

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR ACQUISITION OF
CULTURAL CAPITAL

A Dissertation

by

EMILY CARROLL IVEY

Submitted to the Graduate and Professional School of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee,	Glenda Musoba
Committee Members,	Paul Keiper
	Vicente Lechuga
	Darby Roberts
Head of Department,	Mary Alfred

December 2021

Major Subject: Educational Administration

Copyright 2021 Emily C. Ivey

ABSTRACT

First-generation college students enter higher education with an inherited disadvantage compared to continuing generation college students. Because their parents or guardians did not attend college, first-generation students are limited in cultural capital directly related to higher education. Additionally, because institutional processes are created for continuing generation students, first-generation students face unnecessary barriers as they enter and throughout their time in college.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how White first-generation college students built cultural capital specific to the higher education environment. Twelve first-generation college students, whose parents did not attend a post-secondary institution for any amount of time, were interviewed. These students entered the institution as first-time in college students and were currently enrolled as undergraduate students at a large, public, four-year institution at the time of the study.

Findings suggest first-generation college students utilize allies, purposefully structured educational experiences, personal agency, and resource systems to build their cultural capital in navigating higher education. All participants referenced individuals as being key to their success in navigating higher education. From friends, siblings, roommates, instructors, coworkers, classmates, and staff members, it was clear that various allies were crucial to their persistence. Additionally, it was their own personal skills, such as determination and grit, which aided their navigation of the institution.

Experiences prior to formally beginning classes, such as dual credit courses during high school and mandatory college orientation, proved beneficial as they built cultural capital entering the higher education setting. Once they began coursework they relied heavily on connected individuals, learning communities, and personal agency to navigate their college journey. During each step, their parents provided emotional support, encouragement, and a listening ear. Additionally, the first-generation college students in this study had frequent moments of personal reflection throughout their college career.

Implications for practice to better support first-generation college students are discussed. Research aligning transition theory with first-generation college students, gathering data from the parental view of first-generation college students, and looking into various sub-populations of first-generation college students is recommended.

DEDICATION

To everyone who believed in me along this journey: thank you.

To each first-generation college student: keep leaving your mark on higher education and making us rethink the work we do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was a team effort among family, friends, faculty, staff, and colleagues. The journey proved challenging yet rewarding. Working full time while balancing full-time course work required a supportive community from each area of my life. Many of you took this PhD adventure with me and I appreciate everything you did along the way.

First, a thank you to my committee for their support and guidance throughout: Dr. Glenda Musoba, Dr. Vincente Lechuga, Dr. Darby Roberts, and Dr. Paul Keiper. Dr. Musoba, my chair, guided me along my path throughout. From many conversations about school and work, to pauses in the research process, to navigating unique challenges, yet finding a way to get here. Thanks for providing a balance of patience, reflection, critical conversation, and ultimately helping me get to the finish line.

Megan Higginbotham was a friend, roommate, cheerleader, co-worker, proof reader, celebrator, and encourager throughout. There were moments of tears and celebrations where you walked alongside me. Overall, many of my friends gave encouragement in a variety of ways. You checked-in, asked questions, and provided positivity when I needed it the most. You reminded me I could do this, you believed in me. Thank you to Stefanie Baker, Melanie McKoin Owens, and Daniel Springer for processing, reading, editing, and processing even more. Thanks to each of my friends and cheerleaders for the important roles you played during the past six years: Drew McMillen, Traci Toone, Sarah Jaks, Andrew Carruth, Kristin Harrell, Rachel Hopper,

Mallory Anderson Mills, Sarah Hamilton, Matt Taylor, Amanda Taylor, James Robbins, and the individuals whose names are escaping me during this dissertation fog.

Thank you to everyone who gave your time to help transcribe interviews, forgiving the “umms” and “likes” to ensure stories were told. Another thanks to my small group at Grace Bible Church – Southwood who prayed endlessly and checked-in along the way. I am also thankful to my Camp Gladiator family for keeping me balanced physically and emotionally during this journey.

Staff members in my office were patient with my absence and understood how much I valued finishing this dissertation. Libby Dagers has been alongside me in the office throughout, frequently holding down the office while I took time to write these past few months. To my supervisors during my time in the program, Jennifer Ford and Meredith Malnar, you provided positivity and encouragement to keep going. And you never made me feel guilty for taking time away for class, writing, or to recharge.

Finally, thanks to my family: Mom (Amy), Dad (Rob), Robert, Chad, Michael, Tanna, Collyn, and Patrick. There were missed family gatherings and adventures so I could push through this degree. Thanks for your understanding and encouragement. Even though you might not have understood each step of the process, you knew each step was important and should be celebrated. Thanks for being patient and helping me keep my eyes on the finish... it's done!

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supported by a dissertation committee consisting of Professors Glenda Musoba, Vicente Lechuga, and Darby Roberts from the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development and Professor Paul Keiper of the Department of Health and Kinesiology.

All work for this dissertation was completed independently by the student.

Funding Sources

There are no outside funding contributions related to the research and compilation of this document.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
First-Generation College Students Defined	2
Overview of First-Generation College Students	3
Problem Statement	4
Research Questions	6
Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital Theory	7
Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions.....	13
Limitations.....	13
Delimitations	14
Assumptions	14
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	16
First-Generation College Students	16
Challenges Faced by First-Generation College Students.....	17
Theoretical Framework	20
Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital Theory	20
Habitus.....	23
Cultural Capital and College Students	26
Summary	28
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	30
Research Design.....	31
Participants and Source of Data	32
Instrumentation and Data Collection.....	36
Procedure.....	38

Data Analysis	41
Quality and Rigor	43
Researcher Bias and Assumptions	45
Limitations	47
 CHAPTER IV FINDINGS.....	 50
Profiles of Individual Participants.....	52
Aaron.....	52
Addison	53
Andi.....	53
Caroline	55
Casey	55
Kendall	56
Leah.....	58
Lizzie.....	58
Matt	59
Melissa.....	60
Stacy	61
Todd.....	61
Summary of Participants	62
Emergent Themes.....	63
Prior to the First-Day of Courses	65
Allies	65
Purposefully Structured Educational Experiences	68
Personal Agency.....	75
Resource Systems.....	76
After Their First Day of Class.....	77
Allies	77
Purposefully Structured Educational Experiences	91
Personal Agency.....	93
Resource Systems.....	95
Introspection.....	98
Allies	98
Personal Agency.....	99
Chapter Summary.....	110
 CHAPTER V DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	 112
Summary of Findings.....	112
Interpretation of Findings.....	113
First-Generation Students Rely on Themselves and Believe They Can Succeed ..	113
First-Generation Students Find a Way to Create Their own Higher Education	
Habitus.....	115

Parents/Guardians are Important in Supporting First-Generation Students 119

First-Generation Students Know Resources Exist, but Do Not Necessarily Know
When or Why to Use Them..... 120

First-Generation Students Have a Lot of Emotions They are Processing, in
Addition to the Emotions Continuing Generation Students Also Experience 121

Implications for Practice 123

 Prior to the Beginning of the First Semester 124

 First-Generation First-Year Programming 127

 Engaging the Institution and Enhancing the Environment for First-Generation
Students 130

 Educating Parents and Guardians to Support Their First-Generation Student..... 133

Recommendations for Future Research 135

Conclusion..... 137

REFERENCES..... 140

APPENDIX A SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS..... 145

APPENDIX B OVERVIEW OF THEMES SENT TO PARTICIPANTS 147

APPENDIX C TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT 149

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1 Participant Overview.....	51
Table 2 Overview of Emergent Themes and Subthemes	64

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

First-generation college students are determined, resilient, and ambitious. They have a demonstrated commitment to achieve goals never expected, especially given the basic challenges a first-generation college student may encounter (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). First-generation college students bring strengths and assets to their transition and persistence in the college environment (Azmitia, Sumabat-Estrada, Cheong, & Covarrubias, 2018). However, within the first few paragraphs of journal articles and publications, the authors typically focus on a deficit model referencing the challenges first-generation college students bring to campus, the barriers they will face, and state overwhelming statistics stacked against them.

This deficit framework assumes inherent shortcomings of first-generation college students and shows a lack of knowledge about their abilities. The constant deficit mindset hinders belief in first-generation college students to succeed in a college environment, (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2018). The challenges they face are real; however, a cultural shift to an asset-based lens that focuses on the successes of first-generation college students needs to occur. Institutions should be celebrating achievements and encouraging continued resilience during a first-generation college student's journey (Zuo, Mulfinger, Oswald, & Casillas, 2018).

First-Generation College Students Defined

One challenge in researching first-generation college students are the varied definitions of a first-generation college student. Some common definitions include: a student whose parents have no postsecondary education; a student who had parents who did not attain a bachelor's degree; and a student whose parents did not have a bachelor's degree who were also the first sibling in their family to go to college (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018). Even at the institution of this study, the definition of first-generation college students varies across campus. Admissions defines first generation as a domestic student in which neither parent has a bachelor's degree, which aligns with the definition provided by the United States Department of Education's (Quinn, Cornelius-White, MacGregor, & Uribe-Zarain, 2019). The definition further states if the student indicates one parent is without a bachelor's degree and reports "no answer/unknown" to the other parent having a bachelor's degree, that student is considered first-generation. Scholarships & Financial Aid at the same institution utilizes a definition of neither parents have earned a bachelor's degree; it does not delineate whether those degrees are from a domestic or international institution.

This study utilizes a consistent definition of first-generation college students as an individual who did not have a parent or guardian attend a post-secondary institution in the United States. This definition provides a lens in which a first-generation student has acquired no context for the college environment from a parent or guardian's direct experience. This definition will assist in fully understanding a first-generation college

student's development of cultural capital to navigate a college environment in the United States higher education system.

Overview of First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students made up just over a third of the total undergraduate student population in United States postsecondary institutions in 2011 (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018) and in 2015-2016 first-generation college students represented 47% of undergraduates at public 4-year institutions (Research Triangle International, 2019a). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011, 18.4% of first-time in college students who entered any postsecondary institution stated they were the first person in their immediate family, including siblings and parents, to go to college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). More specifically, at four-year institutions, first-generation college students made up approximately 42% of the incoming class in 2011-2012 (Zuo, Mulfinger, Oswald, & Casillas, 2018).

As demonstrated, first-generation college students are a large proportion of the undergraduate population, almost 22% of the entire undergraduate population at the institution of this study. Therefore, first-generation college students deserve adequate attention in research, programming, and support. Based on retention statistics in which continuing generation students persist at a higher rate compared to first-generation students, there is a gap in knowledge between these students as they navigate college (RTI International, 2019b). Higher education institutions must dedicate time, policies, and support mechanisms for first-generation college students.

A key to navigating the college application process, transition into an institution, and persistence through graduation for any student is an understanding of the college environment. This includes having knowledge of the cultural norms of higher education, terminology used inside and outside the classroom, the resources and tools provided on-campus, and overall awareness of campus processes. If a student is pursuing a degree at a large institution, defined by Carnegie Classification as more than 10,000 full-time degree-seeking students, it adds complexity in understanding and navigating support resources (Carnegie Classification, n. d.). Large institutions comprise more offices, more people, and more complex systems, making it more difficult for first-generation college students to determine where to get assistance, support, and accomplish tasks such as paying a bill (Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, 2018).

Problem Statement

First-generation college students have limited cultural knowledge of the college application process and higher education environment because their immediate family did not attend college. While certain programs in high school, conversations with friends, interactions with high school counselors, or campus visits may provide some general awareness, there is no direct post-secondary experiences for parents or guardians to allow them to share specific knowledge (Dumais & Ward, 2010). We know; however, first-generation college students are acquiring knowledge to navigate the college environment in some manner because of their retention statistics. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, based on students who entered for the first time in academic year 2003-2004, 82% of first-generation students at public 4-year

institutions persisted after the first year (RTI International, 2019b). Additionally, based on a 2003-2004 cohort of students entering post-secondary education, 56% of first-generation college students from two and four-year institutions had earned a degree or were still enrolled six years later (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018).

It is common to focus on the students who leave an institution and, while it is important to learn why those individuals leave, institutions unfortunately may never know the actual reason why a student left. Research on first-generation college students has a tendency to focus on attrition, failures, and struggles for first-generation students (Demetriou, Meece, Eaker-Rich, & Powell, 2017). Therefore, we should look at those who are retained and seek ways to provide or expand services and experiences which aided in their success. Whether through formal or informal experiences, retained first-generation students are gaining some level of cultural capital relevant to the college setting.

As mentioned previously, first-generation college student research has a tendency to focus on the deficit of this population of students, analyzing characteristics that hold the students back or may prevent them from succeeding. While there is a lot of knowledge about first-generation college students overall, the information focuses on their income status, ethnicity, or other perceived demographic barriers. There is little research about what specifically assists first-generation students in succeeding in college, regardless of characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. To better understand first-generation college students, research should isolate the distinct characteristic of first-generation. While all demographics of first-generation

college students are important, isolating the first-generation identifier reduces the likelihood of excusing away results to socioeconomic status or ethnicity, a common practice in current research. Therefore, this study will recruit participants who self-identify as white/Caucasian, the dominant race at the institution of study. This selection criteria will assist in focusing on the first-generation identifier instead of allowing the research to shift to race.

Institutions often have expectations that students come into college with a knowledge of how higher education operates, however for first-generation college students they are unable to gain this type of cultural capital from their parents or guardians. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to learn what experiences, strategies, and approaches are utilized by White first-generation college students that allowed them to gain cultural capital relevant to higher education. This includes understanding which experiences enhanced their ability to navigate the college environment, thereby retaining them at the institution. Through this knowledge, higher education can seek to provide experiences to assist first-generation college students in building cultural capital related to navigating the college setting and reduce barriers to their success.

Research Questions

In order to better understand which experiences first-generation college students have that aid in navigating higher education, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. Prior to their first day of class, what aids White/Caucasian first-generation college students in learning to navigate the college environment?

