive Psychology is a component of general psychology that began in 1954 with Abraham Maslow and continued with Martin Seligman some 40 years later (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Maslow, 1954). “The goal of positive psychology is to enable a greater percentage of the world’s population to flourish” (Schreiner, 2013). Maslow argued in the affirmative for the need to implement positive psychology because

The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side. It has revealed to us much about man’s shortcomings, his illness, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, the darker, meaner half. (Maslow, 1954, p. 354)

Maslow’s assessment of psychology being deficit-focused is spot on; higher education is guilty of being deficit-minded as well, which further elevates the need to present an optimistic point-of-view related to first-generation college students (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Stebleton, Soria, & Albecker, 2012). Catalyzing the conversation allows researchers, colleges and universities, secondary schools, parents, and students to note the pathways used by other first-generation college students who successfully navigated barriers and graduated college.

Chapter II addresses several concepts pertaining to positive psychology: resilience, thriving, strengths, and Appreciative Inquiry. In particular, it focuses on the resilience of first-generation college students, how they thrived while in college, and the strengths they used throughout the process as related to the community cultural wealth model.

Methodology

The Delphi Method was used to examine the research question: What factors influence first-generation college students' ability to graduate college? The purpose of the Delphi Method is to serve as an investigative tool that allows research participants to contribute their perspective on a specific situation or question (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Green, 2014; Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000; Murry & Hammons, 1995). For the purposes of this research, first-generation college students who are recent college graduates provided perspective on their experiences as undergraduate students, which ultimately led them to graduate college. Appreciative Inquiry, an affirmative method on inquiry, guides the questions presented each round of the Delphi process so the research remains positive yet focused to answer the research question (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Watkins, 2001).

The Delphi Method is an iterative process of data gathering, involving multiple rounds of inquiry and anonymous response from study participants, also referred to as subject matter experts (Murry & Hammons, 1995). This method assumes that participation is best when conducted in an anonymous group format and that subject matter experts are better suited as participants for the study than non-experts (Delkey & Helmer, 1963; Murry & Hammons, 1995). For the purposes of this study, subject matter experts are referred to as panelists. Historically, the Delphi Method used snail mail to distribute questionnaires; modern technology has allowed for a speedier and more cost-effective process with the use of electronic questionnaires, which shortens the panelist response time and the time to analyze and develop a survey for subsequent rounds (Sekayi & Kennedy, 2017). This methodology provides a pathway for first-generation college students who are college graduates to share their varied experiences as college students and graduates. Data processed using this methodology are both qualitative and quantitative

(Delkey & Helmer, 1963; Linstone & Turoff, 2010; Murry & Hammons, 1995; Sekayi & Kennedy, 2017).

In order to gain a clear understanding of the multiple realities of first-generation college students, I conducted three rounds of inquiry occurred with panelists. Panelists graduated with their bachelor's degrees between 2009 and 2019 and were the first in their immediate families to graduate from college. Race, gender, and sex are inconsequential to the study; however, panelists are at least 18 years old, live in the United States, and have access to the internet. Panelists completed a brief pre-screening questionnaire prior to being selected. This study is not limited to traditional aged college students; experiences of non-traditional college students are just as important as traditional college students.

Data collection and analysis are significant aspects of Delphi research; thus, data must be captured and analyzed accurately and majority of panelists must be retained through all three rounds. SurveyMonkey was used to collect panelists responses about their lived experiences as first-generation college students during each round. Data collection occurred in the form of written responses, ratings, and rankings. The Delphi Method is detailed in its entirety in Chapter III. Chapter IV examines data results and Chapter V considers the application of the data.

Given the boundaries set for this dissertation, it is necessary to address the delimitations and limitations of the study. The delimitations of this study include the definition of success, the demographics for panelists, and limiting participation in the study to those who have internet access and live in the United States. Limitations of the Delphi method are addressed in Chapter III.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter II is a review of literature on first-generation college students. The chapter begins with a brief historical review of students' access to higher education. Next, I review the experiences of first-generation college students by providing a historical overview of the population's experiences in higher education related to belonging; cultural and social capital; and attrition and persistence. I introduce Positive scholarship as a guide for changing the deficit discourse related to first-generation college students; areas addressed pertaining to positive scholarship include resilience, thriving, and strengths. Appreciate inquiry and appreciative education are addressed as criteria to use when examining the lived experiences of first-generation college students. Last, community cultural wealth is discussed as the theoretical framework for this dissertation.

Chapter III introduces the Delphi Method as the methodology used to answer my central research question for this dissertation. I explain specifics about the research design and how it addresses the research question. Furthermore, I discuss the selection criteria for panelists in detail; panelists share their personal experiences as first-generation college students who graduated from college. Also, I expound upon data collection and analysis.

Chapter IV reviews the findings of data collected. I analyze each Delphi round and present readers a clear understanding of how the data address the research question. Qualitative and quantitative data from the first and second rounds led to the development of themes formulated from responses provided by panelists. Last, I present theme rankings and recommendations from the study panelists on the best ways to support and prepare first-generation students for success.

Chapter V is a discussion of research findings. I remind readers of the theoretical framework for this study, along with a discussion that connects study themes with the

community cultural wealth model. I expound upon commentary on the lived experiences of first-generation college students. Lastly, I discuss future research along with providing direction to high schools, colleges, and universities to guide their work with first-generation college students.

Chapter II

Retention, attrition, and graduation are known to be critical data points within higher education that serve as typical student success measures. This chapter reviews literature on the experiences of college students in general and first-generation college students overall. In particular, this chapter examines first-generation college students from a historical perspective while also providing background information on the impact of belonging and cultural and social capital on first-generation college students. Next, the chapter reviews attrition and persistence data and the effect on first-generation college student graduation. Pre-college experiences are discussed further into the chapter along with the role family has in student success, campus engagement, and race and identity. Last, the chapter discusses positive scholarship through three lenses—resilience, thriving, and strengths. Furthermore, appreciative inquiry and appreciative education are discussed as theories with an ability to impact first-generation college students while the lens associated with community cultural wealth serves as the theoretical framework.

College Students Across the United States

Colleges and universities are focused on admitting students believed to be prepared to meet the academic rigor of their institutions based on entrance and placement exam scores, among other criteria. Despite best efforts retention, attrition, and graduation remain a concern at most higher education institutions for a variety of reasons. As a result, colleges and universities have implemented programming and researched strategies to improve retention and graduation numbers. Despite efforts of first-generation college students' over the past 35 years, data have shown college graduation has only improved marginally; for instance, approximately half of the students who enroll in college as first-time bachelor's degree pursuers actually graduate with the degree within six years (Tinto, 2012). Among the reasons for low college graduation are

students' lack of preparedness for college level work; many students (28%) test into remedial level coursework (Tinto, 2012), which increases the number of classes a student takes. Raju and Schumacker's (2015) research confirmed Tinto's findings. Their research showed a 30% difference in degree attainment between students with strong high school grade point averages compared to those with 2.5 or lower. Furthermore, their research showed a correlation between a student's grade point average during their first semester of college and graduation; students with grade point averages below 2.25 were more likely to leave college before graduating (48%).

Community is important for students as they work to find their place on their college campus while learning what it means to be successful in college; when students lack a connection to the campus, they tend to leave. Essentially, college students are committed to graduating when they feel the institution they attend is committed to their success (Savage, Strom, Hubbard, & Aune, 2017). This means students who feel a connection to an institution are not focused on transferring or dropping out, but instead they are devoted to where they are enrolled because they feel a sense of connection or community. This is important information to consider, especially since a study of enrollment data for the year 2013 found that across the United States 27% of first-time college enrollees in fall term were no longer enrolled by spring term (Ishitani, 2006). Tinto's (2012) research indicated that 38% of first-time college enrollees, regardless of institutional type, transfer schools within their first year.

It is widely known that income affects students' ability to remain in school (Ishitani, 2006; Raju & Schumacker, 2015). For instance, students forced to live with their parents while in school were more likely to stop out (33%) by year two of college (Ishitani, 2006). Students with at least two types of financial aid support were more likely to remain enrolled in school (22%),

indicating that institutions have the potential to improve retention and graduation numbers if more funding is provided to students.

History of First-Generation Students in Higher Education

Since the 1920s, colleges and universities have seen an increase in the number of first-generation college students enrolled at their institutions (Ishitani, 2003; Jehangir, 2013; Orbe, 2004). According to Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998), during the 1989–90 academic year, first-generation college students represented 43.4% of first-time enrollees at colleges and universities in the United States; of those students, 57.3% were female. In 1992, 67% of high school graduates were first-generation; however, in 1994, 56% of students enrolling in four-year colleges and universities were first-generation students (Davis, 2010). While approximately 20% enrollment at four-year institutions are first-generation college students, that number will continue to grow as employers continue to insist that entry level positions need degreed individuals to fill positions (Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Some national research delineates that enrollment of first-generation students at four-year institutions decreased by 28% between 1973 and 2001 (Jehangir, 2013) while Engle and Tinto (2008) discovered approximately five million first-generation students enrolled in college between 1998 and 2008. Carpenter and Peña (2017) determined at least 40% of current college freshmen describe themselves as first-generation college students.

First-generation students have been enrolling in community colleges at a higher rate than in four-year institutions. Research shows first-generation students who attend community colleges test into remedial level classes at a higher rate than their counterparts and are least likely to transfer and graduate with a bachelor's degree (Nix et al., 2015). Banks-Santilli (2015) noted:

Nationally, of the 7.3 million undergraduates attending four-year public and private colleges and universities, about 20 percent are first-generation students. About 50 percent

of all first-generation college students in the U.S. are low-income. These students are also more likely to be a member of a racial or ethnic minority group. (para. 5)

Jehangir (2013) indicated that 26% of low-income first-generation students transferred from a community college to a four-year institution within six years while 38% of their counterparts transferred.

College completion for first-generation college students appears even less likely when considering household income. College enrollment, persistence, and graduation influence family income (Jehangir, 2013). In 2007, low-income students' college graduation rates were 24.7% while students in the highest income bracket had a 94.6% graduation rate (Jehangir, 2010). Paying for college is an issue for students who come from families with meager income causing them to incur huge loan debts (Jehangir, 2010). Furthermore, research shows low-income students often work long hours while attending school to meet family obligations and pay for remaining school expenses (Jehangir, 2010; Mamiseishvili, 2010; Martin, 2015; Stuber, 2011).

Although providing historical background data on first-generation college students is important, it is also important to elucidate the characterization of first-generation college students in higher education literature. The Pell Institute's and others' physiognomies of first-generation college students are that they are low-income, female, minority, speak English as a second language, employed full-time, have one or more children, do not live in campus housing, and have immigrated from outside of the United States (Dynarski, 2016; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Ishitani, 2006; Jehangir, 2013; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Mamiseishvili, 2010; Nix et al., 2015). Additionally, research shows these students have low persistence rates from fall semester to fall semester with persistence from year one to year two being the lowest statistically when viewed over a six-year period (Ishitani, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004); and these students have been deemed unlikely to graduate from college when compared to non-first-generation college

students (Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Petty, 2014). Research has shown first-generation college students lack the social and cultural capital needed to adjust well in a college environment (Aspelmeier et al., 2012).

Sense of Belonging

The uncomfortable and confusing feeling many first-generation students experience when first arriving on campus is called culture shock. Kelly, Moores, and Moogan (2012) defined culture shock as “the anxiety resulting from the loss of familiar signs and symbols when a person enters a new culture [and] familiar cues disappear[s]” (p. 27). While attempting to blend into their new environment, first-generation students struggle because they feel stuck between two identities or cultures—family and school. Stebleton, Soria, and Huesman (2014) asserted that first-generation students not only struggle to blend two cultures, they resolve that they do not belong to either. For first-generation students, a “sense of belonging is a construct that can be defined as a need or desire to be connected through formal and informal interactions” (Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014, p. 8). Belonging is an awareness that is important to most people especially first-generation college students who are already questioning their fit into their new environment. Harackiewicz and colleagues (2014) called this a cultural mismatch. They describe cultural mismatch as confusion experienced by first-generation students when “independent norms of the American university system and their own interdependent motives for attending college” do not match (p. 376). This cultural mismatch can lead to poor performance in the classroom because those lacking the cultural competency needed to be successful in the collegiate world are often the individuals least likely to meet or exceed their personal and professional goals including persisting in college (Bochner, 2003; Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Petty, 2014; Stebleton et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2012).

Strayhorn (2012) believes it is important for colleges and universities to build a climate of inclusivity for all students, so every student knows they are accepted as a member of the college community:

In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3)

Blaney and Stout (2017) referenced sense of belonging as being idiosyncratic in terms of feeling accepted “as a valued and legitimate member of an academic discipline, and is a known predictor of academic persistence and achievement” (p. 69). When students feel alienated or marginalized, the experience has a negative effect on their academics and their sense of self. However, when students from differing backgrounds can learn from one another, there is greater connection to the institution and a greater sense of mattering to someone other than themselves (Strayhorn, 2012). This point speaks to the thought process of most first-generation college students; they want to fit in with their peers, even those who are non-first-generation college students. When first-generation students feel a connection to the academic environment, they are more likely to participate in the academic process by asking questions in class, seeking tutors, and using professors' office hours. Being mindful that for most students of color who are first-generation, the college environment is extremely different from what they are used to, which causes them to question whether they belong at the institution in the first place. The cultural and social capital gained because of their sense of connectedness is invaluable. Below is a list of seven core elements of sense of belonging developed by Strayhorn (2012) that explains sense of belonging, similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943):

1. Sense of belonging is a basic human need.
2. Sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior.

3. Sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts, at certain times, and among certain populations.
4. Sense of belonging is related to and seemingly a consequence of mattering.
5. Social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging (which, in some ways, is related to intersectionality).
6. Sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes.
7. Sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change. (pp.18–23)

Cultural and Social Capital

Many researchers have concluded that first-generation college students lack the cultural and social capital needed to successfully navigate college (Aspelmeier et al., 2012). Social capital is “the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group” (Bourdieu, 1986/2010, p. 86). Thus, social capital concerns the many relationships someone has, including family, friends, social groups, and the greater community, as well as the knowledge one is privy to because of those relationships (Pascarella et al., 2004; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). For first-generation college students, social capital encompasses the support and mentorship needed while in college (Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014). One of the reasons first-generation students struggle with college is because they lack the shared insight of parents (and other family and friends) to clarify college expectations. A disconnect in social capital can affect a student's collegiate experience including their success or lack of success in the classroom.

According to Yosso (2005), “cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society” (p. 76). Furthermore, “in higher education, cultural capital is the currency that allows certain students to apply to college, navigate the implicit and explicit expectations of school, and make social connections that serve as networks of support during and after college” (Jehangir, 2010, p. 542).

When entering higher education for the first time, first-generation students are exposed to threats to their identities; Harackiewicz et al. (2014) wrote that first-generation college “students experience the college environment as threatening, due to stereotypes about their group or a mismatch of cultural values” (p. 375). The balance between school and family can be delicate and challenging for first-generation students at the onset of their scholastic journey because they are learning to navigate two worlds at once (Bochner, 2003).

Just as literature on first-generation college students is full of deficit-based discourse—especially when considering family income, persistence, attrition rates, and so on—the discourse on social and cultural capital also frames first-generation student outcomes in terms of deficits. Gofen’s (2009) research has sought to learn more about familial interactions and their role in a child’s education. In particular, Gofen (2009) studied students attending college in Israel and the impact family had on students’ educational process from the students’ perspective. Results from the study indicated family significantly impacted the success of students through beliefs instilled in them by their parents that education changes the trajectory of the family’s economic situation and students saw the sacrifice parents made to ensure their success. Previous discussions about family impact stated that first-generation college students lack the social and cultural capital needed to be successful in college (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Carpenter & Peña, 2017); such research did not consider family capital, which is relevant to first-generation college students in the United States. Family capital is a combination of social and cultural capital that seeks to capture the “investment made by the family for the benefit of the children’s future” (Gofen, 2009, p. 107). A resilient family invests time and energy in overcoming tough times, thereby teaching children the emotional, relational, and behavioral skills to cope with adversity. Thus, when Israeli students are the first in their family to attend college, they can use the family capital

conferred to them over time.

The uncertainty of self and environment experienced by first-generation college students causes identity issues that initiate the students' process of redefining their identity which

... creates dissonance between their home and school worlds. Parents and community may be threatened by the appearance of a new intellectualism. Even though they may want to help and support their developing child, they may not know how ... and can unintentionally push the students to the margins. To be on the margins of both one's home and school world is to be in a no man's land—it is to be nowhere. (Jehangir, 2010, p. 537)

The straddling concept is what Jehangir, Stebleton, and Deenanath (2015) called “Different Worlds” which is a notion explaining “the struggle between the old (i.e., home, community, and family) and the new contexts (i.e., the college environment, jobs, internships, clubs) students must navigate” (p. 22). This delicate tussle between two worlds instigates first-generation students' belief that they do not belong to either world (Bochner, 2003; Jehangir, 2009; Jehangir et al., 2015).

Illustrations of the importance of social, cultural, and family capital are made evident through Guinier's (2015) discourse on relationship building and mentoring provided to underprivileged students who are members of the Posse Foundation. The Posse Foundation provides college funding for low-income students, many of whom are also first-generation. The funding includes a network of past and current students supported by the foundation who serve as their peer's “posse” or network while in school; posse pertains to friends, mentors, and other supports provided by a group of peers who are also Posse Foundation students (social capital). Much of the peer support students receive includes advice on navigating classes and social environments, encouragement to be actively involved on campus, academic guidance to improve their grades, among other things (cultural capital). Mentoring through the Posse Foundation reminds students of the lessons learned at home pertaining to resiliency, relationship building,

sacrifice, thriving, determination, strengths, etc. (family capital). David Perez, Jr. struggled during his first semester at Vanderbilt University; a Posse member stepped in to help him to acclimate on campus, which helped him academically and socially. David said, “There’s no question that I would not be where I am today but for or because of Posse” (p. 73).

Attrition and Persistence

Persistence and attrition are two data driven areas tracked by colleges and universities. These concepts are tracked from term to term, year to year, and by cohort; the same areas are reviewed when considering the projected success of first-generation college students, and add to the deficit dialogue. Persistence is focused on a student’s year-to-year enrollment at the same or different institution without a break in enrollment other than summer term (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Mamiseishvili, 2010). Attrition is when a student first exits school without graduating, which is institution-centered. There are several “types of departure[s], such as dropout, transfers, academic dismissals, and stopouts” (Ishitani, 2003, p. 439).

To persist in college, first-generation students need to experience success early (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013). Research shows first-generation students with “low or missing GPAs are much more likely to drop out. F-gens (first-generation) may be more discouraged by low academic performance and don’t have the confidence to remain in school and improve their academic performance” (Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004, p. 428). Improving persistence rates of first-generation students should be a focus of higher education institutions. Interventions executed to ameliorate persistence rates in higher education will differ by institution.

Several intervention models have been used at institutions around the United States including paired freshman level classes (Watt, Butcher, & Ramirez, 2013), difference-education panels (first-generation) and standard panels (continuing generation) prior to the start of classes

(Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014), TRIO Student Support Services (Jehangir, 2009, 2013), the Posse Foundation (Guinier, 2015), and strengths education and development (Shushok & Hulme, 2006; Soria, & Stubblefield, 2015; Stebleton et al., 2012). The interventions mentioned above speak to the elements of student success developed by Tinto (2009) (i.e., support, expectations, feedback, and involvement). Furthermore, the interventions strengthen the social capital of first-generation college students to better prepare them for academic success at the collegiate level (Peralta & Klonowski, 2017).

Much of the deficit research on first-generation college students has focused on low persistence rates, high attrition rates, and low graduation numbers. For instance, outcomes from Ishitani's (2003) study ascertained that first-generation college students have a higher rate of attrition (29%) than students with two degreed parents. Jehangir (2010) noted the attrition rate for first-generation college students is 26%, which is much higher than their counterparts (7%) (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Furthermore, Ishitani (2003) and Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) deduced that female first-generation college students were more likely to drop out of college than their male counterparts. Also, Ishitani (2003, 2006) and others surmised that minority students were more likely to drop out of college when compared to their white peers, and inferred that socioeconomic status affects the attrition and persistence rates of first-generation students (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Hand & Payne, 2008; Jehangir, 2013). Likewise, research has shown that first-generation college students rarely graduate from college, lack time management skills, struggle to work through barriers they face while in school, and do not adjust well socially to the collegiate environment (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Petty, 2014; Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Data from Lohfink and Paulsen's (2005) study determined first-generation college

students who identify as male persist in college more than their female counterparts (9.4%; p. 415). McCarron and Inkelas (2006) supported this finding; however, they determined that female students were more likely to graduate with advanced degrees. First-generation college students who are also low-income make up 24% of students enrolled in college; of those, 64% are female, 54% are minority, 74% are financially independent, and 38% have dependents (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 8). The National Center for Education Statistics indicated the following as reasons for high attrition rates of first-generation students: delayed start to college (also known as a gap year), attending part-time, working full-time while enrolled, financially independent from parents, dependent children, single parents, and having a GED (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 9). When the reasons for attrition are coupled with the persistence of first-generation students, data from the 2003 academic year showed 21% of low-income and first-generation students experienced three factors for attrition compared to only 10% of non-low-income and non-first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 9).

Ishitani's 2003 article on attrition is a comparative study of first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students. First-generation students were more likely to leave school in their first year than in year three and female students from the sample were more likely to leave their higher education institution (61%) than their male counterparts. A small number of minority students (n=183) were included in the sample used for this study, with the result that all minority groups were combined into a single category. Of those sampled, minority students had lower attrition rates (43%) than their white counterparts in both year one and year two. Interestingly enough, results showed a decline in the attrition rate for minorities in year two. Last, socioeconomic status proved to be a factor in student attrition rates. The higher the student's family income, the more likely a student is to remain enrolled.

Strayhorn's (2012) work on sense of belonging aligns with Tinto's (1990) work on retention. Tinto's (1990) research showed students are more successful academically when they interact with faculty regularly (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2008) sought to test Tinto's retention theory and discovered faculty interactions are an important aspect of student retention, but those important interactions are extremely intimidating for first-generation college students, as they have internalized several misperceptions about faculty. Some misperceptions include: faculty not being approachable, faculty thinking the student lacks intelligence when asking for clarity, faculty being racist, among other things.

While much of the persistence and attrition research focused on negative outcomes, affirmative research does exist in the same area. Mamiseishvili's (2010) research offered results that suggest first-generation students who work while in school and who view their education as valuable or important are more likely to persist. The same study noted that 51% of first-generation students work at least 20 hours per week. These findings are important because they suggest first-generation students who find value in their education and employment have enough dedication to devote time to studying and being successful in the classroom possibly because of family capital. More positive data of this nature are needed within first-generation student discourse.

Student persistence and income levels are interrelated. First-generation college students who come from

[h]igher incomes were significantly more likely to persist than those with lower incomes, suggesting that lower-income first-generation students are not only disadvantaged by their parents' lack of experience with and information about college, but also by other social and economic characteristics that constrain their educational opportunities. (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005, p. 418)

Income can affect first-generation students' willingness to socialize and it may affect their ability to enroll in college, increasing their loan debt when they do enroll in college, which determines the number of hours they must work and their ability to complete school (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Self-efficacy, "beliefs about one's ability to plan for and execute steps necessary for future success," of first-generation students as they pursue their collegiate studies is another area to consider when reviewing persistence data (Blaney & Stout, 2017, p. 69). The study conducted by Vuong, Brown-Welty, and Tracz (2010) discovered that self-efficacy—regard for a person's adeptness with completing tasks—has a positive effect on GPA and persistence. Results from an earlier study suggest that confidence in one's own ability to be successful in college does not do much for first-generation college students as they still do not perform at the same levels as non-first-generation college students (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007). The same study noted that self-efficacy of first-generation students did not decline as the academic year progressed and their findings showed results for non-first-generation students consistent with results presented by Vuong et al. (2010). Rood (2009) used focus groups and semi-structured interviews with college juniors and seniors to gain clarity on what drives first-generation students to succeed. An analysis of the dialogue discovered several themes: faith, faculty support, family support, and finances. Together, these factors served as motivation to persist.

Data pertaining to persistence and attrition have shown first-generation college students are unique individuals with differing lived experiences, which also indicates varying outcomes. Several topics related to persistence and attrition are explored bellow. Some studies discussed combine all racial minority groups into a single category while others do not. Also, some review employment and the effect it has on student persistence. Regardless of the study, there are

several things to consider when studying first-generation college students that further speaks to the individuality of first-generation college students.

Pre-college. Persistence of college students is directly related to their preparation for college. Therefore, this section will explore first-generation college students' pre-college experiences and the subsequent effect on persistence and attrition.

College students who participated in a college preparatory program, also known as college access programs, in high school believe the programs helped them gain information they would not have known as a first-generation student (Reid & Moore, 2008; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Unverferth, Talbert-Johnson, & Bogard, 2012). TRIO Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math Science, and Talent Search are all examples of college preparatory programs. College students interviewed by Reid and Moore (2008) recommended students take a college preparatory math class during their senior year of high school because, as one student stated,

I think that [college prep] math class helped me out with different math problems while a different student stated, When we first came (to college), we had to take a placement test for math, and I tested out of the first math class. So I only had to take three math classes instead of four. That definitely helped my schedule. (p. 248)

Furthermore, those same students indicated that Advanced Placement (AP) courses prepared them for college level work. They believed the same to be true of English courses when they were required to improve upon work they submitted for class. The insight provided by these students is important considering that research indicates first-generation students “come less well prepared and with more nonacademic demands on them, and they enter a world where they are less likely to experience many of the conditions that other research indicates are positively related to persistence, performance, and learning” (Terenzini et al., 1996, p. 18).

The ethnic diversity of high schools influences first-generation college students academically and socially. According to Hudley et al. (2009), first-generation students who attended a diverse high school reported having higher grade point averages in college regardless of race ($\beta=.10, p<.01$); the same was not true for non-first-generation students of Asian descent. In fact, non-first-generation students in this study showed lower college grade point averages if they attended a diverse high school. Just as interesting, the same study stated students are more social in college when they attended high school where the students were mostly white.

Support and encouragement provided by teachers and administrators is vital as students pursue college enrollment. Terenzini et al. (1996) reported that data from the National Study of Student Learning indicated first-generation students were least likely to interact with high school teachers prior to pursuing higher education; however, the data also showed first-generation students cited receiving encouragement to enroll in college from a teacher more than non-first-generation students did as a factor in their choice to later attend college. Each participant interviewed by Reid and Moore (2008) mentioned receiving support for college preparation from a teacher, counselor, or administrator while in high school. Specifically,

Nine of the participants mentioned by name, one or two adults in their school that they felt encouraged them to attend college and made them believe they could succeed. The other four participants talked about a person in the high school by their role (i.e. teacher, counselor, coach) who helped them prepare for college. (p. 249)

Research also shows the relationship students developed with high school teachers mattered as students worked to adjust academically and socially in college. Furthermore, the relationship leads to positive attitudes about their ability to succeed in college (Hudley et al., 2009).

Role of the family. The level of support provided by families, including economic support, influences persistence and attrition rates of first-generation college students. The

following section will explore the influence family has on first-generation college students' success in college.

Fathers appear to play a significant role in the achievements of first-generation college students (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Gibbons and Woodside interviewed seventeen students, thirteen of which mentioned the role their father played in their academic journey. Some students mentioned learning the concept of hard work from their fathers. Likewise, fathers relayed specific expectations to their children about attending college and selecting a major. For instance, one female student was quoted as saying, “My [father] always expected that I would go to college, um, was never even remotely questionable...” (p. 28). The same student also mentioned that her father was not happy with her major because he expected her to become an engineer. Other students discussed their father’s encouragement to choose a major that will make them happy. Students were encouraged to “find your bliss” and “don’t be miserable throughout your life” (p. 27). This type of parental influence is essential as first-generation students pursue academic excellence while dealing with personal uncertainty.

While Gibbons and Woodside (2014) mention fathers specifically, other studies mention the role of parents in general (Gofen, 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Some parental factors concerning first-generation students’ success in college include: socioeconomic status, race, and parents’ academic background (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). McCarron and Inkelas (2006) concluded that parental involvement is the best predictor of first-generation student’s college aspirations while Hand and Payne’s (2008) research shows that a lack of parental support can determine whether a first-generation student graduates from college. Furthermore, degree completion served as a predictor of college success based on the value students placed on grades. To further explain the effect parents have on first-generation student's education, McCarron and

Inkelas (2006) noted that students belonging to the lowest socioeconomic quartile achieved academic milestones lower in rank than a bachelor's degree (i.e., certificates, associate degree, etc.; 76.5%). Additionally, authors of the study assumed high-income first-generation students do not see the importance in pursuing and completing degrees "if their parents have succeeded financially/professionally without one" (p. 545). To explain their assumption, authors stated that a lower number, fifty students, of high socioeconomic status students participated in their study and, of those students from high income families, only 48% completed a bachelor's degree. Meanwhile, 21% of first-generation students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile completed a bachelor's degree.

Interviews conducted for Hand and Payne's (2008) study provided significant information regarding socioeconomic status. They noted all participants in their study worked while attending school. Furthermore, they demonstrated the economic hardships many students faced while in school by comparing students with financial means to pay for college to those without the financial means to pay for college. For instance, one participant stated, "My roommate from first year, she's kind of like a rich girl from Chicago and she doesn't understand why I have to have a job" (p.8). A different student in the study noted that her mother often stated that she wanted to provide financial support to her, but she could not afford to do so. That same student, wanting to overcome poverty, became motivated by her family's financial situation to successfully graduate from college: "You're in a poor family, most of the time it's going to be that way (referring to her family who is unable to provide her with financial support for school). You have to break the cycle. I'm trying to break the cycle" (p. 8). Research conducted by Hand and Payne (2008) and Gibbons and Woodside (2014) adequately demonstrates that first-generation college student completion is related to family income. Two

students in Hand and Payne's (2008) research dropped out of school after the study because they could not afford the costs associated with pursuing their degree.

Wilbur and Roscigno's (2016) research echoes that of Hand and Payne (2008); the socioeconomic status of a student's family has a tremendous effect on a student's involvement in school and ability to graduate from college. First-generation college students are least likely to take advantage of extracurricular activities such as undergraduate research and study abroad because they are more focused on the financial implications that such experiences will have on their family (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). This information is important to note because data show college graduation increases with involvement in one activity (3%) with a significantly higher increase if the student participates in more than one extracurricular activity (15%; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Degree completion is also affected considerably when students experience family stressors (17%), and living at home while in school has shown to increase the likelihood that a student will stop attending school by 35%.

Gofen's (2009) study used semi-structured interviews to study first-generation students in Israel. Despite a parent's inability to provide guidance through the educational process for their children, parents understood the value of education and conveyed that to their children. Several students discussed having parents who did not attend high school or parents only attending school for two years; those students were able to learn to value education and hard work through the lessons taught by their parents. One example of parents serving as a role model was evident in the following statement,

It is true. My father completed only two years in school. But you can't call him "not educated." He is the most educated person, with much more knowledge than I have, even though I will finish my M.A. this year. He taught himself music, math, everything by himself, with books and encyclopedias. (p. 111)

Other examples of parental sacrifice and commitment to their children's education included working multiple jobs to send their children to quality schools, making sure the children had the supplies needed for school, etc. One respondent shared a story of a mother walking in the pouring rain to purchase a book her child needed for school.

Family support comes from siblings as well. After one child graduated from college, they begin providing financial support and encouragement to their siblings (Gofen, 2009). A respondent in Gofen's (2009) study mentioned paying for his brother to travel before leaving for college because it was his brother's dream to do so. Overall, Gofen's (2009) study showed parental and family support is an integral part of academic success for first-generation college students in Israel. This study of Israeli first-generation college students relates to issues facing first-generation students in the United States because it demonstrates a family's commitment, regardless of cultural background, to education and the measures parents will take for their child to be successful. Gofen's (2009) connected the study to others conducted in the United States by noting similar stories from other studies and further reiterated that capital from various people besides parents (i.e., friends, mentors, coaches, siblings, etc.) has its place in student success (Peralta & Klonowski, 2017).

Integration, engagement, and motivation. Research shows first-generation students who integrate well into the collegiate environment engage in learning by working directly with instructors, are motivated to be successful in classes, and are more likely to persist in college. Furthermore, they are more likely to graduate from college.

Collier and Morgan (2008) conducted two focus groups that included two groups of faculty and separate focus groups with first-generation and non-first-generation students at Portland State University. Each focus group was asked similar questions about classroom

expectations for freshmen and sophomores. During their focus group, faculty discussed the importance of students balancing their time with competing commitments. First-generation and non-first-generation students indicated experiencing trouble prioritizing school because they have other commitments as well. For instance, balancing reading assignments was difficult because they were taking multiple classes and had a small amount of free time. First-generation students in particular expressed “markedly more problems related to time management and placing priority on the time they devoted to their classes” and indicated having fewer resources to help them process their circumstances (p. 436).

Communication is another area both students and faculty agreed needed improvement (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Faculty wanted students to communicate their misunderstandings of assignments early on while students believe faculty should be clearer about expectations for assignments. More specifically, first-generation students did not understand the concept of course syllabi. Professors believe they spend a lot of time explaining course syllabi yet students expressed concern that professors did not spend enough time reviewing the document nor providing clear expectations. First-generation students expressed concern over the vocabulary used by professors when discussing the syllabi and the confusion it caused them.

Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco’s (2005) research focused on motivation of minority first-generation college students. Their short-term longitudinal study surveyed 100 minority first-generation college students (Latino and Asian) in the fall of year one through spring of their second year of college. Later, a focus group was conducted with survey participants also. The study found motivation materialized in many forms for students—personal, career, and family. These motivations served as predictors for college attendance and adjustment. Furthermore, the

study determined peer support served as a strong predictor for college grades similar to family support:

The results of the present study suggest that those who are experiencing academic and adjustment problems feel the need for someone to provide help, guidance, or emotional support, whereas those who are doing well are less likely to feel a lack of support. (p. 234)

Research has shown that first-generation college students have a propensity to be less successful in college for many reasons that include low motivation and lack of integration into the collegiate environment. When first-generation students are not involved on campus, have issues acculturating to the college environment, and do not make connections with peers, faculty, and staff, their ability to be successful and persist in college decreases (Collier & Morgan, 2008; McKay & Estrella, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). An example of a student's inability to connect with faculty was made evident during Collier and Morgan's (2008) focus group session with first-generation students when a student stated,

One big problem I had at that time was I was never able to face an instructor. I was never able to come to see her after class, or actually go to the office to meet with the instructor, I was afraid, I don't know why. It was silly, but I was afraid, new to the authority, she was always dressed in suit, and dressed nice. The fact is, I never came to see her... (Collier & Morgan, 2008, p. 440)

This student's statement is consistent with Tinto's (1990) work; Tinto noted the value of interaction between faculty and students but is aware of the fear felt by students pertaining to an interaction of this sort (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008).

Researchers believe first-generation students have low social capital when it comes to college because their parents are unable to provide insight into college expectations from personal experience, causing first-generation student to spend time working through areas of confusion rather than socializing like their second-generation counterparts (Hertel, 2002; Soria &

Stebbleton, 2012). Thus, when first-generation students lack the social capital to become integrated into the collegiate environment, they likely will not return to school after their first year (McKay & Estrella, 2008). Hertel's (2002) study indicated first-generation college students feel supported more by friends who are not in college while second-generation college students reported receiving more support from friends who are in college. The difference in seeking support on campus versus off campus might exist because first-generation students are not comfortable with others knowing their first-generation status. This is consistent with research discussed in the role of the family theme.

Race and identity. Most of the literature reviewed for this dissertation mentioned race as a factor to determine a student's interest in or potential to complete a college degree. The articles presented in this section focus more on race and identity than other factors.

According to research, being a first-generation college student is an identity most first-generation students think about often. Orbe's (2004) study results included quotes from several students of various racial groups who mentioned feeling the weight of being the first in their family to attend college. A Latina student says she is not only the first to go to college she is the first to graduate from high school:

I think about it a lot. I stress a lot about classes, knowing that it is all of my family's hopes and dreams...everything that they couldn't do, that my brothers and sisters could not do. I'm doing it for everyone. I'm the youngest of four and the first person to graduate from high school, first and only one to attend the university. My dad is one of 12 and my mom is one of 13. Out of all of my dad's side and all of my mom's side, I'm actually the second person to go to the university. (p. 137)

Stuber (2011) noted, "while first-generation, working-class students may recognize themselves as *different* from the majority of their peers, they may not view this difference as a *deficit*" (p. 123).

The experience of white first-generation college students has provided an interesting perspective of first-generation students from a different lens because first-generation status is usually associated with minorities. In particular, research conducted by Stuber (2011) and Stieha (2010) has provided a unique viewpoint of white students attending predominately white institutions. Several of the white students interviewed identified with minorities more than with their white peers. Stieha (2010) interviewed Alli, a white student who identified with minorities so much so that she applied for diversity scholarships but felt her “university does not see her first-generation status as ‘diversity’” (p. 240). A white student in Stuber’s (2011) study identified with minorities in a unique way because he was able to see

A parallel between himself and the “tragic mulatto” of the Jim Crow era, in the sense that he “could pass for a typical white frat boy ... with money, parents, educated, good jobs, and things like that. But inside I knew that I was like totally different.” (p. 131)

The students in these studies were able to experience the privilege of being white and blending into their environment making their enrollment and economic differences invisible to their peers (Stuber, 2011). Stuber noted that majority of the students included in her research thought programs geared toward first-generation students were only for minorities, meaning they did not seek additional support on campus. Because white first-generation college students are often not considered when discussing persistence and graduation data, Stieha (2010) believes colleges and universities need to reconsider persistence theories and begin “to consider how these lesser heard voices speak of their experience in the first year of college against a backdrop of the dominant literature on student persistence” (p. 248). Just as marginalized white voices have been quieted in the literature, so have the voices of minorities who persisted and graduated.

Jehangir, Stebleton, and Deenanath’s (2015) research incorporated several student stories depicting the identity threats students experience while in school which led to the discovery of

the Visible/Invisible theme. The Visible/Invisible theme explains the life and campus experiences of students of color and their need to balance multiple identities. The visible relates to the physical characteristics of students such as race, accents, or ethnic garments that “visibility ‘othered’ them and pushed certain aspects of their identity into greater salience in predominantly White spaces” (p. 19). The invisibility experienced by students occurred because they did not see many people that looked like them in the student body, faculty, or staff. These students lacked a comfortable campus space because they did not feel they belonged and the discriminatory remarks about race and ethnicity made by white students made things worse. Examples of discriminatory remarks include:

One of my friends has a White friend who told her that he sees so many Asian people on campus, and he hates how they all walk around together, and he just wants to run them over with a car... (Jehangir et al., 2015, p. 20)

and

In our major, we kind of focus a lot on how to work with African American kids, how to work with Latinos kids ... At first, it was like OK, maybe I am going to learn something new, but then after a while, you become the token *blackie* of the class. Somebody had the nerve to ask me “How do you work with Black kids?” Same way you work with any other kid ... (Jehangir et al., 2015, p. 20)

How does a student become comfortable acquiring social and cultural capital when the statements and actions made toward them are insensitive, disrespectful, and xenophobic? If these students did not learn to cope with threats to their identity, their confidence could be jeopardized along with their ability to be successful in school.

Categorization using identity labels can be powerful yet jarring for some (Morgan Roberts, 2014), however negotiating multiple identity labels can be a challenge for most college students but especially first-generation college students as they enter into an unfamiliar environment. Students of color attending predominately white higher education institutions not only deal with the stressors of being first in their family to enroll in college but also experience

the stress of racial bias and cultural incompetence of a predominately white college environment (Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). Cultural and social capital prepares students to deal with racial ignorance to a certain extent because often this is an area where families have experience; as has already been noted, the same experience does not exist when considering a student's preparedness for college.

Positive Scholarship

In order to address the gaps in first-generation college student discourse, I include a discussion on positive scholarship and how it can address the lack of positivity in the abilities of first-generation college students. Positive Psychology is a component of general psychology that began in 1954 with Abraham Maslow and continued with Martin Seligman some 40 years later (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Maslow, 1954). “The goal of positive psychology is to enable a greater percentage of the world’s population to flourish” (Schreiner, 2013). Maslow argued in the affirmative for the need to implement positive psychology because

The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side. It has revealed to us much about man’s shortcomings, his illness, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, the darker, meaner half. (Maslow, 1954, p. 354)

Maslow’s assessment of psychology is accurate; research on who succeeds in higher education is guilty of focusing on negativity as well, which further explains my interest in presenting an optimistic point-of-view related to first-generation college students (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Stebleton et al., 2012). Catalyzing the conversation allows researchers, colleges and universities, secondary schools, parents, and students to note the pathways used by other first-generation college students who successfully navigated barriers and graduated college. This section will address several concepts that pertain to positive psychology: resilience, thriving, strengths, and

Appreciative Inquiry (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2006; Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Schreiner, 2010, 2013, 2014; Shushok & Hulme, 2006; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015; Stebleton et al., 2012; Watkins, 2001).

Resilience

Resilience is a term used in positive psychology research and in dialogues on first-generation college students. “Resilience generally refers to *patterns of positive adaptation during or following significant adversity or risk*” (Lopez & Snyder, 2009, p. 118). Alvarado, Spataru, and Woodbury (2017) defined resilience as a person's aptness to survive stressful inopportune situations. Resilience is a skill learned over time as people navigate various circumstances with the goal of improving their current situation and not giving in to the barriers meant to hold them back (Alvarado, Spataru, & Woodbury, 2017); barriers, at times, are unintentional, but some can be deliberately malevolent while others are intentional. First-generation college students are an ideal population for the study of resilience.

First-generation college students often come from backgrounds requiring them to be overcomers in the midst of adversity. When they enter college from high schools that fail to adequately prepare them for the high expectations of collegiate work or when they lack the social and cultural capital needed to understand college, these students are forced to work harder than most of their counterparts to achieve academic excellence and make social connections (Alvarado et al., 2017; Chung, Turnbull, & Chur-Hansen, 2017; Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007).

Alvarado et al. (2017) noted the importance of emotional intelligence when considering resilience. Emotional intelligence speaks to a person's ability to take control of their emotions

while being able to assess their emotional state while working through adversity. Thus, emotional intelligence is a tool some first-generation college students' use as they navigate barriers that could hinder their academic progress. Alvarado's et al. (2017) research indicated that first-generation college students are more resilient than their non-first-generation counterparts.

Educational resilience (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007), also called academic resilience (Alvarado et al., 2017), is used to explain the resilience of high achieving students in the face of multiple barriers such as less than ideal finances, lack of social and cultural capital, and so forth. First-generation college students have the ability to use their self-efficacy to adapt to their surroundings, persist in college, and graduate from college. Discourse on resilience help shifts the deficit focus to success for first-generation college students by focusing on their strengths and ability to thrive (Chung, Turnbull, & Chur-Hansen, 2017).

Thriving

While overcoming adversity, students begin to thrive and see the potential within themselves. Thriving, a theory developed by Schreiner (2010), is defined as

The experiences of college students who are fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Thriving college students not only are academically successful, they also experience a sense of community and a level of psychological well-being that contributes to their persistence to graduation and allows them to gain maximum benefit from being in college. (p. 4)

Thriving linked to positive psychology has focused on student development and academics (Stebbleton et al., 2012). This concept means that students can conquer any struggles they encounter, and can persist and graduate from college; the best part is the Thriving model postulates all students can be successful in college. This affirmation of student success is important for first-generation college students because it raises the level of expectations for their

academic achievement. Thriving helps change the colloquy for this population by acknowledging that students are unique and will use a variety of interventions to reconcile their goals (Schreiner, 2014).

Schreiner (2010, 2013, 2014) developed the notion of Thriving from research on flourishing. Individuals who flourish are active in their community; work well with others, concerned about others, and resilient when facing adversity. There are five elements of the flourishing concept: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and positive relationships (Schreiner, 2013, p.42). Schreiner (2010) established Thriving because the flourishing concept did not focus on academics and student success.

Through extensive research, Schreiner and associates conceived five scales of the Thriving Quotient: engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness (Schreiner, 2010, 2013, 2014). The scales illustrated in Figure 2.1 signify “an element of academic, intrapersonal, or interpersonal thriving that has been empirically demonstrated to be amenable to change within students, rather than a fixed personality trait over which we have little control” (p. 4). Strengths-based programming is one way colleges and universities can help first-generation students thrive (Macias, 2013; Schreiner, 2010, 2013; Stebleton et al., 2012).

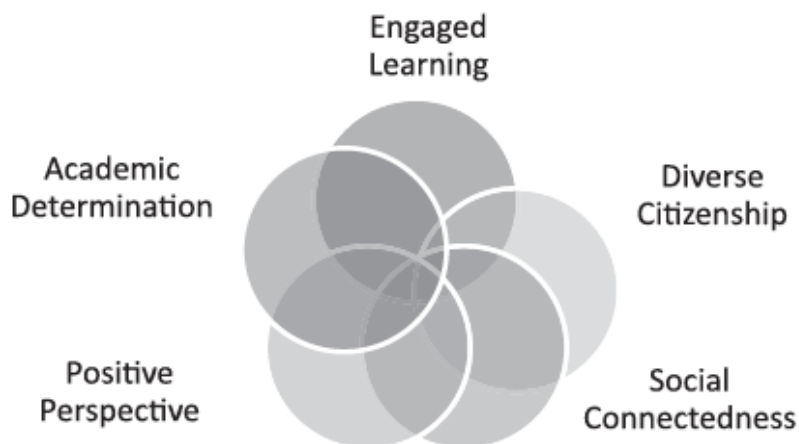


Figure 2.1. Thriving quotient scales. (Schreiner, 2013, p. 42)

Figure reprinted with permission. Originally published in, Schreiner, L. A. (2013). Thriving in college. (pp. 41-52). Wiley Online Library: Wiley Subscription Services, Inc., A Wiley Company. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20059>

Strengths

Strengths-based programming involves student development to “help students to see their potential and to empower them to be successful personally and professionally” (Stebbleton et al., 2012, p. 2). According to Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner (2006), strengths are “the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity.... The concept of strengths begins with talent” (p.4). Within every person are skills that developed naturally overtime and are “productively applied,” called talents (Clifton et al., 2006, p. 2). The StrengthsFinder® is an assessment developed by the Gallop Organization, also known as StrengthsQuest (SQ), used to identify the Signature Themes incorporating the five dominate talents within a person (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton et al., 2006; Shushok & Hulme, 2006; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015; Stebleton et al., 2012). While the assessment provides the five dominant talents, there are 34 talents to choose from overall. Previously, I mentioned first-generation college students’ tendency to question their ability to be successful in college; strengths-based education helps to change the negative mindset of these students by assisting them with the realization of their talents and teaching them to strengthen and cultivate them.

I am very familiar with the StrengthsFinder®. It is a tool I used with my TRIO Student Support Services students to change the way they view themselves and their abilities in the classroom, socially, and professionally. A series of workshops instilled the value of personal strengths; the series concluded with students creating a visual representation of their strengths and goal setting. Students were encouraged to list their talents in the signature of their school email. I enjoyed watching students realize their purpose and overcome negative stigmas placed

on them. Other higher education institutions using strengths-based curriculum with students include Texas A & M University, Texas Christian University, Baylor University, and Azusa Pacific University (Shushok & Hulme, 2006).

Stebbleton et al. (2012) studied the impact of strengths curriculum by using SQ as a pedagogical assessment with first year students at a large research university.

The results suggest that the SQ intervention increased students' confidence in identifying their personal strengths, accurately assessing their abilities, deciding what they value most in a major or career choice, applying their strengths to help them learn more effectively, and understanding how their strengths can help them to be realistic about expectations for the future. (p. 5)

Soria and Stubblefield (2015) studied first-year students at the end of the students' first college term; they discovered that students who understood their talents and were aware of their strengths had a greater sense of belonging on campus when compared to their peers who did not receive the same strengths instruction. The results confirmed the strengths curriculum impacted confidence and a sense of belonging on campus.

How Resilience, Thriving, and Strengths Work Together

Clifton et al. (2006) shared a story about Olympic gymnast Kerri Strug that serves as an excellent example of resiliency, thriving, and the benefits of strengths education. Most Americans remember watching America's sweetheart compete during the Atlanta Olympics, especially when she stuck the landing on the vault with an injured ankle. I remember watching Kerri compete and feeling a sense of American pride as she overcame her injury to help her team win a gold medal. While competing in the Olympics, Kerri was also a college student with awareness of her Signature Themes, which she used while in school and during competitions. For example, Kerri used the Focus talent to concentrate on homework, practice, or competition by being in the moment. Kerri's story illustrates her resilience in competition and in the

classroom and how she thrived as a gymnast and scholar because she was aware of her personal strengths.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a paradigm shift in organization development and human systems focused on seeing the virtuous side of people (appreciative) while using narratives and queries to learn more about the person (inquiry; Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Watkins, 2001). The foundation of Appreciative Inquiry is social constructivism. The Appreciative Inquiry framework appreciates the strengths within first-generation college students and their ability to thrive in college. I posit that learning to appreciate the positive college experiences of first-generation college students will allow institutions of higher learning to be equipped with data demonstrating the effectiveness of services available within their respective organizations. Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2012) believe that “higher education is one of the most powerful forces for social and economic good in our world, and through Appreciative Inquiry, higher education can tap that force to create possibilities and transformation” (p. 1).

Social constructivism calls into question the positivist view and “suggests that the social realities of our world (how people behave, the design or sociotechnical architecture of our organizations, the corporate culture, etc.) are neither fixed by iron laws of human behavior nor are they solely a function of past experiences and history” (Watkins, 2001, p. 28). Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) defined social constructionism as “the idea that social systems creates or determines its own reality” (p. 14). The idea that people or social systems control the direction of their reality is an important aspect of the Appreciative Inquiry framework, which explains the positive focus rather than deficit thinking as a foundation. The appreciative aspect of Appreciative Inquiry encourages an emphasis on the importance of consciously valuing people

and organizations while the inquiry aspect encourages narratives and questions based in optimism (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Watkins, 2001). The foundational thinking and process of AI explains the aim of my research on first-generation college students—a focus on what they can do and valuing them as people and students who have something to add to the higher education experience.

The Appreciative Inquiry process uses qualitative methodology with information gathered from interviews and focus groups to aid the data gathering process (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). Several models have been developed as a guide through the Appreciative Inquiry process; however, the 4D cycle is the most well known and is depicted in Figure 2 (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Watkins, 2001). The first step in the 4D cycle is *Discovery*, it discusses and admires the “what is”; step two, *Dream*, helps individuals and organizations envision the possibilities. Step three is the *Design* phase; during this phase participants are “co-constructing the future” (Watkins, 2001, p.43) through the creation of *provocative propositions*, statements used to organize strategies for implementing the vision (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Watkins, 2001). The final step, *Destiny*, is the development of next steps after the Appreciative Inquiry process has ended. Some researchers recommend a fifth step (5D model), *Delivery*, implementing and sustaining the steps developed during the Destiny phase (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Watkins, 2001). There are five principles that transfer “the foundation of Appreciative Inquiry from theory to practice: constructionist, simultaneity, poetic, anticipatory, and positive” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 8-10).

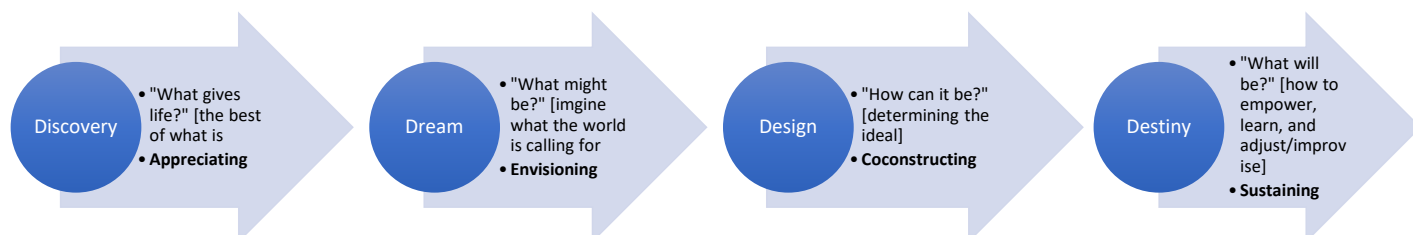


Figure 2.2. Appreciative Inquiry 4D cycle. (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Watkins, 2001).

Appreciative Education

The foundation of Appreciative Education is the Appreciative Inquiry framework

(Bloom, Hutson, He, & Konkle, 2013):

Appreciative education is a framework for delivering high-quality education on both an individual and organizational level. It provides an intentional and positive approach to bettering educational enterprises by focusing on the strengths and potential of individuals and organizations to accomplish co-created goals. This interactive and transformative process functions by permeating educational organizations. (Bloom et al., 2013, pp. 5–6)

Appreciative education is a framework to consider when working with first-generation college students since it focuses on what students can do (the positive) to inform the improvement process when a student experiences failure. Additionally, appreciative education focuses on student strengths rather than a focus on weaknesses. As the description of appreciative education indicates, when this type of positive interaction takes place on an individual level, it begins to permeate the organization as a whole. Thus, if the concept of appreciative education was included in curriculum and advising (i.e., Appreciative Advising; see Bloom et al., 2008) across a higher education institution, there is a possibility the student campus experience would improve. More research is needed in this area, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Community Cultural Wealth

Community cultural wealth is the theoretical framework I will use to examine my research. Community cultural wealth is “an array of knowledges, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression” (Yosso & García, 2007, p. 154). For the purposes of my research, community cultural wealth will examine the many facets of capital associated with community cultural wealth with first-generation college students in mind. While it is true first-generation college student come from different racial and cultural backgrounds, it is also true they experience many of the same oppressive and disparaging circumstances as Communities of Color. It should be noted that Yosso (2005) formed community cultural wealth because critical race theory and other similar theories failed to capture the full essence of experiences connected to Communities of Color; it is my belief that community cultural wealth is able to address the same concerns for first-generation college students as it does for Communities of Color. Community cultural wealth was created by Yosso (2005) to show the positive capital nondominant cultures bring to the higher education environment and to challenge the underpinning deficit agenda associated with social and cultural capital (Yosso & García, 2007). There are six forms of capital associated with community cultural wealth: aspirational, linguistic, social, navigational, familial, and resistant. Figure 2.3 is a visual depiction of community cultural wealth, its connection to critical race theory, which informed the development of the model, and the six forms of community cultural wealth:

1. Aspirational capital encompasses the other five forms of capital (linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant) because it is focused on desired expectations for the future. The irrepressible abilities that come from this form of capital helps individuals to “dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective

means to attain those goals” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Aspirational capital empowers first-generation college students to set goals of admission and degree attainment while dealing with barriers accompanying with the process.

2. Linguistic capital refers to the dexterity and learned utterances “in multiple languages and/or language styles” along with communication involving arts, music, and poetry (Yosso & García, 2007, p. 160). The use of this form of capital is important to first-generation college students because it allows them to share family experiences with peer who have similar backgrounds and enables the students to communicate with family and friends in a way they can understand.
3. Familial capital implies connection to immediate family; however, this concept also pertains to “extended and chosen family” (Yosso & García, 2007, p. 164). Familial capital is “cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). When considering first-generation college students’ need for community on campus, familial capital addresses the “family” student build amongst their peers on campus.
4. Social capital involves a plexus of community that provides various forms of support to help individuals as they navigate countless situations and institutions; no two plexuses are alike (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & García, 2007). Posse, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is an example of social and familial capital. First-generation college students often provide assistance to one another as they seek to navigate the complexities of higher education.
5. Navigational capital involves tactics used to maneuver institutional systems, especially those not meant for Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & García, 2007). Higher education is a perfect example of an elite system built with elitists in mind. Higher

education is still working to become a system willing to support first-generation college students and Communities of Color.

6. Resistant capital pertains “to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso & García, 2007, p. 166). Resistant capital literally calls for going against established systems of oppressive thought or action. First-generation college students who graduate college are directly going against the deficit discourse scholars have associated with their presence on college campuses.

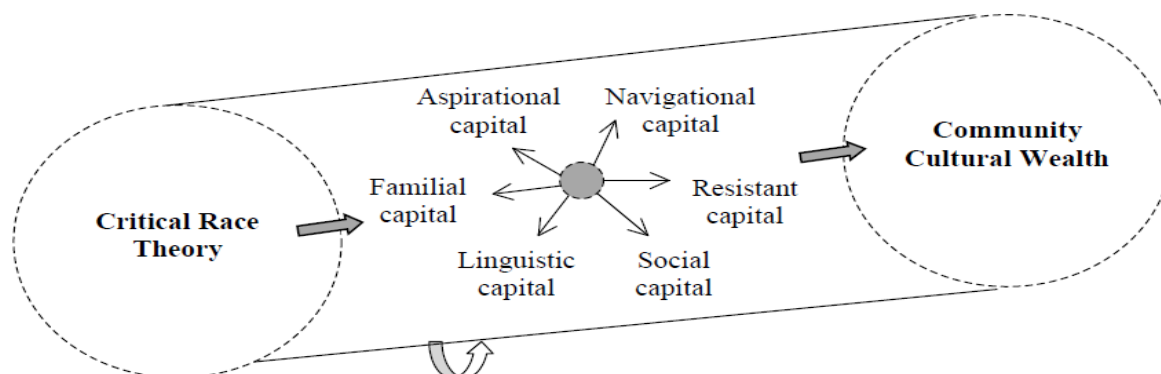


Figure 2.3. A Kaleidoscope of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso & García, 2007, p. 155)

Figure reprinted with permission. Originally published in, Yosso, T.J., & D.G. García. (2007). “This is no slum!”: A Critical Race Theory Analysis of Community Cultural Wealth in Culture Clash’s Chavez Ravine.” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 32(1), 145-179, 155.

Conclusion

First-generation college students deserve success despite the obstacles they face while in school. While researching first-generation college students is not new to higher education literature, my research makes a novel contribution because it provides first-generation college students the opportunity to give voice to their experiences. Furthermore, this dissertation is focused on the success of first-generation college students, a topic which receives inadequate attention in current higher education literature. I use the Delphi Method to capture the lived

experiences of first-generation college students. The community cultural wealth model will guide the way the information is presented using the six forms discussed earlier this chapter.

Chapter III

As higher education continues its focus on improving retention and graduation rates, research on first-generation college students is especially important because it will provide a better understanding of how to serve these students as they seek to graduate college. The Delphi Method provides first-generation college students the ability to share lived experiences leading to improved perceptions of first-generation college students. This following chapter chronicles the Delphi Method by providing a historical depiction of the methodology, explicates why Delphi is the appropriate method for this study, and gives a detailed description of the Delphi Method that includes a full explanation of the research procedures followed in this dissertation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Delphi's advantages, disadvantages, and limitations.

Delphi Method

The Delphi Method is a methodological tool of inquiry developed in the 1950s by Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer (1963) and the RAND Corporation for the United States Air Force. Delphi is "characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem" (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p. 3). The technique is named for a Greek oracle considered to be a visionary for the future (Geist, 2010).

The initial use of the Delphi Method sought to discover a correct number of A-bombs needed for a target system expelling ammunition. The study used the Delphi Method to forecast the needs of the military by seeking to "improve group decision making by obtaining consensus of opinion but without face-to-face interaction" (Murray & Hammons, 1995, p. 424). The original study involved multiple rounds of inquiry through questionnaires and interviews. The Delphi Method has three distinct features: "(1) anonymous group interaction and responses, (2)

multiple iterations or rounds of questionnaires or other means of data collection with research-controlled statistical group responses and feedback, and (3) presentation of statistical group responses” (Murry & Hammons, 1995, p. 424).

Delphi is used in two forms classical and modified (Franklin & Hart, 2007; Green, 2014; Hasson & Keeney, 2011; Hasson et al., 2000; Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2006; Maxey & Kezar, 2016; Stitt-Gohdes & Crews, 2004). Classical Delphi has five components: anonymity of panelists; multiple iterations that allows panelists to modify their responses throughout the study; controlled feedback that involves sharing responses from other panelists; providing opportunity for other participants to modify or clarify their statements (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007); and questionnaires that are distributed through postal mail (Avella, 2016; Hasson & Keeney, 2011). Furthermore, the classical Delphi typically designs the first round to consult with panelists prior to issuing the initial questionnaire; the modified Delphi does not; instead, researchers use other means, such as literature reviews, to inform the questionnaire for the first round (Avella, 2016). The administration of a modified Delphi study can occur in any form deemed necessary by the researcher; for example, panelists can respond to questionnaires electronically or in paper form (Hasson & Keeney, 2011). Also, modified Delphi studies occur in three rounds (Green, 2014). A final difference between classical and modified Delphi includes the classical Delphi seeking consensus from panelist responses and the modified seeking saturation (Hasson & Kenney, 2011; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Linstone & Turoff, 2011). Figure 3.1 illustrates the differences and similarities of the classical and modified Delphi Methods.

Classical	Similarities	Modified
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlimited rounds • Interviews & questionnaire • Questionnaire distributed via postal mail • Questionnaire created after consulting panelist • Consensus required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymity • Quality panelist • Controlled feedback • Panelist modify/clarify statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three rounds • Questionnaire provided online • Questionnaire developed after review of literature • Saturation required

Figure 3.1. Similarities and differences of classical and modified Delphi techniques

Why Delphi?

When considering Delphi for any study, Stitt-Gohdes and Crews (2004) noted one of five areas could justify Delphi as the most effective methodology. Things to consider include:

- The study does not require specific reasoning and can benefit from personal opinions and lived experiences of a variety of people.
- Meeting face-to-face is not possible because of the high number of individuals needed for the research.
- Time and cost are considered too high if the study is conducted in any other manner.
- Anonymity is required or there is a potential of intense interactions between respondents.
- Variety of thought and respondents are required to ensure validity of the study.

Delphi is the best method for this study because it allows input from subject matter experts (panelists), college graduates who are first-generation college students, located around the United States. Participants used in this study are recent college graduates, many of which are in various forms of employment, graduate school, starting families, among other things, which

could hinder their availability to meet face-to-face. This method allows them to continue with their day-to-day routine. Literature is limited on the success of first-generation college students; a study of this nature is necessary to explore the experiences of first-generation students that ultimately led to graduating with their bachelor's degree.

Using the Delphi Method with college graduates who were the first in their family to graduate college presents a unique opportunity to gain insight on the changing needs of first-generation college students. Franklin and Hart (2007) stated that Delphi studies are able to address the fluidity of topics, “uniquely suited to studying topics with little historical evidence,” and allows for the development of new concepts, which is appropriate for a Delphi study on first-generation college students (p. 238).

Delphi and Higher Education

The Delphi Method is an excellent data-gathering tool for topics in higher education; it can be used for everything from crafting policy to updating curriculum (Green, 2014). There are several benefits to using the Delphi Method when studying higher education: cost savings; anticipating curriculum needs for an entire campus; and strategic planning for the colleges and universities (Green, 2014; Murry & Hammons, 1995). This study adds to the forecasting and planning of higher education institutions by providing them insight into the lived experiences of first-generation college students, thereby improving services, curriculum, and financial assistance for first-generation students with the goal of improving retention and graduation data within higher education.

The Delphi Process

Delphi is an iterative process that occurs in multiple stages designed to capture and summarize feedback from study panelist without face-to-face interaction (Dalkey & Helmer,

1963; Hasson et al., 2000). The Delphi Method is purposefully keeps panelists from interacting because it “appears to be more conducive to independent thought” and assists panelist with “the gradual formation of a considered opinion” (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963, p. 459). The researcher is the only one who interacts with panelists directly. Figure 3.2 serves as visual representation of the Delphi Process.

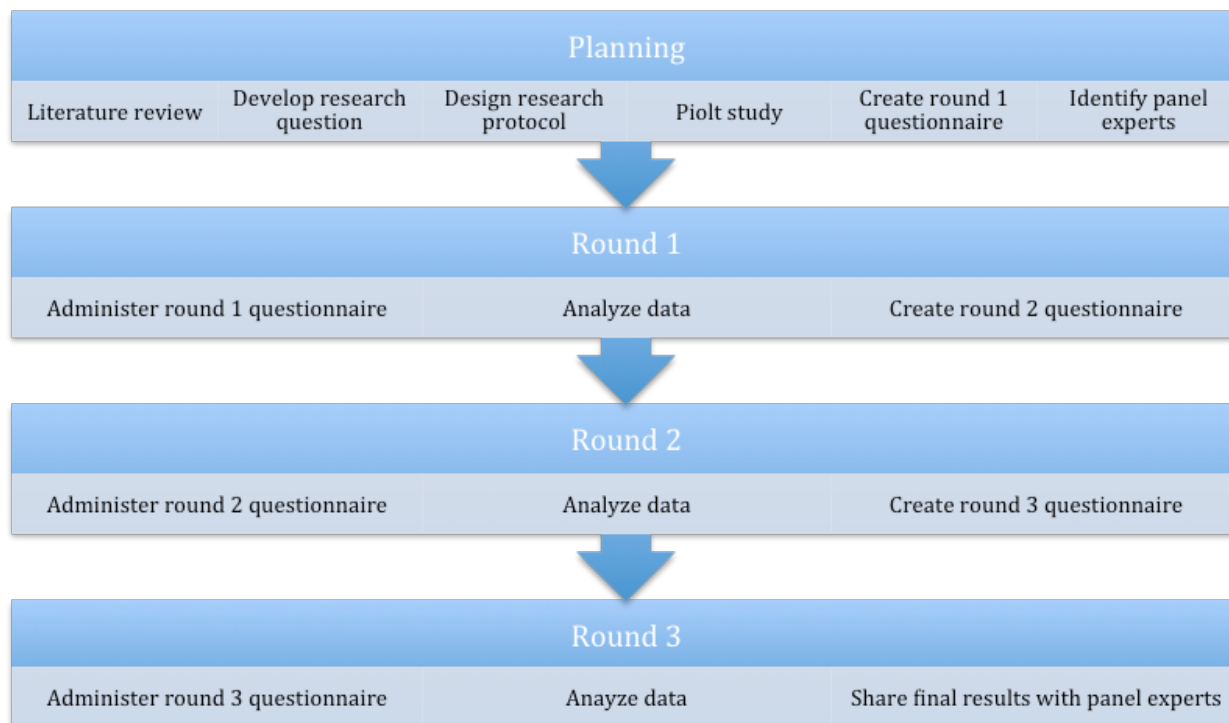


Figure 3.2. Visual representation of the Delphi process during each round.

Delphi studies are meticulous and require precision and rigor (Hasson et al., 2000).

Murray and Hammons (1995) described the Delphi Method as

[a] five-step process: (1) deciding whether Delphi is a valid methodology for the study in question, (2) determining the panel size and membership, (3) inviting the panel members to participate, (4) deciding the appropriate number of rounds of Delphi questionnaires, and (5) determining when to end the Delphi procedure. (p. 427)

After each round, panelist responses were analyzed, which aided in the construction of the questionnaire for each subsequent round. Only panelists who responded to the previous round participated in subsequent rounds (Murray & Hammons, 1995). During rounds two and three

panelists rated responses provided during the previous round, thereby developing descriptive data, which means instructions in rounds two and three were not the same as instructions provided for the first round. Panelists were provided an opportunity to clarify written statements provided from the first round during the second round. This process did not occur during round three because it was the final round. Last, panelists received a summary of results at the conclusion of the study (Green, 2014; Hasson et al., 2000).

Dissertation Research Procedure

The following research question seeks to ascertain the lived experiences first-generation college students had while in college that ultimately led them to graduate from a four-year institution with their bachelor's degree. The research question was developed from an appreciative inquiry perspective. The question is: What factors influence first-generation college students' ability to graduate college?

Thriving is rooted in positive psychology and is discussed in detail in the second chapter. A definition for thriving, success, and first-generation are included on the initial questionnaire to ensure panelists are defining the terms as depicted in this dissertation. The definitions are as follows:

Thriving. To thrive means an individual is engaged and determined to meet and at times exceed their personal and academic goals.

Success. To achieve success means an individual has graduated from a four-year college or university.

First-generation. First-generation college students are students whose parent(s) have not graduated with a bachelor's degree.

Informed Consent

Antioch University requires informed consent when researchers seek information from human respondents. In accordance with guidelines established by Antioch University and the Leadership and Change doctoral program, I submitted an application to the institutional review board (IRB) to conduct research; it was approved. The IRB application is included in Appendix A, which also includes a copy of the informed consent provided to study panelists prior to starting the initial questionnaire.

Advantages

There are several advantages to using the Delphi Method to conduct research. Since the Delphi Method uses anonymous responses from panelists, the feedback is less biased by groupthink and the problem of dominant personalities drowning out the quiet voices within a group can be avoided (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Franklin & Hart, 2007). Furthermore, with panelists being located throughout the United States, the Delphi Method allows inclusion of panelists who otherwise could not participate because of location (Brady, 2015; Murry & Hammons, 1995). Another advantage to using Delphi as a methodology is summarizing group responses using descriptive statistics and qualitative reasoning (Murry & Hammons, 1995; Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007).

Disadvantages

Several disadvantages exist for Delphi studies. The Delphi Method can take a lot of time to complete because of the multiple rounds needed to receive and analyze panelist responses (Murry & Hammons, 1995). With time serving as a factor, communication with panelists and a questionnaire completion through the internet eliminates potential panelists who do not have Internet access (Hasson et al., 2000). Timing also affects panelists' willingness to continue with

the study. If panelists decide to withdraw their participation at any point, the entire research process could be affected (Hasson et al., 2000).