2. What strategies do White/Caucasian first-generation college students use after their first day of class that enable them to navigate the college environment?
3. What introspective experiences do White/Caucasian first-generation college students have as they learn to navigate the college environment?

The first question focuses on understanding what resources and tactics first-generation college students use prior to starting college to better understand the higher education environment they are entering. This may include their experiences in high school or programs at the institution such as orientation that occur prior to the semester beginning with coursework. The second question focuses more on the strategies they utilized once they have begun courses at the institution. This could include learning communities, residence hall meetings, tutoring programs, or interactions with others. The third question focuses more on their personal experiences, the feelings or emotions they process as they navigate higher education.

Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory

The knowledge an individual acquires through experiences is described by Pierre Bourdieu as cultural capital (1977). In its most basic form, cultural capital is defined as the cultural traits that are rewarded in society (Dumais & Ward, 2010). This includes having knowledge of and participation in the arts and high status cultural experiences and goods. Cultural capital is a familiarity with the culture of the dominant class, including tastes, dispositions, and practices engaged by the middle and upper class. Experiences such as museum attendance, art or music lessons, and exposure to cultural norms of the dominant class aids individuals in acquiring cultural capital. Cultural

capital comes through in subtle styles of interacting, conversing, and expressing personal taste (Dumais & Ward, 2010; Weininger & Lareau, 2003).

The market value of cultural capital is determined by the dominant class because the market itself is dominated by those same individuals. Activities deemed acceptable for acquiring cultural capital are legitimized by the upper class (Bourdieu, 1977). Based on the manner in which Bourdieu describes cultural capital, those who are considered to have high cultural capital have the type of cultural capital that is highly valued.

The second level of cultural capital is the ability to apply the knowledge about the dominant culture norms to one's benefit (Bourdieu, 1977). Depending on the environment in which one finds themselves, they must determine what is of value in that setting. Then an individual would want to utilize their knowledge of that social class to interact and demonstrate they belong. The individual makes an attempt to behave in a natural manner of valued norms in a societal class different from their self-identified class (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). The aspect of behaving naturally and instinctively in a setting is discussed later as habitus.

Bourdieu applied the concept of cultural capital to an educational environment where those with high cultural capital were more likely to receive support, understand how to navigate their academic environment, and be encouraged to pursue higher education. He believed cultural capital was most organically acquired in the home and, therefore, parents had a strong influence over whether their children had cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Weininger & Lareau, 2003).

While cultural capital can be acquired over time, its value comes in learning from a young age in the home (Dumais & Ward, 2010). The acquisition of cultural capital in its most natural form, a home environment, is more likely to present benefits in an educational environment. Therefore, as a first-generation college student, the reference points for acquiring cultural capital from home life is limited in regard to the college setting.

DiMaggio (1982) found support for a cultural mobility model where individual's active participation in high culture and prestigious society could move them towards upper social mobility and subsequent cultural capital. Acquiring knowledge of the dominant culture, usually high- and middle-class culture, is rewarded in a cultural mobility model. DiMaggio's description of cultural mobility validates a similar perspective from Bourdieu's social reproduction model (Davies & Rizk, 2018). Overall, if low status individuals acquire knowledge and participate in high culture activities it demonstrates a respect for the dominant culture. Although not perceived as natural, the acquisition may be rewarded in the dominant culture setting (Dumais & Ward, 2010).

Some researchers believe individuals can acquire cultural capital; however, many others state the dominant class will continue to change the value of specific types of cultural capital. Those who have the cultural capital want to sustain a high level of their own cultural capital to maintain a distance from other social classes. The privileged adapt and move the bar of what is acceptable cultural capital in order to maintain their social status (Musoba & Baez, 2009). An oppressive environment is created which continues to privilege the dominant group. Additionally, while an individual may gain

agency through their actions, such as acquiring cultural capital relevant to their environment, any potential benefit of those actions are limited because of the system and structure (Musoba & Baez, 2009).

Bourdieu (1977) also described the concept of cultural mobility as having habitus, commonly referred to as having a “feel for the game.” Habitus are the natural skills one has based on their life experiences. This includes knowledge and awareness of how to behave in specific social settings, ways in which people interpret interactions, and knowledge of navigating an environment (Lareau, 2006). Padgett, Johnson, and Pascarella (2012) defined habitus as “an internalized system of beliefs, experiences, and values acquired from the social environment including the family, school, and work environments” (p. 246). In summary, habitus is a person's unconscious response, actions, and thoughts, which is acquired beginning in childhood (Musoba & Baez, 2009). The habitus is internalized from the surrounding culture and community.

An individual's habitus can be considered narrow if they have less cultural capital, limiting their chance of upward social mobility. An individual with broad habitus, linked to high cultural capital, has a likelihood of advancing upward in social status. However, because habitus is a set of dispositions established over time from formative childhood experiences, class structures are reinforced based on one's class in upbringing (McDonough, 1997). The expected response by the social class in a specific environment is unknowable to someone who developed habitus in an entirely different setting or class. In short, the systematic issues prevent navigation, not a lack of individual cultural capital (Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Musoba & Baez, 2009).

Dumais and Ward (2010) provided an updated definition of cultural capital by Weininger and Lareau (2003) as “processes whereby individuals’ strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence comes into contact with institutionalized standards of evaluation. These specialized skills are transmissible across generations, are subject to monopoly, and may yield advantages or profits” (p. 249). This definition expanded Bourdieu’s original concept to further discuss utilizing cultural capital in interactions with gatekeepers, those who have control over access, opportunity, and achievement. Having cultural capital itself is beneficial; however, the activation of cultural capital is where benefits come to fruition (Dumais & Ward, 2010). Taking the acquired knowledge of the dominant culture, no matter whether it was learned inside or outside the home and applying it to a situation provides rewards. Individuals with higher cultural capital are more likely to utilize it and approach the gatekeepers, described as instructors in an educational environment.

Combining the concepts of cultural capital as described by Bourdieu (1986) and subsequently Weininger and Lareau (2003), the benefits of cultural capital include having knowledge of the dominant culture, known as structure, and the agency to utilize such knowledge. The combination of both assists students in gaining access to higher education (Davies & Rizk, 2018). The educational system transmits a culture closer to the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1977); therefore, the structure of higher education itself creates a barrier for first-generation college students. Higher education reinforces and reproduces a disproportionate amount of capital to students who are able to acquire college cultural capital from their families creating a systematic hierarchy (Bourdieu,

1977; Musoba & Baez, 2009) and producing systematic gaps for first-generation college students.

Bourdieu's work exposed the systematic issues with higher education reinforcing a cycle of class-based systems where those with high cultural capital continue to gain an advantage. Based on cultural capital theory, institutions cannot assume that all students have a support system which has given a student enough knowledge to navigate the challenging and complicated systems of higher education. Given this, higher education institutions must critically determine whether they have created processes and policies which prevent some students, in this case first-generation college students, from being able to succeed in their system.

Given cultural capital is based on the culture of the dominant group, a situation presents itself where the dominant culture prevails. Higher education in the United States was created for the dominant culture (Thelin, 2004), and if we continue to permeate that custom, we lose sight of the opportunity to be impacted by varied perspectives, viewpoints, and cultures.

There are multiple educational environments where individuals are expected to mirror the dominant culture. It is evident at all types of institutions from predominantly white institutions to historically black colleges and universities; at small liberal arts colleges and large research institutions; institutions in the south to those on the west coast. Each institution has a dominant culture and students are taught to find a way to fit into the culture, when they might not have been exposed to any culture beyond their homes. A first-generation college student is naturally outside the dominant culture in a

higher education lens, along with the potential new culture based on the institutional setting, and therefore they may feel compelled to abandon their identity for the dominant identity.

Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory provides a foundation for supporting first-generation college students. It brings awareness to the likelihood first-generation college students will be unfamiliar with their environment and the appropriate methods to navigate the dominant culture of higher education. Cultural capital theory demonstrates a need for institutions to break down the higher education jargon, ensure processes are clear to those with little to no knowledge of college, university and institutional settings, and set up a system in which first-generation college students are not burdened by an unfamiliarity with the higher education environment.

Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions

This research is limited by factors outside of my control and that were present in this study. Therefore, I intentionally set boundaries for the study which presented delimitations for the research. Because the researcher is the instrument in a qualitative research design, I bring my own assumptions into the study.

Limitations

This study followed a naturalistic design, gathering data through interviews with first-generation college students. Additionally, the research was a single-institution study with 12 participants. Thick, rich, description is used to describe the setting and environment for the study; however, due to the aforementioned aspects findings may not be generalizable.

The definition of a first-generation college student is also a limitation in this study. There are multiple definitions utilized throughout higher education and within the institution of study. This research utilized a standard definition; however, readers who desire to utilize results must take into consideration the definition and how first-generation college students self-identify their status at their respective institution.

Delimitations

There were several boundaries strategically set by myself in order to focus the research. This includes the location of the institution in which participants were recruited. In order to access participants and meet the timeline for the study, first-generation college students were recruited from one large, public institution located in the south central United States. Participant criteria included students who self-identify as white/Caucasian, are first-time in college students, first-generation, and current undergraduate students. These criteria were deliberately set to isolate the first-generation characteristic.

Assumptions

As the research instrument there are assumptions I brought into the study. While I am not a first-generation college student, I do identify as white/Caucasian. My experience in higher education for over 14 years as a professional along with two degrees influences my lens and perspective of navigating the college environment. I bring an assumption that any student can succeed if they are willing to seek help and utilize the many resources available on a college campus.

As the researcher, I recognized these assumptions in advance and utilized a reflexive journal and bracketing to identify potential areas of bias. Bracketing included aspects around mandatory orientation and welcome week, components the researcher has professional experiencing in planning. This allowed me to identify and acknowledge my bias during research and pause to think critically about accurately representing participant experiences around these programs.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research and literature on first-generation college students is extensive. Many studies and papers discuss the barriers and challenges first-generation students face during college, focusing on a deficit framework and inherent disadvantages they encounter. Few studies have utilized qualitative measures to better understand the experiences of successful first-generation college students. This literature review includes an introduction to first-generation college students, the challenges first-generation college students face, an overview of cultural capital theory, and existing literature connecting cultural capital theory and first-generation college students. The literature reviewed for this study includes first-generation college students broadly. While many studies have focused on Black or Latinx races and ethnicities in addition to being first-generation college students, White has not been a focused demographic in existing first-generation literature. Therefore, the nearest available literature for this study is of all first-generation college students.

First-Generation College Students

This study defines first-generation college students as individuals who did not have a parent/guardian attend a post-secondary institution in the United States for any amount of time. In 2015-2016, it was reported 24% of undergraduate students had parents with no postsecondary education which equates to approximately 4.68 million students in the United States (RTI International, 2019a). First-generation college

students are inherently at a disadvantage in applying to, entering, and graduating from college because their parents lack direct experiences in higher education and institutions have established environments which require a basic knowledge to navigate a university. First-generation college students do not have a “feel” for the college setting because they are not exposed to college knowledge by their families (Dumais & Ward, 2010).

Additionally, students who are first-generation frequently have additional characteristics which are commonly known to put them at a disadvantage in the higher education setting. This includes being first-generation as well as possibly being part of an underrepresented demographic and low income, which are frequently associated with leaving college (Cataldi et al., 2018). This intersectionality is commonly referred to as a first-generation plus identity. While each identifier for first-generation college students is valuable, this study seeks to exclude the plus identities by focusing on a privileged group within the institution who also identify as first-generation. This method and reference to another researcher who utilized this process is discussed further in Chapter III. Therefore, this literature review focuses on first-generation college students broadly and does not address specific aspects of socioeconomic status, gender identity expression, or race.

Challenges Faced by First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are often disadvantaged because of a lack of family support, finances, academic preparation and expectations about higher education which has become necessary due to institutional practices (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Duron, 2013; Pascarella et al., 2004). First-generation students face their own

set of challenges such as anxieties about academics, living on-campus, and career choices, in addition to the traditional issues they and continuing generation students have in transitioning to college (Jenkins et al., 2013). First-generation students often enter college unaware of how to access resources and have limited information about what resources can provide assistance (Pascarella et al., 2004). Even when institutions provide resources, they assume a student is knowledgeable and aware of how and when to utilize services. This is not the case for first-generation college students and an institution must create practices and processes which expose and encourage these students to use support services and understand their purposes.

Compared to their non-first-generation peers, first-generation college students have been identified as having lower critical thinking skills, spend less time socializing with social agents, have lower scores on standardized tests, and are less prepared academically when entering college. First-generation students are less engaged with the campus, more likely to live off campus, participate in less campus activities, study less, and have less interactions with their peers when compared to continuing generation students (Padgett et al., 2012).

First-generation college students have similar transitional challenges as their continuing generation peers entering higher education. In addition, first-generation students face cultural and academic transitions unique to them (Pascarella et al., 2004). Students who identify as first-generation have a delicate balance of navigating two cultures: their home culture and the academic culture in higher education. Home culture may include less educated individuals working in traditional blue-collar jobs. The

academic culture they are navigating at their institution, however, was designed for children of college-educated individuals working in management (Jenkins et al., 2013).

It has been found that first-generation college students have lower levels of enjoyment surrounding literacy-based activities and writing. Students with parents who attended college share the importance of engaging in activities such as reading and writing because they know the benefits of those skills in an educational setting (Padgett et al., 2012). This aligns with a transmission of higher education knowledge from one generation to the next which is discussed later and more thoroughly in this chapter as cultural capital.

Another difficulty for first-generation college students is not being prepared to interact with faculty. Their parents are unaware of the benefits of engaging with faculty, and first-generation students might not have been encouraged to get help from their high school instructors. Therefore, first-generation students are hesitant to approach faculty and may feel intimidated or overwhelmed by the expertise of a faculty member during initial interactions (Jenkins et al., 2013; Padgett et al., 2012). The feelings of intimidation in early interaction means they are more likely to withdraw from approaching faculty in the future (Padgett et al., 2012).