Limitations

The following are limitations to the study:

1. Panelists represent a variety of four-year institutions, which means each experienced different cultures and academic expectations throughout their academic career.
2. Panelists may have busy schedules during each round limiting time they spend providing detailed responses to questionnaires.
3. Participation in this study requires individuals have Internet access thus leaving out the perspectives of several potential panelists who do not have access to the Internet.
4. There is a low number of male study participants making difficult to disprove statistics that imply male first-generation college students graduate at higher rates than their female counterparts.

Panel Selection

The Delphi Method relies on responses from subject matter experts through the iteration of rounds (Brady, 2015; Franklin & Hart, 2007; Hasson et al., 2000; Maxey & Kezar, 2016; Murry & Hammons, 1995). The term expert “implies that the individual panelists have more knowledge about the subject matter than most people” (Murry & Hammons, 1995, p. 428). For the purposes of this dissertation, subject matter experts are individuals who are first-generation college students who graduated from college and will be referred to as panelists throughout the study. First-generation college students are the most qualified individuals to speak to the personal experiences of first-generation college student thus leading to germane responses.

A pre-screening survey was used to identify and select the appropriate panelists. The survey asks potential panelists to provide demographic information, whether their parents earned a bachelor's degree, and college graduation year; also, the questionnaire includes a question about having access to the internet and comfort level with responding to an online survey (Franklin & Hart, 2007). Initially, panelists were required to be within the five years of graduating from a four-year college or university; this requirement changed to 10 years in order to expand the pool of available panelists. Ninety-nine potential panelists responded to the pre-screening questionnaire. See Appendix B for a copy of the pre-screening survey.

After reviewing responses from the pre-screening questionnaire, 27 participants were selected to serve as subject matter expert panelists while only 23 participated in the first and subsequent rounds. Using a large number of panelists helps to preserve continuity of the study in case any participants withdraws from the study. The following data reflect the study panelists: 20 females, 3 males; 47.826% White, 39.130% Black/African American, 8.695% Hispanic, 4.347% another race; 26.086% are between the ages of 18 to 24, 69.565% are between ages of 25 to 34 and 4.347% between age 35 to 44; 56.5217% are employed full-time while 4.347% are employed part-time, and 39.130% indicate being currently enrolled in a graduate degree program.

Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire format was utilized for this study. The administration of each questionnaire occurred using SurveyMonkey. Panelists received questionnaires for each round via email; also, they were given one week to complete each questionnaire.

Franklin and Hart (2007) noted the importance of developing a substantive first questionnaire. Development of the question posed on the initial questionnaire resulted from an

extensive review of literature on first-generation college students. The initial questionnaire is included in Appendix C. Panelists answered the following question on the initial questionnaire:

Everyone who has experienced the success of attending college has inspirations they can point to as reasons for thriving while in college; first-generation college students are no different. Please share *at least 3 to 4* detailed examples of your lived experiences that exemplify reasons for your success.

Qualitative data from the initial round informed the questionnaire for the second round. Statements provided during the initial round were analyzed, eight themes were developed from those statements, then panelists rated each theme using a six-point Likert scale where one (1) is Strongly Agree and six (6) is Strongly Disagree (Brady, 2015; Green, 2014; Stitt-Gohdes & Crews, 2004). Also, panelists cogitated their ratings and were asked to share their thoughts and experiences with each theme during the second round. Last, panelists were asked to suggest additional themes. This process is known as the member check process (Franklin & Hart, 2007). Round three did not have a member check process because it was the final round of the study.

During the third and final round, panelists provided ratings and statements for two additional themes. Next, panelists were asked to rank themes in order of impact on their experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college with 1 being a significant impact and 10 having little to no impact. Not applicable was provided as an option in case a theme did not apply to their experience. Last, panelists were asked to provide responses to the following three questions:

1. What advice do you have for first-generation college students entering their first year of college?
2. What recommendations do you have for higher education institutions to help first-generation college students succeed in college?

3. What recommendations do you have for high schools who are preparing first-generation college students to succeed in college?

At the conclusion of the study, panelists received a copy of final results. A copy of the second and third round questionnaires are included in Appendix D.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Validity and reliability are important when conducting research; in the case of Delphi research, trustworthiness is important also. Establishing validity and reliability for Delphi studies can be difficult because procedures for Delphi studies vary (Hasson & Keeney, 2011). Validity entails the accuracy or generalizability of a study (Stitt-Gohdes & Crews, 2004) while “reliability is the extent to which a procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions” (Hasson et al., 2000, p. 1012). Trustworthiness considers “the integrity of the research process as well as the final product or products produced” (Brady, 2015, p. 4), which also corresponds to the rigor of the study.

To ensure validity, the selection of panelists involved very specific criteria to ensure each respondent is a graduated first-generation college student who attended a four-year institution (Maxey & Kezar, 2016). Focusing on panelist selection is important because it improves the rigor and validity of the study (Brady, 2015; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Linstone & Turoff, 2011; Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, 2007). Last, it is important to note that validity improves when panelists have a vested interest in the topic, which means panelists are more likely to remain in the study through each subsequent round (Hasson et al., 2000). To ensure vested interest, each panelist received an email about the study; they then responded with “yes” if they remained interested in participating in the study (See Appendix E).

While panelist selection is important for determining validity of any Delphi study, it is also important when considering reliability. Reliability of a Delphi study is determined by the definition the researcher attaches to the terms expert or panelist and the selection of the expert panel (Franklin & Hart, 2007). Panelist selection is important because panelists should be knowledgeable of the research topic, which allows them to provide germane insight toward answering the research question from an individual and group perspective (Franklin & Hart, 2007; Green, 2014; Murray & Hammons, 1995; Rowe & Wright, 1999). Reliability is also dependent upon the consistency of the expert panel (Green, 2014).

Trustworthiness of a Delphi study is dependent upon a study's validity and reliability. Brady (2015) stated, "the trustworthiness of the study is improved as other researchers can follow the logic of the researcher's decisions at every step and stage of the study" (p. 5). In other words, the established procedures are a vital and documented aspect of any Delphi study and have a direct impact on the validity and reliability of the study, which provides credibility to data presented (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004).

Instrument Development

Antioch University created a survey group for students to use as a group to pilot instruments. This group provided substantive feedback for each questionnaire used for this study. Testing the questionnaires ensured clarity of instrument instructions and questions. Improving the questionnaire improves the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study.

Data Analysis

Following each round, I analyzed the data collected in qualitative and quantitative formats (Hasson et al., 2000). Themes developed from data collected during each round provides more ubiquitous insight into resilience, thriving, and strengths related to first-generation college

student success. Each questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics (Hasson et al., 2000; Keeney et al., 2006; Murry & Hammons, 1995; Rowe & Wright, 1999; Stitt-Gohdes & Crews, 2004).

Formulation of themes came from in depth reading of each panelists statement. As I read through each statement, I noted key terms that stood out. Each statement was read more than once. A list of terms was created and then synthesized in collaboration with my committee chair leading to the creation of the first eight themes for the second round.

Summary

The Delphi Method served as the appropriate methodology for panelists to share their lived experiences. Additionally, the methodology provided the space panelists needed to think through their individual memories in a way that added to the narrative and experiences of first-generation college students without the influence of other thoughts. The use of SurveyMonkey to collect data further allowed panelists to participate in this dissertation while continue their daily routines. Each round of data collection built upon the next, which added to the quality and integrity of the research.

Chapter IV

The success of first-generation college students is important as higher education institutions seek to improve retention and graduation numbers and to further encourage future first-generation college students as they pursue their goal of college completion. A focus on the positive outcomes of first-generation college students is needed in order to gain insight into the experiences of students and reasons for their academic success. This research study sought the perspectives of first-generation college students with the purpose of learning which collegiate experiences best helped them graduate from college.

This dissertation explored the reasons surrounding the success of first-generation college students using the Delphi Method. First-generation college students who graduated college within the past 10 years were asked to reflect upon their experiences as college students, with particular emphasis on reasons for their graduation. This chapter shares the results of data generated from three rounds of questionnaires.

Using the Delphi Method, this dissertation sought to answer the following research question: What factors influence first-generation college students' ability to graduate college? The study was conducted using questionnaires in three separate rounds. As mentioned previously, 23 first-generation college graduates, considered to be "subject matter experts" in Delphi terms, participated in the study.

Results

Results from the questionnaires from each of the three rounds are presented below both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Round One

The initial round presented the following question to study participants:

Everyone who has experienced the success of attending college has inspirations they can point to as reasons for thriving while in college; first-generation college students are no different. Please share at least 3 to 4 detailed examples of your lived experiences that exemplify reasons for your success. Instead of stating simply that you made friends while in college, provide a detailed example of how those friendships helped you be successful in college.

Panelists provided at least three lived experiences, five sharing a fourth. The responses led to the development of eight themes: Social Network, Campus Resources and Programs, Self-development, Finding a Passion, Family, Work, Service, and Financial Support. Below, each theme is presented with an example from statements provided by the panelists. Some responses reflected more than one theme; Social Network was the strongest theme based on the frequency of appearance in panelists' statements. The entire list of responses is included in Appendix F.

Social network. "I was able to attend a pre-orientation program geared towards first generation and multicultural students, which allowed me to acclimate myself to campus before orientation. With this program, I was able to meet other first gen students, some of whom became my best friends throughout college. It was great to meet them early on, knowing that we came from similar backgrounds and had a connection of being first gen. When I had issues relating to being first gen, I was able to come to my friends and we could discuss those issues in ways that a lot of my other friends would not understand."

Campus resources and programs. "I was a member of the McNair Scholars program which help students who are interested in graduate school, graduate their undergrad and get accepted into grad school. This program really showed me that I was able to be successful both

as an undergrad and as a future grad student. I received a lot of intellectual validation, that I wasn't expecting.”

Self-development. “At my first university, I was very lost. I felt like just another number paying tuition. I changed my major three times and was shuffled from advisor to advisor. I was not given the support I needed at this university and decided to take time off. When I decided to start again at a community college, I realized that it was my job to be my own advocate and seek out the answers to questions I had. This led to immediate success and led me to finish my bachelor's degree and allowed me to begin graduate school.”

Finding a passion. “Organizing around low-income and first-gen issues was a very empowering experience while I was in college. Advocating for inclusion of first gen and low-income students made me feel as though all the struggles I had been through were worth it. I struggled a lot in my time at college but working with other low income and first gen students made me realize that future students shouldn't have to go through what I did and because of this I felt empowered to make a difference. Activism was central to me in my time at college.”

Family. “My family was by far the biggest support I had. They would always say they didn't know what I was doing, but they were 100% behind me. They would find money to fund experiences my classmate had, they checked up on me via phone and email. They told me to work harder when I was floundering. The mindset 'failure is not an option' was imparted to me all throughout my life and it was helpful in getting through college. I always found a way around all the barriers and struggles.”

Work. “Being a resident assistant for 3 in my undergraduate experience really shaped my desire to help others. I was able to become more confident in my leadership abilities especially in my 2nd and 3rd years. Additionally, during my time as an RA [Resident Advisor] I discovered

my major was not right for me anymore and my career goals had changed. I ended up switching my major from English to Psychology which I was more passionate about.

Service. “During my sophomore [year], I became an Army Service member. This experience taught me the importance of grit, tenacity, and perseverance. It also provided me the opportunity to make and save enough money to pay my school balance in total so I could re-enroll into college. I also received educational benefits which gave me the advantage of having the rest of my college courses paid for and I also received a monthly stipend that helped me to pay bills as a mom and a full-time student.”

Financial support. “My cousin who is basically my sister encouraged me. She had a master’s degree in business something from Ashland University. She bought me a laptop and paid for my first semester books for school as a going away present.”

Round Two

The second-round questionnaire sought to do three things—have panelists rate themes developed from their responses during the initial round, provide insight into their experience with each theme, and recommend additional themes. Each theme was presented, along with the specific descriptors mentioned in the first round, and rated using a six-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Not all raters chose to explain the reasons for their ratings. Two new themes were recommended. Round two results are included in Appendix G.

Social network. The italicized text that follows, both here and in subsequent sections, are the questions presented to panelists. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Social Networks? (i.e., belonging, peer support system, intellectual validation,*

community, campus involvement, athletics, spiritual connection, sisterhood/brotherhood, empathy)

Social Networks relate to the connection's students make while on campus through peer support, campus involvement, and athletic teams among other things. A majority of the 23 subject matter experts (78.26%) rated the Social Network theme as strongly agree while two (8.70%) rated the theme as either somewhat disagree or disagree. Figure 4.1 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “I don’t feel that social networks had a heavy impact on my education.”
- “I didn’t live on campus and wasn’t associated with any groups on campus. I worked full time and went to school full time. I didn’t have time to socialize.”
- “I think being on the Track and Field team was the only reason I showed up to my sophomore year. It gave me friends and something I was good at while I found my feet academically.”
- “Social networks played a large role in my ability to connect with individuals from my various identity groups, engage in meaningful dialogue about issues, and expand my learning beyond the classroom. I was heavily involved in campus involvement for underrepresented and marginalized populations, and we form strong support networks and validated each other in our journey.”

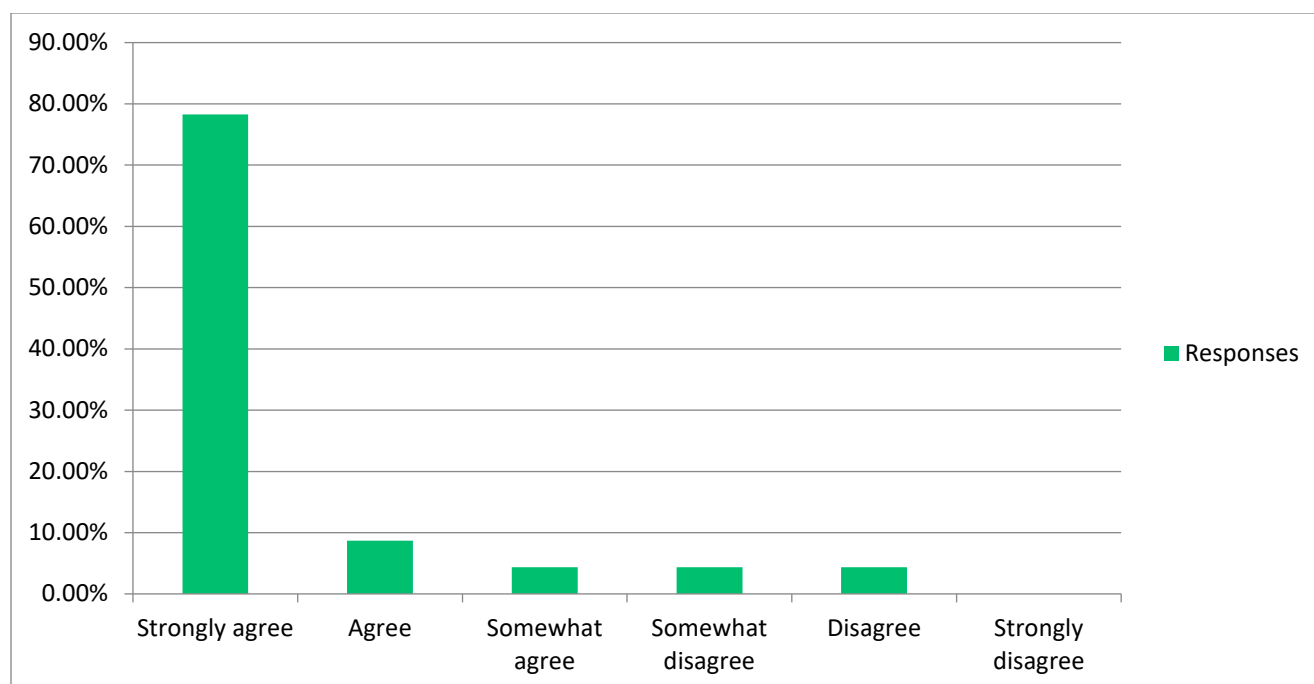


Figure 4.1. Impact of social networks on first-generation college students.

Campus resources and programs. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Campus Resources and Programs? (i.e., Educational Opportunity Program, TRIO, academic support, summer bridge program, career guidance, faculty connection, mentoring, study abroad.)*

Campus Resources and Programs refers to support programs and mentoring obtained on-campus from educational opportunity programs such as TRIO, summer bridge programs, living learning communities, and connecting with faculty. Ratings of Campus Resources and Programs were mostly positive. For instance, 14 panelists (60.87%) rated Campus Resources and Programs as either strongly agree or agree while 4 panelists (17.39%) rated it either somewhat disagree or disagree. Figure 4.2 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “Looking back, I assume I qualified for support programs like TRIO and the likes, but I do not recall receiving notification about them. This may have been due my high academic achievement in high school. Mentoring from my supervisors at my on campus jobs was impactful. They helped me become more confident and navigate my career plans.”
- “My experience was not guided by campus resources. I did utilize faculty help but not much else. Most things were self-taught or found through self-discovery.”
- “The EOP program was the only reason I stayed at [school]. They helped me financially, I had the best counselor whom I could not have graduated without. I had contact with some great faculty members and resources. Studying abroad changed my outlook on life and gave me a love for travel.”
- “I had a good relationship with my academic advisor and faculty members but no real connections with programing efforts.”

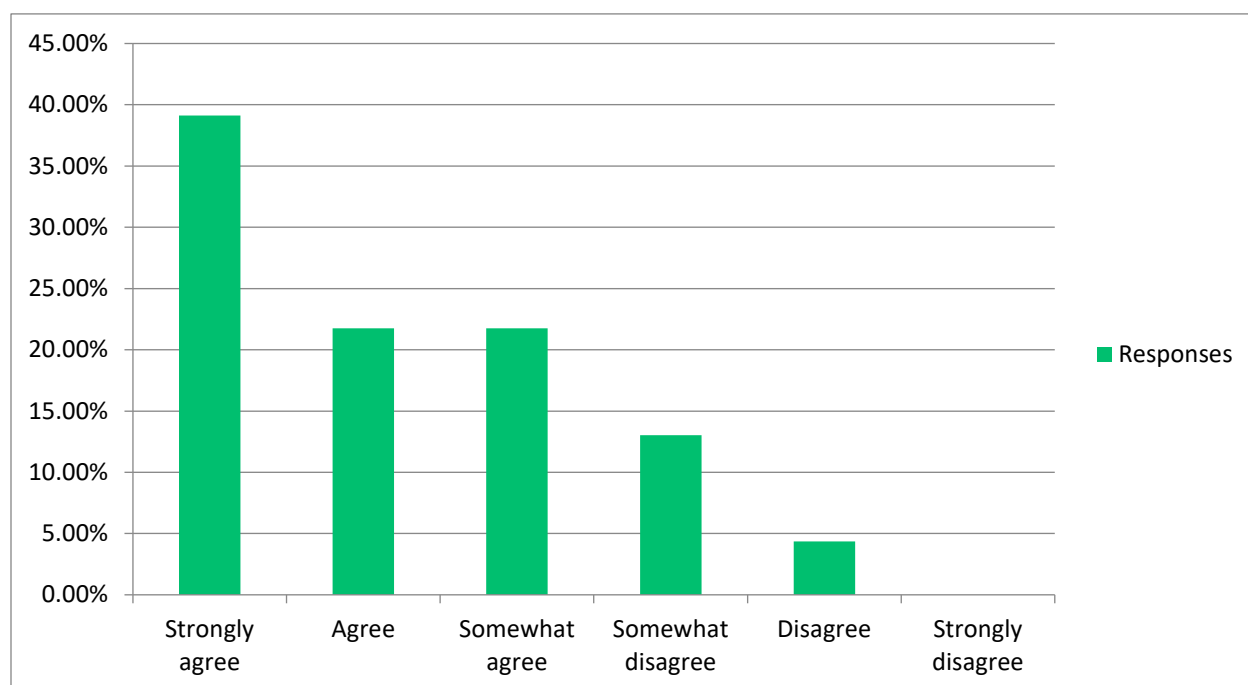


Figure 4.2. Impact of campus resources and programs on first-generation college students.

Overall, responses appeared to have a positive association with Campus Resources and Programs. Two negative responses pertaining to access to resources on college campuses were jarring, however. One response stated that the school they attended did not care to invest in first-generation college students unless students complained, noting, “My school did not like to specifically work with first-gen students and label things as being specifically for us.” The other response stated that white first-generation students were overlooked because it was believed they had the “cultural capital and money” thus causing a gap in needed support.

Self-development. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Self Development? (i.e., deep desire to succeed, leadership development, empowered, motivation, skill development, personal wellness, fear, changing schools)*

Self-Development involves having a deep desire to succeed along with things like skill development and empowerment, and motivation. Panelists rated this theme extremely high with all of the responses being in the affirmative and 14 rating the theme as strongly agree (60.87%). Statements indicate that fear of failure impacted panelists’ collegiate experiences. Figure 4.3 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “I think fear of failure is an important note here. I don't think my desire to succeed was intrinsic, I fully believe that I needed to succeed to be a model for my sister and show her it could be done. Also, failure would have proved my mother right that going to the college I chose was a bad idea.”

- “Because I had no idea how to transfer and feared going back to a home environment that was not very emotionally or personally supportive of me, I was terrified at the prospect of leaving and not being able to keep my full-ride.”
- “Fear of failure was one of my major influencers. my siblings and cousins both older and younger looked up to me and I didn't want to disappoint.”
- “Self-development was a huge part of my experience. I learned from others as I explored myself and who I was and who I wanted to be. I took leadership roles in various student organizations and student government.”
- “Most of my self-development was done through advocating for first-gen and/or low-income students more broadly. Holding my school's administration accountable allowed me to see myself as someone with important things to say.”

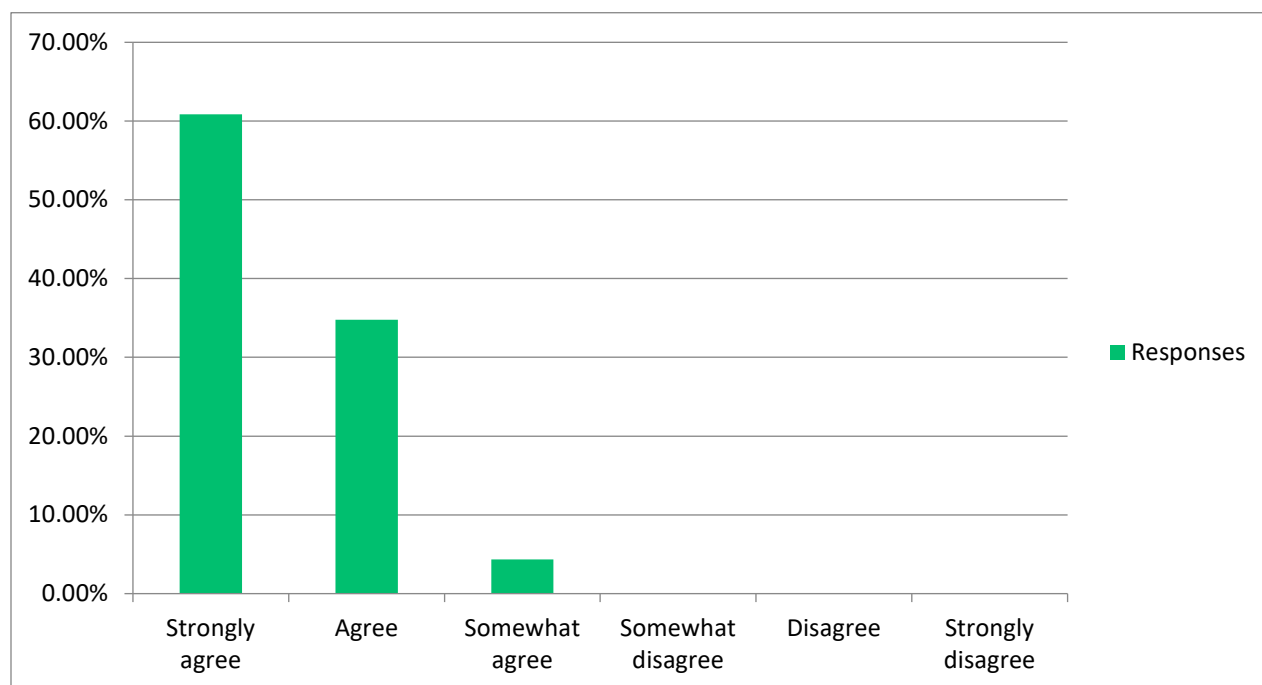


Figure 4.3. Impact of self-development on first-generation college students.

Find a passion. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by finding a passion? (i.e., career, activism, introduction to new things)*

Finding a Passion consists of finding a direction for one's career, being introduced to new opportunities, and activism. Only one panelist disagreed (4.35%) with this theme while ten panelists (43.48%) strongly agreed. Figure 4.4 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “Having a passion for what you’re going to school for, and finding others with that same passion, is huge.”
- “After switching my major 3 times and transferring institutions I felt somewhat lost but once I found the right program that allowed me to embrace my social nature, I was in a much better place mentally.”
- “I don’t think I ever truly found my passion in undergrad. It was afterwards when I developed that.”
- “My passion for social justice has carried me from being a first-generation bachelor's student to a first-generation Ph.D. student, a place I never thought I'd get to.”

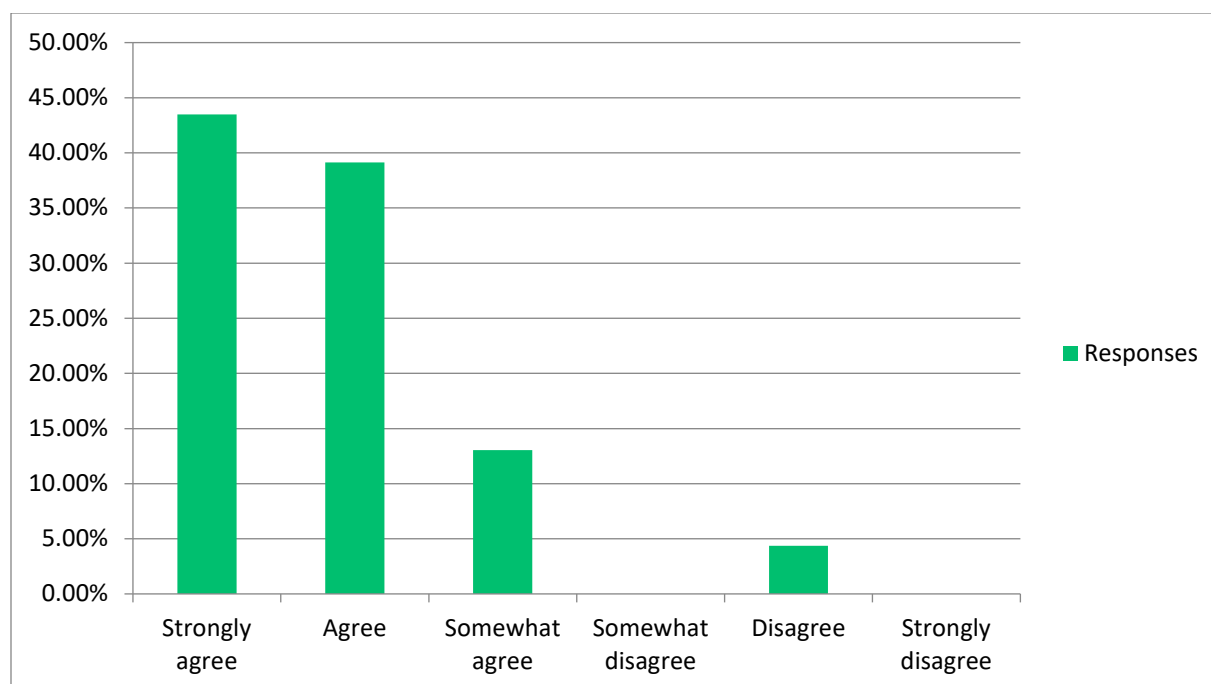


Figure 4.4. Impact of finding a passion on first-generation college students.

Family. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Family? (i.e., becoming a parent, campus feeling like home, attending school close to home, encouragement, serve as example for family, pre-college support)*

Family means many things to different people; in terms of this study family refers to both blood and non-blood relationships. Responses to this theme indicated that some panelists felt family had a negative impact on their ability to thrive while in college (21.75%) while others noted family had a positive impact on their colligate experience (78.26%). In some cases, negative responses related to the panelist's family lacking understanding of higher education or family not wanting panelists to attend college altogether. Positive responses involved viewing peers as their support system or nuclear family providing encouragement as the panelist faced challenges while in school. Figure 4.5 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The

following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists representing both the positive and negative points-of-view:

- “While the previous themes all were either positively impacted or positively impacted my experiences at college, family (especially my immediate family) had a more ambivalent role towards my college experiences. The majority of help with pre-college preparation came from the Upward Bound program I participated in throughout high school. While my parents tried to help with the college process, I ended up doing a lot of the process by myself or with the help of my educational counselor. I had applied to my school with hopes of moving away from both my hometown and my family and going to school gave me the chance to become my own person. Growing up as part of the LGBT community and not being out to my parents affected my home life and my experiences of living at home, while choosing to be out at college and being able to surround myself by an accepting community allowed me support I had not previously received. On the other hand, this made it more difficult when receiving support from my parents, as it felt as though I was keeping a part of myself from them whenever I would return home from college for vacations.”
- “I felt like I served as an example for my family. I was the first to finish a degree and now two more have gone on to further their education. I felt like i showed them it was possible and that it could be done.”
- “At the time, I was driven by making my family proud and becoming the 1st one to graduate from college. I also knew I had been working towards that goal since I started school but there were times, I felt pressure to succeed just for them. As a first-generation student, I had to show my younger siblings that college was attainable. I also had to show

my parents that their sacrifices they made for me would pay off. I had 2 of my younger siblings follow in my footsteps and attend my alma mater while I was there either as a student or academic advisor. That led to me feeling like I had to parent them to be successful since I had gone through the same thing they were dealing with. That experience with my siblings was so hard on me and created tension between me and my family but I also didn't know how to tell my parents that I didn't want to help since I felt it was expected.”

- “I have a difficult relationship with my actual family, so I was not really influenced by them. I often thought of my family as a source of stress because they often guilted me about going to college and not being at home and working. Some of my family was supportive (my grandfather) but most of my support was received through professors and friends.”

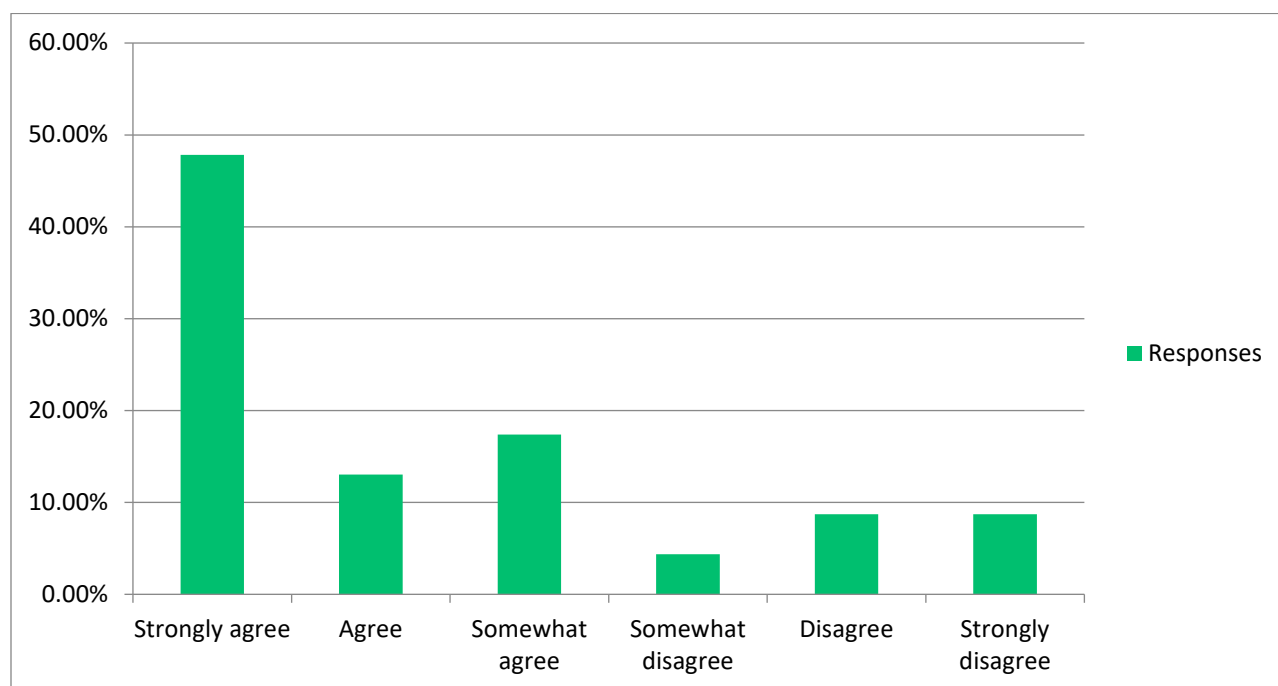


Figure 4.5. Impact of family on first-generation college students.

Work. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Work? (i.e., being employed, support from colleagues and supervisor, internships)*

Work is simply employment whether through work-study, an internship, or needing to maintain employment in order to afford school. A few panelists (8.70%) indicated work negatively impacted their ability to thrive while in college. A much higher percentage (56.52%) indicated work positively impacted their ability to thrive while in college. The negative impact related to the number of hours worked and simply having to work instead of focusing on being engaged academically. The positive association related to being able to attend college and afford necessities that would have otherwise not be obtainable. Figure 4.6 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “Work negatively impacted me. it was a stressor and an obligation I could not afford to lose. I almost failed my summer course due to crazy work schedule where I was missing dining hall hours and too hungry to study properly.”
- “I worked 30–40 hours a week more than five out of seven years. My supervisors were very supportive of my educational pursuits and would work with me when I was needing time to focus on my bachelor’s degree. Due to the network I built from various work experiences, I was able to find several full-time positions after college due to this network. I completed four internships during this time as well, so my experience is a little bit of a mix of working from unpaid internships or working as a paid employee.”
- “I worked on campus as a resident adviser and it really shaped how I think about my career and connecting with people. Being an RA was sometimes tough because I had to

balance school, work, social life, and advocacy/activism. My supervisors were always super supportive and were willing to help me and push me towards my goals and passions. I made strong connections with my fellow RAs and even my students who I still keep in touch with years later.”

- “Work was often a source of stress since I had to work a lot more than my non-low-income peers.”

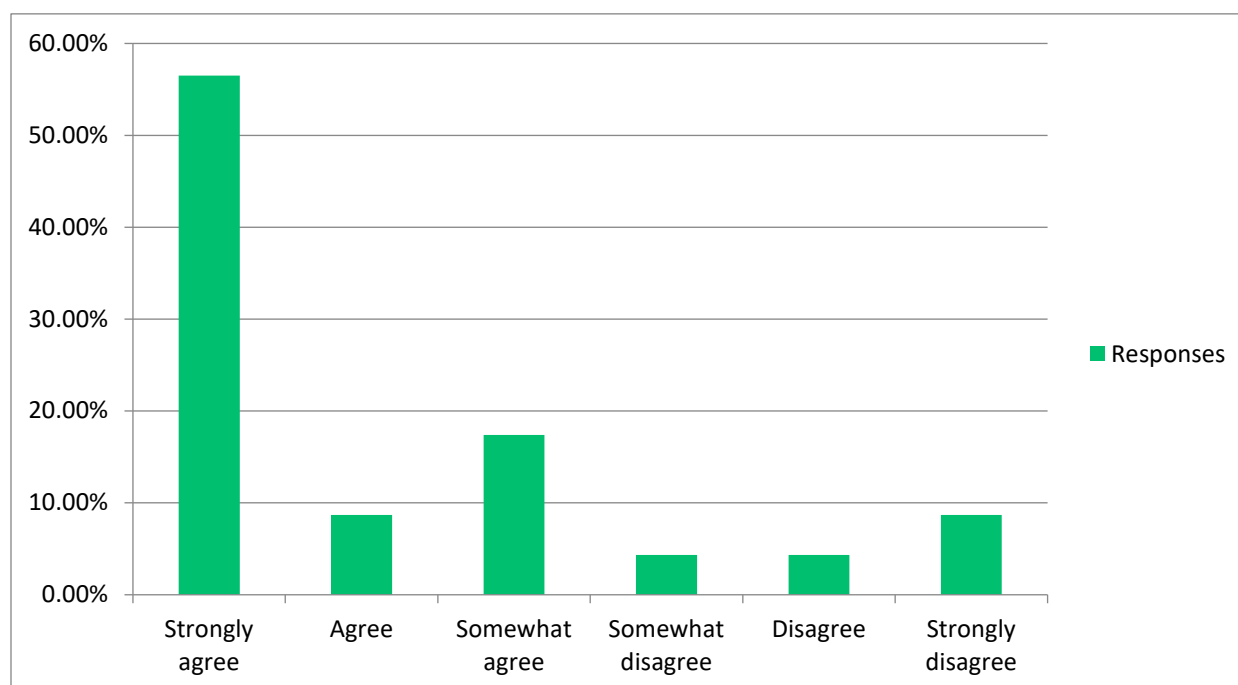


Figure 4.6. Impact of work on first-generation college students.

Service. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Service? (i.e., helping others, advocacy, community service)*

Service involves advocacy and community service. Responses for this theme varied with 34.78% indicating they somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree that service impacted their ability to thrive while in college, meaning that service was not factor on the panelist’s ability to thrive while in college. Strongly agree earned a 30.43% response rate, meaning that

some panelists felt service did have an impact on them thriving while in college. Figure 4.7 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “I did some service during my undergraduate time, but I do not think my experiences were shaped by it.”
- “I think as a first-gen student trying to survive college, helping others was nice and made me feel extremely fulfilled, but this in itself did not help me succeed in my academics. They were side hustles and extracurriculars that kept me emotionally energetic and gave me a reason to wake up in the morning - but I wouldn't exactly say 'thrive'.”
- “My experience was impacted by service through my position as a RA as the job required serving first year on campus students. I specially oversaw 22-24 females in their first year. Helping others was something I enjoyed doing and drove me to explore a new career field in student affairs. I only somewhat agree since I don't see my experience being shaped by this theme as much as other ones.”
- “Service played a huge role in my undergrad experience! my primary means of service was through alternative breaks and days of service (days we would typically have off from class like MLK day). It helped connect me to the broad community and helped instill values like global citizenry! I also was able to take on leadership roles within community service organizations.”

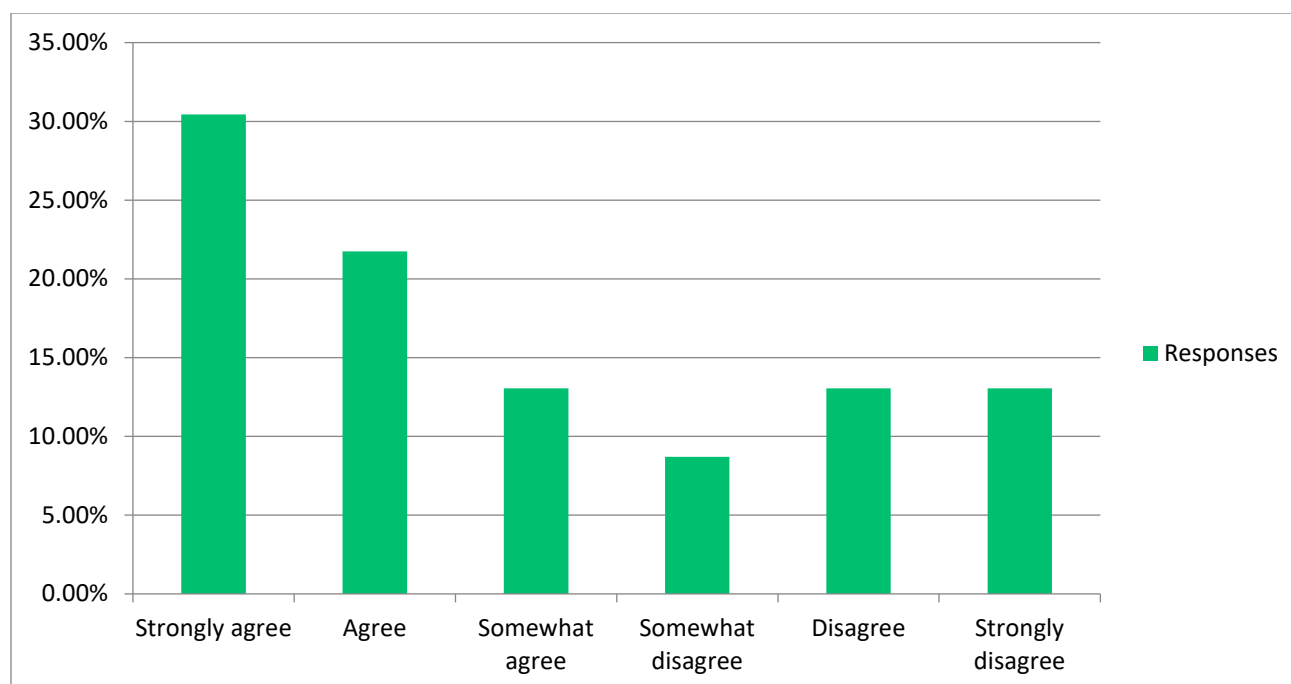


Figure 4.7. Impact of service on first-generation college students.

Financial support. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Financial Support? (i.e., grants, scholarships, other forms of financial assistance)*

Financial Support includes funding for school and other personal needs. The Financial Support theme was strongly in the affirmative with 73.91% of exerts indicating strongly agree that Financial Support impacted their ability to thrive while in college; 8.70% indicated they somewhat disagree. Figure 4.8 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “My college was a safety school and I did not want to attend it, but it was the best choice financially for me. Having the financial support I did through scholarships and grants (especially when study abroad and receiving national grants to fund my study) was critical to my success.”

- “While I still had to take out student loans, I recognize that my loans are not as bad as many other students and am grateful for all the financial assistance I received.”
- “My entire undergraduate experience, except a \$1200 summer loan, was financed by federal/state grants and scholarships. If I didn't want to, I could have not worked. There were times I had financial concerns, but those were due to not understanding how disbursement worked at the beginning of the semesters. Once I knew everything was covered, I was okay.”
- “Academic grants and loans were essential.”
- “My opinion is mixed: I chose a private college for my freshmen year, so it was helpful to receive a merit scholarship for my high school GPA (which was only a 3.0). I think it was \$7,500 each semester and the total cost of the year was \$32,000. I believe I received the state grant which is for private colleges. The next five years were a struggle since my middle-class parents chose not to pay for my education. I did not receive any financial assistance except for a small scholarship from one of my employers (\$600 a semester for a year). My final year of college, I was 24 years old and classified as an independent student. The federal Pell grant and the state grant covered the tuition costs during my final academic semester of University Online.

I missed either several sub-terms (8-week courses) or semesters because I owed a balance to University Online three times. Each were about \$700, but I had no one to help me with this cost. They did not have any assistance for online students unless they made a mistake. I had to take online classes because of the federal limit for students borrow loans each year. The loan amount would not have covered my cost of living, which is why I was working. I only took out loans for my tuition, so I fortunately only ended up with

\$24,000 in debt when I graduated, which was below what was anticipated for my graduating class of 2014 (around the US).”

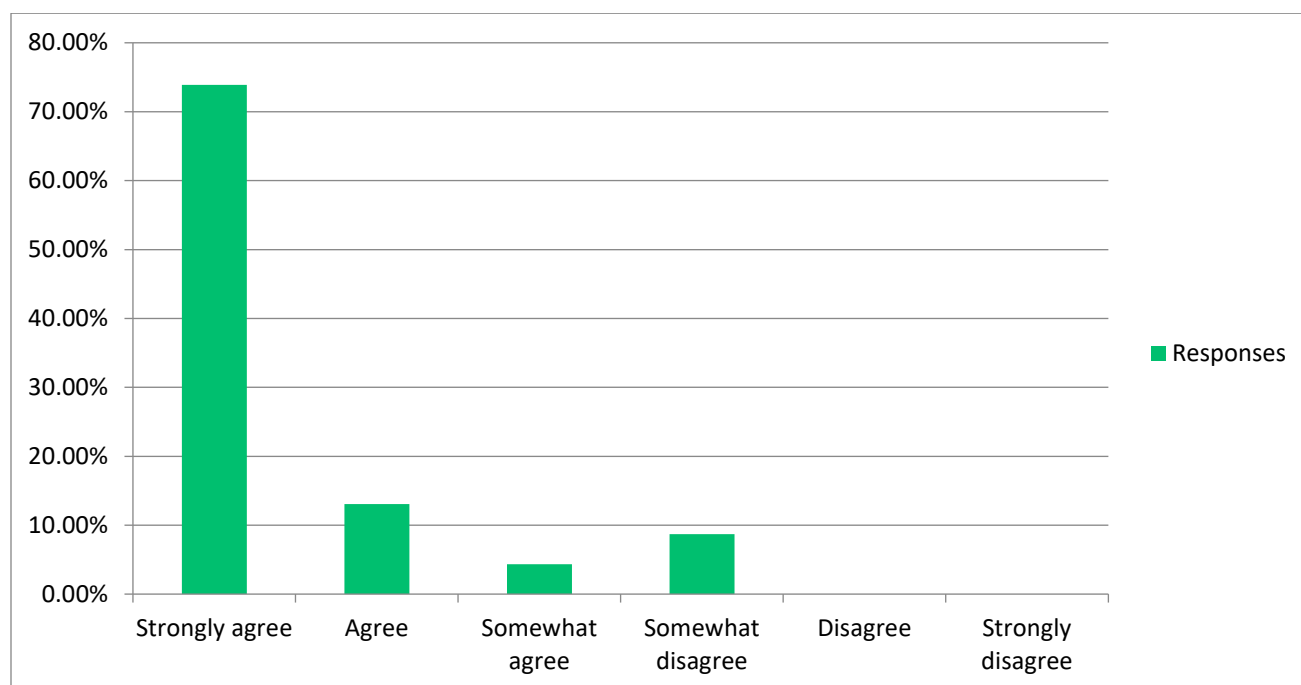


Figure 4.8. Impact of financial support on first-generation college students.

The final question asked panelists to indicate additional themes along with context for suggesting the addition(s). Panelists suggested two themes: Self-starter and Cultural/Identity Development. The contexts provided were as follows:

“Since I was an online student and did not really speak with anyone in Academic Advising, I had to learn how to be a self-starter. I was actually hired as an Academic Advisor two weeks before graduating from University, because I understood how to advise other college students based on my experience. During my final semester, I realized it was going to be difficult to find a job within my field of study (Psychology) unless I did an additional unpaid internship or went on to a graduate degree. I had never thought about pursuing a master’s degree until that final semester. That final semester when I was hired at University started my career in higher education. I served two years

as an Academic Advisor and two years at another college as an Admissions Recruiter.

Next May, I will graduate with a M.Ed in Higher Education.”

and

“Cultural/identity development just because I found myself as a woman of color during my time in undergrad.”

Both themes were included in the third questionnaire for panelists to rate.

Round Three

The last round asked panelists to rate and provide context to their rating for the two new themes recommended during the second round. Next, panelists were asked to rank the ten themes in order of impact on their collegiate experience and provide context to their ranking. Last, panelists were asked to provide recommendations to first-generation college students, colleges and universities, and high schools as they prepare first-generation students to enter and graduate from college. Some panelists opted not to provide context to their ratings or rankings. All 23 panelists addressed the last three questions. Results from round three are included in Appendix H.

Self-starter. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by being a Self Starter? (i.e., driven, motivated, doing things of own volition, results-oriented)*

Being a Self-starter means that one is motivated, driven, and results-oriented. All of the responses received for this theme were in the affirmative with strongly agree being highest at 65.22%. Figure 4.9 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “I was 36 when I graduated with my degree, 19 years after I graduated high school. When I decided to go back to school, it was all on me, I had to push myself to talk to admissions personnel, fill out my financial aid papers, and register for classes. And with the beginning of each term, I had to push myself to keep going, knowing the end result would change my life and my son's life forever, for the better.”
- “I knew there was no backup plan, I had no safety net, my parents didn't have any money to support me beyond 18. This was made very clear my whole childhood. I had goals and no one was going to accomplish them for me. When I would start to get overwhelmed or exhausted my family was always there to support me and remind me why I started in the first place and help me keep going to the finish line.”
- “I think that for me, being a self- starter meant that I worked from my own motivations to do well in school. I sought my own assistance and resources to help me when I was struggling. Not to say that I did it on my own, but my perseverance came from my own goals and interests.”
- “Without my drive I would have failed out of school. I was physically ill my first year, dealing with loss of grandparents, being away from home for the first time. I used my circumstances a fuel rather than sulk and fail. I was so driven towards success I was able to turn it all around once I got clear with myself on what I wanted.”

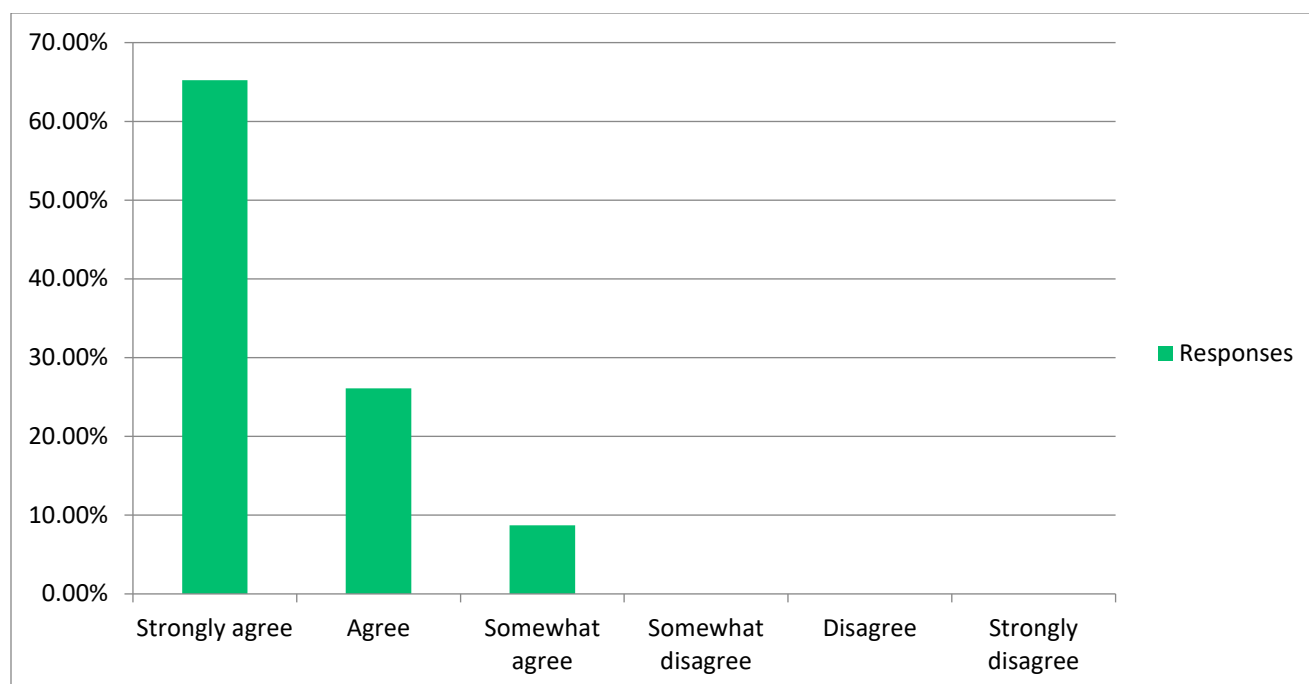


Figure 4.9. Impact of self-starter on first-generation college students.

Cultural/Identity development. *Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Cultural/Identity Development? (i.e., heritage, racial identity, beliefs, value system, ethnic group, personality)*

Cultural/Identity Development involves racial and ethnic identity along with one heritage and value system. A majority of the panelists' responses were in the affirmative with agree being the highest rating at 30.43% while 17.39% either somewhat disagree or disagree that Cultural/Identity Development impacted their ability to thrive as a first-generation college student. Figure 4.10 is a depiction of responses received from panelists. The following responses are samples of expressions received from panelists:

- “I am a white female who has learned more by learning about how others experience there racial and ethnic identities. I understand the privilege I had growing up even if my family does not see it as privilege.”

- “Due to completing an online degree, I never set foot in a classroom, and I never met any of my fellow classmates or instructors. I have no idea of their race, religion, background, etc. To me, they were just my classmates, as I hope I was to them.”
- “I come from a working-class Irish-Catholic family; my family is mixed, though, since my mother's stepfather is Puerto Rican and half my family are Puerto Rican so I grew up in both cultures. I think coming from a poor, working-class white family made me feel ashamed a lot of the time because there's this assumption that if you're poor and white you really must have fucked up because you had all the privileges of being white and you still ended up poor. I think a lot of the time I felt like I had to prove that I wasn't white trash and that I was better than other poor white people who were stupid, racist and all addicts. This was really hard because my family also fit some of those stereotypes. At the same time, though, I am really proud of being Irish and I took lots of pride in the work my ancestors have done and I think my ethnic identity helped me feel some sort of pride about where I come from and wanting to improve it but my racial identity did not.”
- “I used college as a time to explore being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and chose to be out to those I met, rather than just a few close friends like I was in high school. Along with that, I tried to attend as many diverse events and organizations as I could, which I believe helped me become more empathetic to people of backgrounds different than my own. Growing up in a predominantly white state and attending a predominantly white institution made it difficult to learn about other cultures, and I strove to diversify my education as much as I could.”

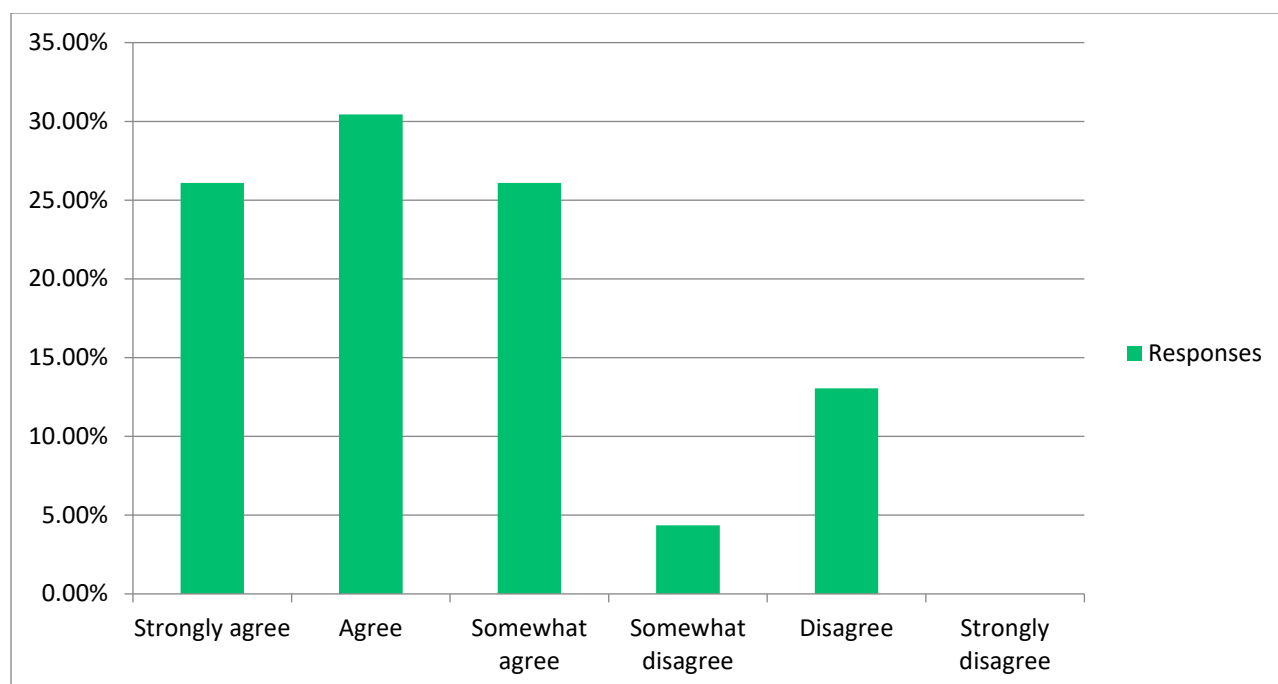


Figure 4.10. Impact of cultural/identity development on first-generation college students.

Rankings. Panelists were presented with the following question pertaining to all themes developed from their previous comments:

Below are the themes developed from your responses during the first two rounds. Please rank the themes in order of impact on your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college with 1 being a significant impact and 10 having little to no impact. Not applicable (NA) is provided as an option in case a theme does not apply to your experience.

Figure 4.11 is depiction of the results. Not applicable was provided as an option because it was clear from previous panelist statements that some themes did not have an impact on their experience. Providing the not applicable option allows for a truer representation of panelist experiences and allows the data to be more accurate.

Figure 4.11 portrays each ranking and theme. The numbers at the bottom are the rankings and not applicable option. Each theme is labeled in the legend with a specific color in order to

clearly identify its position in the rankings. Below, the rankings are reviewed from the top of the figure to the bottom.

As a reminder, this study is not seeking consensus from panelists but does seek to understand the varied experiences of first-generation college students. A review of the data shows being a self-starter, financial support, and finding a passion were selected the most for the highest ranking and were consistently ranked high among the top five themes. Themes consistently ranked low were service, work, and campus resources and programs. Three themes were marked as not applicable by one panelist each: self-starter, work, and financial support.

Panelists were asked to provide context to their rankings. The following responses are samples of context provided by panelists:

- “I based my ranking according to what I believe pushed me to continue my education. While in college, I quickly came to the realization that college was not for everyone. At the end of my first semester, my GPA was 2.18. I graduated high school with a 4.14 GPA. So, after my first semester, I made the choice between dropping out or going full-force in my studies. After being a private school student all my life, the freedom of college life was a total culture shock to me. Since I am a first-generation student, my family could not give me tips or anything that would prepare me for college life. But the emotional support to do whatever made me happy they gave me was pivotal! The rest of the themes played a part in my success, but none were as influential as my own self-discovery and the support of my family and friends.”
- “Without my family I would not have been as motivated to apply schools out of state let alone prestigious east coast liberal arts colleges. Without the financial support I received from the college and loans taken out by family members I would not have been able to

attend even a single year. Those were important cause they got me to college in the first place. 3-6 were the reason I wanted to stay and felt at home on campus. 7-10 were the extra support I needed when I was lost, overwhelmed or wanted to quit.”

- “Self-starter is ranked number one, because I believe I could not have experienced success without being a self-advocate. Financial support in the form of grants and scholarships put me through college. Social networks made my university feel like a home. The rest of the themes were important but not as important as the top three.”
- “The most important thing I gained out of my college experience that allowed me to thrive was finding a group of people who could support me and challenge me to be the best version of myself I could be. Being given the chance to explore my passions and discover what I was interested in helped me think towards my future after college and having people who shared my passions made my experiences worthwhile for me. I was heavily involved in many organizations on campus and relied on other organizations throughout my career for things like financial assistance for study abroad. Without departments and campus resources, I would not have had many of the experiences I did during college. While I valued my ability to work in various departments on campus, and appreciated the financial support for my college career, those ranked lower in their importance to me compared to the social connections I was able to make.”
- “Family is important and was the foundation for a lot of my experience, however, having the solidified money for school allowed me to develop who I am and would become outside of my familial role. Additionally, it allowed to find and define ‘my Blackness’ outside of the definition and perception that I was given by my hometown. Same with

self-starting. It was innate but what got me through was finding myself and having the financial means to do it.”

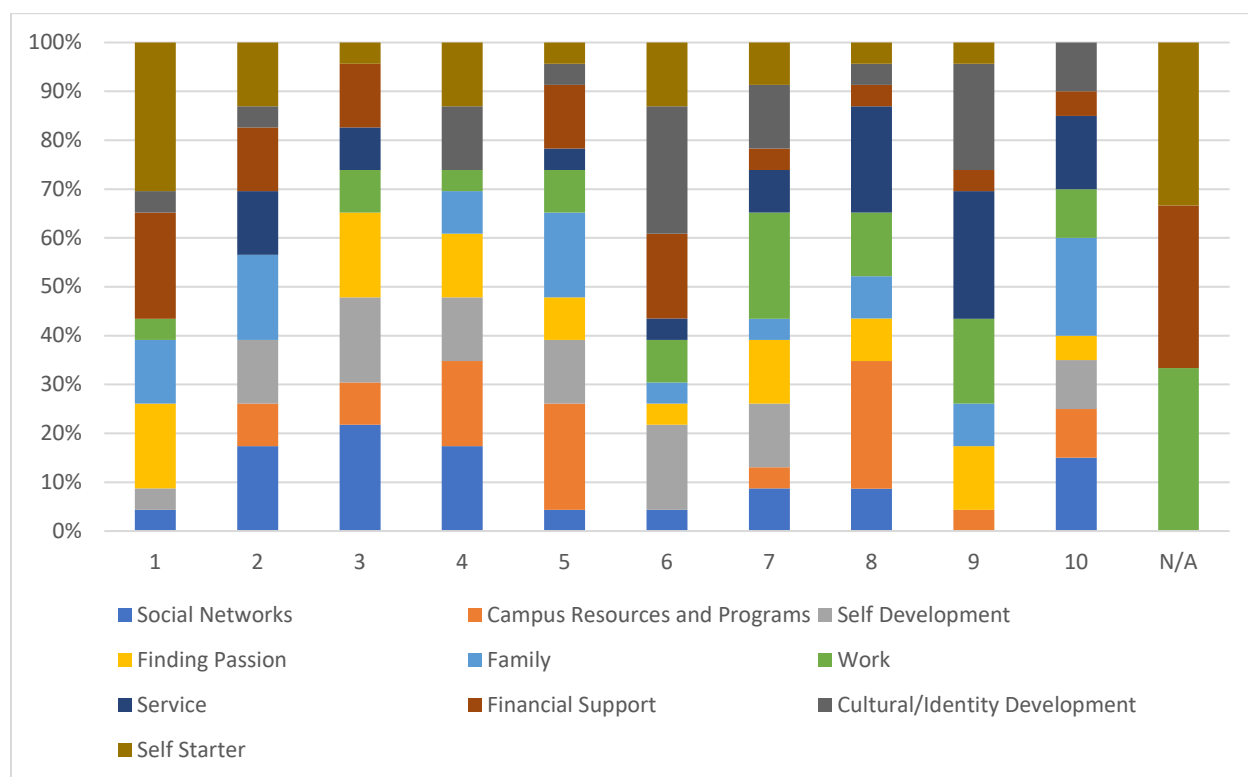


Figure 4.11. Ranking of themes by impact on panelists' ability to thrive while in college.

What advice do you have for first-generation college students entering their first year of college? Subject matter panelists were asked to provide advice to newly minted first-generation college students. Advice was positive and uplifting but also reflected the positive and negative experiences of panelists. It was clear from panelist response that they want to see incoming first-generation college students achieve success. Several themes stood out: use resources, ask for help, prioritize mental and physical health, get a mentor, you belong, join organizations, resist family drama, be proud of who you are but don't be prideful, and there is nothing wrong with being a first-generation college student. Below are samples of advice given; the entire list of responses is included in Appendix H:

- “You will feel out of place, it doesn't mean you do not belong there.”

- “NEVER BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP!!!”
- “Be open to new ideas. Take a class, join an organization or attend an event outside your comfort zone. You never know where you will find your next passion!”
- “Be proud to be first generation and let people know you're first generation. There are many services and resources available to first generation students, so take advantage of them. Secondly, build a support system.”
- “It doesn't matter how long it takes as long as you choose to finish.”

One response speaks volumes when considering the lived experiences of first-generation college students. The statement reads, “There is nothing wrong with being the ‘token’ you had to work hard to earn that spot and are the best for that spot.” Tokenism is often associated with people of color and has a negative connotation to it. This panelist reminded first-generation college students that they belong in college and they worked hard to get to where they are; nothing was handed to them. Advice like this can be helpful to first-generation students especially when they experience tough times throughout their academic journey.

What recommendations do you have for higher education institutions to help first-generation college students succeed in college? Persistence and graduation of first-generation college students is important for institutions of higher learning and the students they serve because it means successful completion of the journey. As first-generation college students who already graduated from college, panelists are uniquely positioned to provide advice to colleges and universities on the best ways to assist first-generation college students with achieving their goal of college completion. Several themes were noticeable when analyzing panelist responses: connect with first-generation students early, allocate funds for first-generation students, teach students higher education lingo, remember first-generation college students are new to college,

share your stories, create a safe space and establish support programs, be aware of institutional barriers, and communicate more than normal to ensure understanding. Below are samples of recommendations provided by panelists; the entire list of responses is included in Appendix H:

- “Be an open book. Don't assume a prospective student understands everything you are telling them. They may say they do, but they don't.”
- “It's not just about paying for the financial aid or having social groups - being first-gen is heavily correlated with poverty and being low-income. Students might get far less emotional support because they can only afford to visit home once a year as opposed to their roommate who visits every two-three months. First-gens might not have the money to afford fancy interview attire which might deter them from finding jobs or being as presentable during job interviews. This population might suffer from food insecurity and might not have trouble securing summer jobs if 1. they're unpaid or 2. they need to support their families at home. Colleges don't seem to think about these things or have budgets for them, so impoverished students can escape financial insecurity with more stability.”
- “Identify and engage these students early. Ideally identify them before they apply, but at least during the application process. Once they are identified, start a communication flow that explains what being first generation means and why the institution is the best place for their success. In regard to actual programs and services, educate staff and faculty on what it means to be first generation. Ensure they understand first generation students in an assets based lens. In addition, establish a dedicated office for first-generation student support. This office should provide mentoring, networking opportunities, academic development, identity development,

and financial support. If the institution has a TRIO SSS program and/or McNair Scholars Program, ensure those programs are not only valued, but also financially supported by the university, since grant funds have many restrictions.”

- “Recognize that first-generation students are a diverse population, with a myriad of identities as well as being first-generation. Supporting first-generation students means working intersectionally to provide support for students. Students should not just attend their institution but should thrive. Breaking down barriers that prevent first-generation students from accessing all parts of institutions is important to their success. Not only do barriers need to be broken down, but the perception of these barriers needs to be eradicated for students to succeed. For example, studying abroad as a first-generation student might be more affordable than students believe, but efforts must be made for students to be aware they are welcomed and able to apply for these opportunities.”
- “We are different and we come with challenges, but that does not make us any less than any other student type. We do not fit under one theory and we should be handled with respect and guidance not set up to fail an already broken system”

What recommendations do you have for high schools who are preparing first-generation college students to succeed in college? Last, panelists were asked to provide advice to secondary schools preparing first-generation students for college. The reality is high schools have a stake in the student’s collegiate outcome because they are a part of the prep work that helps the students access higher education. Proper preparation for the next level of education can make a difference in a student’s overall outcome. Noticeable themes from panelist responses include: create an alumni network, educate parents, build relationships with colleges and

universities, remember your influence, focus on writing and math skill development, affirm that community college is an acceptable option, help students apply to their dream school, allocate funds to help with college visits and application fees, be honest about the college experience, expose students to colleges and universities,, and connect with college access programs. Below are sample recommendations provided by panelists; the entire list of responses is included in Appendix H:

- “Exposure is key. Show students more than the neighboring colleges. Organize campus visits for more than just the seniors and make it a requirement for each student to have visited at least 3 college campuses by the time they graduate. Many students don't go anywhere or don't find a good fit because they have not been exposed. Put more effort and energy into the students who seem unmotivated. They need your support and more importantly need to know that someone believes in them. There are great schools that have open enrollment for those who are academically unstable who simply need a second chance. Also, build relationships with college representatives and offices. Sometimes if a student is not accepted to a school, all it takes is for someone to call or write a letter or email to advocate for them.”
- “1. Preparation needs to start at your level. 2. Students are captive audiences and need cultivating before they get to college. 3. You have the power to create and build or break trust that at the postsecondary level creates a greater level of danger. Simply because we all need each other to succeed and the precursor to each level makes a great impact on the other.”

- “Educate students on what first-generation means. Provide additional academic support and development, especially in writing and math. Focus on developing grit and growth mindsets.”
- “College Prep programs are essential! College can be a lot mentally and it’s is important to have an example before trying new things. I was a part of the TRIO Upward Bound program that helped mold me into a college student during high school. I honestly feel like if I had not had that opportunity I would not have been successful during my undergraduate years or knew how to maneuver a different environment.”
- “Really prepare them, don’t just say apply. Explain the process of going away and the feelings that will come with this. Share your own experiences. Bring in alumni who are a success to share their journey. Let them know it’s ok to ‘fail’ along the way to find yourself!”

Conclusion

The results presented in this chapter answers the research question that guides the study for this dissertation. Data clearly show first-generation college students who thrive while in college and ultimately graduate from college associated the ten themes presented in this chapter with their success in some way. The combination of qualitative and quantitative assessments presented in this chapter provides the insight needed into the lived experiences of first-generation college students and the best ways to support them as they navigate the academic and social terrain of higher education.

Chapter V

Supporting first-generation college students as they journey to complete their college education is an important mission for college administrators to focus on as they endeavor to improve retention and graduation rates. It is true that support for all students is important; however, data collected for this dissertation show that first-generation students require acknowledgement and support beyond that of their non-first-generation peers. This chapter will summarize the findings of the research conducted for this dissertation, discuss the research question as it relates to the data, and connect findings to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter II. Next is a discussion of implications for how high schools and colleges and universities on how they might use the insights gained from this research. Last is a brief presentation of study limitations and guidance for future research.