While these challenges are common, they do not prevent first-generation college students from being successful in the college environment. First-generation college students may be at an inherited disadvantage; however, they are not broken. A large amount of the disadvantage is actually created by the institution. Colleges and universities rely on practices which serve first-generation college students in the exact

same manner as continuing generation students. Rather, institutions need to acknowledge the unique needs of first-generation students and adapt their processes to accommodate those needs. First-generation students bring a set of strengths and abilities to college which aid in their successful retention from one year to the next. Institutions must recognize these strengths and build off them to create an environment which serves first-generation students and allows them to succeed.

Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to understand how first-generation students acquire knowledge to succeed in college and navigate an institutional environment. Given first-generation college students have parents/guardians who did not attend any post-secondary education, direct knowledge of college is not coming from their parents. They are gaining awareness of campus resources, support systems, and engagement through other individuals, experiences, or settings. Having the knowledge of the culture within a specific environment and utilizing that knowledge is known as cultural capital. French theorist Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory provides a framework for this study.

Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory

Bourdieu (1977) described cultural capital as a hereditary transmission of power and privilege which reproduces the structure of class relations in society. Capital is inherited, passed down from generation to generation and ultimately belongs to those who are able to appropriate it for themselves. It is described as a symbolic good with no intrinsic value (McDonough, Antonio, & Horvat, 1997). Cultural capital means being

familiar with and understanding the dispositions, tastes, and practices of the upper class (Davies & Rizk, 2018).

Bourdieu (1977, 1986) indicated all individuals bear some type of capital in an environment. It varies from individual to individual based on their experiences. Additionally, the value of that cultural capital is determined by the environment in which it is being used. For example, an individual who lives in a rural town can acquire capital related to that specific town. However, the capital directly related to living in a rural town is unlikely to be valued in a large metropolitan city.

Cultural capital is mostly shared directly from generation to generation, from parents or guardians to their children. Parents create opportunities and experiences for their children to develop cultural capital. Those opportunities vary with each family unit, but they often include attendance at high society events such as the arts, performances, and high-status cultural experiences (Bourdieu, 1977). It is believed cultural capital is learned most naturally in the home setting, transmitted from parents or family members during childhood. Parents, therefore, have a strong influence on the type of cultural capital a child gains (Bourdieu, 1977; Weininger & Lareau, 2003).

Jenkins et al. (2013) stated “cultural capital is a culmination of cultural experiences that are viewed as educational and social assets. These include familiarity with authority patterns and social arrangements” (p. 136). Cultural capital can also be described as the relative ease and familiarity an individual has with the dominant society. This includes a shared vocabulary, phrases, gestures, styles, rituals, and sacred objects within a culture (Pascarella et al., 2004). Everyone has some level of cultural

capital within a social group or class. The value of that cultural capital, however, varies depending on the dominant culture of a particular class or society (Davies & Rizk, 2018).

Legitimate cultural capital, or the cultural capital that is valued in a specific setting, is defined by the highest class in that societal structure (Bourdieu, 1977). Those in the dominant class determine the market value and criteria for which the cultural capital is most valuable and favorable, if at all. Members regulate access and conditions for individuals outside their social status, they determine what is required to declare outsiders a part of the group (Bourdieu, 1986).

According to Dumais and Ward (2010) Bourdieu stated, “cultural capital is acquired over time, mainly through the socialization process at home and through parental investment in the ‘right’ kinds of cultural training” (p. 247). The specification Bourdieu gave in regard to the “right” type of cultural capital reiterates the concept of the dominant class determining what is valued.

Most of Bourdieu's work and theory relate specifically to how cultural capital is rewarded in the field of education. Bourdieu first hypothesized the concept of cultural capital in his research as a way to explain the unequal academic achievement of students from varied social classes. Additionally, he desired to bring awareness and understanding to inequalities in education (Davies & Rizk, 2018).

In the educational system, the imperfect distribution of valued cultural capital is reproduced because it transmits the dominant culture. The education system expects students to be familiar with its culture, one taught during upbringing. If a student,

however, is not brought up in the dominant culture, they immediately lack the cultural knowledge for navigating their educational environment (Bourdieu, 1977).

Cultural capital is unequally distributed among upper- and middle-class families who are more likely to have college degrees. Because first-generation students often come from a low- to middle-class household socioeconomically, the cultural capital in the household of continuing generation college students is generally higher than first-generation college students. This results in students from more privileged backgrounds, whose parents have fostered acquisition of valued cultural capital, being most likely to graduate from college and obtain prestigious jobs (Dumais & Ward, 2010). Success in an academic setting depends on cultural capital and utilizing agency, discussed later in this chapter, to apply the knowledge gained from the inherited advantage for continuing generation students (Bourdieu, 1986).

The disproportionate distribution of cultural capital becomes cyclical as it is reinforced from generation to generation (Dumais & Ward, 2010). The educational system reproduces social stratification and the unequal social structure because it values the inherited advantage students bring from their cultural capital acquired in the home (Bourdieu, 1986). First-generation college students lack the inherited advantage of cultural capital specific to higher education and, therefore, continue to lack college knowledge compared to their continuing generation peers.

Habitus. Habitus is defined by Padgett et al. (2012) as:

a mechanism by which an individual assesses his or her social environment in an effort to rationalize decision making. Habitus is an internalized system of beliefs,

experiences, and values acquired from the social environment including the family, school, and work environments. (p. 246)

Habitus is a common set of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs held by all members of a social class or community. This community shapes an individual's expectations and aspirations in particular social settings (McDonough et al., 1997). Habitus is created by personal and social history which create a fluid and continually evolving set of dispositions regarding the world around us. It goes beyond what is learned formally to include what is instinctive and necessary in specific conditions (Horvat & Antonio, 1999).

An individual's social community directly contributes to the amount of habitus that individual possesses in relation to a specific setting (Padgett et al., 2012). If first-generation students are not exposed to life experiences relevant to the dominant culture at home, they lack the habitus for navigating the college-going experience.

Continuing generation students possess habitus surrounding the college going process and are more likely to engage with gatekeepers, such as admissions counselors or university resources, during application and admissions processes. Because continuing generation college students have inherited cultural capital, they are more comfortable interacting with and approaching gatekeepers (Dumais & Ward, 2010). First-generation college students lack cultural capital surrounding the process of researching, applying, and selecting a college. They do not have a reference point for completing these processes or a family member who can guide them or encourage them to approach gatekeepers (Lareau, 2006).

Organizational habitus. Organizational habitus is a concept realized by McDonough (1997) which describes how organizations create a set of class-based perceptions and transmit those dispositions to individuals in the organization. This correlates to acculturation, which is a requirement of those entering any formalized organization to adopt its norms and general practices (Jenkins et al., 2013). In consideration of a college environment, there are ideals, behaviors, language, and expectations which are shared through organizational habitus. Students are educated about the institutional habitus through formal and informal experiences during their college career. First-generation students' lack of cultural capital within higher education hinders a natural acculturation process. Jenkins et al. (2013) stated:

Often, first-generation students do not have the cultural capital of academic skills and knowledge that college-educated parents typically supply to their children. ...Until and unless they can acquire the needed cultural capital by a process of acculturation into academic culture and its related institutional processes, first-generation students are likely to experience more frustration and failure than non-first-generation students. (p. 138)

Jenkins et al., however, fail to acknowledge the institution's responsibility to adapt its culture and environment to value the habitus of first-generation college students. Each student, first-generation or otherwise, brings their own habitus with them to college. However, the habitus that is highly valued in institutional settings is that of the privileged class. Higher education was created to serve the upper class and,

therefore, their habitus is of most value in institutional settings, continuing a cycle of disadvantage for first-generation college students.

Agency. If a student possesses cultural capital, they must also know when to activate the cultural capital for their benefit, described as agency (Dumais & Ward, 2010). It is not enough to simply have the cultural capital; an individual must activate that cultural capital at key moments in order to reap the benefits. For a college student these key moments include the transition from high school to college and overall college experiences (Dumais & Ward, 2010).

Utilizing cultural capital also includes the ability and agency to decode symbolic meanings and objects which are valuable in a specific setting (McDonough et al., 1997). Utilizing the knowledge about what is valuable in a social environment requires intentional action. Access, however, may be limited because of the systemic issues and the reinforcement of social stratification in higher education (Musoba & Baez, 2009).

Cultural Capital and College Students

Studies have determined possessing the valued cultural capital is associated with higher grades, test scores, and college enrollment (Dumais & Ward, 2010). Padgett et al. (2012) stated benefits exist not only for students whose parents graduated from a post-secondary institution, but also for students with parents who attended any amount of college:

Even minimal or non-degree-obtaining college experiences by parents may create enough of an understanding of the value and importance of a college education that parents transmit their cultural capital through resources and personal

experiences (McDonough, 1997). Furthermore, these finite experiences may be powerful and influential enough that parents' interpersonal relationships with their children likely reinforced the values, norms, and expectations about the collegiate experience that non-first-generation students use to navigate through the first year in college. (p. 259)

Having and utilizing cultural capital is associated with positive educational outcomes (Dumais & Ward, 2010). Those with high cultural capital are encouraged to pursue education and receive more attention from teachers compared to those with low cultural capital (Davies & Rizk, 2018). When a family member transmits cultural capital to their child, it reinforces the value and importance of a college education in regard to maintaining or acquiring middle to upper-class status (Jenkins et al., 2013). Pascarella et al. (2004) found that cultural capital from family influences the choice students make about which institution to attend and also influences the types of experiences students engage in when enrolled.

If a student possesses high levels of cultural capital relevant to the college setting, they have knowledge of additional resources to help them succeed (Padgett et al., 2012). Students with parents who have no postsecondary experience are more likely to attend less selective institutions, work more hours during college, are less involved in college activities, and complete fewer course hours in a three-year timeframe compared to their continuing generation peers (Lareau, 2006).

Through their findings, Pascarella et al. (2004), determined first-generation college students can acquire cultural capital through extracurricular activities and peer

involvement and that additional cultural capital would help them succeed academically. If institutions offer meaningful culturally relevant programs for students, it provides an opportunity for first-generation college students to build cultural capital. These cultural capital events connect students to the college, create a sense of belonging, and can help retain first-generation college students (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2017). While Pascarella et al. (2004) found the college experience provides first-generation college students methods for acquiring cultural capital, another study by Dumais & Ward (2010) found the cultural capital continuing generation college students have, is more seamless and valuable compared to the cultural capital first-generation college students gain through college experiences.

Summary

A review of literature indicates most studies utilize quantitative methods to understand first-generation college students. Additionally, these same studies focus on barriers first-generation students experience in their transition to and through college. There is a lack of accountability towards institutions who have created systems which benefit certain students over others. In the circumstances of this review, continuing generation students gain privileges which first-generation students do not because of institutional systemic issues.

Current research barely scratches the surface of understanding first-generation college students and their cultural capital. A gap in research exists surrounding experiences which aid first-generation college students in acquiring cultural capital. Successful first-generation college students are experts at understanding their own

experiences and adapting to the valued cultural capital in an institutional setting. Further research is necessary to understand how first-generation college students acquire cultural capital to successfully navigate the college environment. This study is an attempt to fill this void by learning from first-generation college students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Given the value of college knowledge in succeeding through college, first-generation college students would benefit from mechanisms to gain cultural capital specific to higher education. Cultural capital in application to the higher education setting is the degree of ease and familiarity a student has in navigating the college environment (Pascarella et al., 2004). However, there is little information available about how and through what experiences first-generation college students have acquired cultural capital applicable to higher education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to learn what experiences and opportunities have allowed White first-generation college students to gain cultural capital relevant to higher education. This included understanding the strategies and tactics they used to enhance their ability to navigate the college environment, thereby retaining them at the institution. Through this knowledge, higher education can seek to provide experiences to assist first-generation college students in building cultural capital related to navigating the college setting. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. Prior to their first day of class, what aids White/Caucasian first-generation college students in learning to navigate the college environment?
2. What strategies do White/Caucasian first-generation college students use after their first day of class that enable them to navigate the college environment?

3. What introspective experiences do White/Caucasian first-generation college students have as they learn to navigate the college environment?

Research Design

To better understand the experiences of first-generation college students, which may influence their level of cultural capital specific to higher education, a qualitative research study guided in a framework of a naturalistic study design was utilized.

A naturalistic design creates the human as the instrument in data collection and analysis. This provides an opportunity for the researcher to adjust to the dynamics of the study and adapt to the various realities each student presents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During inquiry the researcher can clarify statements, summarize accounts back to the respondent for confirmation, be responsive to the environment and situation, and adapt interviews and procedures when necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Within the naturalistic design, narrative inquiry uses stories of individuals to understand their experiences. Gathering the stories of first-generation college students relevant to their college experience allows the student to define their own experience and how it influences their world. A naturalistic inquiry creates a real world setting where there is no manipulation of the environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interaction with first-generation college students without manipulation of the setting ensures context is included in the research. The context of each student's environment, especially their lived experiences prior to college, provides valuable perspective.

Students were asked questions that allowed them to describe experiences which aided in their navigation of the college environment. This included discussing their

challenges, successes, and how they managed everyday tasks related to higher education. Knowledge is constructed by individuals as they engage in and make meaning of their experiences, which is a central characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through a constructivist lens, individuals construct their reality within their own context which aligns with a naturalistic design. Participants can construct and give meaning to their own experiences without influence (Bodner, 1986). Given context is a key component of naturalistic research design, the constructivist view ties seamlessly into the study. There are an infinite number of constructions which create multiple realities and this study found common categories to those realities for first-generation college students. A goal of this qualitative research study was to understand how first-generation college students interpreted and made meaning of their experiences in relation to navigating the higher education environment.

An added benefit of a naturalistic study is the development of an emergent design. A design framework was formulated and then adapted once interviews and data analysis begin. As the study progressed the researcher modified the design based on identified gaps, new information, and through continual data analysis. As pieces of the study become clear and explicable, the design can shift to meet the previously unknown research needs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants and Source of Data

In order to guide the research intent, purposeful sampling was utilized. A series of broad, contextually similar, selection criteria were used to create an initial sample and continuous sampling occurred throughout (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Towards the end of

the study, snowball sampling was used to recruit additional participants. The selection criteria were:

1. college students who did not have a parent or guardian attend a post-secondary institution.
2. college students enrolled at a specified public four-year institution located in the south central United States with over 50,000 undergraduate students.
3. students who entered the institution as a first-time in college first-year student.
4. students who self-identified as white/Caucasian.

These criteria helped focus the research on first-generation college students who were attending a large institution, as defined by Carnegie Classification (Carnegie Classification, n.d.). As described by Strange and Banning (2015), the larger the enrollment of an institution the more bureaucratic and impersonal it becomes to students. Additionally, the institution can appear indifferent to the varied needs of individual students while students are challenged in navigating a multitude of campus offices. As a first-generation college student, these challenges can become amplified due to first-generation student's lack of familiarity with college. Additionally, limiting the sample to students who entered as first-time in college first-year student restricted transfer students from the sample. Transfer students come with a different set of cultural capital compared to first-time in college students, and while they are an important group to study, transfer students are not the focus of this research.

Often first-generation students identify as an underrepresented demographic and current research relates findings to the specific demographics of ethnicity or race, instead

of the explicit component of being a first-generation college student. Utilizing students who identified as the majority ethnicity at the institution of study, white/Caucasian, reduces rationalizing the results due to other common first-generation college student characteristics, such as underrepresented ethnicities, and puts the focus on the characteristic of being a first-generation college student.

In an attempt to prevent excusing the research results for characteristics other than first-generation status, participants who self-identified within the predominant ethnicity of White were selected. While all first-generation college students' experiences are important, this study seeks to tease out the unique characteristic of being a first-generation college student, thus race as a criteria was removed. This research strategy was utilized by McDonough (1997) in her study of high school students and their college choice process. McDonough interviewed only white females, controlling for race and gender in order to focus her study on understanding social class and school context (1997).

Another criterion for participants was college students who did not have a parent or guardian attend a post-secondary institution. This means the parent or guardian did not attend any schooling at a community college, junior college, or four-year institution. Therefore, participants' parents or guardians have no direct experiences or knowledge of the college environment. The parent or guardian did not go through post-secondary educational experiences and therefore have limited direct knowledge of the higher education setting, navigating processes, and understanding the environment with the exception of second-hand knowledge acquisition.

Recruitment began with pre-existing first-generation communities at the institution. This included first-generation college student learning communities and a first-generation college student organization. Emails were sent by the researcher to the individuals responsible for leading these communities, the emails were then forwarded by those individuals to students in each respective group. All recruitment emails contained the criteria for participation and a link to an online intake survey. Recruitment through these pre-existing groups continued multiple times and later included a brief video overview of the study with corresponding slides about the study.

While the aforementioned groups were valuable to recruitment, I acknowledged students within a learning community may limit or distort the results of the study. Therefore, I worked with the institution to send an email to all current students. That email also contained the participant criteria and link to the online intake survey. The institution was unable to sort out undergraduate and graduate students, therefore the email was sent to all current students. This resulted in some graduate level students responding to the intake survey, however they were ineligible to participate.

The intake survey asked students the following questions: first and last name, email address, phone number, major, month/year began at institution, expected graduation month/year, and ethnicity. Ethnicity mirrored the identifiers used by the assessment office at the institution of study. Preference for participation was originally given to students early in their time at the institution because their experiences as a first-year student were more recent. However, as the study progressed and the need for participants continued, I stopped giving preference to underclassmen students.

A total of 114 individuals completed the intake survey. A few of those individuals were transfer students or graduate students, and thus removed from the study. Additionally, 53 of the intake survey respondents identified as non-white or White plus an additional race, therefore they were removed from eligibility. The final number of individuals who met the basic criteria on the intake survey were 61 students. Each student was sent an email within a few days of completing the intake survey and given a series of days/times to have their first interview with the researcher. Many of those students never responded, even with at least one additional follow-up email.

As participation in the study slowed, snowball sampling was utilized to increase the sample size. Participants were asked to share a brief description of my study with their peers. This information was shared by participants through group text message platforms and email lists.

In the end, 16 first round interviews were scheduled. Four of those participants started their interviews, however it was later determined they did not meet the definition of first-generation college student for this particular study. After interviewing 12 students, each of them two times, no new information or insights into the experiences of first-generation college students occurred and saturation was reached. This included hearing the same information from participants and determining no new themes were emerging (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews with participants who met the selection criteria. Two interviews were conducted with each student within

a two-week timeframe. Interviews were conducted through Zoom, a video conferencing platform, which required user authentication with an account linked to the institution of study. Using the video conference platform allowed observation of participant behavior as they described their experiences. This proved beneficial as several participants demonstrated an emotional response when answering questions, allowing me to empathize and seek understanding about what caused the response, which is further described in Chapter IV. Observation details are a valuable part of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and were included in field notes. A series of prepared questions, which were open-ended began conversation between the researcher and participant. The interview protocol provided flexibility to add follow-up and clarifying questions as participants answered questions.

Interviews were audio and video recorded along with the utilization of field notes which included behavior and setting observation, both collected and written by myself. An initial review of interviewer notes and the audio interview were completed to allow myself an opportunity to spend time in the data and identify potential gaps in the research and interviews. This initial review of field notes and listening to interviews allowed for adaptations to the interview process and questions. This included adding and removing questions for both the first and second interviews as new participants joined the study. For example, after a few interviews participants had referenced experiences in high school, such as dual credit, which were helpful. Therefore, I added questions in future interviews about student's participation in dual credit. Additionally, questions for the second interview with participants were adjusted based on notes from the initial

participant interview and the information they previously shared. This method of adaptation and refinement to the research process aligns with the emergent design of this qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Procedure

Two individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted on Zoom between myself and participants. Students received compensation of a \$12.50 Amazon gift card for participating in each interview. A series of predetermined questions ensured some consistency in information collected across interview participants. With a semi-structured interview, questions were asked in order of the flow of conversation and adapted when needed. The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to seek clarification on responses, request examples when applicable, and redirect conversation when necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Given the importance of understanding whether specific experiences impacted first-generation college students' persistence in college, having the ability to follow-up and probe throughout the interview process was highly valuable. Throughout interviews I often summarized responses and sought clarification as needed.

Additionally, the interview as a data collection method allows participants to reflect on prior experiences. These experiences cannot be replicated in the present, therefore an interview process aligns with the purpose of the qualitative research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through a constructivist lens, the interview process allows the participant to create their own reality from their experiences and provide a picture of their truth (Narayan, Rodriquez, Araujo, Shaqlaih, & Moss, 2013). How first-generation

college students perceived their experiences created a foundation for understanding potential acquisition of cultural capital. During the interview, the participants constructed the meaning of their experiences through strategic questioning by myself.

Interviews were scheduled for 90 minutes, however, most took around 60 minutes. Participants were offered multiple days and times to complete the interviews to accommodate their schedules. Once scheduled, a reminder email was sent a day before including the day, time, and link to the Zoom meeting room. Two interviews with each participant were conducted to allow opportunity to build rapport and provide participants an opportunity to reflect in between interviews. Often participants leave the first interview and begin processing their thoughts and come to a second interview with further information regarding their experiences (Seidman, 2013). At the end of the first interview I requested students think about anything additional they might want to tell me during the second interview. They were encouraged to take notes on their cell phone if they thought of anything, that way they would remember to share it during the second interview.

While some researchers suggest three interviews with participants, this study involved interviewing college students with complex and full schedules. In order to maintain participant retention, only two interviews were conducted. I conducted interviews with three participants and briefly analyzed their responses prior to scheduling more interviews. This allowed an opportunity to adapt interview questions and protocol.

The first interview with participants focused on building rapport and trust with the students. I began with basic questions, asking about the students' background, family, and hometown to build trustworthiness. From there, questions then asked about the application process, participant involvement at the institution, experiences they enjoyed, challenges they faced, any institutional processes that may have prohibited their success, and their most beneficial experiences. Overall, a series of open-ended questions were used to understand the student's experiences and knowledge about the college environment. An overview of questions for the semi-structured interviews are in Appendix A.

Throughout the interviews I demonstrated interest through verbal and non-verbal cues, was a sympathetic listener, showed care for what the student was sharing, and ensured my response to any negative statements towards the institution of study remained neutral. When students expressed frustration, I validated their perspective through non-verbal and verbal cues. After the initial interview with participants, I reviewed field notes and participant responses to adapt interview questions for the second interview with the participant.

The second interview was held 10-14 days after the first interview. It focused on the depth of students' experiences, clarified any statements from the previous interview, and sought a better understanding of students' interpretation of their higher education experience. This included questions about specific institutional programs, how they get help on campus, how they utilize their parents for support, their interactions with instructors and staff, experiences which have helped them the most as a first-generation

student, and ways the institution can better serve them. Additionally, I followed up on statements they previously made about experiences, asked if they had any new information to share as they reflected in between interviews, and asked for more depth to their previous responses.

Data Analysis

Immediately following interviews, I reviewed field notes and made a summary of what the participant had stated. Additionally, I made notes about questions to ask during the second interview and items which needed more follow-up. Initially in the study I conducted transcription myself, to get a feel for the data. Because Zoom was used for the interviews, it provided a draft transcript of each interview. While helpful, the transcripts still needed to be reviewed for accuracy and proper sentence construction. Transcribing initial interviews myself allowed me to get a feel for the data and become familiar with the results early in the interview process. After almost half of the interviews, external individuals aided in transcription. They were required to sign a transcriber confidentiality agreement, a copy of which can be found in Appendix C.

Throughout the data collection process, I analyzed data in order to continually follow an emergent research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A constant comparative method of data analysis occurs from one set of interview data to the next set of interview data. While Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory frames the thinking for this study, it was not used to determine coding in analysis. Inductive coding was utilized in the data coding process.

Transcripts were printed and the data was coded in the right hand column based on a summary of participant statements. Once coded, each piece of data was placed into units and placed in a spreadsheet. Each unit contained the original coding from the printed transcripts, the participant identifier to connect it to the respondent, the page number where the data could be found in the interview transcript, and notation of whether the data was from interview one or two. Throughout the coding on transcript each code was constantly compared to the next looking for recurring regularities in data. Those regularities were placed through an emergent category designation process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Units of data were categorized into groups with a category title which is descriptive of the units within. Additionally, each category was mutually exclusive of the other categories. This method continued until each unit was placed within a category. These categories were cross referenced against the purpose of the study to determine which categories answer the research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the units of data were continually reviewed more columns were added to the spreadsheet to continually narrow themes in alignment with the research questions.

Once the spreadsheet was completed the original 12 themes were placed on a post-it note with corresponding notes about each theme. From there the original 12 themes were sorted into the final four themes with subthemes within. During this process of sorting, I utilized peer debriefing which is discussed later in this paper.

Quality and Rigor

In consideration of trustworthiness of findings, thick description, peer debriefing, and member checks were utilized. All of these components have the ability to increase finding credibility and internal validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tracy, 2010). Thick description was used to include a highly descriptive and detailed presentation of the setting, environment, and findings of the study. Descriptors aid the reader in understanding the context of the study's findings. While qualitative data cannot be generalized, it can be applied based on similar context and settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is why using thick description is important in the research.

To assist in the analysis and discussion of initial findings, I utilize a peer debriefing method. This process allows the researcher to think out loud about data correlations while a peer with baseline knowledge asks questions and plays devil's advocate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the spreadsheet was developed, I spoke with three individuals who are familiar with higher education to probe findings. These individuals were all individuals who worked at the institution of study. Additionally, two were first-generation college students themselves, all had experience in qualitative research, and two have received their doctoral degrees. They asked questions about how data was interpreted and looked for assumptions in data based on my bias. This included checking my assumptions about formal and informal experiences, which is discussed later, and breaking down the utilization of the terms faculty, instructor, teacher. Peer debriefing helped me verbally process data and ensure clarity to an individual who is external to the study but has enough knowledge to understand terminology and purpose.

In order to validate understanding of participant experiences, a member check was conducted. The member check process provides respondents an opportunity to correct errors and provide clarification to the assigned meaning of experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While the initial plan was to conduct member checks through a 60 minute focus group on Zoom, unfortunately participants did not appear for the scheduled focus group. This included a total of 28 individuals who were asked to participate in the focus group, the 12 participants and 16 individuals who completed the intake survey and met participant criteria, however, none chose to participate in the focus group

Instead, member checks were conducted through email. Initial findings were shared with participants for review to allow feedback on data analysis (Tracy, 2010) through a one-page briefing about the results of the study. A copy of this one-page briefing can be found in Appendix B. This one-page briefing was emailed to the 12 participants and they were asked to review the findings and respond to four questions:

- 1) Do you see yourself in any of these themes?
- 2) Which ones speak to you?
- 3) Which ones don't speak to you?
- 4) Any further comments?

Participants had six days to review the briefing of themes and reply. A text message was sent to participants two days after sending the email then the day before the response deadline. Of the 12 participants, seven completed the member check process by replying to the email.

Conducting member checks helped me summarize participant experiences accurately. The four overarching themes and subthemes about experiences that aided in their development of cultural capital in the higher education environment was shared. The seven students who responded to the initial findings stated the four themes were accurate. While they more strongly related to some over others, they saw themselves in all of the themes. When responding to the questions posed in the email, some additional data points appeared and therefore that information was added to the results of the study.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

I am a current staff member at a large public institution working in new student transition programming. I am a continuing generation college student whose parents graduated from a four-year institution prior to attending college myself. Additionally, I had an older sibling in college two years before beginning my own collegiate journey and attended the same college as the older sibling for two years.