The Delphi Method was used for this dissertation because it served as the best method to learn from the lived experiences of first-generation college students in the United States who graduated from college. Subject matter panelists were selected through a national search for participations that led to 23 people sharing their experiences. Research was conducted in three rounds where panelists were asked to provide insight on circumstances that impacted their ability to thrive while in college. Through analysis of each round iteration, ten themes were discovered and ranked by panelists; they also provided contextual responses that led to additional perceptions about the data. Last, panelists provided recommendations to high schools and colleges and universities to better prepare students for college level work. Recommendations were made for other first-generation college students as well.

Summary of Findings

This dissertation sought to add to the positive discourse on first-generation college students by addressing the following research question: *What factors influence first-generation college students' ability to graduate college?* Responses provided by subject matter panelists resulted in ten themes determined to influence their ability to graduate college: Social Network, Campus Resources and Programs, Self-development, Finding a Passion, Family, Work, Service, Financial Support, Self Starter, and Cultural/Identity Development.

Using the Delphi Method for this dissertation created a thought-provoking experience for panelists. During each round, panelists reflected on what influenced their ability to thrive while in college. The initial round asked panelists to consider their lived experiences and to share examples of their inspiration and reasons for thriving. The second round presented panelists with themes developed from their first-round responses. The final round presented additional themes and asked for reflective thought as panelists made recommendations for improving work with first-generation students and encouragement for first-generation students.

Round One

The robust information provided during the initial round provide insight into the diverse experiences of panelists. The discourse led to the development of themes used in this dissertation. Beyond the themes, some important statements from panelists should be noted. They shared lived experiences pertaining to becoming parents, choosing an online school over a traditional school, transferring schools, studying abroad, and receiving intellectual validation. These experiences provide a glimpse into the unique lives of panelists and further shows the steps some took to get themselves to graduate, whether purposeful or not.

Round Two

The second round asked panelists to rate and reflect upon the themes developed from their responses during the first round. Panelists ruminated about their lived experiences as students by discussing supportive supervisors, manifested communities, educational opportunity programs, coming into their own as a person, overcoming financial and familial barriers, and much more. Inimitable experiences of panelists are a reminder that no two students are alike even when they are first-generation. For example, some students of color were focused on their cultural upbringing while others were not.

Round Three

Round Three asked panelists to continue reflecting upon their experience as a first-generation college student who thrived in college. Panelists reflected upon two additional themes added from responses to Round Two, ranked all ten themes, then provided robust recommendations to colleges and universities, high schools, and other first-generation college students. The addition of two themes resulted in varying responses from panelists. For instance, 100% of panelists agreed that being a self-starter had an impact on their ability to thrive while in college. The majority of panelists felt cultural/identity development impacted their ability to thrive; however, four panelists did not feel that this impacted their experience. One panelist noted they did not consider their culture or personal identity until they enter graduate school.

Themes

The factors that influenced first-generation college students' ability to graduate college include:

Self-starter.

- Being a self-starter was highly ranked amongst the ten themes as many panelists stated they would not have graduated college had they not been results-oriented, determined, and driven.
- Failure was not an option for panelists; being without a back-up plan and not wanting to return home a disappointment made panelists focus on their end goal.

Financial support.

- Majority of panelists indicated that financial support through scholarships and grants made it so they could graduate college.
- Several panelists served as resident advisors, which served as a source of income making their education more affordable.

Finding a passion.

- Finding one's passion, for some panelists, meant discovering their major and career paths.
- A few panelists shared they discovered their passion by participating in things that were new to them or through connections with their peers.

Social network.

- First-generation students were able to develop support systems and a sense of belonging by joining organizations and athletic teams.
- First-generation students found a safe place with other first-generation college students, which allowed them to share and receive support when dealing with similar circumstances.

Self-development.

- Fear of failure served as a source of encouragement that assisted panelists with focusing on their personal development.
- Exploration of self, learning new things, and academic development (like professional development) all serve as methods of empowerment leading to growth for panelists.

Cultural/Identity development.

- Panelists learned about themselves by connecting to their personal and cultural identities while in college adding to their deep appreciation for their ancestors, personal identities, and global citizenship.
- One panelist shared the importance of living their truth by choosing to share their sexual orientation, which was very different than how they lived their life with family. This means panelists were able to develop a strong sense-of-self through their various interactions.

Family.

- Interactions with nuclear family was not always positive but, in many ways, served as a catalyst for students who want to avoid the same financial and educational shortfalls as their family.
- Students were able to create familial connections with peers and other social groups that served as a source of support and encourage throughout their time in school.

Campus resources and programs.

- Panelists learned about the collegiate system from support programs and faculty who often served as mentors to students even after they graduated college.

- Some institutions lacked proper support for first-generation college students causing some panelists to feel disconnected, unsupported, and at times invisible to the campus community.

Work.

- Many panelists indicated a need to work while in school; some indicated working more than 20 hours a week and at time multiple jobs.
- In some cases, panelists indicated that work negatively impacted their educational experience because of working multiple hours and not being able to focus on classes and social experiences.

Service.

- Some panelists found service to be important to their connection with the campus community while others did not feel service impacted their collegiate experience.
- Advocacy served as an overwhelming aspect of service. In some cases, advocacy was for first-generation college students in general and in other cases it was personal advocacy; either way panelists learned the power of their voice and actions.

Recommendations

Colleges and Universities

- Panelists recommended colleges and universities know their students especially first-generation students. Knowing the students means schools will have grasp on the barrier's students face daily and are able to see the individuality within each student.
- Helping first-generation students access campus resources is another important recommendation from panelists. Panelists further stated that access to resources

means institutions should invest money and time into programs that will support first-generation college students.

- Feeling safe on campus is significant to the first-generation student experience.

Panelists encouraged colleges and universities to create safe spaces for first-generation students as a way to escape their daily realities, lean on students and mentors with similar backgrounds, and to learn to navigate higher education.

High Schools

- With finances serving as an important aspect of the collegiate journey, some panelists recommended that high schools encourage first-generation students to take college classes while in high school to help limit the financial impact first-generation students often feel when attending college.
- Involving parents in the college enrollment process is among the recommendations from panelists.
- High schools should define the term first-generation for students.
- Panelists recommended that high schools should help students to learn money management early to help alleviate some of the financial stressors encountered by students while in college.

First-generation College Students

- Panelists encouraged first-generation students to be confident in their abilities, seek out new opportunities, and to remember they earned their acceptance into college.
- Consistently, panelists urged current first-generation student to seek out resources, ask for help, and find balance.

- Students were reminded not to abandon their goal of graduating; when needed they should remind themselves why they started the journey. Along with this advice were remarks that students will encounter obstacles along the way but giving up should not be considered.

Community Cultural Wealth

Community cultural wealth refers to the capital in underrepresented and underserved communities (Yosso, 2005). For the purposes of this dissertation, community cultural wealth is discussed in relation to first-generation college students and the capital they have when they enter college. Literature often refers to the lack of capital within the first-generation community because they are seldom looked at from a positive perspective. The reality is, this population enters college with capital obtained from various familial and community interactions that when applied to their collegiate experiences often make the difference in whether they graduate or stop out. Statements collected from study participants make this clear. Community cultural wealth encompasses six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. Each form of capital is discussed in detail in Chapter II. Data discussed in Chapter IV are analyzed according to the six forms of capital from the community wealth model.

Aspirational capital refers to a student's desire to achieve despite the barriers they encounter (Yosso, 2005). Being enrolled in school serves as one of many ways that first-generation students position themselves to overcome barriers. This form of capital directly addresses several themes that developed from data collection. Subject matter panelists ranked being a self-starter highest amongst the ten themes and described themselves as being motivated, pushing to achieve their goals, an advocate for self, and simply not having a plan if they failed. Self-development includes gaining a sense of self, using capital learned from working prior to

and while in college, pride in personal and cultural identity, discovering their passion for careers and service. Without work, students felt they would not have been able to attend school; several also mentioned however the added stress work provided because it took away from studying and campus involvement.

Linguistic capital entails communication in forms that are culturally relevant to students and their experiences (Yosso, 2005). Social networks, family, and cultural/identity development are themes that best represent this form of capital. Study panelists discussed the work ethics they learned from family and mentioned receiving support from peers with similar academic and ethnic backgrounds, which made things easier for them as they navigated the academic and social landscape of their institutions. In many cases, panelists referred to their family's inability to understand their academic experiences but mentioned commitment to work or things learned from family while growing up. Examples provided by panelists pertaining to communication included conversation, cultural connections, and learning from the actions of others. These examples differ from family and social capital because they refer to the way individuals communicate culturally and adds to one's understanding in the form of cultural linguistic and cultural cognition (Sharifian, 2017).

Familial capital pertains to connections among kin (nuclear family) and chosen or extended family; it also includes examples set on being concerned for others and community and togetherness (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital is modeled through several themes in this study. The most obvious theme is family. This theme speaks to the blood relations and chosen family, connections through sororities and fraternities, athletic teams, etc. Many of the friend groups are developed through social networks, campus resources, and programs, some of which also provide financial support. In some cases, students become involved with service opportunities

that allows them to contribute to their global community. This differs from social capital because familial capital requires personal connection and social capital pertains to how one interacts with another or are socialized into a community. Students can be friends with someone but not feel a familial connection with them. The last theme reflected in familial capital is cultural/identity development. Panelists referred to learning more about themselves through the many connections they made through organizations, friend groups, exposure to others with similar cultural backgrounds.

Social capital refers the networks and resources students build as a means of support and encouragement (Yosso, 2005). Social capital literally refers to social networks students build through their various campus involvements and service opportunities. Furthermore, campus resources and programs add to those various networks in the form of mentoring, advising, and faculty support, and membership in educational access organizations such as TRIO. Social capital can be built through work experiences as well. For example, students working on campus gain a support system in campus supervisors and peer coworkers. Additionally, students build professional networks by working internships. Service opportunities provide connections as well. Students often connect with the communities they service and their peers and advisors participating in service trips.

Navigational capital recognizes the difficulty students have navigating an educational system that was not created for them (Yosso, 2005). Thus, navigational capital speaks to students' ability to navigate their various colleges and universities. Clearly the panelists in this study were able to successfully navigate their schools since they ultimately graduated; however, that does not mean they did not encounter obstacles. One panelist wrote about being hired as an advisor at their alma mater after learning to advocate for themselves and learning the academic

system. This panelist shared this as an example of what it means to be a self-starter. Social networks and campus resources and programs served as another means to help students maneuver their campus. Programs geared toward first-generation students along with supportive faculty and staff help panelists achieve their goal of graduating. Noticeably absent from themes relevant to navigational capital are families. In many instances, panelists discussed their family's inability to help them navigate higher education because they lacked the experience and capital to provide the support needed in the way their non-first-generation peers were.

Resistant capital is overcoming situations and systems that are not equal or equitable by challenging systems to bring about transformative change (Yosso, 2005). Resistant capital is shown within the themes in various capacities. For example, the financial support first-generation students receive whether through work or scholarships and grants provide students the opportunity to better their lives and those of their families. The connections made on campus through their social networks and campus resources and programs help students to challenge a system not built for their success. Through mentoring, advising, organizational involvement, among other things, students are able to pass along knowledge gained through personal experiences similar to families or the Posse Scholars program discussed in Chapter II (Guinier, 2015); these experiences further develop students' connections to the cultures and personal identities. Being a self-starter helped some panelists learn to advocate for themselves which allowed them to challenge the educational system they were members of. Thus, resistant capital helped panelists overcome the various barriers they encountered while in school.

Discussion

Themes that emerged from this study serve as a reminder that first-generation college students can graduate from college when appropriate resources are in place to support their

journey. Panelists shared detailed accounts about how they focused on their personal success while also serving as a source of strength and reassurance for other first-generation college students. Furthermore, belonging, strengths, resilience, and thriving were reinforced through panelist statements as they wrote about lived experiences with Greek organizations, athletic teams, living and learning communities, volunteer and service opportunities, and connecting with peers who identified as first-generation.

Studying successful first-generation college students is important for first-generation college students, secondary schools, and colleges and universities. Colleges and universities can no longer afford to ignore their needs. A focus on improving retention, persistence, and graduation rates means schools need to learn more about the students they admit and avoid lumping students together because it is the easiest way to do the job. Panelists in this study were adamant that schools need to know they are individuals and a community. This means first-generation college students bring many identities to campuses; they should not be forced to choose. A panelist expressed this same sentiment by writing that colleges and universities need to

Recognize that first-generation students are a diverse population, with a myriad of identities as well as being first-generation. Supporting first-generation students means working intersectionally to provide support for students. Students should not just attend their institution but should thrive. Breaking down barriers that prevent first-generation students from accessing all parts of institutions is important to their success. Not only do barriers need to be broken down, but the perception of these barriers needs to be eradicated for students to succeed. For example, studying abroad as a first-generation student might be more affordable than students believe, but efforts must be made for students to be aware they are welcomed and able to apply for these opportunities.

Collecting data on first-generation students would help colleges and universities to know who is enrolled. I am often perplexed at the difficulty colleges and universities have with assessing data on first-generation college students. Simply adding a question to the college

application would help improve the quality of information schools gather on first-generation college students. Imagine colleges and universities being able to determine additional financial need for students because they assessed data to learn that a certain percentage of first-generation students are also low-income. This information could help institutions seek funding from donors to cover expenses for first-generation students. Data are important for colleges and universities; they are used to assess retention, persistence, enrollment, and graduation numbers. Data should also be used to have an intelligible depiction of students on campus.

First-generation college students not only need to feel comfortable on campus, they also need to feel safe on campus. Psychological safety, a term coined by Amy Edmondson, pertains to the performance and effectiveness of groups (Edmondson, 1999). Additionally, psychological safety is the ethos of teams or groups that allows guarded “interpersonal risk taking” individually and collectively to allow people to grow and develop (p. 354). The term Psychological safety typically has a business focus; however, it is a great term to use when discussing the safety and comfort of first-generation college students on college campuses, which supports the self-development theme.

Stuber (2011) and Stieha (2010) discussed the marginalization of white first-generation college students. A panelist in this study discussed the same concern noting that, “it felt like all the campus resources were reserved for minorities. All the white students had families with cultural capital and money, so the white first-generation student fell in the gap.” Colleges and universities must determine a way to connect all students to all services. Assuming that white students have the capital needed to be successful means colleges and universities have associated race with success and wealth. That is a very xenophobic mentality that should not be displayed in institutions that purport to be supporters of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Furthermore, it

prevents the psychological safety that first-generation college students need because assumptions are made about their needs rather speaking with them about their needs and connecting them with services.

Faculty and staff support are an important part of first-generation college students' academic journey (Collier & Morgan, 2008; McKay & Estrella, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Many panelists discussed mentoring relationships that developed with faculty and staff who saw their potential and challenged them to improve academically. Approachable faculty are essential as many first-generation students deal with the impostor syndrome and are afraid to discuss concerns because they do not want to be viewed as incompetent by their peers and faculty (Collier & Morgan, 2008). The very idea of mentoring from faculty creates a safe learning environment that allows first-generation students to come into their own as students and members of the campus community.

Academic support programs create safe spaces for first-generation students leading to connections with campus staff and personal growth and development of first-generation students. Staff connections are crucial to first-generation college students' sense of belonging like their connection with faculty. Mentoring and tutoring programs; living and learning communities; student organizations; and other leadership and personal development opportunities aid students in their development and adds to the feeling safety and belonging on campus. Staff have the ability to connect with students in a way that builds student confidence. First-generation students need those type of connections and safety so they can be vulnerable when necessary.

Academic advising along with several positions within Student Affairs such as deans, student activities, international student services, study abroad, career services, etc. have the ability to nurture the growth and development of first-generation college students through their

varied interactions. While data indicates that first-generation college students are able to find intrinsic value to complete their education from within, it often takes the care and concern of college professional to show them they possess the skillset to reach their potential. Being a self-starter is within each first-generation student however they often need to be reminded they can handle the journey they face. One study participant noted that the support they received from a campus program, “helped us through our academic journey.” The us refers to students who participated in the program. It is important for staff to understand the role and impact they too are able have on first-generation college students.

Panelists were clear that their nuclear families often made their academic journey more challenging. This is where colleges and universities can partner with high schools to improve parent’s understanding of higher education and the journey their student is taking. Parents should be educated on the application process, entrance exams, placement tests, federal aid, and scholarships, etc. It is wrong to assume that parents who attended college remembers all aspects of higher education; just the same, making assumptions about first-generation student families is equally wrong, which is an indication of cultural mismatch (Harackiewicz et al., 2014). Educating first-generation families about the collegiate process will help to improve college enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation overall.

One of the biggest issues in higher education are policies created to make things easier for faculty and staff but instead become barriers to students. Some examples of unnecessary barriers include requiring students to live on campus, high cost of books, lack of student employment positions, limited faculty availability, lack of guidance on college processes, and use of acronyms to name a few. Being mindful of barriers that impede students’ ability to successfully navigate higher education will help first-generation college

students move forward. Additionally, it will improve students' feeling of safety as they work with various campus departments. It is unfair to assume that first-generation students understand the processes colleges and universities use. Educating students on the processes and testing processes for barriers with students could make things less difficult for students. Faculty and staff cannot continue to make processes easy for themselves at the expense of students; the education system is about the students and should be set up to help students be successful.

Colleges and universities should avoid assumptions that they are doing first-generation students a favor by admitting them into their institutions and further assuming that putting them with non-first-generation students will help acclimate them to higher education. There is a notion in higher education that implies that merely educating first-generation students and students of color they will receive a much needed hand up because they are incapable of educating themselves. They are often considered the "other" or an outsider who needs the help of non-first-generation students or white students to help socialize them. It is akin to Native Americans being called savages because their way of living was different from white people when the United States was first colonized. Certainly, there are things first-generation students will gain by attending school but there is also plenty they can add to the environment. The presence of first-generation students on campus will improve non-first-generation students' cultural capital and that of faculty and staff. Furthermore, first-generation students remind their peers of their privilege as they work through the barriers they face while managing the academy. Helping their peers adds to the psychological safety of first-generation students because it allows them to be exposed in a safe way that adds to their ability to thrive as campus community members. Furthermore, it should be recognized

that first-generation students bring something to campus that other students do not. Last, as Student Affairs professionals engage, support, and cultivate first-generation students, they must take time to consider what first-generation students bring to their institution all while not patronizing the students.

More colleges and universities should do away with college entrance exams. Guinier (2015) discussed the cultural disparities associated with the exams and the impact on students of color. With students of color serving as the highest proportion of first-generation college students, it seems only plausible that completely revamping the college entrance exam system to eliminate the cultural bias associated with the exams would help more first-generation students with the college enrollment process. Another option is simply eliminating the requirement for entrance exams like some schools have already done. Several study participants discussed the importance of college preparation and even the support first-generation students need for the ACT/SAT. Eliminating the need for college entrance exams eases the stress first-generation college students experience prior to starting school and mitigates some of the impostor syndrome students enter college with.

Many colleges and universities host various forms of programming with the intention of increasing institutional visibility and bringing alumni and families to campus. During those sessions, schools should host gatherings for current first-generation college students and first-generation students who graduated college are able to connect. This is a great opportunity to create mentoring opportunities and increase donors who have interest in supporting first-generation students. Alumni and advancement offices should develop giving opportunities geared toward first-generation students. The influence that donations will have on first-generation students will be tremendous thus providing the school the ability to speak about the

tangible impact donations are making on student lives and the institution. A study panelist also recommends hosting sessions during parent weekends specifically for parents of first-generation students; it allows the teaching and information gathering to continue while their student is enrolled and connects other first-generation student families with one another as added support. Families of alumni who are first-generation would be an excellent addition to this gathering. Institutional advertisements increase the applicant pool yearly. Larger colleges and universities with large sport programs receive additional visibility through television endorsements as well. Using the various marketing techniques, colleges and universities should begin to tell the success stories of first-generation students. The more the success stories are highlighted, the more first-generation students will feel they are members of the community. To highlight the scholastic achievements of current students and alumni speaks volumes to families of first-generation college students whose families only introduction to their college experience may be through marketing ventures. A focus on athletes who are first-generation college students who are overcoming the barriers they experience while in school through the support of coaches, administrators, and teammates simply says “you are welcome here.” A study panelist put it best: “There’s nothing greater than to have a success story for both the students and the institution.”

While securing donations to support first-generation students is important, it is also important to be sure those funds are directed toward the true needs of students. For instance, colleges and universities could develop family housing for students who are parents. Additionally, childcare facilities could be added to campuses who need them so first-generation students who are parents do not have to travel far for childcare or pay unreasonable costs for services for their family. Donations could address food insecurity as

one study panelist points out. Some internships are unpaid, which prevents students, especially first-generation students who are also low-income, from taking advantage of opportunities that will give them experience in their field. Also, donations have the potential of providing income for first-generation students who are work low pay or no pay internships. Additionally, donations help first-generation college students' study abroad. Financial support in these areas would add to the psychological safety of first-generation students and help them to gain access to their same resources as their counterparts.

High schools must remember that they are partners in the collegiate academic journey and can help develop the psychological safety of first-generation students. Working with educational access organizations to help first-generation college students learn about college and visit campuses is important. I recognize that high schools may not have funding to support college applications and campus visits; however, there are community partners and higher education institutions who would fund opportunities if high schools asked. Furthermore, high schools need to introduce all students to the idea of going to college, and not just those with high grade point averages. It is demeaning to assume that only students with high grade point averages are successful in college. This adds to first-generation students feeling inferior to their peers. As someone who has worked in higher education for many years, I have seen students with low grade point averages in high school achieve high scholastic honors in college.

Additionally, secondary schools need to create classes specifically to assist seniors with the college enrollment process, ask different higher education professionals to speak in class, and bring alumni to discuss their experience as college students and their careers. In particular, ask first-generation college students who are currently enrolled and those who graduated from college to speak in the class and mentor students. Teachers and administrators should speak

about their college experiences as well. The sooner students are introduced to the college enrollment process and start thinking about majors and careers, the better. Schools should prioritize educating students and families about the collegiate process the way they prioritize college entrance exams and mandated state testing. Secondary schools must do more to assist students and funding must be granted to help with the process.

Curricula focused on preparing students for college would help college bound students to be better prepared for college level work (Reid & Moore, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1996; Unverferth et al., 2012). There are several ways to go about this. First, secondary schools can partner with colleges and universities to assist students with earning college credit while in high school. Classes could be offered in secondary schools, online, and on college campuses. Second, secondary schools can offer advance placement courses and international baccalaureate programs. These programs prepare students for the academic rigor of college level work. Third, partnering with educational opportunity programs such as TRIO would help students to learn more about the collegiate process, get introduced to college level coursework, and visit various college campuses. Furthermore, pre-college programs to help students connect with college level educational opportunity programs that can continue supporting students while enrolled in college. Many panelist comments discussed the importance of educational opportunity programs.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that first-generation college students are enrolling in for-profit institutions at a higher rate than their counterparts (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Redford & Hoyer, 2017). Recently, the media has been filled with stories about the closing of for-profit schools, as well as high student loan default rates (Huth, 2019; Kelderman, 2018, September 29; Keldermann, 2018, December 6; Looney & Yannelis, 2019; Puzzanghera & White, 2016). Knowing that several for-profit schools have

closed and have accreditations that differ from non-profit schools, secondary schools must begin sharing the truth about student experiences and outcomes. It is unrealistic to believe first-generation college students will understand accreditation concerns, defaulting on student loans, or other issues plaguing for-profits without having it explained to them. Secondary schools are not helping their students to make the best decisions for their academic future by avoiding such an important and noteworthy conversation.

Colleges and universities need to gain clarity about why first-generation college students are drawn to for-profit institutions. First-generation students are being enticed to attend for-profit schools, even with abysmal student outcomes, because they do not know how to research graduation rates. What model are for-profits using to convince first-generation students their institution is the right choice? What changes can non-profit colleges and universities make so their campuses are more inviting and help first-generation students know they belong? How do for-profit schools make first-generation students feel safe in their programs? Non-profit colleges and universities cannot continue to complain about outcomes of first-generation college students while continuing to do the same things they always have done. The system needs to change, and colleges and universities need to see the value of having first-generation students enrolled in their schools.

Finances have a huge impact on the experiences of first-generation college students. Several panelists discussed the need for financial support to get through school including work and aid to fund their schooling. One way that panelists were able to obtain financial support was by becoming Resident Assistants. The role provides funding for their housing; allows the first-generation students to remain connected to peers and campus; develops leadership skills; builds a family unit with residents; and more. The role of a Resident Assistant reflects all ten themes in a

variety of ways as well. As colleges and universities consider ways to connect, engage, and support first-generation students, it is important to learn more about the students who work on campus in various capacities. Training and support of Resident Assistants and other student employees is an excellent way to help first-generation students understand higher education while also improving persistence, retention, and graduation rates. Furthermore, college employers can use their time with first-generation students to learn more about their experiences to discover what they can add to the academic environment.

Results from this study has shown that first-generation college students possess the skillset needed to graduate college thus refuting the deficit model. Secondary schools should build a stable academic foundation that prepares first-generation college students for college. College and universities should provide the support and structure first-generation students need to complete the academic journey. Themes developed from the contributions of study participations clearly demonstrate first-generation college students dedication and fortitude to completing college despite the various barriers they face throughout the journey. What matters to these students is that they complete; it is up to academic professionals to remind them that they have the ability to succeed in college and that they in fact belong. Additionally, academic professionals who were first-generation college students should share their experience as another way to refute the deficit model, which will lead to more first-generation college students graduating from college.

Limitations

There are three limitations of this study. The limitations are as follows:

1. As with most Delphi studies, the number of participants was small. However, it should also be noted that, unlike most Delphi studies, attrition was virtually nonexistent and panelists remained engaged throughout.
2. Because this research was conducted electronically, panelists could not be asked to provide clarity to their varying statements or expound upon their experiences with greater detail.
3. The modified Delphi Method used for this study limited the number of rounds used to collect data from panelists. Part of the reason for this limitation was to ensure the continuity of panelists by respecting the amount of time they were asked to devote to the study.

Future Research

The insights gained from the panelists who participated in this study are crucial to future research opportunities. Future research on first-generation college students can continue to add to the positive discourse on the population by studying what motivates current first-generation college students to remain in college. Furthermore, turning data from this dissertation into a national study to verify the impact of each theme on a greater population of first-generation college students who graduated college would be a great addition to literature on first-generation students. To further assist first-generation college students, future research is warranted to discover why first-generation college students did not graduate college, seek insight on how the decision to leave school impacted their lives, and learn what colleges and universities could have done to convince the students to remain in school. Panelist statements pertaining to the family theme made it clear that familial interactions and support were not always positive. A study involving families of first-generation college students would provide understanding of the

barriers families face as they attempt to support their student and insight into what they know about college, thus providing important direction for colleges and universities and high schools who are seeking to educate families on college expectations. Lastly, research on the psychological safety of first-generation college students will add to the discourse on their sense of belonging on college campuses.

More research is needed on the motivations for and experiences of first-generation college students attending for-profit schools. Additionally, analysis of loan default rates and employment outcomes for first-generation students would provide insight into whether for-profit schools are truly a good option for first-generation students. Further, a study assessing what students and parents know about the college enrollment process would add to existing literature. This information will help schools of all types to learn more about the information families and students need to have a clearer understanding of the academic process. Moreover, this information will help clarify why students are choosing for-profit schools while having limited information.

Regardless of the direction future research takes, I recommend researchers include a qualitative component in their study designs to allow the many voices of first-generation college students to be heard. The varying experiences of this population will provide awareness and clarity that is needed within higher education. Many of first-generation college students feel ignored or overlooked. Allow them to speak their truth rather than telling them the “truth” researchers feel comfortable presenting.

Impact on Panelists

Without the willingness of panelists to share their lived experiences, this dissertation study would not have been possible. After data collection concluded, I was contacted by a few of

the panelists to thank me for including them in my study. They further shared that deep reflection had a profound impact on them. One panelist noted that the introspective nature of the study reminded them why they decided to work in higher education. Others stated they were reminded of things they encountered that ultimately helped them to be in a better place today. I appreciated the thoughtful insight panelists shared about the impact the study had on them personally.

Impact on Researcher

As an educator working in a higher education setting, I find the work to be profoundly important to students. While education is my passion, first-generation college students have become my reason for staying the course. This dissertation helped me to see the impact of my work from a different lens. My academic career background started as a high school teacher but extended into higher education. The lived experiences shared by panelists reminded me of the importance my allyship has on their funding and access to services. Furthermore, I was able to see the need for advocating for first-generation students in various forms because it is apparent from statements provided in this study that some students feel invisible. I want first-generation students to know I see them and I will continue to be one of their advocates.

As a scholar focused on leading and changing organizations, I am confident this dissertation will make a positive impact on the way colleges and universities serve first-generation college students. Furthermore, as colleges and universities consider the implications of this work, they will be able to partner with secondary schools to begin more impactful work earlier in the academic journey. More first-generation college students will realize their dream of degree attainment because resources and support will be available to them and they will be better equipped to handle the barriers they will grapple with while on their academic journey.

Conclusion

First-generation students' lives matter. Remembering how the work of secondary schools and colleges and universities shape the experiences and outcomes of this population is vitally important. This dissertation serves as a reminder that first-generation college students can and do thrive while in college; they graduate college also. By changing the deficit narrative to a positive message and simply engaging students the way they deserve more first-generation students will attain their goal of degree completion and feel safety while pursuing their dream.

If higher education truly intends to improve attrition, persistence, and graduation numbers for first-generation college students, it is necessary to change the conversation to discover what has worked for college graduates who are first-generation college students. First-generation college students deserve an optimistic outlook on their education. Educators cannot continue to encourage them in their face and discredit them behind their backs. Change is necessary; this dissertation leads the charge.

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Appendix

Appendix A: IRB Application and Approval

1. Name and mailing address of Principal Investigator(s):

Ashley Benson

For faculty applications, Co-Principal Investigator(s) name(s):

2. Academic Department: Leadership and Change PhD

3. Departmental Status: Student

4. Phone Number: (a) Work (b) Home

5. Name of research advisor: Dr. Jon Wergin

6. Name & email address(es) of other researcher(s) involved in this project:

a) Name of Researcher(s)

NA

b) E-mail address(es)

NA

7. Project Title: The Impact Resilience, Thriving, and Strengths had on First-Generation College Students' Ability to Graduate College: A Delphi Study

8. Is this project federally funded: No

Source of funding for this project (if applicable): NA

9. Expected starting date for data collection: February 2018

10. Expected completion date for data collection: April 2018

11. Project Purpose(s): (Up to 500 words)

The purpose of the proposed Delphi Study is to postulate changing dialogue on first-generation college students from deficit-based to positive (Greenwald, 2012). Many families are seeking better employment opportunities by enrolling in college at higher rates than ever before. It is my belief that by reframing the conversation on first-generation college students, future students, their families, and colleges and universities will be able to see first-generation students as resilient individuals who will thrive in college while incorporating a variety of strengths. The proposed project will involve asking recent college graduates to reflect upon their recent collegiate experience as first-generation college students. The proposed research will seek to answer the following research question: How have first-generation college students' resilience, thriving, and strengths impacted their ability to graduate college?

12. Describe the proposed participants- age, number, sex, race, or other special characteristics. Describe criteria for inclusion and exclusion of participants. Please provide brief justification for these criteria. (Up to 500 words)

The selection of panel experts is critical to the proposed study. I will use a pre-screening survey (included for review) to select the appropriate experts for the study. The survey will ask

potential experts to provide demographic information, academic information such as if they are first-generation college students, type of institution(s) they attended and graduated from, and college graduation year; also, potential experts will rate their comfort level with the internet and SurveyMonkey (Franklin & Hart, 2007). Experts should be within the five years of graduating from a four-year college or university, a first-generation college student, passionate about the experiences of first-generation college students, and at least 18 years old. Race, gender, and sex are inconsequential. No experts will be recruited from the College of Wooster, where I currently work.

I propose to select 20 to 25 participants for the proposed Delphi Study.

13. Describe how the participants are to be selected and recruited. (Up to 500 words).

Study participants sought via social media, professional/personal networking, emails, and professional organizations. I am a member of several social groups on social media that will garner a variety of respondents for the proposed study. Potential respondents are asked to complete the pre-screening questionnaire. The following message will be used initially to recruit study participants:

Dear College Graduate,

My name is Ashley Benson, I am currently conducting a research study for my PhD dissertation at Antioch University. Specifically, my research is focused on first-generation college students' ability to graduate college despite literatures' focus on their inability to graduate college. This information will help colleges and universities to better understand the experiences of first-generation college students' while in college. Please consider participating in my research by completing the pre-screening survey? The survey should take no more than 5 minutes to complete. The link to the pre-screening survey is...

14. Describe the proposed procedures, (e.g., interview surveys, questionnaires, experiments, etc). in the project. Any proposed experimental activities that are included in evaluation, research, development, demonstration, instruction, study, treatments, debriefing, questionnaires, and similar projects must be described. USE SIMPLE LANGUAGE, AVOID JARGON, AND IDENTIFY ACRONYMS. Please do not insert a copy of your methodology section from your proposal. State briefly and concisely the procedures for the project. (500 words)

Using a Delphi Study, participants will answer questions on three different questionnaires, one supplied during three different rounds. The initial survey is included for your review. After analysis, data from the initial survey are used to create the second survey, which is the second round. During this round, participants are asked to rate responses provided during the first round and modify/clarify their personal statements, if necessary. After being analyzed, information from the second round will inform the final questionnaire for round three. During the final

round, participants are asked to complete a final rating of answers provided during the second round, explain their rating, and rank themes in order of importance. At the conclusion of the study, participants will receive the final results of the study for their review. A 6-point Likert scale will be used rating themes.

15. Participants in research may be exposed to the possibility of harm - physiological, psychological, and/or social - please provide the following information: (Up to 500 words)

a. Identify and describe potential risks of harm to participants (including physical, emotional, financial, or social harm).

The proposed study does not pose physical, financial, or social harm to study participants. There is possibility for emotional moments as participants reflect on their collegiate experiences as first-generation college students. However, I do not believe the emotional moments will cause harm to participants but instead will add to the richness of their responses.

b. Identify and describe the anticipated benefits of this research (including direct benefits to participants and to society-at-large or others)

While study participants will not benefit directly, their responses will have an effect on future first-generation college students, colleges and universities, and college access activities. Study participants will receive a \$20 Amazon e-gift card for participating in the entire study.

c. Explain why you believe the risks are so outweighed by the benefits described above as to warrant asking participants to accept these risks. Include a discussion of why the research method you propose is superior to alternative methods that may entail less risk.

As mentioned previously, the proposed research study is of minimal risk to study participants and the topic is not contentious.

d. Explain fully how the rights and welfare of participants at risk will be protected (e.g., screening out particularly vulnerable participants, follow-up contact with participants, list of referrals, etc.) and what provisions will be made for the case of an adverse incident occurring during the study.

Study participants will receive the Informed Consent form when they receive the link for the initial questionnaire. By participating in the initial questionnaire, they are providing consent. The following statement is included on the informed consent: "Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw from this study at any time without consequence. Also, the researcher reserves the right to not include you at any time during the study. If a Delphi round has already taken place, the information you provided will not be used in the research study." A copy of the entire Informed Consent is included with this application.