I have completed a master's degree in student affairs administration from a public institution in the Southeast United States, and I am near completion of a Doctor of Philosophy in educational administration from the institution of study. I have worked full-time in a higher education environment for 14 years and part-time for an additional two years, all within units housed in Student Affairs.

The aforementioned dispositions were brought into the study. This included a high level of cultural capital in navigating college as well as institutional knowledge in persisting through college. Researcher bias also included significant understanding of how colleges and universities operate, especially in non-academic realms. Furthermore, I

brought assumptions regarding ease of access to knowledge regarding higher education and the ability to persist with the use of institutional resources.

To assist in minimizing researcher influence, I bracketed areas of potential bias based on orientation and background (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, I critically analyzed interview questions to ensure jargon or common higher education terms are not present. When participants expressed uncertainty about how to respond to questions based on their wording, I reworded the questions for future interviews.

A reflexive journal was utilized during the research process, from recruitment through data analysis. The reflexive journal documented researcher reflections on problems, issues, and ideas. This included reflections on my positionality during the research process and manners in which I wanted to reduce how that positionality affected the study. However, I also made notations about how my positionality aided in the recruitment process and knowledge of programs the participants referenced. Other notes in the reflexive journal were distractions observed by participants during the interview process, such as taking the call in a car, in open public space, or in spaces where friends, roommates, or family were present. Additionally, throughout interviews and data analysis the reflexive journal was a place to note systemic issues, ways institutions could better serve first-gen students based on their experiences, and recommendations for future research.

An audit trail with details regarding how data was collected and how methodological decisions were made complement the reflexive journal. This included dates of recruitment, interview schedules, and notes on changing future interview

questions or protocols. Additionally, I used the audit trail to make notations of data sorting decisions and ways in which the results were organized and themed. All of these components will assist in reducing researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As an educated white female with more than 14 years of professional experience in the field of higher education and student affairs, my positionality brings benefits and challenges to the research process. When interviewing participants it was vital to build rapport and reduce higher education jargon in questions and discussion. By holding two interviews with participants, asking basic introductory questions to foster open conversation, utilizing my student email account, and meeting virtually I was able to reduce my positionality with participants.

Additionally, my positionality as a highly educated, white female, in an administrative leadership role, with several years of higher education experience allows me to disseminate the results of this study and influence practitioners to utilize the research to advance their work with first-generation college students. As an individual with high positionality, it provides a forum for sharing results and inspiring others improve services, practices, and policies for first-generation college students.

Limitations

Given the nature of qualitative research, the number of participants was relatively small, therefore, broad transferability is cautioned. Additionally, the research was conducted at a large, public institution and therefore should be taken into consideration when applying to other institutional types. According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.), the institution in which participants in this study

attend is considered more selective. The three categories of selectivity defined by Carnegie are inclusive, selective, and more selective. The selectivity classification is determined by SAT and/or ACT scores or percent of applicants admitted if the institution does not require test scores. In 2017, 17% of higher education four-year institutions were categorized as more selective, specifically 428 of 2,523 met this classification. Given the small percentage of institutions which meet the same criterion of the institution where the study is being conducted, the transferability of findings is somewhat limited.

Transferability of findings can be applied based on the similarity in context between the study and the environment. Those interested in applying the research should review the descriptive data, rich description, and details regarding the context in which the inquiry was carried in order to make an appropriate decision on transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Another limitation was in the recruitment of participants in the sample. The proportions of first-generation students within racial/ethnic groups are disproportionately Hispanic and African American and this study sought participants whom self-identity as white or Caucasian.

Another limitation was the application of the term first-generation college student. There are multiple varied definitions of the term and depending on the source it led to incongruence in participants. A common definition is a student who did not have an immediate family member attend college. Another common definition is a student who did not have a parent graduate from a four-year institution. Data sets from the

institution usually involve self-reporting of first-generation college student status and therefore may be inaccurate compared to the definition in this study (Whitley et al., 2018). While the definition for this study of first-generation college student was placed in recruitment materials, three individuals began participation in interviews before it was realized they did not meet the specified definition for the study.

Given the qualitative research design, findings cannot be generalized because the research environment is not universal. Additionally, because the study is a single institution, study findings are not generalizable. All of the specific characteristics of the study are present because of the desire to understand the population in depth, not to determine what is generally true of a large sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The environment in which the study is being conducted is not controlled nor predictable and cannot be fully replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A reader, however, can take into account a working hypothesis based on the findings, in consideration with local conditions. An extrapolation of data beyond the narrow context allows potential application in similar, not identical, conditions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The responsibility of applying results lies to the individuals reading the study, who must determine transferability to their specific environment and situation.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to better understand how White/Caucasian first-generation college students gained cultural capital relevant to higher education. This chapter reports the findings of the study, outlining the methods that White/Caucasian first-generation college students used to understand higher education and get help navigating the college environment.

The study was conducted at a very large, land-grant, research intensive, public institution. Fields in science, technology, engineering, math, and agriculture are strong given the land grant designation. Most students attending the institution are in-state and there is a strong alumni network. Many continuing generation students have parents and family members who also attended the institution. The institution is traditional in nature and considered residential with approximately 12,000 beds on-campus.

The study addressed the following three research questions:

1. Prior to their first day of class, what aids White/Caucasian first-generation college students in learning to navigate the college environment?
2. What strategies do White/Caucasian first-generation college students use after their first day of class that enable them to navigate the college environment?
3. What introspective experiences do White/Caucasian first-generation college students have as they learn to navigate the college environment?

Data collection produced 351 pages of completed transcripts and just over 400 individual units of data. This chapter reports the findings from data collection with an introduction of each participant, using pseudonyms, to give context to their stories and experiences. Then an overview of emergent themes are outlined within the framework of each individual research question.

Table 1
Participant Overview

Participant ¹	Academic College	Classification ²
Aaron	Science	Senior
Addison	Education	Senior
Andi	Education	Sophomore
Caroline	Business	Junior
Casey	Liberal Arts	First-Year
Kendall	Education	Junior
Leah	Engineering	Junior
Lizzie	Liberal Arts	First-Year
Matt	Agriculture	First-Year
Melissa	Agriculture	Sophomore
Stacy	Education	Senior
Todd	Agriculture	First-Year

¹Pseudonym assigned to participant for confidentiality purposes

²Classification at the time of the interview

Profiles of Individual Participants

Twelve participants were interviewed for this study and at the time of interviews all participants were currently enrolled undergraduate students at the institution where the study was conducted. All participants self-reported they were first-generation college students and that their parents/guardians did not attend any college. Additionally, they self-reported they entered the institution as a first-time first-year student, and identified as White/Caucasian.

Of the participants, four were first-year students, two were sophomores, three were juniors, and three were seniors. The academic majors of participants varied across six of ten academic colleges. Four students were in Education, three in Agriculture, two in Liberal Arts, one in Business, one in Engineering, and one in Science. Each participant brought unique family profiles, high school backgrounds, college experiences, and perspectives which are told below in individual participant profiles.

Aaron

Aaron was a senior studying Biology, expected to graduate in four and a half years with the goal of attending dental school after graduation. He grew up in a small town with a population just over 1,000 people near the Gulf Coast of Texas. Aaron has a little sister who is in high school.

Aaron stated ever since he was a kid his parents had the goal of sending him to college. They regretted not being able to attend and worked hard so Aaron and his sister could attend college. Aaron frequently referenced his experience in the Pre-Dental Society as beneficial to his college experience, including his interactions with the

organization's staff advisor. At the conclusion of his first interview, Aaron stated that reflecting back on his experiences was almost like a therapy session, that he really enjoyed thinking about his time at the institution as a first-generation college student.

Addison

Addison was a senior working on a bachelor's degree in Kinesiology who grew up in a small town in rural Texas west of Fort Worth. His father was a farmer and rancher, his mother worked for a crop protection service. Addison has an older sister who completed one year at a community college prior to receiving a cosmetology degree. Addison has a younger sister who was a first-year student at a mid-size public institution in Texas and a younger brother in elementary school. Addison knew early on he wanted to attend college. He had a desire to get out of his small town and knew he didn't want to be a rancher or farmer, like most people in his town. He stated everyone, such as teachers, parents, and society talked about the path of getting your high school diploma, going to college, then getting a good job. Addison frequently references his "community" as being beneficial to his college experience. These are individuals throughout his time in college who hold him accountable, care for him, and hold him to high standards; most of whom Addison met through a religious-based organization for college students.

Andi

Andi was a sophomore working to complete her Allied Health degree. Her mother has worked at a large financial institution for 15 plus years; her father was in the military prior to opening his own business. Andi has a younger brother in high school

who she has been helping apply to and explore college options. She always knew she wanted to go to college; her parents stressed her going.

Andi expressed emotion throughout both interviews, often pausing as tears welled in her eyes, when discussing her family, when talking about a disagreement with a professor, and over the term first-generation college student. During her second interview, Andi shared she sometimes felt guilty going to college since her parents didn't and felt a pressure to succeed as a first-generation college student.

Andi also discussed her dislike of the term "first-generation college student," stating she didn't want to be labeled something just because her parents didn't come to college. Andi felt that even though she might not know as much as other students, she's still capable and feels professors treat first-generation college students differently:

I don't want to be labeled something because my parents didn't go to college. I might not know as much but I'm still capable. I feel like when you're labeled first gen, people assume you don't know, like, everything you need to know, which it might be true. That's for me to know, me to find out. And with professors, like, I feel like when they know that you're first gen, you are different. So like, I don't tell people that I'm first gen. (AH91820_2:12)

Andi frequently referenced the connection and support she has from a staff mentor in her academic college because they communicate through email regularly, and she asks him lots of questions. The individual often checks on Andi, encourages her, and frequently states he believes in her ability to succeed.

Caroline

Caroline was a junior pursuing an undergraduate degree in Business. Her mom works at an oil and gas company, having worked there for almost 40 years and her father is retired. Caroline has three older brothers, there is almost a 20 year gap in age between Caroline and her oldest sibling. Her oldest brother attended a mid-sized state university in Texas, briefly stopped out due to academic issues, and eventually graduated after about eight years. Her second oldest brother attended a large state university in Texas, he also had academic issues and therefore transferred to a regional campus within the same institutional system, where he earned his bachelor's degree and also a master's degree. Caroline's third brother was a Marine and didn't attend any college.

Caroline stated attending college was always a given, it was always a part of conversation regarding her life. Most of her success she attributed to the community at her institution that she built through a first-year leadership organization she was involved in, and later became an upperclassman mentor, and her job at one of the largest student employers on-campus. Additionally, Caroline participated in a weekend recruitment program at her institution during the spring semester of her junior year of high school. A common statement from Caroline centered around a feeling that everyone else knew what they were doing in college, but she felt lost.

Casey

Casey was a non-traditional first-year student pursuing a degree in University Studies with a focus on Dance. Prior to enrolling at her institution, Casey served in the military, making her about six years older than the traditional age of a first-year student.

Her experience in the military created a strong sense of independence, willingness to ask questions, along with discipline and time management skills. This was evident as Casey described her confidence in researching resources on-campus, problem solving, willingness to find answers, and overall asking for help. It was challenging to delineate Casey's experience as a first-generation college student independent of her Veteran status.

Casey's parents divorced when she was a teenager, and she lived with her biological mother after their divorce. While her stepmom attended college, Casey stated she did not live with her nor interact with her in a meaningful manner, therefore she wouldn't consider her step-mom and parent or guardian for purposes of this study. Her interactions with step siblings and her stepmom were described as not exceptionally close but on good speaking terms.

Casey referenced two of her friends, one a graduate student at a small Ivy League college in the northeast and another a graduate student at a mid-sized university in rural Arkansas. The friend in Arkansas has been a hall director and graduate assistant for a student affairs department and is pursuing a career in higher education. Both of these individuals were an asset to Casey as she found herself seeking clarification from them about higher education jargon and a better understanding of her academics.

Kendall

Kendall was a junior pursuing a degree in Kinesiology who came from a split family background and attended a small high school in Texas. Her biological parents never married and parted when she was very young. Her mom had previous marriages

but has been single for the past several years. Her father remarried when she was three and is still married. Kendall lived with her mom most of the time growing up, but during her freshman year of high school moved to her biological dad's house for a year, before returning to her mom's house. She has a sister in high school who lived with her at her mom's house, twin stepbrothers who were first-year students in college and a younger brother in high school, who all lived with her dad. Kendall's mom got a certificate to become a legal assistant.

Kendall was a mentor for a first-generation learning community for two years, therefore she had a lot of context about the stigma surrounding first-generation college students. Kendall referenced articles she read as a first-generation college student mentor, showing incoming first-generation students the statistics and also those articles showing there are differences in being first-generation and not every first-generation college student is poor or a minority. She also mentioned reading articles "which stigmatize gen one students as either poor or uneducated" (KD91720_1:5) and stated it feels like the term first-generation college student has a negative connotation. Because of this she believes first-generation college students are treated as needing extra help. Kendall stated she now looks at things differently compared to her first year in regards to getting help as a first-generation college student. Even though she might get extra help, the positive attention she receives from her hometown or family for doing something big is appreciated.

Leah

Leah was a second semester junior in pursuit of an undergraduate degree in Civil Engineering who attended a large high school in the greater Houston area; she graduated with 800 people. Leah spent her childhood between her mom and dad's houses; they were divorced. She has a sister who is about five years older and attended the same institution Leah is attending. Her stepmom received an undergraduate degree; however she doesn't interact with her, and they haven't spoken in several years, therefore falling outside the scope of parent or guardian. Her stepsister is about eight years older than her and attended the same institution as Leah, but they haven't spoken in about five years.

Throughout both of her interviews Leah discussed her fear of professors, mentioning they were untouchable, come off high and mighty, are scary, and make her feel less than. This leads her to not asking them questions unless she absolutely has to, instead she prefers talking with a teaching assistant to get help.

Lizzie

Lizzie was a first-year student living on-campus in her second semester pursuing an undergraduate degree in English. Her mom previously worked; however she hasn't worked in about 17 years. Her dad has done maintenance work throughout his life which is his current profession. Her half-brother, whom she references as her brother and someone she lived with throughout childhood, is six years older than her and received a degree from a regional institution.

Lizzie attended high school in a West Texas community and had a graduating class of about 650 people. She had a really positive high school experience, graduating

near the top of her class while maintaining involvement in theatre. At her institution Lizzie participated in a first-year specific organization which she felt helped her be most successful. She is also active in an off-campus religious college ministry, which helped her navigate personal challenges during her first few weeks on-campus.

Matt

Matt was a second semester first-year student living on-campus and studying Biochemistry. His parents run their own advertising agency and Matt has a younger brother in high school. He attended high school in the suburbs of Houston with a graduating class around 750 students.

Matt frequently referenced emailing professors to introduce himself and would send them thank-you emails at the end of the semester, something he stated he learned from his dad. “One of the big things he’s instilled upon me is professionalism, always putting yourself out there in a professional manner. And no one’s going to know who you are until you introduce yourself to them” (ML2121_1:12).

Matt mentioned multiple times his anxiety which he’s always had, yet it was amplified somewhat during his first year. While he was aware of the counseling center on-campus, he did not utilize it, instead he used coping mechanisms recommended by his mom which she researched online. Additionally, Matt stated the importance of his faith to him and his family. This included his family getting trusted advice about college and suggestions for Matt from fellow church members who previously attended college at the same institution as Matt.

Matt spent several moments during both interviews reflecting on privilege, specifically that because he was white didn't mean he didn't have challenges. He stated:

...people assume everything that my parents got, they got because they're white and that's not the case... for people to make it seem like everything I got was on a silver platter kind of hurts my feelings a little bit...I didn't feel like I got that much of a privilege for my skin tone. (ML2221_ 2:2)

Melissa

Melissa was a second semester sophomore student majoring in agricultural economics. She grew up in a small town west of the greater Houston area. Her parents own their own business; her mom runs the accounting and her dad has skills in welding, construction, and electricity from attending technical school. Melissa has an older sister who attended junior college prior to transferring to and graduating from the same institution Melissa attends. Her younger brother is a senior in high school also looking to attend college, potentially at the same institution.

Melissa was highly involved in Future Farmers of America (FFA) during high school, where she met an academic dean of her institution who encouraged her to attend the institution, instead of another one. However, she has not maintained frequent communication with that individual since coming to college. Additionally, her participation in FFA influenced her involvement in the Student Government Association (SGA), where she has held a position for two years. Melissa made multiple statements that it seemed other people knew more than her about college. Specifically stating, "it

felt like I was a little late to the party,” and “it’s been hard to kind of figure out what some people already know” (MH2221_1:12).

Stacy

Stacy was a first-semester senior getting her undergraduate degree in Education. She spent the first six years of her life living with her biological mother, father, and grandfather. Then Stacy’s biological uncle fostered her until he was able to formally adopt her several years later. Whenever Stacy references her parents, mom and dad, she is referring to her biological uncle and aunt by marriage.

Stacy grew up on the east side of Houston. Her mom stayed at home until the kids were in school and she began working in the local school district before retiring. Stacy’s dad works in the chemical plant industry and was slated to retire within the year. She has two siblings, technically her cousins, who she calls her brother and sister and are both 20 plus years older than her.

Frequently throughout her first and second interview, Stacy referenced mental health challenges during her time in college. Her first year she stated it was a blessing she got out of bed some days. While quite in tune with her mental health issues, Stacy only visited the campus counseling center when her primary care physician required it. Stacy admitted she should have continued going to the counseling center, but stated “I knew what I needed to do, but I literally, I didn’t do it” (SF91720_1:10).

Todd

Todd was a first-semester first-year student studying Agricultural Economics. He grew up in a rural East Texas town and graduated in the top 10 of his high school class.

Todd's mom is a cosmetologist and his dad is retired but managing a business. Todd is the youngest of three, his brother is 16 years older and his sister is eight years older. Todd's brother attended a junior college but left for a job before receiving a degree. His sister graduated about four years ago from the same institution Todd is attending.

During his time in high school Todd was significantly involved in Texas 4-H, a youth development program. Each year 4-H hosts a conference on site at Todd's institution, meaning he had been to campus prior to enrolling. Additionally, Todd was very involved in Future Farmers of America (FFA), an intracurricular student organization for those interested in agriculture and leadership. Todd frequently mentioned how his experiences in 4-H and FFA positively impacted his experiences at his institution. This included knowing several peers in his classes who were also involved in 4-H or FFA, knowing an academic dean through FFA who he would trust if he needed help, and having an FFA advisor who graduated from his institution and provided advice.

Summary of Participants

Each of the 12 participants had unique stories for how they learned to navigate the higher education setting. The individuals brought forth their own skills and qualities to the college experience which proved useful as they navigated challenges during college. Their challenges and situations varied but the manner in which they sought help, guidance, and learned to understand higher education brought similarities which are outlined below.

Emergent Themes

Based on participant responses for this study, four themes emerged. All four themes fell within the research questions focused on building cultural capital pre- and post- first day of classes. Two themes were present in the third research question regarding first-generation college student introspection as they navigated higher education. The four themes are allies, purposefully structured educational experiences, personal agency, and resource systems which are described below:

- **Allies** - Starting from the application process to current day, students indicated people were a tremendous help as they navigated the college environment. Throughout interviews participants referenced various individuals from friends to instructors as people who aided them in navigating higher education. From an emotional support frame to asking questions to getting advice, people were a constant source of aid to participants. This theme was present within all three research questions.
- **Purposefully Structured Educational Experiences** - Participants engagement in programming during high school, pre-enrollment, and during enrollment helped provide insight, resource awareness and knowledge of how higher education functioned. This theme was present within pre and post course enrollment.
- **Personal Agency** - Throughout their time in college, students relied on themselves, their personal skills, and self-agency to persist. They believed in themselves and recognized they had the ability to be successful. This theme was

most prominent once students enrolled in classes and was also present as they reflected about their experiences.

- Resource Systems - Students utilized formal resources, outside of people, such as campus offices and online resources to seek guidance and resolution to questions. These systems were mostly used once students began coursework, but there were a few instances where they appeared prior to beginning classes.

Table 2
Overview of emergent themes and subthemes in relation to research questions

Research question	Emergent themes	Emergent subthemes
Q1	Allies	Community, Networks, Parental Support
	Purposefully Structured Educational Experiences	High School Experiences (Dual Credit, Leadership Programs), Higher Education Programs (Mandatory Orientation, Official Campus Visits, Extended Orientation, Learning Communities)
	Personal Agency	
	Resource Systems	Online Resources
Q2	Allies	Community (Friends, Siblings, Parents), Instructors, Staff Members, Networks (Co-Workers, Upperclassmen, Classmates, Alumni)
	Purposefully Structured Educational Experiences	Learning Communities
	Personal Agency	Relying on Self/Skills
	Resource Systems	Institutional Resources (On-Campus Tutoring, Campus Offices, Academic Departments), Online Resources

Table 2 continued

Overview of emergent themes and subthemes in relation to research questions

Research question	Emergent themes	Emergent subthemes
Q3	Allies	Helping Other First-Generation College Students
	Personal Agency	Limited Knowledge, Continuing Generation College Students, Navigating Emotions, Needs, Impacts of COVID-19

Prior to the First-Day of Courses

Experiences of participants prior to their first day of class provided valuable context, insight, and resource awareness as they learned to navigate higher education. Many of the participants first considered college as early as childhood. During high school they participated in formative programs such as dual credit courses and youth leadership development programs. They participated in orientation and transition programming before they formally began classes their first semester. And along the way, people were a valuable resource for guidance in the process.

Allies

Participants referenced people as helpful resources during their application process and as they determined whether they wanted to attend the institution. This included members of their community and networks:

Community. In this study, community is defined as one degree of separation from the participant. This included individuals such as a friend, sibling, or other individual with which the participant has a direct, close, and personal relationship. Unofficial visits to campus with siblings and friends aided participants to better

understand the college environment prior to attending their chosen institution. Stacy and Todd both visited campus with a sibling, Todd felt it provided a foundation for the institution: "When my sister was here, I had visited campus, numerous times, and so I had already understood what [the university] was like and what the traditions and values were like" (TW91720_1:3). Additionally, participants utilized their community as they applied to the institution. Casey has a friend who has graduated from college and is pursuing a master's degree, so Casey reached out to her friend to review her application once she had written it. These types of interactions between first-generation students and individuals who have experience in a college setting proved beneficial to them learning the basics of higher education as they prepared to enter college.

Networks. Individuals with more than one degree of separation are identified as a member of the participant's network in this study. This includes individuals who have some connection to the participant but would not be considered close individuals. Participants had individuals within their network that specifically aided in the college application process. Half of the participants explicitly stated a high school counselor or teacher aided them through their college application process. Their high school teacher or counselor reviewed their essays, helped them navigate the logistics of the application, gave insight on requesting transcripts, provided details for transferring dual credit courses, and made suggestions for creating a competitive scholarship application. Andi and Matt both expressed the benefits of having college application essays read by their high school English teachers.

Todd shared that both of his high school counselors were graduates of the institution he attended and he felt like that was beneficial. They were able to provide him insider knowledge about the institution including details of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other scholarship programs specific to the institution. They helped him navigate the process and make sure he was on the right track for completing applications. Addison stated his high school counselor had always been good about helping students in his high school apply for college: "If they want a [post] secondary education she's been really good keeping up with students, making sure they're on track, making sure they're not slacking, or what's the word I'm looking for, procrastinating. So she was a really big help, if I ever had questions I would go to the school counselor" (AH91720_2:1).

Parental Support. While their parents did not attend college, for a majority of participants they stated college was always on the horizon after high school. This idea generated mostly from immediate family members and society in general. When Casey was young her parents said they wanted her to go to college, and after her time in the military she felt it was the next step. She knew that going to college was what she was supposed to do. Similarly, Aaron said it was always his parents' goal to send him to college because they didn't get to go; they regretted not attending, so he planned to attend. More than half of the other participants all had similar conversations and discussions with their parents. Leah summarized the sentiment by many of the students that college was the natural next step after high school. She said, "They just acted like

yeah this is what happens after high school, I didn't really realize you could not go to college, until probably high school" (LH2221_1:3).

Purposefully Structured Educational Experiences

High School Experiences. An unexpected subtheme mentioned frequently by participants were various beneficial experiences connected to their time in high school. Dual credit courses contributed to almost half of the participants' knowledge of the college setting and connected them to resources at the institution. Additionally, participation in youth leadership programs during high school, such as 4-H and FFA, were strong factors in learning about higher education.

Dual credit built confidence and skills. A majority of participants took part in a dual credit program during high school. The number, subject, and location of courses they took varied, but each participant who took a dual credit course stated it was beneficial to their college experience. Participants spoke extensively about how their dual credit courses prepared them for college.

Lizzie felt the dual credit courses helped transition her from being a high school learner to being a more advanced college learner. She was able to better understand the higher expectations professors had because the courses were more of a college level. Melissa took almost 12 credit hours in her dual credit program and shared that taking dual credit courses on a college campus provided a framework for the environment she would be entering.

The outlet mall college campus isn't super big. I think there's like four or five classrooms. And then, like, some computer labs... but it was definitely a different

environment of, like, stepping into a college classroom with a professor who's used to teaching in that sort of classroom. And we really kind of got that, this isn't a high school class, this is a college class and like, the environment helped us realize that. (MH2221_2:2)

Additionally, the dual credit courses helped Melissa learn techniques for studying, note taking, and discerning what was important, which helped her in some of the introductory courses she took her first year. She was learning material at an accelerated rate for deeper understanding, which was different than high school and prepared her for college courses.

Matt continually mentioned how grateful he was for his dual credit program and how it prepared him for college. It desensitized his fear of what college was going to be like and taught him to ask for help from professors when needed. Dual credit also helped Matt realize that college was not going to be like the movies, that college would be hard and difficult, and he was going to have to put in work and effort. His dual credit professors made classes more professional, preparing him for what a college professor would be like and helping him understand he can still have a personal relationship with the professor even in a big class. Similar to Matt, Todd was grateful for his dual credit courses and recognized many of his college classmates didn't have dual credit. Todd felt dual credit provided a familiarity with the college atmosphere and gave him a grasp and feeling of what to expect his first year in college.

High School Leadership Programs. Two nationwide youth development leadership programs for high school students, which participants referenced as preparing them for college, were Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H.

4-H is delivered by Cooperative Extension Systems and involvement ranges from Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), Agriculture & Livestock, Leadership & Citizenship, Family & Community Health, and Natural Resources. 4-H states its purpose is to “help young people and their families gain the skills needed to be proactive forces in their communities and develop ideas for a more innovative economy” (4-H, n.d.).

FFA is for individuals interested in agriculture and leadership, together or independent of each other. While the name implies participation based on interest in farming, FFA states its mission is to “make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education” (Future Farmers of America, n.d.).

Melissa and Todd felt very strongly that their involvement in 4-H and FFA aided their college experience and both spoke about it at length during their interviews. Those programs allowed them to meet individuals in their academic majors and classes, connected them to their institution, and encouraged their involvement in college. Todd came to campus during high school to participate in a large scale 4-H event for five days. During that time he took a compilation of college like classes as if he was in a specific major. That experience provided an opportunity for him to better understand the physical

environment of the institution and also gain knowledge about how classes function and the structure of what being a student would be like.