16. Explain how participants' privacy is addressed by your proposed research. Specify any steps taken to safeguard the anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of their

responses. Indicate what personal identifying information will be kept, and procedures for storage and ultimate disposal of personal information. Describe how you will de-identify the data or attach the signed confidentiality agreement on the attachments tab (scan, if necessary). (Up to 500 words)

See the attached consent form. All identifying information will be deidentified to ensure participant anonymity. Furthermore, the pre-screening survey, questionnaire results, etc. will be kept on a password protected external hard drive only accessible to by me.

17. Will electrical, mechanical (electroencephalogram, biofeedback, etc.) be applied to participants, or will audio-visual devices be used for recording participants? No

If YES, describe the devices and how they will be used:

NA

18. Type of Review: Expedited

Please provide your reasons/justification for the level of review you are requesting.

This study involves several areas that fall under the expedited category in the AU IRB Handbook:

1. Pre-screening survey and questionnaire
2. The research involves minimal risk to the participant
3. There is little to no risk of violating participant confidentiality

19. Informed consent and/or assent statements, if any are used, are to be included with this application. If information other than that provided on the informed consent form is provided (e.g. a cover letter), attach a copy of such information. If a consent form is not used, or if consent is to be presented orally, state your reason for this modification below.

***Oral consent is not allowed when participants are under age 18.**

A copy of the Informed Consent is attached. Participants are asked to review the Informed Consent prior to completing the initial questionnaire. By completing the questionnaire, participants agree to the terms of the Informed Consent. I opted not to have participants sign the Informed Consent because it would take more time from research participants and with them being needed for three rounds, I want to be mindful of their personal time devoted to the research study. The pre-screening survey will determine that participants are at least 18 years old.

20. If questionnaires, tests, or related research instruments are to be used, then you must attach a copy of the instrument at the bottom of this form (unless the instrument is copyrighted material), or submit a detailed description (with examples of items) of the research instruments, questionnaires, or tests that are to be used in the project. Copies will be retained in the permanent IRB files. If you intend to use a copyrighted instrument, please consult with your research advisor and your IRB chair. Please clearly name and identify all attached documents when you add them on the attachments tab.

The following questions are from the initial questionnaire:

1. How did your resilience contribute to your ability to graduate college?
2. How were you able to thrive in college?
3. What strengths did you use to help you graduate college?
4. Discuss any other factors that impacted you, as a first-generation college student, to graduate college.

Questionnaires for the second and third rounds are created based on responses from the previous round. For that reason, I am unable to provide specific questions for either questionnaire. Each questionnaire will use a six-point Likert scale where one (1) is Strongly Agree and six (6) is Strongly Disagree. The Likert scale is not used on the initial questionnaire. Participants will complete questionnaires using SurveyMonkey.

Antioch.edu Mail - Online IRB Application Approved:An Exploration of F... Page 1 of 1



**Online IRB Application Approved:An Exploration of Factors
Influencing First-Generation College Students' Ability to
Graduate College: A Delphi Study July 15, 2018, 7:50 am**

Sun, Jul 15, 2018 at 7:50 AM

Dear Ashley Benson ,

As Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for 'Antioch University Ph.D., I am letting you know that the committee has reviewed your Ethics Application. Based on the information presented in your Ethics Application, your study has been approved. Your data collection is approved from 07/15/2018 to 07/14/2019. If your data collection should extend beyond this time period, you are required to submit a Request for Extension Application to the IRB. Any changes in the protocol(s) for this study must be formally requested by submitting a request for amendment from the IRB committee. Any adverse event, should one occur during this study, must be reported immediately to the IRB committee. Please review the IRB forms available for these exceptional circumstances.

Sincerely,
Lisa Kreeger

Appendix B: Pre-screening Questionnaire

Pre-screening Survey For Dissertation Research Study

1. Did you graduate from a four-year college or university?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. If yes, what institution did you attend?

3. What year did you graduate from college?

4. Do you have access to internet?

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. Did your father graduate from a four-year college or university?

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. Did your mother graduate from a four-year college or university?

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. Do you feel comfortable completing online surveys through SurveyMonkey?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Demographic Information

8. Gender:

9. Age

- ☐ Under 18
 ☐ 45-54
☐ 18-24
 ☐ 55-64
☐ 25-34
 ☐ 65+
☐ 35-44

10. Race/Ethnicity

- ☐ White or Caucasian
 ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Black or African American
 ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
☐ Hispanic or Latino
 ☐ Another race
☐ Asian or Asian American
 ☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ Other (please specify)

11. Employment Status

- ☐ Full-time
 ☐ Unemployed
☐ Part-time
 ☐ Other
☐ Student

12. Marital status

- ☐ Single, never married
 ☐ Separated
☐ Married
 ☐ Widowed
☐ Divorced
 ☐ Other

13. Individuals who complete this questionnaire may receive an invitation to participate in multi round research study that will take 60-90 minutes of your time to complete the questionnaires. Panelists will participate in the study via the internet. Are you willing to serve as an expert panelist for a three round Delphi research study?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

14. Contact Information

Name

Phone

Email

15. Do you agree to receive text messages, emails, and/or phone calls for the purposes of this research?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C: Initial Questionnaire

Informed Consent

Name of Principal Investigator: Ashley C. Benson

Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program

Name of Project: An Exploration of Factors Influencing First-Generation College Students' Ability to Graduate College: A Delphi Study

Dear Participant:

This is a survey about the success of first-generation college students. Through this survey, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your personal experience as a first-generation college student who has graduated from college. Your responses will involve three rounds of questionnaires seeking both descriptive insight and calculable feedback.

There are minimal, if any, risks from participating. Your identity will be confidential and all demographic data being collected will be reported as aggregated information. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your responses to any reports of these data. Each survey will take approximately 30-60 minutes to complete.

This survey is part of my dissertation research at Antioch University in the PhD in Leadership and Change Program. Study results may be included in future presentations and publications.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may elect to discontinue your participation at any time.

If you have any questions about the survey or the research study, please contact me at:

██████████

This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Antioch University. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Lisa Kreeger, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change, Email: ██████████.

I have read and understood the above information. By checking the box below and completing the attached survey, it means that I have read the information contained in this letter and would like to volunteer for this research study. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

Thank you for your participation!

Sincerely,

Ashley C. Benson

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

**An Exploration of Factors Influencing First-Generation College Students' Ability to Graduate
College: A Delphi Study**

Dissertation Research

Round 1 Questionnaire

Important Definitions for this Study

Thriving. To thrive means an individual is engaged and determined to meet and at times exceed their personal and academic goals.

Success. To achieve success means an individual has graduated from a four-year college or university.

First-generation. First-generation college students are students whose parent(s) have not graduated with a bachelor's degree.

Everyone who has experienced the success of attending college has inspirations they can point to as reasons for thriving while in college; first-generation college students are no different. Please share **at least 3 to 4** detailed examples of your lived experiences that exemplify reasons for your success.

Instead of stating simply that you made friends while in college, provide a detailed example of how those friendships helped you be successful in college.

Example: I was a member of a learning community that required monthly cohort meetings. Those meetings allowed students to discuss things they were experiencing, receive advice and support from peers and faculty and staff, and provided a safe learning environment for students to be vulnerable when needed. Those monthly meetings and the cohort concept helped me to create connections with my peers who went from being a stranger to lifelong friends and supporters. Because many of my peers came from the same background as me, I gained a family I can go to for support and advice when I was ready to give up.

Lived experience 1	<input type="text"/>
Lived experience 2	<input type="text"/>
Lived experience 3	<input type="text"/>
Lived experience 4	<input type="text"/>

Thank you for completing the first-round questionnaire. Questionnaires for the second and third round will be informed by responses provided during the first round; however, responses with personally identifying information will not be shared in subsequent surveys.

Appendix D: Second and Third Round Questionnaires

An Exploration of Factors Influencing First-Generation College Students' Ability to Graduate College: A Delphi Study

Dissertation Research

Round 2 Questionnaire

Important Definitions for this Study:

Thriving. To thrive means an individual is engaged and determined to meet and at times exceed their personal and academic goals.

Success. To achieve success means an individual has graduated from a four-year college or university.

First-generation. First-generation college students are students whose parent(s) have not graduated with a bachelor's degree.

Thank you for your insightful and thoughtful responses during Round One! Based on your responses in Round One, several clear themes were evident and are listed below. For Round Two, please consider your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college and for each theme, select the response that most closely agrees with your experience. In addition, for each theme, please add narrative context for your choice. The comment box at the end of the questionnaire allows you to suggest additional theme(s) along with a justification for the addition(s).

As a reminder, your confidentiality is assured as a participant in this research study.

1. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by **Social Networks?** (i.e., belonging, peer support system, intellectual validation, community, campus involvement, athletics, spiritual connection, sisterhood/brotherhood, empathy)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

2. Social Network - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

3. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by **Campus Resources and Programs?** (i.e., Educational Opportunity Program, TRIO, academic support, summer bridge program, career guidance, faculty connection, mentoring, study abroad)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

4. Campus Resources and Programs - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

5. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by **Self Development?** (i.e., deep desire to succeed, leadership development, empowered, motivation, skill development, personal wellness, fear, changing schools)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

6. Self Development - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

7. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by **Finding a passion?** (i.e., career, activism, introduction to new things)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

8. Finding a passion - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

9. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by **Family?** (i.e., becoming a parent, campus feeling like home, attending school close to home, encouragement, serve as example for family, pre-college support)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

10. Family - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

11. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by **Work?** (i.e., being employed, support from colleagues and supervisor, internships)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

12. Work - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

13. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by **Service?** (i.e., helping others, advocacy, community service)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

14. Service - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

15. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by **Financial Support?** (i.e., grants, scholarships, other forms of financial assistance)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

16. Financial Support - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

17. Additional feedback (optional): Please indicate additional themes along with context for suggesting the addition(s).

Thank you for completing the second-round questionnaire. The third and final questionnaire will be informed by responses provided during the second round..

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

**An Exploration of Factors Influencing First-Generation College Students' Ability to Graduate
College: A Delphi Study**

Dissertation Research

Round 3 Questionnaire

Important Definitions for this Study:

Thriving. To thrive means an individual is engaged and determined to meet and at times exceed their personal and academic goals.

Success. To achieve success means an individual has graduated from a four-year college or university.

First-generation. First-generation college students are students whose parent(s) have not graduated with a bachelor's degree.

Thank you for your insightful and thoughtful responses during the first two rounds! Based on your responses in Round Two, two new themes were created and are listed below. For this section, please consider your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college and for each theme, select the response that most closely agrees with your experience. In addition, for each theme, please add narrative context for your choice.

As a reminder, your confidentiality is assured as a participant in this research study.

1. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by being a Self Starter ? (i.e., driven, motivated, doing things of own volition, results-oriented)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |








2. Self Starter - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

3. Considering your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college, how closely do you agree that your experience was impacted by Cultural/Identity Development? (i.e., heritage, racial identity, beliefs, value system, ethnic group, personality)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree | <input type="radio"/> Disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |

4. Cultural/Identity Development - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

5. Below are the themes developed from your responses during the first two rounds. Please rank the themes in order of impact on your experience as a thriving first-generation college student who graduated from college with 1 being a significant impact and 10 having little to no impact. Not applicable (NA) is provided as an option in case a theme does not apply to your experience.

- | | | |
|---|--|------------------------------|
|  | <input type="text"/> Social Networks | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Campus Resources and Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Self Development | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Finding Passion | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Work | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Service | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Financial Support | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Cultural/Identity Development | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
|  | <input type="text"/> Self Starter | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |

6. Please explain your ranking.

7. What advice do you have for first-generation college students entering their first year of college?

8. What recommendations do you have for higher education institutions to help first-generation college students succeed in college?

9. What recommendations do you have for high schools who are preparing first-generation college students to succeed in college?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Appendix E: Email to Panelist

Hello!

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. Your time and experiences matter to me and without you, I could not complete this worthwhile research. I may have spoken with some of you over the phone about this study, but opted to email everyone to ensure participants receive the same information.

With that being said, I want to explain the process in some detail and make sure you remain interested in participating in my dissertation study.

I am using a method called Delphi. This method requires the use of surveys in multiple rounds. For the sake of my research on first-generation college students, you will receive three separate surveys (three rounds). The first round is the initial survey that is short in terms of the number of questions asked but allows participants to provide extensive insight into their lived experiences as first-generation college students. Rounds 2 and 3 ask participants to rate categories developed from responses received during round 1. Each survey should take approximately 10-30 minutes. I am asking participants to respond to each survey as quickly as possible upon receipt without hindering your thoughtful responses.

The informed consent for this study is included in the initial round. Please note, you can withdraw from participating at anytime. Should you decide to withdraw from participating, you will not receive surveys for subsequent rounds.

If you remain interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email by saying "Yes." I am the only one who will have access to your responses. Names and institutions will be changed to assure confidentiality.

Sincerely,

Ashley C. Benson
PhD Student
Antioch University
Leadership and Change

Appendix F: Round One Responses

Respondent	Lived experience 1
1	I was accepted into a learning community for my first semester. Being surrounded by other students with similar interests, it gave me a "safe" topic to discuss during my first week on campus. From there, we further developed our relationships and have kept in touch with a majority of them upon graduation.
2	I left a traditional college setting by going from a residential college to an online college. I did not know how to communicate my disability status when I was a freshmen in college. Online studies allowed me to study when I was feeling well and I did not have the pressure to show up to a classroom environment. My autoimmune illness is unpredictable and I have struggled with anxiety and depression at times. The online program allowed me to focus on my academic goals and not feel pressured by the socialization aspects of a traditional college. Since I have learned how to manage my autoimmune illness, I am now attending a residential program for my graduate degree.
3	During my first year in college I struggled to understand what was happening and things that I needed to do. One of my roommates helped me because we came from the same high school. She was the person who I asked questions and she told me that I had to do more than just go to class and hw. She pointed me into the right direction for how to get money for college. Between her and this other person who helped me apply for the EOP (Educational Opportunity Program). I wouldn't have been able to stay at [school].
4	I joined a sorority to make friends as a way to connect on my commuter campus at my first university. Though this, I gained leadership skills, stepped out of my comfort zone, gained confidence, and succeeded academically.
5	I was a member of a service learning corps that perfected and enlightened my servant leadership style. The idea was to come up with a sustainable program and or partnership that can still be done and committed to once I have graduated and was beneficial to my community. I created a leadership lock in that was despot [sic] cover the essential of finding your niche in a pwi, why getting involved was important, and how to be your authentic self. The event helped [made] me a leader and I was also able to produce more student leaders on campus
6	I curated a community of low-income/working-class and/or first-generation students as my friend group. Having friends who really understood what I was going through made me feel like I belonged. It was nice to have friends who didn't pressure me to spend money or go out all that often because they just understood. I didn't have to explain my situation. The feeling of being understood really helped me in ways that I did not realize until I finished college.
7	I was a member of my college's div III track team. My teammates were the only people I knew on campus that had not come from very wealthy backgrounds. It allowed me to drop my guard and feel like I fit in for two hours every afternoon.

8	I was able to attend a pre-orientation program geared towards first generation and multicultural students, which allowed me to acclimate myself to campus before orientation. With this program, I was able to meet other first gen students, some of whom became my best friends throughout college. It was great to meet them early on, knowing that we came from similar backgrounds and had a connection of being first gen. When I had issues relating to being first gen, I was able to come to my friends and we could discuss those issues in ways that a lot of my other friends would not understand.
9	During my sophomore [year], I became an Army Service member. This experience taught me the importance of grit, tenacity, and perseverance. It also provided me the opportunity to make and save enough money to pay my school balance in total so I could re-enroll into college. I also received educational benefits which gave me the advantage of having the rest of my college courses paid for and I also received a monthly stipend that helped me to pay bills as a mom and a full time student.
10	I became involved on campus. I was a student leader serving as a resident assistant as well as a member of the campus activities board leadership team. I was also an active member in my sorority. At one point in my junior year I was going through a major change and decided maybe I should take a break from college. However, I had formed a community within all of my organizations and the thought of losing those communities kept me pursuing my Bachelor's degree.
11	Student Support Services saved me from failing out of school or just quitting. Without my Advisors through this program I wouldn't be where I am today. My Advisors got to know me and worked with my strengths to get me through. They were always available for me when I needed them.
12	My parents encouraged me to pursue my degree. My parents, instead of being like them, wanted what was best for me. My first degree was an associates that I earned from [school]. My mother worked there so my degree was basically free. My mother didn't graduate from even an associates despite the fact she started but did not finish. My father didn't even graduate high school because he had to drop out to work. I was encouraged by them to go to the next step and get my bachelors at [school].
13	I was driven by a deep desire to not want to disappoint my parents. as the second to last child I constantly witnessed my older siblings make many mistakes in their life and how their choices hurt themselves and my parents emotionally and financially. I can remember vividly always being told to not be like them and to do better by my parents and my siblings. This definitely put undue stress and unrealistic expectations of how I defined my success but it was definitely a thought that was on my mind when I felt like giving up. I believed if I failed I would not have a home to go to since my parents would have been that disappointed in me. In hindsight that was not true but my young mind believed it so it made me try as hard as I could to succeed.

14	I was a member of a mentoring program. There were weekly and monthly meeting where we discussed plans moving forward and how to stay on track for graduation. There were student and staff mentors who emailed and called me beyond the meetings to check on me. This for sure held me accountable for my success and graduation. I created connections, learned about important relieves on campus, and met other students just as myself who were trying to navigate college.
15	Living on campus—Growing up, my family did not have a car and I could not afford one before leaving for college. One of the main reasons I chose to attend the [school] was because, I was afraid of not being able to afford to travel home during breaks. [School] was the closest major university to my home. It was a 35-minute car ride or a 4 hour public transportation ride. Although campus [was] relatively close, I knew I could not live at home and be successful. The first reason being I did not have reliable and efficient transportation to campus. The second reason being my childhood home did not have resources, such as access to the Internet and a quiet place to study. Living on campus offered all of those things. Fortunately, a combination of grants and scholarships covered all of my expenses.
16	My 1st year in college, I became involved in my resident's hall council. I also fostered a friendship with my RA and other RAs in my hall. Becoming involved in hall council provided me a leadership opportunity that allowed me to meet other students in my hall through meetings and events. Being involved in hall council and becoming friends with RAs provided me a support system in my first year when I was struggling. I became homesick during my first semester but by the 2nd I had formed a peer group and felt part of community that homesickness was not an issue. By the end of my 1st year I had decided to apply to become a resident assistant.
17	I'm not sure if 'thrived' is the right way to express my experience - I want to say that I 'got through'. One of the reasons, albeit more depressing, I completed college was because I didn't understand the transferring process and what my scholarship would look like at another school if I left. During the periods of my experience when I was doing poor academically and feeling emotionally lost, I tried to consider the option of leaving but the logistics were too much - flying and moving back home, reapplying and transferring somewhere else, finding another psychologist, working out the finances of such an idea, etc. So instead, I pushed through always tired and sad while taking advantage of every office hour or tutoring opportunity resulting in semesters where I was passing my courses, but barely.
18	I joined the university's Black Student Union where I met people who not only were engaged politically but also socially. I met many people who believed in my goals and helped me achieve them. In addition, they challenged me to take on more responsibility within the organization and helped foster leadership skills.
19	As a member of a scholars group that was based on financial need, many of my friends and colleagues were in the same predicaments and backgrounds that I was. This made it easier to transition to the hustle and bustle of college and find a network that helped me be successful all around.

20	My FYE class allowed me to connect with other professors outside of my major as it was an art class and I was a psychology student. This particular professor followed me throughout my college career encouraging me to explore all of my interests and also gave me a job as a TA my senior year. Her dedication to me as a human motivated me to work hard in all of my classes.
21	My son. I was 36 when I graduated with my bachelor's degree. It took a lot of time and patience for me to complete my degree, especially as a single parent that works full time. My son is the reason I was able to finish. He was encouraging me through the whole process. He is active in sports, band, and drama. During his practices and warm up before games I would sit in my chair and work on my iPad. After warm ups were done, he'd always come over and ask how my homework was and tell me he's proud of me. What 15 year old tells their parents they are proud of them? Not many, but I'm so grateful mine did.
22	Coming from a small private school with a graduating class of 14 students, I feared starting college at what felt like a HUGE four-year university. Upon admission, [school] requires all new students to attend a three-day orientation. My orientation leader was a junior, and she did everything in her power to help our group feel comfortable and confident that we would succeed at [school]. I believe a great majority of success is derived from one's mindset and attitude. Although [name] was only required to be there for us during orientation, she gave us her cell phone number and offered her help in anything she could help with.
23	I found a mentor that empowered me to believe I was capable of more and learn to love myself.

Respondent	Lived experience 2
1	In my sophomore year of my undergraduate career, I applied to work for New Student Orientation over the summer. This being the most prized leadership position on campus, I was optimistic that I would be able to share my story with the incoming class. Looking back, this position gave me my best friends, leadership skills, interpersonal communication abilities, conflict resolution and most importantly opened my eyes to a career in higher education.
2	Although my parents were not paying for college and had not attended college, my father and mother still provided encouragement for me to finish my degree. Another reason I moved to online courses was due to financial reasons so it was more affordable. I almost gave up when I only had four semesters remaining, but my dad reminded me that the debt I accrued would not be worth it if I did not finish the degree program. This practical financial advice helped me stay focused and I ended up being eligible for grant money that covered the last two semesters since I was an independent. I graduated at 24 years of age because it took me seven years of doing classes on and off depending on my finances and my health.

3	My experiences in EOP really truly helped me to be successful. They offered a \$18,000 grant to students who were accepted, as well as personal academic tutors, academics advisors and financial aid advisors. When I had issues with my classes, my advisor walked me through requirements for both my declared majors. She made sure I understood exactly what classes I needed to graduate. She also helped me to drop one of those majors down to a minor so that I could graduate on time. My financial aid advisor literally sent me extra money while I studied abroad and needed help. She never let me struggle if I didn't have to. But she was firm in saying that these are loans and she made sure I knew what that money meant. EOP was everything to my success in college.
4	As a transfer student, I met a professor that took me under her wing and helped me through the end of my undergraduate career. She too was a woman of color and a first generation college student and saw my struggles early on.
5	Being the president of black student union manifested my success as well. I was able to have a voice and project the change my peers needed. I also was connected to my cause, which lead me away from my STEAM degree too my Student Affairs degree.
6	I had a major advisor and a minor advisor both of whom came from poor and working-class backgrounds and identified as first-gen students. My major advisor taught courses that specifically talk about educational inequity and she starts every class by sharing her personal background. Knowing that my professors had struggled in college allowed me to relate to them better and I was able to see them as professors who had once been students rather than just professors. These professors, especially my minor advisor, were incredibly understanding especially around financial issues. What I think made the most impact was that they were very big on not putting the blame on me when my college made things difficult for me. I was never told to "toughen up"; they knew that I'd been plenty tough already. They really ensured me that I was not the problem but that institutional inequality was.
7	I joined a lab on campus that was run by a professor that wanted his students to be active in research and pursue a PhD. He mentored me away from the 'I am more stressed than you' games my classmates were playing. It really helped during college and then after I graduated he would call once a year to see if 'we' were going to grad school yet.
8	Living in a smaller dorm my freshman and sophomore year meant I was able to know a lot of my peers. I got involved in hall council both years, which helped me take on responsibilities in the community and have a voice in what was happening in our community.
9	My freshman year of college, I became a parent. While some would've considered life to be over, for me it was just beginning. As a first generation student, now mother, I knew that my success was for more than just me, it was for my daughter. The responsibility I had embraced becoming a parent really influenced me and motivated me to push harder and keep going in school. Even when I was broken and tired mentally, physically and emotionally, there was nothing that could keep me from striving to build a better life and create a foundation for my daughter and myself.

10	I was a first-generation college student but I grew up with the value of education. My step dad was a carpenter and he always enforced the importance of education. I was always to do my homework before anything else. After getting my job as a resident assistant I fell in love with the environment of higher education. My first job out of undergrad was in admissions. In this environment I was financially supported and encouraged to pursue my Masters. When I started working in Advising five of my fellow advisors were pursuing their Doctorates. Also my group of friends from undergrad all value education and are all pursuing future degrees so I have surrounded myself with people who value education.
11	I met one particular friend who helped change my college experience. She brought out “me”. When I started college I was so home sick and depressed. When she came in to my life, it changed. It meant so much to me to finally have someone who supported you no matter what. To this day we are great friends. I also met my husband in undergrad. He made a tremendous impact on my life. He let me know it was ok to experience my emotions and I was safe with him; he meant every word.
12	My cousin who is basically my sister encouraged me. She had a master’s degree in business something from [school]. She bought me a laptop and paid for my first semester books for [school] as a going away present.
13	I was fortunate to attend college with my high school best friends who were also a part of the track team with me. Everyone had so much motivation to succeed that I had to keep up. There was enough competition between us that we were able to push each other to be better. They were also my support. They understood my adversity as a first gen and a student athlete. The other team members were also great. It was like I had my own personal community to thrive. If I was struggling with a class topic I was able to discuss it at practice with a senior student who had taken that course previously. the team also served as great resources on study material for different classes. No one felt they were too good to not lend a hand. My favorite memories are being at track meets and everyone would be huddled up studying together because track meets often fell on and during midterms or finals. Most of all I didn’t want to miss out on all the fun times we had so I worked hard as to not fail off the team. Since I was on an athletic scholarship and a grant I had to maintain a certain gpa that was higher than normal expectations.
14	I was a member of first-generation specific programs. These programs helped to finance my college education, provided me with mentors, created a sense of community, and exposed me to the operation and dedication that’s the institution had to ensure my success. There were weekly meetings, mentors sent care packages, gained valuable volunteer experience, and exposed me to a bigger world. Without these programs and the support of the institution I wouldn’t be before you today. A special thank you to {program} and TRIO!

15	Church involvement—I would not classify myself a very religious person now, but in college my connection to campus religious organizations provided me with growth and development. Growing up I attended church with my grandmother, so when I went to college, I immediately got involved in small group Bible studies and a campus church. Through this involvement, I met several friends and felt part of a community. As I grew more comfortable, I served as a volunteer helping with set up and greeting on Sundays for [Church]. I believe these connections and community helped me feel cared about and develop self-confidence.
16	Being a resident assistant for 3 [years] in my undergraduate experience really shaped my desire to help others. I was able to become more confident in my leadership abilities especially in my 2nd and 3rd years. Additionally during my time as an RA I discovered my major was not right for me anymore and my career goals had changed. I ended up switching my major from English to Psychology which I was more passionate about.
17	I also lived in a cultural house for all four years of college where I lived among other Latinxs of various backgrounds - some had tons of help getting to college and others had a similar background to me. Regardless, it was a community that was significantly understanding of our differences in terms of academic levels and continuously supportive of me during all my highs and lows in college.
18	I lived on campus for all 5 years of my undergrad career. This allowed me to stay connected to campus, and meet new people every year.
19	Joining the marching band at my institution allowed me to continue using an outlet for stress and introduced me to my sorority in which I met some lifelong friends that inspire and motivated me in undergrad and still as a doctoral student.
20	I was accepted to the Project REACH program at my school which allowed me to meet others in similar circumstance to myself. We got to bond over our lifetime experiences while also attending events through the program we wouldn't have had access to otherwise, like musicals and local sports events. Meeting with this group of people regularly gave me a community to rely on when things at home weren't always so great, but also made me feel at home when I was at school.
21	My best friend [name] was a huge driving force behind my success in obtaining my degree. For 15 months I made little to no plans so I could focus on school work and being a mom. She knew this and never once complained. Instead, she'd slip over and drop off a bottle of wine, card, chocolates, or some other small memento showing her support. It meant so much to have her in my corner.
22	On my very first day of college at [school], the sororities and fraternities on campus were recruiting. Two sisters from [sorority] came up to me. At the time, I was adamant that I would not join Greek life. However, our conversation somewhat changed my mind. They were super real with me and continuously gave me advice even though I decided that Greek life was too expensive for me. At the time, I was a Biology major. I finished my semester with a GPA of 2.18. Since I graduated high school with a GPA of 4.14, I was completely shaken and absolutely heartbroken. I felt like a total failure and was ready to drop out. [Name] and [name] encouraged me to stay in college and persevere even though it was difficult.

23	I learned that the major I had chosen wasn't the right career track for me and learned about social work which was been a much better fit
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Respondent	Lived experience 3
1	My academic advisor played a huge part in my overall success to reach graduation. At my university, you are randomly assigned a faculty advisor and when my initial advisor left the institution I was re-assigned which turned out to be the best thing for me. My academic advisor really took an interest in her students and ensured that they would reach graduation.
2	A third reason I transferred after my first year is I was offered a year-long internship program in another state and I had a shoulder injury so I was no longer able to compete for the Track & Field team. This internship program provided us with 30-hours of work experience each week and the community encouraged us to complete our undergraduate programs. I had a small group of students in our residential housing that we met with weekly and I was given mentors to meet with bi-weekly. I ended up staying as an intern there for three years because I kept being offered new work experiences, mentors, and leadership training opportunities. The final year I was there, they gave me money towards my tuition.
3	I think that I also owe some degree of success to pursuing membership in a sorority. I left my first year of college with a 1.5 gpa. But I knew I wanted to join a sorority. So for three semesters I had to change my attitude and study plans, buckle down into changing my major and bring my gpa up to a 2.5. I was really hard taking 15-16 credits each semester but I worked towards a 3.6 semester gpa one of those terms. I am really proud of myself. I believed in myself and in my abilities. And I was more confident about going after my goals at that point.
4	At my first university, I was very lost. I felt like just another number paying tuition. I changed my major three times and was shuffled from advisor to advisor. I was not given the support I needed at this university and decided to take time off. When I decided to start again at a community college, I realized that it was my job to be my own advocate and seek out the answers to questions I had. This led to immediate success and led me to finish my bachelor's degree and allowed me to begin graduate school.
5	Being an AmeriCorps member also made an imprint on my success. I was able to provide a service for a non-profit organization while making an impact on the organization and community. My site was the Boys and Girls Club, where I was in charge of the after school power hour homework/reading sessions. I enjoyed connecting the two realms and leaving an imprint on the generation to come .
6	Organizing around low-income and first-gen issues was a very empowering experience while I was in college. Advocating for inclusion of first gen and low income students made me feel as though all the struggles I had been through were worth it. I struggled a lot in my time at college but working with other low income and first gen students made me realize that future students shouldn't have to go through what I did and because of this I felt empowered to make a

	<p>difference. Activism was central to me in my time at college.</p>
7	<p>My family was by far the biggest support I had. They would always say they didn't know what I was doing, but they were 100% behind me. They would find money to fund experiences my classmate had, they checked up on me via phone and email. They told me to work harder when I was floundering. The mindset 'failure is not an option' was imparted to me all throughout my life and it was helpful in getting through college. I always found a way around all the barriers and struggles.</p>
8	<p>My sophomore year, I started tutoring students from disadvantaged backgrounds. I really enjoyed working to help other students learn the materials, and see their growth throughout the semester. Knowing that many of them were first generation students helped me relate to them in ways others might not be able to. Not only was it rewarding to support these students, but it also strengthened my relationships with professors and the department where I worked.</p>
9	<p>As a junior, I discover TRIO Student Support Services. TRIO SSS is a program that provides first generation, low income students with resources and support needed in order to graduate. I was required to meet with my TRIO mentor monthly and they truly helped me set a foundation for life after graduation. In these meetings, we discussed academics, extracurricular activities I was involved in, how I felt as a parent and how they could help me get into graduate school or find a job. It was in these meeting, I felt supported and I knew people were rooting for me to not only finish but to thrive after graduation as well!</p>
10	<p>When I was graduating with my Masters I had my graduation regalia hanging up in one of my guest bedrooms. My little sister was over (she is 17 years younger than me). She asked me if she could have my graduation cap after I was done with it. I said "sure, but what do you want it for?" She said, "To be smart like you". That was the moment that made all the papers and light night studying worth it. I knew that she looked up to me and was watching. Whenever I have a bad day or an assignment seems to difficult I always think of that moment.</p>
11	<p>Without the support from my high school teachers encouraging me to go to college because they saw the future in me I didn't. I was able to get a grant that assisted in funding my undergrad degree.</p>
12	<p>My best friend was graduating from [school]. He was on track as he graduated exactly 4 years after we graduated as planned. I was unable to get my degree at that time because I was pregnant. By the grace of God, my pregnancy allowed me to get extra grant to pay for school. I was able to go back to school but I graduated after him. He encouraged me to continue because he had graduated. He laughed because he said I was smarter than him anyway so he knew I could do it. I went back to school and graduated with a Bachelors from [school] in</p>

	<p>Social Work. I even went to get my Masters in the same field. The funny thing is I bet him to getting a Masters and was able to encourage him to pursue his Master's degree. He's in school now for it.</p>
13	<p>Mentorship helped me thrive. I've always been fortunate to have people come into my life and shape it. In college it was my summer genetics teacher who saw more in me than I did myself and encouraged me to explore scientific research which led me to finding a lab to work in. My undergraduate lab professor was a kickass woman who was also so nurturing and kind that I wanted to emulate her. I wanted to take the route she did so I pushed myself to balance lab, my part time job, and my classes because I had a new career goal which was graduate school.</p>
14	<p>I was a member of our [school] Black Student Union and area student union. Students of color came together to discuss both academic and personal challenges. This provided an outlet and sense of community. There were many similar yet different experiences. It was important to share our stories and learn from one another. This for sure ensured my success.</p>
15	<p>Campus jobs—I held several campus jobs during college. I worked as a campus tour guide, orientation leader, marketing assistant, resident assistant, and a leadership development assistant. These positions not only provided financial benefits, but also skill development. I can confidently say that I learned to communicate better orally and through writing from my student employment experiences. In addition, I learned tangible skills such as how to navigate Adobe Photoshop, Adobe InDesign, website content management systems, and other software programs. There was also a sense of pride and community that I gained from my jobs.</p>
16	<p>During my 1st year I was invited to be a part of an honor society on campus. I joined and during my 2nd year maintained being an active member. I ended up being in a leadership position during my 3rd and 4th years in the org. I created a peer group of academically achieving and community service drive people. This experience complemented my experiences as an RA. I believe that my leadership style and passion for helping others is a result of this experience along with my RA experience. Overall, with all 3 lived experiences mentioned, I believe I was successful because I had found people who I could trust, rely on, and lean on. I also believe I was successful because I got involved and found something I was passionate about which was helping others.</p>

17	I also had the fortune of taking part in a pre-freshmen summer program open to all students but mostly targeted towards underrepresented students like myself, and this program allowed me to take college level courses in the summer prior to starting college, and granted me 4 credits and a few PE credits. It was a place where I learned about the resources available to underrepresented students prior to orientation, built a close network of friends that would support me throughout my time at college, and quickly understood what I was in for when September came around - I think that last part helped me out the most. I knew early that I wasn't going to be acing my classes like I had in high school and that I was going to have a much more difficult time than many of my peers; I was determined to work as hard as possible to do well, but it helped me conceptualize the reality of not being surprised if things weren't going my way.
18	I was a member of the McNair Scholars program which help students who are interested in graduate school, graduate their undergrad, and get accepted into grad school. This program really showed me that I was able to be successful both as an undergrad and as a future grad student. I received a lot of intellectual validation, that I wasn't expecting.
19	Having to work while in school honestly helped me with my time management. It took messing up in undergrad to make me value my graduate studies more and how to balance my time to achieve what needed to be done and what I wanted to do.
20	My sophomore year I became an RA and this is by far the most impactful thing on my success. Being an RA kept me busy so I had to become extremely efficient at time management. Being an RA also gave me an opportunity to become extremely active on campus and connected me with a lot of other professional staff on campus. Those fellow RAs became my best friends and we continued to push each other throughout out college careers. They even motivated me to apply to grad school when I wasn't quite sure of what to do after I took a gap year after college.
21	My co-workers. Working at a career tech high school means I am surrounded by those that believe in a solid education, not only in high school, but beyond. I am blessed that my bosses and co-workers were behind me every step of the way, always asking how I'm doing and having meaningful conversations about my classes, engaging me and keeping me positive.
22	As a junior in college, I decided that Biology was not the major for me. I was a much better writer, and I found a passion in tutoring my classmates in English courses. So, I concluded that I would pursue a career in teaching writing at the collegiate level. When I entered my very first English class, I feared that my writing skills would never measure up to those who'd grown up with a passion for writing. My hands shook as I introduced myself to my class. My professor (a then-PhD student) encouraged me and inspired me to keep going. She helped me sharpen my writing skills. When I told her that I hoped to teach someday, she gave me multiple opportunities to assist her in teaching my class. Once the semester ended, she took me under her wing and met with me multiple times to discuss my future. After years of pursuing her dreams, she graduated with her PhD on Saturday.

23	I had 2 close friends who I grew up with and could relate to the entire time I was in college
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Respondent	Lived experience 4
2	My undergraduate major was Psychology. I began to thrive in this major because of my practical experience when working with college-aged students who were under my leadership in the internship programs. I realized I should learn as much as possible about working with people so I could develop myself, learn how to develop others, and become the best leader I could be. Due to some mistakes from earlier in my academic career, I had to work diligently to bring my GPA above a 3.0 by the time I graduated with my Bachelor's degree because I knew I would eventually go back to complete a Master's degree. The mistakes I made at the residential college had to do with not understanding how to manage my academic responsibilities, training schedule for a sport, and socializing with friends. I spent too much time socializing and doing things I did not want to do in order to gain friends. My Resident Advisor was never available and we had no mentors on the Track & Field team. I had two professors who I would go to for guidance; one for spiritual guidance and the other for academic guidance. I usually saw them after I made a mistake because I did not know what to use office hours for and I was not passionate about my overall learning then.
8	At the end of my freshman year, I got involved with a few diversity organizations on campus. While I myself did not come from the cultures whose organizations I attended, I was able to learn a lot and enjoyed interacting with people from other cultures, something that I had not really experienced growing up in a predominantly white state and attending a predominantly white institution.
15	Attending class—I cannot recall a time when I missed class without a valid reason. I was very involved in extracurricular activities, but I also ensured that I made time for academics. During my sophomore year, I was working two part-time jobs and I made the decision to quit one of them, because I started to fall behind in assignments. I believe regular class attendance helped me be successful, because I was present to hear lectures first-hand and take notes. I did not have to rely on classmates for information covered during classes.
22	At the end of my college career (senior year), I joined three organizations that propelled my success. The first was [school]'s First to Go and Graduate Program. In this program, first generation college students are connected with groups of about 10 students, a first generation student peer mentor and a first generation faculty coach. My faculty coach encouraged me to apply for graduate school. She even offered the [school]Fast Track Graduate Application. This application allows each tenured professor to admit one student to [school] graduate school for a major in their field. Since my GPA disqualified me for this application, Dr. [faculty] wrote recommendation letters for me to send to the three universities I applied [schools]. The second and third organizations I joined were honor societies: [organization] English Honor Society and [organization]National Society of Leadership and Success. Both of these honor

	societies contributed to my success by sharpening my leadership skills.
23	I joined a research project studying the higher education transitions of Appalachian students which helped me to understand and tackle my struggles with my transition.

Appendix G: Round Two Responses

Social Network - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	Being involved in various social networks (in my dorm, various clubs, certain classes where my peers and I traveled upwards through the classes together, and jobs) gave me many outlets in which I could express myself and felt welcomed. I was able to fulfill various needs with these social networks.
2	I don't feel that social networks had a heavy impact on my education
3	My social networks helped me feel liked I belonged at the institution. When I doubted myself or felt alone, I knew I could turn to those circles for support. In addition, they helped develop my cultural capital and taught me how to engage in various settings.
4	I didn't live on campus, and wasn't associated with any groups on campus. I worked full time and went to school full time. I didn't have time to socialize.
5	As I became more involved on campus, my social circle quickly grew and gave me a student-centered support circle that I now realized that I needed as I transitioned into college. When I first entered, I was hesitant on continuing my enrollment past the first semester due to the fact that I didn't connect with very many people in my residence hall.
6	Utilizing social networks to keep in contact with classmates and using group functions allowed me to stay on top of assignments and seek help from fellow class members. Social networks also allowed me to stay on top of campus activities to stay involved and interested.
7	Belonging helps the transition. It gives a sense of comfort in an in known territory.
8	The communities and cultures at my college were a large part of the reason I didn't give up during challenging periods of the academic year. That being said, I chose the groups I wanted to be affiliated with - so I was connected with other first-gens, low-income, and Latinx students who had similar backgrounds and showed me that I was capable of succeeding as they had.
9	I think my strongest social network was being an RA. I became an RA to pay for my room and have a little pocket money, but it ended up leading me to my current career. Making friends and interacting with all of my peers was strongly facilitated by being an RA
10	I've been lucky to have had so many great people in my life during undergrad. And everyone played a different role. I'm not sure if I would have stayed if it weren't for those connections.
11	Having a group of people to talk to and know the struggles I was facing was very helpful.
12	My friends were all really driven people so I naturally wanted to not be the weakest link. we had healthy competition with grades and encouraged one another to keep trying our best. Systems like honor roll in athletics or being able to get out of mandatory study hall with a certain gpa was also a good help. I personally also looked for self-validation in my grades but that proved to be problematic and a double edged sword as my worth became tied to my success

	in a class
13	<p>I took a non-traditional college path. During my first year at a residential college, I was on the Track & Field team (DIII) so I had a team I was a part of for this year. I was also a volunteer Young Life leader (faith-based organization) so a team of volunteers served high school students on a weekly basis. This was my second supportive network for the year. I had trouble with my roommates and the girls on my hall during my freshmen year, and my RA was not available so I did not enjoy this aspect of socializing.</p> <p>The next four years, I was either an intern (3 years) or on staff with a non-profit organization (faith-based) in Texas while I was taking classes with Liberty University online. There were 400-800 interns on this campus and staff members so this was my social network. I did not have a social network with Liberty until I was employed by them after I graduated with my Bachelor's degree. This job was referred to me by someone I met while at the internship at Texas.</p>
14	I believe becoming involved on campus helped me feel more confident in my abilities as a student and allowed me to become connected. Additionally in my role as a resident assistant, I was trained on campus resources so I could refer my students to them, that also helped me as a student as well. By becoming involved in on campus employment and student organizations, I found my tribe of like-minded individuals who wanted to succeed and also help me succeed.
15	It is by far because of my social networks that were support systems that I am a success.
16	Having a network of people living a similar experience or who I could connect with on shared experiences made me feel connected and motivated me to stay in my new community.
17	Social networks played a large role in my ability to connect with individuals from my various identity groups, engage in meaningful dialogue about issues, and expand my learning beyond the classroom. I was heavily involved in campus involvement for underrepresented and marginalized populations, and we form strong support networks and validated each other in our journey.
18	My sorority and membership in the marching band and the Black Student Movement really helped me to ease into going to school and being away from home.
19	<p>Being a part of the first-generation student organization at my school really helped me by putting my frustrations with being a first-gen student into action; I was able to hold my school accountable and I could advocate for my fellow first-gen students. If I could make changes at my school so that future students like me would never have to go through what I went through, it would be worth it.</p> <p>My own personal friend group was also super helpful. Had I not had a group of friends who were also low-income and first-gen I would not have been able to thrive at my college. It took a great deal of stress off of me because I did not have to explain myself. For example, if I couldn't afford to go out to eat dinner I did not have to explain that to my friends; rich friends often just couldn't</p>

	understand that I literally didn't have money to spend. My fellow first-gen and low-income friends never asked for an explanation about things. They just understood me.
20	Social networking was beneficial to me because I was able to connect with Greek Life and other organizations on campus. I was able to scope each organization out and see where I fit in best.
21	I honestly did not believe that I “fit” in during undergraduate. The people were foreign to me. However, I was able to find my place and people that were on a similar path, which felt good to have.
22	I think being on the Track and Field team was the only reason I showed up to my sophomore year. It gave me friends and something I was good at while I found my feet academically.

Campus Resources and Programs - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	<p>I had been a member of TRIO programs before coming to college, and ended up working for the TRIO offices at my college. While I had a stronger bond with my pre-college TRIO program (even working with them as a staff member for their Upward Bound program for three summers), I still found the TRIO program at my college welcoming and helpful.</p> <p>I also connected with quite a few of my professors. My Japanese professor (with whom I took 6 courses over my college career) and a Sociology professor (with whom I took two classes and tutored for her Statistics classes) had a large impact on my success.</p> <p>I also utilized the Office of National Fellowships for help with scholarships while studying abroad. This office and the study abroad department were great resources my junior and senior year.</p>
2	The TRIO program played a part in my success but the most valuable piece was family support
3	Looking back, I assume I qualified for support programs like TRIO and the likes, but I do not recall receiving notification about them. This may have been due my high academic achievement in high school. Mentoring from my supervisors at my on campus jobs was impactful. They helped me become more confident and navigate my career plans.
4	Campus resources were lacking at my institution. The guidance counselor at my school suggested classes for students that had nothing to do with their degree, making us have to go longer than the 4 years. He did this with hundreds of students, padding the pockets of the institution.
5	N/A did not enroll through a summer bridge/mentoring program but I now see the large-scale impact that these programs can provide.
6	My experience was not guided by campus resources. I did utilize faculty help but not much else. Most things were self-taught or found through self-discovery.

7	I was a part of upward bound and it gave me the experiences i needed that were very accurate to my actual four years of college. I felt more prepared and didn't let the social or academic pressures and anxieties consume me but instead i keep thriving to succeed through many organizations
8	Without the pre-freshman introduction programming at my college, I'm 90% sure I would not have completed my bachelor's degree at my institution. It gave me the tools and knowledge I needed to be mentally prepared for the academic rigors of the courses at my college.
9	I was a part of Project REACH at my institution which was a catch all program for those who were financially disadvantaged but didn't academically qualify for other programs. It allowed me to get more involved in the community as it provided opportunities to get off campus and connect with students I wouldn't have otherwise connected with.
10	The EOP program was the only reason I stayed at [school]. They helped me financially, I had the best counselor whom I could not have graduated without. I had contact with some great faculty members and resources. Studying abroad changed my outlook on life and gave me a love for travel.
11	I had a good relationship with my academic advisor and faculty members but no real connections with programing efforts.
12	I wasn't offered these resources since the ones on my campus were income based and i had just missed the cut off. Academic support was generic and not very good. Mentorship however was crucial. I happened to take a class with a professor who encouraged me to try research and I did and found another great mentor from that lab which changed my life trajectory
13	I had two faculty connections during my freshmen year at a small, private college in Virginia. Unfortunately, I did not seek any other services that year. Also, when I was an online student, I learned how to advise myself based on the information that was provided on the website. I did not speak with any of the services offered by [school].
14	I personally did not take advantage of a lot of programs on campus as I turned to my mentors for advice and guidance. I also did not really struggle academically mostly socially etc. I did find having mentors to be a huge advantage but I sought them out on my own. I did participate in the mentoring program as a mentor but not as a mentee. I did find out the TRIO program at my school after my freshmen year but thought I was unable to apply for it since I was no longer a freshmen.
15	TRIO, Black Student Unions, [organization], the Black House, 100 Strong, and other systems were instrumental in my experience.
16	I met my mentor through my scholarship, but outside of her, campus resources and programs did not affect my experience much.
17	I was involved in a mentoring program at my university that really helped me connect to first year students and help ensure they succeeded. In addition, I was a McNair Scholar (TRiO programs). which helped get me to graduate school!
18	Carolina Covenant was a need-based scholarship program that consisted of many first-generation students. This program allowed us access to certain counselors and programs that helped us through our academic journey.

19	My school personally did not have many first-gen resources and programs that I could access. We had AEMES, a mentorship program for first-gen and/or students of color but it was only for students studying STEM fields which I was not. We had a first-gen student orientation our first year but it was really poorly ran when I did it; all we did was share trauma and be sad together about how hard it is to be a first-gen student. I hope it gets better because it could have helped so much and it didn't really help me at all. All the help I got out of it was because of a student who did it with me and had also done a pre-orientation program that was only for students of color; all the resources she told me about were because she had done that program. My school personally had next to no sources for first-gen students. Whenever this was brought to their attention, they would host a "first-gen tea" with the president or something like that to pretend that they cared. My school did not like to specifically work with first-gen students and label things as being specifically for us.
20	Although I did not take advantage of campus resources and programs until my senior year at [school], they were very beneficial to me. I wish I would've gotten connected sooner. I took advantage of Supplemental Instruction sessions (tutoring sessions with a selection of students who have aced the class in past semesters) throughout my first year of college. Other than that, I wish I would have spent more time in tutoring with the library group and other tutoring programs.
21	This was answered in the first round of questions. SSS had a huge impact on me thriving.
22	At my school it felt like all the campus resources were reserved for minority students. All the white students had families with cultural capital and money so the white first generation student fell in a gap.

Self Development - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	I have always been academically inclined and felt the need for an academic challenge, so I tried to find classes that were both interesting to me and would provide me with an opportunity to grow as a learner. Being the first in my family to graduate from college also brought me pressure to succeed. I have always been held to high standards for academics, and this would potentially cause me to become stressed, especially when combined with all of the extracurricular activities I was involved with (at one point being 5 clubs and three jobs on campus). As I wasn't able to be very involved in high school, I felt that being in college was a chance to "catch up" on some of the opportunities I missed in high school.
2	I was extremely self-motivated. I did not want to let myself down nor my family, teachers, and friends back home. I took initiative when I arrived on campus. I read policies and asked questions when I did not understand something. I wouldn't say I was motivated by fear, but more by my desire to succeed.
3	Changing schools was my saving grace.

4	My internal motivation was to break the cycle and become the first in my family to complete a degree program. This was then supported by other students whom I met along the way in the same situation.
5	My experience was impacted by self-development in the form of stepping out of my comfort zone to join clubs, student government and other organizations to add to my leadership development and keep me involved on campus.
6	I had a very strong will and might . I believed that “ to whom much is given much was required. I examined each self-development opportunity as me be given so much and the least I could do was make sure my return on the investment was worth it and left an imprint of resilience.
7	Because I had no idea how to transfer and feared going back to a home environment that was not very emotionally or personally supportive of me, I was terrified at the prospect of leaving and not being able to keep my full-ride.
8	I think fear of failure is an important note here. I don't think my desire to succeed was intrinsic, I fully believe that I needed to succeed to be a model for my sister and show her it could be done. Also failure would have proved my mother right that going to the college I chose was a bad idea.
9	I worked really hard for everything I did in undergrad. And I had to mostly motivate myself when friends weren't helpful.
10	Fear of failure was one of my major influencers. my siblings and cousins both older and younger looked up to me and I didn't want to disappoint
11	I was in a volunteer or paid leadership position at least 6 of the 7 years I was in my college career (I was not continuously enrolled in classes because I had a couple breaks in my enrollment due to my autoimmune illness or finances). I also had mentors outside of my college experience during this time because I sought out those opportunities. I remember during my busiest year, I was working 30 hours a week in a supervisory position, taking full-time courses with [school], volunteering on a weekly basis, and read at least 20 books for personal enjoyment. I learned to be so disciplined that I was able to handle more responsibilities. When I did not graduate college in four years, other people thought this meant I would not finish my Bachelor's degree. It was important for me to have work, leadership, and college experience which was helpful when I went to apply for full-time jobs. I also do not mind that I changed majors once and was enrolled at three different universities as this helped me have a more well-rounded experience.
12	I contribute a lot of my success in undergrad to my drive to succeed and to achieve my goals. I also know that if I did not become a Resident Assistant and learn about leadership, I would not have had the experience I did. I also dealt with lots of challenges related to work/life balance and managing conflict. I look back on my undergrad experience and realized I encountered a lot of opportunities for growth that shaped my later experiences.
13	It is through understanding self-care, attending wellness events, lunch-n-learns that I kept myself developing.

14	My whole identity and perspective of the world changed in college. If I wouldn't have been ready to grow and change I don't think I would have made it.
15	Self-development was a huge part of my experience. I learned from others as i explored myself and who i was and who i wanted to be. I took leadership roles in various student organizations and student government.
16	The motivation to not fail my family or myself is what honestly kept me going and at the same time, caused my depression.
17	Most of my self-development was done through advocating for first-gen and/or low-income students more broadly. Holding my school's administration accountable allowed me to see myself as someone with important things to say.
18	Self-Development definitely had the strongest impact on my success. The desire to succeed starts with you. If you do not want to succeed, you won't. It doesn't matter if you're involved in everything if you don't have the right mindset.
19	Being a first generation college student, I wanted to set a new tone for my family. I was determined to succeed in college. I was always engaged in some type of activity to develop as a person. I was not going to become negative statistic where I came from.
20	I think that because I had no safety net I found motivation within myself because failure was not an option.

Finding a passion - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	There were many great ways to both discover my passions at my college, whether that be through courses or clubs. I was very involved throughout college and my involvement helped me grow my social networks and find explore my passions in ways I had never had the opportunity to do before.
2	I wouldn't have continued to go to school had I not found a field that I was passionate about
3	I knew I wanted to help others, so I initially chose math education as a major. This decision was also influenced by the fact that I knew educators (my teachers). Whereas, I did not know of people in other helping professions. My passions changed as I got more involved on campus and understood student affairs/higher education as a career option.
4	Having a passion for what you're going to school for, and fining others with that same passion, is huge.
5	After switching my major 3 times and transferring institutions I felt somewhat lost but once I found the right program that allowed me to embrace my social nature I was in a much better place mentally.
6	As a student affairs professional now, my experiences as a first-generation student only add to the experience I try to give my students. I remember the barriers that I experienced (lack of knowledge navigating college systems, lack of knowledge navigating campus resources, etc.).

7	My bachelor's degree is a in computer engineering and information technology, my JR year i knew that was not my passion it was just something i was good at . I was a part of the on campus programming board and i was the first student leader to pilot this program! From that moment on i knew i was born for student affairs which lead me to my Masters in higher education.
8	Though I entered college with the intent of being a doctor, once I became a junior and started questioning this, I became extremely lost. I had already completed far too much of my major to backtrack then - I also wasn't sure of what I wanted to do anymore or what I was passionate about. This wasn't an important factor for me in junior or senior year.
9	I think having the option to explore things through my electives was powerful, but I also thought that I was going to work with teenagers as a psychologist.... I hated doing that...I work in Higher Education now
10	I don't think I ever truly found my passion in undergrad. It was after wards when I developed that.
11	I am working on a Doctorate degree and sometimes still think that I am trying to find my true passion.
12	i found passion in science research and I wanted to obtain the grades to be even more competitive enough to get into graduate school. This definitely helped motivate me to study for GRE's
13	I graduated five years ago, so my passion has changed since that time period. My passion when I graduated was serving at non-profit, faith-based organizations that served teenagers or college-aged students. Now, I have a career in higher education due to that original passion. In the future, I hope to work in a public university.
14	I entered my undergrad with a clear career goal and selected major and it was my passion for that goal and subject(English) that propelled me to be academically successful. When my passion began to dwindle, I took a break from English coursework and explored my interest in Psychology. That exploration led to a major change and the discovery of a whole new career field (Student Affairs).
15	This made a huge impact of my life as it guided me into the career path I am. If it were not for the experiences in college I don't believe I would've considered higher education.
16	My passion for social justice has carried me from being a first generation bachelor's student to a first generation PhD student, a place I never thought I'd get to.
17	my first year in undergrad the first semester i struggled finding people related to my passions and eventually was able to connect with people through other campus resources that helped connect to me student orgs that helped me develop my passion and thinking about my legacy.
18	Somewhere along the way I found myself as a woman of color and experienced some new places and things due to my time in marching band.
19	Finding a passion was mostly because of my professors who allowed me to explore intellectual interests. They let me do research and without their advocacy, I wouldn't have been able to do research and go into academia.

20	I definitely agree. When I started college, I went in with the mindset that I would be earn a degree in Biology. I was born with four holes in my heart, so I had a passion to become a pediatric cardiologist for as long as I could think. However, that passion wasn't as strong as the passion I encountered with teaching while in college. I hated my biology courses, so I would procrastinate by teaching writing techniques to my friends. Writing classes were my safe havens. Once I found my passion, I was actually excited to go to class.
21	I found passion in several areas while attending undergrad. By finding this passion it pushed me towards succeeding in school. My biggest passion was taking a stand against injustice.
22	I found science research and decided to go to grad school. I found Islamic studies as a passion outside of science to give me balance.

Family - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	<p>While the previous themes all were either positively impacted or positively impacted my experiences at college, family (especially my immediate family) had a more ambivalent role towards my college experiences. The majority of help with pre-college preparation came from the Upward Bound program I participated in throughout high school. While my parents tried to help with the college process, I ended up doing a lot of the process by myself or with the help of my educational counselor. I had applied to my school with hopes of moving away from both my hometown and my family, and going to school gave me the chance to become my own person.</p> <p>Growing up as part of the LGBT community and not being out to my parents affected my home life and my experiences of living at home, while choosing to be out at college and being able to surround myself by an accepting community allowed me support I had not previously received. On the other hand, this made it more difficult when receiving support from my parents, as it felt as though I was keeping a part of myself from them whenever I would return home from college for vacations.</p>
2	My family was of great support during my studies
3	Campus feeling like home was extremely important. At times, campus felt better than home because I was surrounded by people working toward the same goals, I felt like I could be myself, and I felt support by friends, faculty, and staff.
4	My son was my main cheerleader. Without him I would have never finished.
5	My institution became my "home" during my junior year. At this point, I was so heavily involved with clubs, organizations and my work-study position that I often found myself not visiting home for months at a time.
6	It was important for me to graduate college as a first generation student. My parents wanted to see me succeed and find a job after college and obtaining a degree, to them, was the way to do that.
7	I felt like i served as an example for my family . I was the first to finish a degree and now two more have gone on to further their education. I felt like i showed

	them it was possible and that it could be done
8	My family wasn't supportive of my journey at a high-stress, intense four-year university and didn't understand the challenges I was encountering. I wasn't worried about being a role model for my younger brother too much because he was already somewhat driven to attend college in the future, and I didn't have to worry about kids.
9	I built a family at school with friends and it was a huge positive impact for me, but I also wanted to show my younger sister that if you want something you need to just go for it.
10	My family wasn't very helpful at all. I went to [school] as a necessity. Almost none of my family went to college
11	My friends were like family since we all went to high school together. Having that familiar comfort around me helped me not to have battles with isolation like many face when they dorm away from home or the stress of having to meet new people.
12	I intentionally chose a college away from home so I could become my own individual and heal from adverse childhood experiences. My parents wanted me to finish my college education, however, they were only able to provide me with some general encouragement since they did not attend college. They were disappointed when I transferred from my first college and moved to another state (Virginia to Texas). They would share this disappointment on our phone calls so I learned to seek support from mentors or friends who were supportive of my non-traditional path to a college education. My parents had also chosen to not pay for my college education, which I was not upset with them about because I know they were making the best financial decision for their future. I was from a middle class family, but my parents had triplets (I am a part of that set of triplets) in college so the estimated family contribution established by the federal government was too high for where they were living (northern Virginia). I lived a low-income reality, but was not allowed to be an independent or ask for financial help since I was from a middle class family. My parents did take me to one college visit and to my Orientation, but remember, they had to do this for three children so I did not have the option of visiting several colleges or paying for the application fees for more than 3-5 colleges.
13	At the time, I was driven by making my family proud and becoming the 1st one to graduate from college. I also knew I had been working towards that goal since I started school but there were times I felt pressure to succeed just for them. As a first generation student, I had to show my younger siblings that college was attainable. I also had to show my parents that their sacrifices they made for me would pay off. I had 2 of my younger siblings follow in my footsteps and attend my alma mater while I was there either as a student or academic advisor. That led to me feeling like I had to parent them to be successful since I had gone through the same thing they were dealing with. That experience with my siblings was so hard on me and created tension between me and my family but I also didn't know how to tell my parents that I didn't want to help since I felt it was expected.

14	It was important that I went to a prestigious institution not too far from home as I needed to be able to access my family and them me quickly.
15	My family was proud of me and motivated me, but I still felt disconnected from them. I also did not feel like I had a campus family until grad school.
16	I did not have a lot of traditional family support. me and my family are almost estranged at this point. I found close friends through college, some of whom are in my close circle.
17	It helped to be close to home but I could have gone further from home. I was pretty much alone in my experiences when it came to my family. They were learning as I was going through it.
18	I have a difficult relationship with my actual family so I was not really influenced by them. I often thought of my family as a source of stress because they often guilted me about going to college and not being at home and working. Some of my family was supportive (my grandfather) but most of my support was received through professors and friends.
19	The Roadrunner Family is just that: a family. But, I did not base my response on them. I needed my biological family's support. They were the ones who built me up throughout college.
20	My family encouraged me on a daily basis that I could and would succeed. Especially my parents; who I spoke to everyday to get me through.
21	My campus was a residential college environment which felt like home, it helped me feel close to the women around me and less anonymous. My parents lived 3,000 miles away, but my sister lived 300 miles away so I have somewhere to go on holiday weekends and that really helped. While my family didn't understand what college was like they were always great cheerleaders.

Work - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	I worked at my college my sophomore through senior year, at some points working three jobs on campus. I found these jobs to be a good way to learn various skills in different fields. Having worked with TRIO students in one of my jobs, I found a lot of support from my bosses.
2	I had a job up until a certain point. My degree program required an internship with it so there was a tough time of only having one income to maintain finances
3	My supervisors taught me so much. I learned to communicate better (orally and written), listen better, use various programs/software, think critically and more. I believe I learned more from them than I learned in classes.
4	Both of my bosses were in my corner, backing me and pushing me the whole way.
5	My on-campus work directly benefited me not only professionally but personally. This is where I found my greatest mentors as well as my passion for higher education.

6	All of my employers during my time in undergraduate coursework were supportive of my strides to complete college. Most allowed me to adapt my schedule to finish assignments or finals, take off time to complete schoolwork and even do my schoolwork at work.
7	All of my jobs where on campus so i believed it shaped me in a very productive and professional man art . I learned how politics worked in the work place and most importantly work life balance
8	I can't say that the work I did in college brought me financial stability because I was drawn towards work-study jobs and other campus jobs that served other underrepresented populations or other students, in general, which don't pay very much. I can say that it got me connected with some really incredible, kind-hearted leaders in the community who encouraged me to take leadership roles in the future and to be confident in the pursuit of my goals.
9	I had multiple jobs every year while I was in college, except my freshmen year. I don't think I would've managed my time as well without them
10	Work didn't really affect me at all. Especially once I started working off campus
11	I worked on campus and this is where I formed a community of support.
12	work negatively impacted me. it was a stressor and an obligation I could not afford to lose. I almost failed my summer course due to crazy work schedule where i was missing dining hall hours and too hungry to study properly.
13	I worked 30-40 hours a week more than five out of seven years. My supervisors were very supportive of my educational pursuits and would work with me when I was needing time to focus on my Bachelor's degree. Due to the network I built from various work experiences, I was able to find several full-time positions after college due to this network. I completed four internships during this time as well so my experience is a little bit of a mix of working from unpaid internships or working as a paid employee.
14	My 3 years as a Resident Assistant provided me a great opportunity both socially, personally, and financially. I had 3 wonderful supervisors who were supportive. I also made friends with both my fellow RA's and students. My experience as an RA also drove my interest in working with college students.
15	Working during college helped to give me experience, foster networking opportunities, creating life-long kinship, and support for next steps.
16	I had a campus job I loved my second two years of undergrad, but at that point other factors had already kept me dedicated.
17	I worked on campus as a resident adviser and it really shaped how I think about my career and connecting with people. Being an RA was sometimes tough because I had to balance school, work, social life, and advocacy/activism. My supervisors were always super supportive and were willing to help me and push me towards my goals and passions. I made strong connections with my fellow RAs and event my students who i still keep in touch with years later.
18	I would not have been able to stay at school or even go at all if I had not worked throughout my time in undergrad. However, work also allowed me to enjoy learning about drama and the theatre while working.

19	Work was often a source of stress since I had to work a lot more than my non-low-income peers.
20	I did not work until my senior year in college. I did not need a job to make an impact on me.
21	Did not work
22	Getting into summer research programs for undergrad scientists like REU and DAAD-RISE made me feel like I was good enough to pursue science and have a chance at PhD program.

Service - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	While I did not do much community service throughout college, I was a part of many clubs and organizations geared towards minority groups and spent a lot of time volunteering for events put on by these clubs. Both having the chance to work with these groups as well as educate others on social justice issues related to these groups was one of the most impactful parts of my college career. Tutoring TRIO-eligible students was also an important part of my college experience. Nothing gave me more joy than being able to help another student succeed in their own college experience.
2	This didn't really impact it
3	Service was a big part of some of the organizations I was a part of like the Residence Hall Association and various honor societies. I believe it helped me feel more connected to those around me, which enhanced those feelings of family on campus. I remember volunteering with a friend during MLK Day of Service. He and I went with a group to a children's group home to clean and landscape the facilities there. That experience truly helped us bond and realize how important it was to give back.
4	I didn't experience anything in this theme
5	I did some service during my undergraduate time, but I do not think my experiences were shaped by it.
6	I am a servant leader . I have been to and planned more than 7 alternative break trips. My graduate assistantship was in the community engagement department. I found my niche as a leader and a citizen . I was also a part of AMERICORPS.
7	I think as a first-gen student trying to survive college, helping others was nice and made me feel extremely fulfilled, but this in itself did not help me succeed in my academics. They were side hustles and extracurriculars that kept me emotionally energetic and gave me a reason to wake up in the morning - but I wouldn't exactly say 'thrive'.
8	I was an RA but there weren't a lot of external opportunities for community service at my institution.
9	Unfortunately I didn't have many experiences with service.

10	Service for me is independent of academic success. while I enjoyed doing it i never thought of it as a reason to thrive in school. It was just something i did that sometimes made me happy.
11	Like I mentioned above, I was primarily mentoring high school or fellow college-aged students in faith-based organizations. I also lead six trips (mission or service) within the US or internationally (Mexico). Due to these experiences, since graduating, I have lead college students on trips to Costa Rica, Turkey, and Georgia (the country).
12	My experience was impacted by service through my position as a RA as the job required serving first year on campus students. I specially oversaw 22-24 females in their first year. Helping others was something I enjoyed doing and drove me to explore a new career field in student affairs. I only somewhat agree since I don't see my experience being shaped by this theme as much as other ones.
13	It is through volunteerism, community service, advocacy, and helping others when possible that I fostered a deeper love for service.
14	I did not start doing service until grad school
15	Service played a huge role in my undergrad experience! My primary means of service was through alternative breaks and days of service (days we would typically have off from class like MLK day). It helped connect me to the broad community and helped instill values like global citizenry! I also was able to take on leadership roles within community service organizations.
16	Participating in service opportunities and service-learning courses provided me the opportunity to get involved in the community and learn more about it.
17	Organizing helped me feel like I had a place on campus and all of that was around first-gen and low-income student identity.
18	I don't believe that service impacts a college experience.
19	Getting involved in activities to help others has always been a passion of mine dating back to preschool. It is a part of who I am. This area assisted me in staying active and motivated to achieve greater things.
20	Helping the underclassmen on my Track Team gave me purpose in my last couple of years.

Financial Support - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	My college was a safety school and I did not want to attend it, but it was the best choice financially for me. Having the financial support I did through scholarships and grants (especially when study abroad and receiving national grants to fund my study) was critical to my success. While I still had to take out student loans, I recognize that my loans are not as bad as many other students and am grateful for all the financial assistance I received.
2	I was grateful to be able to get financial aid to finish school

3	My entire undergraduate experience, except a \$1200 summer loan, was financed by federal/state grants and scholarships. If I didn't want to, I could have not worked. There were times I had financial concerns, but those were due to not understanding how disbursement worked at the beginning of the semesters. Once I knew everything was covered, I was okay.
4	Obtaining my degree wouldn't have been possible without my grants and tuition reimbursement from my job.
5	I did not receive many scholarships or grants for my education but each semester as I applied for additional loans I had the chance to reflect on why I was there and looked at it as an investment in myself.
6	I did not receive any scholarships, but grants and loans were the only way I could have completed college.
7	Without my 21st century scholarship my education would not have been possible. I took out loans as well, I felt like it was an investment in my future
8	I would not have gotten my four-year degree at a school with such a high sticker price and known worldwide had I not gotten a full-ride for being labeled a need-based applicant/student.
9	I wouldn't have gone to or chosen the institution I did if it weren't for the scholarships and grants I received.
10	Academic grants and loans were essential.
11	Wish I would have known more about these options and been better educated on this topic
12	having grants and an athletic scholarship helped relieve financial burden on my parents which in turn made me happy because I didn't want to be a burden on my parents and always wanted to be the child that never needed financial support from them. However athletic financial support was partly a negative impactor. I was in a sense owned and my accomplishments on the track weighed heavy on my mind since if I performed poorly there was fear of losing that support. wanting to missing practice for either sickness, mental health or to catch up on school work induced fear so I rarely did it and eventually was in a constant stressed state
13	<p>My opinion is mixed: I chose a private college for my freshmen year, so it was helpful to receive a merit scholarship for my high school GPA (which was only a 3.0). I think it was \$7,500 each semester and the total cost of the year was \$32,000. I believe I received the VTAG (Virginia state grant) which is for private colleges. The next five years were a struggle since my middle-class parents chose not to pay for my education. I did not receive any financial assistance except for a small scholarship from one of my employers (\$600 a semester for a year). My final year of college, I was 24 years old and classified as an independent student. The federal Pell grant and the VTAG covered the tuition costs during my final academic semester of [school].</p> <p>I missed either several sub-terms (8-week courses) or semesters because I owed a balance to [school] three times. Each were about \$700, but I had no one to help me with this cost. They did not have any assistance for online students</p>

	unless they made a mistake. I had to take online classes because of the federal limit for students borrow loans each year. The loan amount would not have covered my cost of living, which is why I was working. I only took out loans for my tuition, so I fortunately only ended up with \$24,000 in debt when I graduated, which was below what was anticipated for my graduating class of 2014 (around the US).
14	I still think back to the summer before my 1st year and how with financial aid covering most of my tuition and housing, I was still about \$2,000 short. I remember thinking I was not going to get to go to college when I was awarded a scholarship that covered the rest of the costs. If it was not for that scholarship who knows what would have happened. I also became an RA due to the financial support it provided (housing, meal plan, and a monthly stipend). I am proud to say I graduated debt free from undergrad.
15	Through scholarships and grants I received a full ride to the most expensive public state institution.
16	Without scholarships and grants I never would have even been in college
17	Grants and loans and scholarships are how I got through college. My freshmen year i almost lost my scholarship but i appeal it and was granted an appeal. I feel like I got lucky because without being granted the appeal I probably wouldn't have been able to continue.
18	Need-based scholarships and work-study allowed me to literally attend school and not to have to worry as much about financial stressors and strains.
19	Had I not receive financial aid, I would not have been able to attend college.
20	Prior to beginning my college career, I made the decision that I would not allow my parents to help support me financially. They paid for 14 years of private school for me and my sister, so I did not want to put that extra burden on them. I chose to wait to decide on a school until I had a secure financial path. I chose a forgivable loan. This loan paid for all my finances throughout college so long as I graduated on time with a 3.0 GPA. Without that loan and various scholarships, I likely would've dropped out or taken breaks when I could not afford it.
21	I obtained two grants to assist with paying for school. In addition to grants, my grandfather paid my tuition/room/meal plan for duration of school. This was extremely helpful because I was able to focus on my studies, engage in volunteer, and develop without having to worry about money.
22	Financial Aid and my family taking out loans for me was the only reason I could go to a private liberal arts college.