When Melissa came to college she already had a good network of peers from her time in FFA and 4-H: "I knew, like, there were people that I was going to see, and it was familiar faces ...that I could rely on to give information if I didn't know them already. So that's just kind of like the networking, the people aspect I guess" (MH2221_2:3). That network created a reliable group of individuals for Melissa to reach out to and get help when she needed it.

The encouragement to be involved once arriving on-campus came from FFA for both Todd and Melissa. Todd's advisor in FFA graduated from his institution and mentioned several organizations for Todd to consider getting involved. Additionally, Melissa found that her interest in governance during FFA translated to an interest in student government in college. She expressed a lot of excitement and passion for participating in student government; she was proud of her involvement and the work she did in student government, which was a direct connection to being encouraged to be involved during her time in FFA.

Higher Education Programs. Campus programs such as mandatory orientation, formal campus visits, and extended orientation programs, all which occur prior to the student attending classes, proved beneficial to participants in varying manners.

Mandatory Orientation. Almost all of the participants referenced some aspect of their mandatory orientation being helpful to their transition and time thus far in college. Either they learned about a campus resource, or orientation helped them better

understand what college was going to be like. Some participants acknowledged they did not remember significant details about mandatory orientation but felt like it was a beneficial experience. Students referenced offices they learned about during mandatory orientation, but often didn't remember specific details about those offices. They recalled hearing certain offices existed and knew they could provide some type of support but didn't necessarily know the exact services provided.

Additionally, some participants stated orientation was a bit overwhelming and a lot of information to absorb as a first-generation college student. Kendall specifically said it was a lot of information in a short amount of time and overall it was tough to retain what was shared.

Casey, who attended orientation virtually, remembered hearing about the academic center. She felt like it stuck out because she was worried about how her academic performance would be. Casey also learned about the math center during her orientation which she has already utilized for help in a math course. Kendall remembered hearing about career services (which she used later during her time in college), financial aid, and the student portal to access things. Lizzie also recollected learning about the student portal during orientation and specifically how she would register for courses in the portal.

Kendall felt like orientation was also helpful for her parents: "It [mandatory orientation] was really helpful because it not only taught me like what I was going to go into, and like what resources there were, but they also reassured my parents. I would say it was really helpful" (KD91720_2:2). Several other students specifically mentioned

orientation being a good opportunity for their parents to learn more about college. It provided them knowledge about how college would operate and some basic information about support services for their student.

Addison felt mandatory orientation gives a lot of advice and information so if he even needs anything, he knows what to do. He also mentioned his dad attended a presentation specifically for parents of first-generation college students during orientation, which his dad said was helpful. Overall, Addison said that orientation created a vision for how his experience at the institution would be and felt encouragement from the institution during his experience:

Orientation was really welcoming. They really tried to take the intimidation of classes away, like, you know, you applied, you made it here, so you made it for a reason. We believe that you can do this ... you have grades, you have the capacity to do this and be accomplished...I remember that and feeling more comfortable with that, and how welcoming the professors [and staff] were that spoke. Like, if you ever need anything come talk to me, and my professors have always been like that. (AH91720_2:2)

Official Campus Visits. Another experience participants indicated was beneficial were official pre-college visits, either a general campus visit or a weekend recruitment program. Kendall took an official campus visit and said, "It was a really good experience, and it really helped, like, I guess, visualize things because I'm such a visualization person" (KD91720_2:2). Caroline had a similar feeling; she was unaware

of what college would be like but after a campus visit she realized the campus was going to be her new home.

Caroline participated in a recruitment weekend during the spring of her junior year of high school. The weekend program included panels with students, speakers, organizations talking about what they do, some entertainment, participation in campus traditions and having small group discussions. The discussions and meeting her peers were the most beneficial aspects of the weekend for Caroline:

Having those small group discussions and having those connections with the people, like, that we went to every single little thing together. That was a big thing, because it just kind of sparked the [institution] community and, like, the [alumni] network and everything. Being with my peers was a big thing because it was people I've never met before. In a whole new place and we were all kind of on the same level, so it was really a cool experience. (CJ10720_2:2)

Extended Orientation. Melissa attended extended orientation and that's where she learned about leadership organizations specifically for first-year students. It also provided her a better understanding of the traditions of the institution and connected her with a first group of friends as she started college. The resource awareness and opportunities for involvement were also key aspects Caroline took away from her time at extended orientation. She was in a GroupMe with other individuals and that connected her to some involvement opportunities on campus and the student organization fair. Students expressed it was mostly meeting people, building their network, and connecting with others at extended orientation that helped them in the long run. While their

relationships did not necessarily last long, they were helpful as the first-generation college students got settled into the college setting.

Learning Community. One of the learning communities on-campus for first-generation college students conducted meetings over the summer prior to school beginning. Around May, the learning community Casey was a part of started meetings through Zoom. During the meetings the upperclassmen mentors talked about what it was like to live with a roommate, various techniques to stay organized with schoolwork, and broad based life skills for someone new to being on their own. At those summer meetings prior to enrolling, Casey asked about resources for counseling, and they were able to tell her what was available, which she felt was helpful. Those meetings allowed Casey to get her footing and ask questions prior to classes formally beginning, a way for Casey to build her cultural capital.

Personal Agency

Students knew they needed to utilize their own determination and independence to manage the application process without help from their parents. Kendall especially recognized the personal agency needed to get the application turned in: "...it takes a lot of confidence and determination to actually get here...the determination to get the application turned in, with no prior knowledge to how it works, and yeah, just doing it all and not giving up" (KD91720_2:8).

Additionally, many students had in their minds that college was the next step after high school. Addison knew in elementary school he wanted to attend college: "I didn't want to be a farmer or a rancher when I grew up, and the best way to do that was

to go to college and get a higher education” (AH91720_1:1). Most of the individuals from his rural hometown went on to work blue collar jobs nearby, but Addison was interested in a different career path and knew he wanted to go to college. Lizzie had similar sentiments, she felt it was in middle school that she really thought about going to college after high school, it was something she expected to do. She said college was something you do after high school when you grow up. Stacy had a mindset that the natural path was to graduate, go to college to further her education, and then get a job. Going to college was never a question for her, the question was more where she was going to attend college. Overall, it was known by each individual their next step after high school would be college. Even for Casey, who went into the military prior to college, she knew college was the next step, but she was not quite ready immediately after high school. Participants felt attending college would provide opportunities, financially or otherwise, give them the chance to leave their hometown, or lead them to a specific career path.

Resource Systems

Online Resources. As students prepared their college applications, they utilized Google and other websites to find information. Melissa looked up topics online to figure out ways to make her application essays better. She knew she was mostly on her own for the process so using the internet was a good way for her to find information. As Leah worked on her application, and explored details of the institution she was interested in, she utilized Google with specific searches related to her institution: “I just looked at um, anything [institution], I just started by, just, research [institution] and their website, and

all the little ... they have so many, and just read as much as I possibly could about it" (LH2221_1:6).

After Their First Day of Class

Once students began coursework, there were frequent occasions where they needed guidance, help, or general advice as they navigated college. This was the time when students needed the most guidance or help in resolving issues or concerns. They sought knowledge about aspects of campus specific to their academic journey as well as non-classroom specifics such as involvement or personal challenges. This included tutoring, office hours, services on campus, major changes, involvement opportunities, campus jobs, resume building, and how to register for courses, among many other inquiries. Students utilized multiple approaches to gain perspective in navigating higher education whether related to inside or outside the classroom needs.

Allies

Community. A strong theme for participants during their time at the institution was the value of community in navigating the college experience. They found themselves in need and utilized these individuals to ask questions, seek advice, and problem solve. Their community were the individuals closest to them who they felt most comfortable asking for help and guidance.

Friends. Virtually all participants referenced friends as individuals who have provided help during their college career. These friends shared about their experiences with campus resources, offices to visit for specific concerns, guidance on academics,

information about available tutoring services, how to get help with class, and shared what helped them when they previously needed help in college.

Casey has two close friends at other institutions who have college knowledge beyond that of a traditional undergraduate student. She has asked them for help throughout her first few months in college. One friend has a lot of experience specific in the higher education; she is working on a master's degree in a field specifically related to student support services. Her experience in the higher education environment provided an opportunity for Casey to reach out and seek help to better understand what she was experiencing: "I don't know her exact job role, but she was doing her graduate stuff at her college and she works for the university. So, I felt really comfortable approaching her with questions because I know that was part of her job" (CT91520_1:7). Casey texts her two friends for help understanding college verbiage, clarification about things before going to her professor, and for help in specific courses. She is very comfortable approaching them with questions and utilizing their expertise as connected individuals within a higher education knowledge base.

Leah felt making friends helped her be most successful during her first year. "Having a well-rounded group of friends helped, because you can't be good at everything. Or like, they may know about some organization that I want to be a part of...because I didn't know it existed" (LH2221_1:11). Friends helped Leah get connected to a student organization specific to her major and desired career path; she was unaware the organization was on-campus. Caroline expressed a similar sentiment that her conversations with friends have helped her the most during college. She had one close

friend who helped her a lot throughout her first year, especially in navigating some of the academic components of college. He sat down and walked her through degree plans and the classes to take in alignment with her degree and took time to outline it for her. That friend also helped Caroline register for classes because she didn't know how. Her friends have been a huge help and connected resource for her: "I felt like they [friends] genuinely care ... or like one person figures out one thing and you hear like "do you know how to do this?" (CJ101720_1:14).

Aaron mentioned it as more helpful for his friends telling him about a resource being as opposed to getting a piece of paper that tells him about an office. The personal experience his friends have, their ability to share exactly what the office does or how it has helped them in the past, aid in his understanding of how a campus resource can serve his needs: "As a first gen, like, and you have no idea what any of these things do... you read them in a pamphlet, but that pamphlet doesn't come to your mind, like, when you're struggling with the papers or something, you know. But if a friend tells you, it's like, yeah" (AL2221_2:13).

Siblings. Siblings were a frequent source of guidance and help for participants. They would call their older siblings, or the siblings would reach out to the students to check-in. Their siblings had valuable knowledge and participants recognized they could be helpful in providing context to their experiences within higher education.

Lizzie called her older brother and asked him questions about student loans, her resumé, and details for her college application. "If I wasn't sure about something, I did call my brother" (LV2221_1:4). She knew her parents did not have the knowledge, but

her brother has been through the experience and figured it out, so he was the next best option. Caroline had a similar experience with her older brother encouraging her to stay on track with grades. He always encouraged her to get it together and get on the right path. Caroline's brother would frequently ask her how classes were going and offered help if she needed it. Leah and Todd similarly had older siblings who they asked lots of questions. Leah asked her sister as much as she could, knowing not everything would be the same as her sister, but felt she was a good source of help. Todd's sister would call and check in on him, she also gave advice on course scheduling, encouraged him to utilize tutoring services, and reminded him of the class drop process when he mentioned he was having a hard time with a class. When he was younger, he remembered his sister coming home from college, and he was old enough to understand some of what she talked about regarding her college experience.

Parents. The concept of emotional support, encouragement, and general problem solving from family was a significant theme throughout interviews. Participants recognized their family didn't have college knowledge, but were still able to listen, encourage, and talk their students through challenges. Aaron summarized the support from his family during his time at the institution:

They're more emotional support, like, I'd say, more than anything... if I have, like, a crazy week I'll call just, like, just to rant about it, you know what I mean? Or like, because every college kid has those moments of self-doubt, where you're like 'oh I can't do this. I'm just going to be a garbage man or something,' you know? So, like, if I have one of those breakdowns, I will call my mom or

something. But other than that, I mean life issues yeah, but not school issues.

(AL2221_2:10)

Participants mentioned receiving encouragement from their parents, who helped them stay positive and push through challenges they were facing. Matt acknowledged his parents have known him for 19 years so they best understand how to support him emotionally, and push him to earn his degree, while using an empathetic approach. He has an open relationship with his family and reaches out to them when he's struggling, referencing their support with his anxiety. Andi and Stacy both referenced encouragement from their parents, specifically the fact their families demonstrated a belief in them to succeed and ability to persevere. Their parents gave them confidence that they could do it, and both participants expressed their family support was important to their college success.

Another key aspect of the parent support was a listening ear. Addison recognized his mom's ability to be a good listener when he faced challenges. He stated:

Definitely the talking through and listening, listening. She's [my mom] always been a really good communicator, listener... She doesn't have any college experience, so she did the best she could with what she had, which was talking to me and, like, talking me through situations. So yeah, conversation. Calm me down, not the end of the world, chill out, that kind of thing. (AH91720_2:5)

While families may not have the detailed knowledge of the college setting or the specifics of how to navigate the higher education environment, they provide valuable behind the scenes support. Through encouragement and being a reliable individual for

first-generation college students to speak with, vent, and problem solve as their students pursue their undergraduate degree, parents are a key aspect to supporting their first-gen students through college.

Instructors. Faculty, professors, instructors and teaching assistants (TAs) were all beneficial human resources to participants. While the individual who stands at the front of a classroom has their own specified title in the higher education organizational hierarchy, participants did not indicate a delineation among those lecturing, with exception to TAs.

The relationship instructors built with participants were mentioned by several participants. The first-generation students had positive interactions with instructors across first-year seminar programs and general academic courses. The instructors supported, advised, encouraged, and provided resource awareness for the students.

Melissa referenced a strong working relationship with the instructor for her introductory major course. He demonstrated a willingness to help, to talk with students, and she felt he was nice and understood everyone was a first-year student and might need help. Melissa remembered the professor by name and his willingness to work through problems, academic or otherwise, with students. Aaron studied abroad as an upperclassman and built a positive relationship with the two faculty members who led the program. While he didn't necessarily maintain frequent or consistent contact with the two faculty members, Aaron felt like he could rely on those instructors and reach out to them if necessary. He stated: "It's nice to have, like, a friend in the faculty, you know what I mean?" (AL2221_2:5).