Additional feedback (optional): Please indicate additional themes along with context for suggesting the addition(s).

Respondents	Responses
1	None
2	N/A
3	N/A

4	Since I was an online student, and did not really speak with anyone in Academic Advising, I had to learn how to be a self-starter. I was actually hired as an Academic Advisor two weeks before graduating from [school], because I understood how to advise other college students based on my experience. During my final semester, I realized it was going to be difficult to find a job within my field of study (Psychology) unless I did an additional unpaid internship or went on to a graduate degree. I had never thought about pursuing a Master's degree until that final semester. That final semester when I was hired at [school] started my career in higher education. I served two years as an Academic Advisor and two years at another college (in Minnesota) as an Admissions Recruiter. Next May, I will graduate with a M.Ed in Higher Education from the [school].
5	All of these things help to create and culminate an experience I'll carry with me for a lifetime.
6	n/a
7	Not at this time.
8	Cultural/identity development just because I found myself as a woman of color during my time in undergrad.
9	N/A
10	N/A

Appendix H: Round Three Responses

Self Starter - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
1	When I first got to college I didn't know anyone and it was my yearning for connections that pushed me to reach out and try new things and join organizations. In addition, i knew i wanted to go to grad school but i wasn't given the tools on how to get there and went out and found them myself including the Ronald E. McNair program
2	I feel that being a self-starter played a large role in be graduating from college.
3	I was heavily motivated to go to school so I could pursue my dream of becoming a pediatric cardiologist (which I did not do after all. I ended up earning my BA in English because I realized how much I enjoy teaching people how to write while in college). I have always been a studious student.
4	I described myself as a self-started in an interview recently, which is five years after my graduation.
5	If not for my own motivation I would have dropped out
6	I was 36 when I graduated with my degree, 19 years after I graduated high school. When I decided to go back to school, it was all on me, I had to push myself to talk to admissions personnel, fill out my financial aid papers, and register for classes. And with the beginning of each term, I had to push myself to keep going, knowing the end result would change my life and my son's life forever, for the better.
7	My experiences in success were almost entirely the result of being a self-starter and having the motivation to find out answers on my own.
8	I think of myself as a self-starter to some extent. I don't necessarily get the support I need from my parents about my academic goals. I want to get a PhD and go into academia. They do support me they just don't really know how to do so sometimes so in a lot of ways I've had to give myself that support and have found it in my friends. Sometimes I think it's easy to get into a competition of who's the biggest self-starter, though. There's this idea that all first-gen students have to constantly be hustling and that we work harder than other students. I think there's a lot of truth to that but I think sometimes it can turn toxic when you're seen as not being respectful of your parents sacrifices or not "really" deserving of the things you've been given through your institution if you're not constantly working, if you take a break. It feels like first-gen students can't even just be average, like we have to excel and be perfect or it's all a loss.
9	I was motivated to go to college and better myself since 6th grade. I know I wanted to do more but knew I needed at least one degree to push forward.
10	I'm not sure whether my self starter trait was more fear of failure and familial disappointment or if it just started off as that and then morphed into my own desire to be great
11	This was largely induced by the fact there was no plan b and consequences would be large: if I left my college, my scholarships would be lost, if I didn't work, then I wouldn't have money to afford to live in the area, etc. I couldn't depend on my family to help with these things.
12	I didn't have a lot of assistance when I first began college and it wasn't until my

	junior year that I became aware and unashamed to use certain resources around campus.
13	I knew there was no backup plan, I had no safety net, my parents didn't have any money to support me beyond 18. This was made very clear my whole childhood. I had goals and no one was going to accomplish them for me. When I would start to get overwhelmed or exhausted my family was always there to support me and remind me why I started in the first place and help me keep going to the finish line.
14	It definitely takes motivation and determination to be successful! You just have it to navigate the system.
15	I believe we cannot control everything in our lives, but we can control a lot of things. With this mentality, being self starter comes somewhat naturally.
16	It was partially self starting mixed with external supports from my family
17	I think that for me, being a self- starter meant that I worked from my own motivations to do well in school. I sought my own assistance and resources to help me when I was struggling. Not to say that I did it on my own, but my perseverance came from my own goals and interests.
18	I feel like I'm only a self-starter as a way to not fail. I'm always willing to try something new but I'm not sure I would describe myself as a self-starter
19	During high school, I was unable to take advantage of many opportunities after school, and felt quite limited by my financial situation. When I entered college, I was given the chance to live independently and had more opportunities readily available for me. I wanted to experience things in college that I hadn't been able to do thus far in my education, such as attending extracurricular activities that I could not attend in high school, or working in various locations on campus.
20	I learned from an early age that doing things well resulted in praise. I also developed a love of learning. Both of these things led to me being a devoted achieving student. Once I learned about my parent's educational background, I felt a desire to achieve more than they did for my own betterment but also to make them proud. I was driven to perform well in high school so I could get into college. Once in college, my mindset shifted to doing well to be able to stay and complete my degree.
21	I was very driven to have a successful time in college . I always did things out of the normal and eventually brought that connection to my circles which made them branch out . An example is the year that I decided to run for a SGA senator that year was the most diverse senate my pwi had ever had
22	Everything I did in college was based on maintaining the expectations I had for myself and to make my mother proud.
23	Without my drive I would have failed out of school. I was physically ill my first year, dealing with loss of grandparents, being away from home for the first time. I used my circumstances as a fuel rather than sulk and fail. I was so driven towards success I was able to turn it all around once I got clear with myself on what I wanted

Cultural/Identity Development - Share your thoughts and experiences on this theme.

Respondents	Responses
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1	During college I was heavily connected with organizations that helped me further my identity development through programming. I was also strongly connected with the university's multicultural office and engaged in their program. Through this process I learned more about who I was as a person but also learned how to become a global citizen.
2	My mom is a bartender and my dad owns his own business but works long hours in the weather. Watching them I knew that was not the path I wanted to be on. I am proud of them and I know they both are hard workers, however, I knew that I wanted a different outcome.
3	As a Hispanic in a predominantly Hispanic student body, I rarely experienced racism. However, my high school best friend attended and graduated from a university in Iowa. As a Hispanic in a predominantly Caucasian student body, he struggled to focus on his studies at times because he was often singled out for being Hispanic. It made group projects/assignments difficult to complete. Although [school] is a predominantly Hispanic institution, the student body is fairly diverse. I had the opportunity to meet and become friends with people who were Asian, Middle Easterners and many racial identities.
4	I am a white female who has learned more by learning about how others experience there racial and ethnic identities. I understand the privilege I had growing up even if my family does not see it as privilege.
5	This really wasn't something that I explored in depth until graduate school.
6	Due to completing an online degree, I never set foot in a classroom, and I never met any of my fellow classmates or instructors. I have no idea of their race, religion, background, etc. To me, they were just my classmates, as I hope I was to them.
7	As a first-generation American and college student, my experience was very much impacted by my cultural and identity development. It was important to my values as a first-generation American to complete college for my immigrant mother and as a first-generation college student to complete my degree for my family.
8	I come from a working-class Irish-Catholic family; my family is mixed, though, since my mother's step father is Puerto Rican and half my family is Puerto Rican so I grew up in both cultures. I think coming from a poor, working-class white family made me feel ashamed a lot of the time because there's this assumption that if you're poor and white you really must have fucked up because you had all the privileges of being white and you still ended up poor. I think a lot of the time I felt like I had to prove that I wasn't white trash and that I was better than other poor white people who were stupid, racist and all addicts. This was really hard because my family also fit some of those stereotypes. At the same time, though, I am really proud of being Irish and I took lots of pride in the work my ancestors have done and I think my ethnic identity helped me feel some sort of pride about where I come from and wanting to improve it but my racial identity did not.
9	I really wasn't thinking of that at first, however, it started to become important to me somewhat when I entered the social work field in college. I realized that there wasn't many African Americans represented. As a matter of fact, I was the only African American in my class for my Bachelors Program

10	I was the only woman of color in my science and math courses so I always felt I had to represent and couldn't be a stereotype or fail.
11	Growing up, I learned that 'Latino men are sometimes lazy, and because of that you can't rely on a man to support you.' Seeing my father leave and even acknowledging that my school had more difficulty retaining moc [men of color] as opposed to woc [women of color], was motivating for me as a woman.
12	I believe my identity development came into play as I became more involved in campus life which helped to shape my values and beliefs. Overall it was more importantly for me to feel welcome and thrive in an environment that embraced me regardless of the ethnic, religious or racial group.
13	I come from German immigrants who homesteaded the west. There has always been a ethos of hard work modeled from a young age and instilled in us. I also came from a protestant family that deeply instilled a sense of community and civic responsibility that helped me find a community at college (my track team) and really commit to seeing everyone on the team achieve their best. Which gave me a lot of joy.
14	Due to my background, strong sense of self, values, and resources specifically targeted to my ethnic group that for sure played a role in my success.
15	Looking back, I believe my college experience lacked cultural/identity development in regards to heritage, racial identity and ethnic group knowledge. I did grow in my personal beliefs and value system. This growth helped me make decisions in life.
16	I think that I developed a lot of who I am during my last year or so of college, and so my thriving and experiences were less impacted by identity development along the way.
17	I think that having had to work to help support my family before college translated into hard work in college. My mom also always taught me to treat all people equally so it made becoming an RA a breeze
18	I used college as a time to explore being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and chose to be out to those I met, rather than just a few close friends like I was in high school. Along with that, I tried to attend as many diverse events and organizations as I could, which I believe helped me become more empathetic to people of backgrounds different than my own. Growing up in a predominantly white state and attending a predominantly white institution made it difficult to learn about other cultures, and I strove to diversify my education as much as I could.
19	I personally did not find a lot of my experiences impacted by my cultural development because I always had a clear idea of who I was culturally. My identity did develop a lot during college and I feel that was impacted by my experiences not the other way around.
20	Being the president of BSU I was very connected in our cultural center. I even became a peer mentor my junior year and when i went on to graduate school my assistantship assignment was there. I enjoyed emerging the next leaders and our black community in a safe space
21	Being able to find solidarity and community in the Black Student Movement and finding a group of friends to share Black experiences and Christian experiences made it easier to socialized to campus.

Please explain your ranking.

Respondents	Responses
1	This was actually really hard. Financial support was my number 1 because my freshman year I lost my scholarship but was lucky enough to get granted an appeal, otherwise it wasn't something I really thought about because it was all loan/fasfa funded, I didn't need any 3rd party loans. i really think 2-8 are all equal if i had to do this as a pie chart they would each get equal amounts, but as a ranking I think this is the best way to rank them for me. I worked as a resident adviser and while it did help pay for room and board it didn't necessarily help. as a 1st gen college student my family wasn't sure how to be supportive or how to help and college was actually often a point of conflict.
2	I felt that all somewhat played a role, and it was difficult to decide what one played a bigger role. I think it would depend on the time you asked during the journey.
3	Financial support is at the top because it's the most basic need. I personally didn't view my family as much of an impact on me because of personal issues; my family was supportive of me being in college but they didn't know really how to be supportive. I have a difficult family life at home so I didn't really have the same relationship to my family as a source of inspiration as my peers did. Sometimes this felt ostracizing and I felt disconnected from the "first gen" experience. My friends were more important than my family in that regard because they could support me and loved me in a different way that I personally needed more.
4	I based my ranking according to what I believe pushed me to continue my education. While in college, I quickly came to the realization that college was not for everyone. At the end of my first semester, my GPA was 2.18. I graduated high school with a 4.14 GPA. So after my first semester, I made the choice between dropping out or going full-force in my studies. After being a private school student all my life, the freedom of college life was a total culture shock to me. Since I am a first-generation student, my family could not give me tips or anything that would prepare me for college life. But the emotional support to do whatever made me happy they gave me was pivotal! The rest of the themes played a part in my success, but none were as influential as my own self-discovery and the support of my family and friends.
5	I only attended a residential campus for one year and then I was a part of an internship program. I was raised in the middle class, so I was taught to be independent even though I was living a low-income reality as an adult. My family kept telling me I should not ask for help and only receive what I earn myself.
6	Things related to me directly were of highest importance, then things beyond me.
7	In my experience and situation, having the passion and desire to go back to school for my degree was the most important. If it wasn't for that, I would have never gone back. Being older and knowing who I am, I felt as though the Identity Development wasn't as important as other factors.
8	Self Development is definitely something that I found within my own success in the completion of my bachelor's degree and my master's degree. I started college because I thought I had to go, all of my friends were going and I thought I would be left behind if I didn't go, then I failed. When I started college again, I had to rely on

	only myself to complete my degree.
9	For me social networking was last on my mind. It was important for me to find a field that I loved so I wouldn't be "stuck" in a job instead of thriving in a career. Financial aid was important but family came before that because I knew that would assist me in making finances happen
10	My cultural background led my parents to prioritize education as only measure of success which pushed me to want to aim high. my track team motivated me to both not fail off the team and lose my scholarship but also gifted me the best social network of friends who provided support both academic and personal. Once i found a career path that motivated me because I finally had something i chose for me and not what my family thought I should be. Financial support and working was somewhat a hinderance making it harder to achieve my goals. Campus support wasn't as useful since I was already striving in academics. It was a minor push to get out before my friends did as friendly competition between teammates.
11	I would not have had a degree if it had not been covered by the school (1), and my family was not very supportive of me during my time at my college as they were not understanding of the environment or my mental illness in college.
12	Without my family I would not have been as motivated to apply schools out of state let alone prestigious east coast liberal arts colleges. Without the financial support I received from the college and loans taken out by family members I would not have been able to attend even a single year. Those were important cause they got me to college in the first place. 3-6 were the reason I wanted to stay and felt at home on campus. 7-10 were the extra support I needed when I was lost, overwhelmed or wanted to quit.
13	This was very hard for me seeing as many of the topics played a major role in tandem with one another. However with the true understanding of self, family, resources, and other supports which go back to my core values they helped me to graduate from a four year institution.
14	Self-starter is ranked number one, because I believe I could not have experienced success without being a self-advocate. Financial support in the form of grants and scholarships put me through college. Social networks made my university feel like a home. The rest of the themes were important be not as important as the top three.
15	I think that for me, what mattered most to my experience was having to figure out things for myself as a first generation student. My family was not very helpful during this time, and I worked a lot of odd jobs to make ends meet. I never really found my passion from undergrad, because when I had it, the goal was unattainable at the time. So I had to change my plan. What helped me the most, was financial assistance from the EOP program, the people I met through that program, and finding community on campus. Additionally, self-development around my identity and traveling helped me to seek out certain resources and program that helped me along the way.
16	Work has always been high on what I attributed my success to in college. It helped me become efficient at managing my time and completing things quickly.
17	The most important thing I gained out of my college experience that allowed me to thrive was finding a group a people who could support me and challenge me to be the best version of myself I could be. Being given the chance to explore my passions

	<p>and discover what I was interested in helped me think towards my future after college, and having people who shared my passions made my experiences worthwhile for me.</p> <p>I was heavily involved in many organizations on campus, and relied on other organizations throughout my career for things like financial assistance for study abroad. Without departments and campus resources, I would not have had many of the experiences I did during college.</p> <p>While I valued my ability to work in various departments on campus, and appreciated the financial support for my college career, those ranked lower in their importance to me compared to the social connections I was able to make.</p>
18	In looking at my overall college experience I feel my success came from my drive to succeed and do well. Part of that became being able to financially support myself so as to not put pressure on my family to provide for me. That is what initially drove me to apply to be an RA which ultimately led me to discovering my passion for working with college students. Through that experience I was able to develop my social network which led to mentors and strong social bonds.
19	I found my niche through student organizations. If I had not been diligent and persistent towards what I wanted out of my college life I wouldn't have found my purpose and made an impact.
20	Family is important and was the foundation for a lot of my experience, however, having the solidified money for school allowed me to develop who I am and would become outside of my familial role. Additionally, it allowed me to find and define "my Blackness" outside of the definition and perception that I was given by my hometown. Same with self-starting. It was innate but what got me through was finding myself and having the financial means to do it.
21	My family played a huge role in my survival and success in school. With that, they helped connect me with resources and programming to help me along the way. Self-development played a huge role too. Without developing and growing, I'd still be a sad freshman!

What advice do you have for first-generation college students entering their first year of college?

Respondents	Responses
1	YOU GOT THIS!!! It's tough but you will get through it, use all of your resource, get connected to something!
2	Find a mentor or friend to confide in that will understand when you need to vent. Also always vision that end goal.
3	Form strong connections with friends who understand you without having to explain. A support system doesn't have to fit any sort of preconceived notion.
4	<p>Don't overwhelm yourself. Take it all one assignment at a time.</p> <p>Ask questions in class. You can never be too clear on a given topic.</p> <p>Connect with your professors in their office hours. It can be intimidating at first, but most professors are helpful if you make the effort.</p>

	<p>Take advantage of any tutoring services your school might offer.</p> <p>Don't be afraid to meet people of all cultures and backgrounds! Expand your comfort zone!</p> <p>Get involved in clubs, honor societies, Greek life and any organizations your school offers.</p> <p>Work out in your free time! Freshmen 15 is no joke...</p> <p>Above all, enjoy your time as an undergrad. You can do it!! These really are the best four years of your life. Do your best in class and connect with your new family at your school.</p>
5	If you have the financial support to not work during your first two years in college, then get involved and engaged with campus life and events. If you have the opportunity to study abroad, then take the risk. Sometimes your overall growth and learning is more important than the immediate financial gain. Networking is important, however, make sure it is a two-way relationship. Yes, you want to get to know them, but they should also know you as well so they can speak into your strengths and encourage you to pursue opportunities you did not think you could achieve.
6	Stick with it, find a group of supportive friends, know that the struggle is temporary.
7	Don't over work yourself. You are young. Find out who you are while attending college. Join clubs, be involved on campus. These years can help form your future more than you know.
8	Get involved and spend your free time in the library, studying. Utilize the resources on your campus and make allies who can assist you along the way. Make sure you listen to your body and your mental health too.
9	First of all save! Don't get discouraged my money. If your driven, it's out there somewhere. Take your time in selecting the classes that you are taking. I almost wasted my time in the education field but I figured out in my freshman year that that's not what I wanted to do due to some introductory classes. Utilize your advisor. They are important in your journey during your collegiate career and lastly, socialize and get to know people
10	Find a career, academic and personal mentor who you can turn to for advice, support and opportunities. Counseling should not be feared! take care of your mental health. It's okay to have to cut your family off from time to time to focus on yourself and your studies. You cannot help if you don't make it and if their constant issues are hindering you LET IT GO. Be kinder to yourself. You are doing your best and sometimes that doesn't measure well under someone else's standards (grades). Seek all campus resources for internships, mentors, tutoring, food pantries, etc. sometimes these things are not widely advertised but are there. There is nothing wrong with being the "token" you had to work hard to earn that spot and are the best for that spot. its okay to outgrow friendships or relationships
11	It's okay to feel behind, so you need to remember to utilize every resource you have

	and ask for support whenever you need it to play catch up with other students who had access to these skills and knowledge in their more privileged lives. It'll get better eventually, but don't let the first year bring you down.
12	Find your niche and place where you feel you belong on campus. Don't be ashamed to ask questions. It could possibly lead you to a world of assistance that can be the difference of you going to and graduating from college. Find a mentor or someone you can relate to that you would like to help develop your personal and professional self.
13	You will feel out of place, it doesn't mean you do not belong there.
14	<p>1. Understand that you are not alone.</p> <p>2. It's ok to make different types of friends and networks beyond that which you're used to.</p> <p>3. Make sure to find supportive services and resources that are dedicated to your success (TRIO programs, mentoring programs, housing living and learning communities etc.)</p> <p>4. Every decision has an impact on you and someone else. Take your time making sections.</p> <p>4. Despite the pressure that's being put on you to do this or that understand that your passion can be fulfilled in many ways.</p> <p>5. Not a single person understands your experience like you do. So live it, learn from it, and move forward.</p> <p>6. NEVER BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP!!!</p> <p>7. When the going gets tough don't try to navigate alone. Reach out to your network and counseling. These will all help you through.</p> <p>8. Your friends you started with many not be your friends or you'll notice some distance in the end. That's ok because there are multiple levels to friendship. You will SURVIVE!</p> <p>9. Sometimes those closest to you including your family won't understand or be by your side the way you hoped. Reach deep down inside and keep going!</p> <p>10. You belong and have the responsibility of helping someone else!</p>
15	Be proud to be first generation and let people know you're first generation. There are many services and resources available to first generation students, so take advantage of them. Secondly, build a support system. Your family may care about your success, but they may not be the best people to turn to when you experience failure, success, and everything in between while in college. This is why it is important to find mentors - peer mentors and non-peer mentors. Lastly, get involved with activities that you're passionate about. Your university needs to feel like a second home, especially if you're

	away from home. One of the best ways to make it feel like home is by developing connections with others who share your interests. If you like sports, singing, volunteering - find others who enjoy those things.
16	Be open to new ideas. Take a class, join an organization or attend an event outside your comfort zone. <u>You never know where you will find your next passion!</u>
17	Please do not fail classes during that first year. Work to find friends or people who share similar experiences with you. Seek out counseling, financial, social clubs so that college doesn't feel so new and isolating. Spend time away from campus as well to gain real-world experiences to complement your studies.
18	It doesn't matter how long it takes as long as you choose to finish. I work in higher ed and sometimes my students take a semester off and telling them that they can always go back.
19	If possible, attend events or go to organizations on campus meant for first-generation students on campus. Finding people who are going through similar experiences as you will mean more than one might imagine, as students are not equal despite attending the same college. Having even one person who you can talk about your experiences being first generation with can make a world of difference. Get connected on campus through jobs and organizations that are of interest to you. Exploring your interests and passions can provide you with an outlet that you may not have had access to before entering college.
20	You don't know what you don't know. This is a cliché but is so true. Ask questions you have, ask for advice on what you should be asking, and more than anything be proud of where you have come from.
21	Get INVOLVED!!!! It will help mold you and strengthen your skill set! It will also open many doors for you socially and academically. Lastly please ask for help! There are so many resources on campus that are for you to succeed with everything. Remove your pride no one cares here! We want you to succeed so ask for help
22	Find yourself. Find a community of people and hold onto them. Realize when you are burning out and need someone to keep you from drowning. Therapy is not because you're crazy; it's to keep you achieving those goals.
23	Engage in campus resources. Connect with your professors; you will need them later. Advisors are phenomenal and provide excellent encouragement/guidance; get to know your advisor EVEN IF THEY CHANGE!!! Please engage in Trio services, volunteer, get involved with student organizations. Be willing to try new experiences; expand, grow, and enjoy the journey!!!

What recommendations do you have for higher education institutions to help first-generation college students succeed in college?

Respondents	Responses
1	Connect connect connect, based on my experience we are just left to wander aimlessly throughout the institution. Universities NEED to connect with their 1st gen student base, because they usually have other hurdles to overcome as well.
2	Help set up mentors for first-gen students.

	1. Better and more financial aid overall
	2. Creation of first-gen student centers
3	3. Having a paid staff member to work with first-gen students and create a community
4	If they do not have a program in act for first-generation students, START ONE and make it mandatory! [School] had a program for first-generation students, but I did not join until my senior year when I wanted to beef up my resume. My little sister will be an incoming Freshman at [school] in the Fall. They require all first-generation students to get involved in their first-generation program. When I was that age, I made the excuse that I didn't have the time to add on one more organization but I really do see how much having that extra support system would've helped me succeed even more!
5	Have a full-time staff member and office for first-generation college students. Allocate and align the budget to support low-income students. Understand the various and multiple identities that first-generation college students may experience. Share their stories!
6	Offer lots of financial aid resources and opportunities to connect with other friends.
7	Be an open book. Don't assume a prospective students understands everything you are telling them. They may say they do, but they don't.
8	Honor them and acknowledge them. First gen students have completed something brand new to them and their families; they have never attended a family weekend, a graduation and probably don't know the terms or lingo that colleges use. Spend time getting to know your first-gen students and getting to know their needs. Invest in teaching your faculty members what first-gen is and how to work with first-gen students.
9	I would encourage institutions to build more grant and scholarship opportunities. The reality of it is not many, or at least in my experience, have enough money to succeed without putting strain on their families. I would love for the next generation not to have to worry about paying off tons of student loans like I am!
10	Provide safe spaces! it's so imp[ortant] to have somewhere to be who you are with people with similar interests
11	It's not just about paying for the financial aid or having social groups - being first-gen is heavily correlated with poverty and being low-income. Students might get far less emotional support because they can only afford to visit home once a year as opposed to their roommate who visits every two-three months. First-gens might not have the money to afford fancy interview attire which might deter them from finding jobs or being as presentable during job interviews. This population might suffer from food insecurity and might not have trouble securing summer jobs if 1. they're unpaid or 2. they need to support their families at home. Colleges don't seem to think about these things or have budgets for them, so impoverished students can escape financial insecurity with more stability.
12	Be more intentional about the programs and services you offer and align them with what students need and not what it simply easy for the department to do that day. By aligning resources and reaching out to students so the resources are used, it makes for a more educationally, financially, and socially comfortable student, and encourages them

	to want to stay at the institution to become an alum. This in turn assists with the low retention and graduation rates that many higher ed institutions are battling. There's nothing greater than to have a success story for both the students and the institution.
13	More financial resources and some sort of 'club' or group where you meet others who are also first gen, especially at the schools where it feels like everyone else's parents went to graduate school.
14	<p>1. There's a bottom line beyond your Tyrion dollar.</p> <p>2. First-generation college students are very unique and special. Listen and make change according to their needs.</p> <p>3. Create the system that's needed. Relying on old systemic ones that were built on racism and other blood and tears of the oppressor are not the way to go.</p> <p>4. There are new students each year with different needs. So what worked in the past may not work today.</p> <p>5. Realize that yes you've opened the door for an opportunity to changes the lives of families and generations to come but that doesn't mean the student understands that. So create some support around that.</p>
15	Identify and engage these students early. Ideally identify them before they apply, but at least during the application process. Once they are identified, start a communication flow that explains what being first generation means and why the institution is the best place for their success. In regards to actual programs and services, educate staff and faculty on what it means to be first generation. Ensure they understand first generation students in an assets based lens. In addition, establish a dedicated office for first-generation student support. This office should provide mentoring, networking opportunities, academic development, identity development, and financial support. If the institution has a TRIO SSS program and/or McNair Scholars Program, ensure those programs are not only valued, but also financially supported by the university, since grant funds have many restrictions.
16	Reflect on your current daily vocabulary and think to yourself "would I have known this at 17?". We use too many abbreviations in higher education.
17	Work to make college information more accessible by breaking down language, forms, financial aid, classes and enrollment information. Allow students to contribute to ways that institutions can be improved.
18	Find ways to teach them about how college actually works. How do they find things, which offices do what, what resources are available
19	<p>Recognize that first-generation students are a diverse population, with a myriad of identities as well as being first-generation. Supporting first-generation students means working intersectionally to provide support for students.</p> <p>Students should not just attend their institution, but should thrive. Breaking down barriers that prevent first-generation students from accessing all parts of institutions is important to their success.</p>

	Not only do barriers need to be broken down, but the perception of these barriers needs to be eradicated for students to succeed. For example, studying abroad as a first-generation student might be more affordable than students believe, but efforts must be made for students to be aware they are welcomed and able to apply for these opportunities.
20	Identifying who first generation students are is the first step. Once the students are identified, they should be contacted by relevant people like their advisors, on campus hall directors, financial aid advisors, etc. so they can start to develop contacts with those crucial offices. I also think offices that provide TRIO services like Student Support Services or other 1st gen specific resources should market more and make themselves more visible. First gen students are not going to inherently know there are services just for them
21	We are different and we come with challenges, but that dose not make us any less than any other student type. We do not fit under one theory and we should be handled with respect and guidance not set up to fail an already broken system
22	Higher education institutions need to consider how much intersections will play in the first-generation experience. ESPECIALLY at a PWI. There will need to be community experiences and support networks. One of the best things the diversity office at my undergraduate institution was to assign me a minority advisor (an upperclass member) that helped me socialize to campus.
23	Reach out often. Explain your role more than once. You never know whose life you are truly touching by doing this.

What recommendations do you have for high schools who are preparing first-generation college students to succeed in college?

Respondents	Responses
1	Help students navigate how to get into college, financially get through college beyond fasfa, and how to get through college once there. create an alumni support network at various colleges alum are at.
2	Also educate parents on things so they have a better understanding of the culture their children are in.
3	Put the material needs of your student first over college enrollment numbers. If that means kids going to community college and working over going to a four year school, let it be. Also encouraging students to be proud of their identity while also acknowledging that it's hard; you're allowed to feel multiple ways about being first gen.
4	BE BLUNT! Don't scare students, but be real about the new challenges that they face as new college students. STRESS the importance of applying for scholarships at the beginning of their Senior year in high school. Explain the severity of choosing a school that will not put them in a lifetime's amount of debt. Many first-generation students have parents who may not even speak English, so it truly helps when they can look up to a teacher/counselor who has attended college.
5	Help students understand the definition of a first-generation college student and help them to have pride in this identity rather than the feeling of embarrassment. Encourage them to go on several campus tours and find financial support for students who do not have the money to travel to a campus tour or pay an application fee. Let them know the

	various options of colleges and universities and do not allow them to believe they cannot apply to a dream school. They should take a long-shot risk and a manageable risk. Being told no is okay and they need the emotional support to understand that they can accomplish graduating from college.
6	Tell them to be ready for a challenge
7	Ask questions, be pushy if needed. Do what you need to do to survive and thrive in school.
8	<p>Define the term for these students, most of the first generation students who are entering college don't know they are first-gen students. This could help bridge the gap between them and non-first-gen students who seem to have an easier time attending college. This sense of identity can give these students who may feel out of place, a sense of ownership in the new space they are in.</p> <p>Next, help these first-gen students understand the process of applying to college and applying for financial aid. These students need financial aid the most and will have the hardest time during this process.</p>
9	Utilize your guidance counselors and resources. Make a list of things that you enjoy and start building a major and career off of that. Don't choose a field because it's popular, choose something that really matters to you!
10	same advice for college students
11	Go to a school where you'll exit with the least amount of debt and take the dual classes seriously, so you can graduate faster.
12	<p>Exposure is key. Show students more than the neighboring colleges. Organize campus visits for more than just the seniors and make it a requirement for each student to have visited at least 3 college campuses by the time they graduate. Many students don't go anywhere or don't find a good fit because they have not been exposed.</p> <p>Put more effort and energy into the students who seem unmotivated. They need your support and more importantly need to know that someone believes in them. There are great schools that have open enrollment for those who are academically unstable who simply need a second chance.</p> <p>Also, build relationships with college representatives and offices. Sometimes if a student is not accepted to a school, all it takes is for someone to call or write a letter or email to advocate for them.</p>
13	I wish there would have been more honesty. Just tell me that I will not have the resources of the people around me and wasting energy on comparison only makes it so you have less energy to focus on your own success.
14	<p>1. Preparation needs to start at your level.</p> <p>2. Students are captive audiences and need cultivating before they get to college.</p> <p>3. You have the power to create and build or break trust that at the post-secondary level creates a greater level of danger. Simply because we all need each other to succeed and the precursor to each level makes a great impact on the other.</p>
15	Educate students on what first-generation means. Provide additional academic support

	and development, especially in writing and math. Focus on developing grit and growth mindsets.
16	Situation depending, try and include or educate the parents/supporters on the process as well. They are a crucial component in their student's life.
17	Seek out resources that can explain the college search process, and financial resources in college. Teach them the basics of money management and finances (paying bills, taking out loans, credit, etc.)
18	That college isn't always the answer. It's okay to choose a different path and you should choose something that makes you happy not something that makes your parents/family happy
19	<p>The TRIO Programs (such as Upward Bound) are great opportunities for high school students to experience a college campus and gain support through their high school career in preparing for college. If high schools are not partnered with TRIO Programs, I recommend them looking to making these connections.</p> <p>High schools should also let students know the potential barriers they will be facing when applying to colleges (such as financial difficulties), and shouldn't let students blindly apply for programs that aren't financially conscious for them.</p> <p>Providing them with help throughout the college application process (SAT/ACT support, college essay writing, researching colleges, applying for the FAFSA) will be important if they do not have the prior knowledge on how to do so.</p> <p>If teachers/guidance counselors/etc. are first generation students themselves, disclosing this information to students can give them tangible examples of people who are first generation students. This is important in showing them they can be first-generation and succeed.</p>
20	High schools should focus on helping these students understand the financial aspect of college more such as financial aid and work study. I also think even providing a general layout of how college works and is structured would be helpful.
21	College Prep programs are essential! College can be a lot mentally and it's important to have an example before trying new things . I was a part of the Trio Upward bound program that helped mold me into a college student during high school. I honestly feel like if i had not had that opportunity i would not have been successful during my undergraduate years or knew how to maneuver a different environment.
22	Help them find as many financial options as possible and even if they are highly intelligent and could attend the 4-year outright, do not discourage them from attending the community college to save money before moving to the university. College tours and meeting other first-generation students on campus would be helpful
23	Really prepare them, don't just say apply. Explain the process of going away and the feelings that will come with this. Share your own experiences. Bring in alumni who are a success to share their journey. Let them know it's ok to "fail" along the way to find yourself!

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