Stacy had an instructor who demonstrated care and concern for her, which she expressed was very beneficial to her staying in school and finishing the semester. She had been struggling during the second semester of her first-year and went to speak with him: "After I went to his office and had that mental breakdown second semester, I sought out help from him for sure... He gave me hope. He said, 'you only have a few more weeks; you can do it'" (SF91720_1:6). That was the point when things started turning around for her, a simple phrase from her instructor was just enough to encourage her to finish out the semester

Lizzie similarly referenced the value in instructors showing kindness and compassion to their students. A course she was in at the time had a professor she felt was willing to help her students. Even though classes were held on Zoom, Lizzie felt her instructor was compassionate and really passionate about helping others.

Instructors' office hours served as a valuable resource for Caroline, Andi, and Kendall. Attending office hours helped them navigate their courses, better understand the material, and fostered a positive relationship with their instructors. Even if she did not have questions, Kendall frequently attended office hours, basically every week she found herself at office hours sometimes just hanging out. She expressed being present at office hours created a smaller community on a large campus, which was important to feeling supported. Andi went to office hours regularly and her instructor would review prior exams. She found getting help from her instructor was really beneficial in that course. For Caroline, attending office hours helped with her assignments but also created a positive relationship with her instructor: "I knew that if I went to her office

hours, she would sit there with me; and she'd tell me, she'd ask me questions like 'Okay, what do you mean by this?' and really helped me work through it. And I just really like her, she's a great instructor" (CJ10720_2:11). She really wanted to do well in the course and attending office hours helped set her up for success.

First-generation college student learning communities during the first semester of college proved helpful for both Kendall and Todd. They stated the instructor for the learning community, the same staff member who taught both of their particular courses, was valuable to their transition because she provided guidance and referrals to various campus resources. Kendall stated, "the coordinator really opened up so many options for me because I saw so many resources that I didn't even know existed... without her, I would not have known about half of them" (KD91720_1:3). The instructor also helped Kendall through roommate challenges, referring her to speak with the resident assistant. During a follow-up email after interviews had concluded, Kendall reiterated the importance of the learning community instructor in her college experience: "She has been by my side and guided me at all hours of the day for the past three and a half years." Todd went to the learning community instructor with concerns about his calculus class, and she reminded him of the math learning center and encouraged him to attend his professor's office hours.

Leah specifically mentioned teaching assistants as being individuals who have been very helpful and individuals she felt comfortable approaching. Leah stated several times during her interviews that professors were intimidating, and she was hesitant to approach them with questions because they seem untouchable. However, she was

comfortable approaching the TAs for her classes and felt like they were easier to speak with and ask questions: "They help because they're closer to our age and they had just taken the class... so they're kind of the bridge between professors" (LH_2221_1:3). Leah went on to state she has a great relationship with one of her TAs who was frequently in the lab and always around to answer questions. She described their interactions as more student to student. Leah felt like TAs respond to emails quicker than her professors and overall that having a good TA was really beneficial to her success and willingness to get help in a course.

Staff Members. Identified as mentors, academic advisors, and organization advisors, university staff members played a crucial role in supporting participants. Whether providing encouragement, a listening ear, referring students to resources, or recommending involvement opportunities, staff members were mentioned by over half of the participants as being helpful.

Andi spoke throughout her interviews about a staff mentor she met through the first-generation community in her academic college. They met just as classes were beginning in the fall of her first year. She emails that staff member with questions about anything, visits his office to ask questions or just hang out, talks to him about her challenges with classes, and asks his advice with academics and other aspects of college life. Andi said it has been very helpful to have him to talk about stuff and get encouragement from him. Her mentor emails her about involvement opportunities, checks in on her to make sure everything is going okay, and calms her down when she's

worried about something. At the core, Andi said meeting him is one of the best things the institution has done for her as a first-generation college student.

Academic advisors were also helpful for students within an academic and social framework. Kendall met her advisor at mandatory orientation and realized it was the person who would guide her through the degree plan and course selection. She emails her all the time with questions. As a first-generation student, Kendall stated it is helpful to sit and plan it all out and get explanations the various courses from her advisor. Leah said her academic advisor listens patiently to her questions even when they aren't about coursework. They meet at least every semester, and she stated her advisor is so nice and understands how Leah operates. Even though Leah knows the advisor has heard similar questions from other students thousands of times and appreciates her being kind and answering them. When Caroline was exploring a major change, one of many across her time as an undergraduate student, she met with a general academic advisor who was very helpful. The advisor recommended she visit the career center to better understand the connection between a major and career choices, which aided her in selecting her next major.

Organizational advisors also played a positive role in participant experiences, helping them along their college path inside and outside the classroom. Aaron was in a student organization related to his professional interest. His advisor also happened to be a first-generation college student, something she mentioned to him during one of their conversations. Aaron worked with her a lot because he became a leader of the organization, and he felt she was very helpful. She provided general advice for his career

pursuits and was an individual willing to provide guidance when he needed it. Lizzie referenced an organization advisor for her academic college freshman organization, stating that even through Zoom you could tell he was kind and compassionate and had a willingness to help the students in the group. Student governance has its own dedicated staff advisor, and Melissa's interactions with that advisor related to her academics and general interest as a student leader on campus. She mentioned speaking with him to get his opinion and advice. "He has been a really cool person to motivate me through not only just being a leader but making sure I'm still focusing on academics" (MH2221_2:13).

Networks. Participant networks, individuals in which the participant did not indicate a strong or direct relationship, that provided help and guidance once they were in college included alumni of the institution, co-workers, upperclassmen and fellow students from class. A frequent method of communication among co-worker and classmate networks was GroupMe, a group text messaging application, where first-generation students asked questions of the individuals in each respective group.

Co-Workers. Caroline and Todd talked about asking their co-workers for help and guidance with questions about navigating the institution and resolving issues or concerns. Caroline referenced co-workers at her on-campus job as individuals who she would reach out to, often through GroupMe:

I would go to my co-workers, because we have an outside of work GroupMe, so it's not an actual GroupMe for co-workers, we just all happened to be employees... I think that's a good one because, like, even if I'm not super close to

anybody, there's so many different kinds of people in, like, years, involvement. So that's the best, like, chances that I'll have of getting a response that I don't already know about. (CJ10720_2:7)

Caroline also referenced her supervisors in the position as individuals she could always go to with anything.

Todd mentioned his co-workers have almost all graduated from his institution. Several are working on their master's degrees, one is a faculty member at a local junior college, and another individual had recently defended their dissertation. Todd's office is affiliated with the university but not considered an on-campus job. He has a lot of individuals in his office with college knowledge because of their roles as students or staff, most of them with experience specific to the institution he's attending. He said they all understand so he frequently asks questions of the multitude of individuals in his office: "Academic, non-academic, I definitely go to all of them for help" (TW91720_1:16).

Upperclassmen. Participants engaged with upperclassmen at their institution in a variety of settings. From student organization leaders, to extended orientation counselors, roommate's siblings, and friends' siblings they were interacting and asking questions of these upperclassmen.

Caroline and Lizzie mentioned upperclassmen from their student organizations provided guidance and direction when they needed it. This included giving advice on degree plans, academic majors, and courses to take. Caroline had a counselor, kind of like a mentor, in her organization to look up to and get advice. The organization gave her

a network of people who helped see her situation and gave recommendations of what to do for her degree plan, classes, and major. She stated the connection with those people was really helpful. Lizzie felt the upperclassmen in her first-year leadership organization were particularly helpful because they had college experience: "My [organization] has helped me the most... I know they're always there; you know, I mean the staff is only like a year or two older than me, but they've experienced it so they're really helpful" (LV2221_1:8). She was partnered with an upperclassman in her major of interest, which later became her major, and was able to learn more about the classes she would take.

Andi and Aaron referenced siblings of roommates or siblings of friends as being helpful. Aaron stated he had a lot of friends who had siblings and that's how his friends knew about resources on campus. Those same friends would then share information about resources from their siblings, such as information about chemistry lab, with Aaron. Andi's roommate had a sibling who was graduating in a few months, and she felt that allowed her roommate to better understand what she was doing in college and subsequently provide advice to Andi.

Classmates. Participants saw their classmates as valuable sources for information and problem solving. They often asked classmates questions about coursework as well as academic resources. When they struggled with specifics from a course, they found classmates helpful in problem solving and providing recommendations for seeking help.

Similar to Caroline's use of GroupMe with co-workers, Todd and Leah both specifically utilized GroupMe to ask questions of classmates. Todd stated: "And even in GroupMe's, for class...you know, somebody's having trouble and nobody else can

answer it. They always say, 'hey check the academic student service center, or check here, or check here,'" (TW91720_1:7). Similarly, Leah stated if she has an academic related question, she relies heavily on her course GroupMe because she assumes other people have a similar question.

Kendall relied on her classmates to better understand using professor office hours. She said: "the people I sat next to happened to be really cool; and they had talked about how they went to her office hours and said 'hey, if you really need help with something she does walk you through it slower than she does in class'" (KD91720_1:9). Hearing about office hours from classmates made her feel confident and more comfortable attending them herself. As mentioned above, Kendall would attend office hours, even if she did not have specific questions, because of the positive experiences of her classmates.

Alumni. Participants were keenly aware of individuals who were alumni of the institution, and felt their advice was beneficial and gave them an inside connection to the way the institution functioned. Additionally, a few participants utilized alumni from other institutions to get advice and learn from their cultural capital within higher education. Alumni shared directly with participants or through the family members of participants. This included advice about attending campus programs, paying bills, and navigating the scholarship process.

Kendall's mom received advice through her boss who is an alumni:

My mom's boss is an [alumna] and has kids who graduated last year...Her whole family went to [the institution], so she basically talked to me and my mom about

how a lot of things are possible and financial aid can cover things that you wouldn't imagine. You can get loans and scholarships that you don't really hear about. She was a good resource. (KD91720_1:6)

Matt's parents are part of a religious community and seek advice from individuals in their group who previously attended the same institution as Matt. He shares his problems with his parents, and they ask their religious community for college advice. Addison spoke to college graduates, some outside of the institution he's attended, to get help. He said, "sometimes I'll talk to alumni, they're not necessarily graduated from [institution], but they've got college experience. So, like, if all else fails, I'll talk to them" (AH91720_2:4).

Purposefully Structured Educational Experiences

Learning Communities. Many participants were involved in learning communities during their first-year of college. These learning communities were variations of first-year seminar courses, first-generation college student specific first-year seminars, and a scholarship program for first-generation low-income students. These various learning communities included participation requirements such as meetings, classes, and presentations.

The first-year seminar course was very helpful with campus resource identification for handful of participants. Their first-year seminar classes included presentations about campus resources and specific offices such as the counseling center. Andi's first-year seminar class met once a week and provided information about resources available to students. Her instructor required students to visit specific offices

and attend certain campus programs to gain knowledge about the institution and build their community.

She would force us to get these points, we'd have to, like, go to [institutional event] or go to a football game or do like something out with other people and get to, like, know the environment and campus and stuff. So, it was really helpful. (AH91820_1:2)

Stacy appreciated her first-year seminar instructor providing study tips such as reviewing for a test three to five days prior to the exam and to review notes you took during class every day or week. She also enjoyed that her professor brought in people that gave their testimonies about being a first-generation college student and becoming doctors and lawyers. She felt it was inspiring and encouraging to her journey as a first-generation student.

Casey referred to her learning community as a “forced community” (CT91520_2:12) but still felt it was very beneficial. Kendall agreed her first-year seminar class helped tremendously: "Getting into that learning community my first year [was the most beneficial experience as a first-generation college student.] I don't know, really, what I would have known now, if I hadn't been in it” (KD91720_2:7). She also felt like she was able to bring problems to her learning community class, and they helped, talked through it, and provided advice. The learning community experience provided Kendall a network of individuals to reach out to for support.

Personal Agency

Relying on Self/Skills. Determination, independence, and self-motivation were key personal skills participants said they used to help themselves during their time at the institution. Often that involved problem solving and looking for solutions on their own. Aaron talked about his independence and how it helped him figure things out as he navigated his college experience:

I am, like, really good at doing research on things and figuring things out myself, especially as I got older in college. Like a lot of, like, being successful here is figuring out how to do things. So, it's a lot of spending time reading and figuring it out, and so I've got pretty good at figuring things out myself.

(AL2221_2:10)

Many other participants specifically talked about using their own independence to help them navigate college. Matt said with problems he faced he would search for answers himself and then find something to help. He taught himself how to be a college student, how to juggle his coursework and manage the stress of multiple professors. Melissa felt like she'd learned a lot and managed to be successful on her own during her time at the institution, using her own independence: "I've come so far in the year and a half I've been here without having really any resources from my parents to help me get to this place" (MH2221_2:1).

Determination and endurance were additional personal skills Addison felt benefited him during college. They were skills he built up from high school and life in general which have been helpful in building his personal agency. He learned to work

with the skills, abilities, and gifts he had to make the best out his college experience. Kendall mentioned spending time early in her college career figuring things out on her own and determining what worked best for her. Ultimately, in order to be successful, she had to learn on her own instead of being told by someone. Specifically, Kendall described her experience as “figuring out how to student, I figured out how to manage my time” (KD91720_1:4).

Participants acknowledged that at some point a student has have to move from knowing about a resource to actually using it. This was described as first recognizing you have a need, second remembering the resource is available, and third taking the steps to use the resource for that need. Stacy referenced how people can tell you about something, about what it might be like, but until you actually experience it, you don't truly know what it is going to be like. Therefore, you build up your personal skills and toolkit, then you get to a moment of absolutely needing a resource, and you rely on yourself to remember what exists. She was reflecting back on challenges during her first year and adjusting to the new environment without her family. For her, this manifested in some challenges with her mental health and eventually she came to seek support.

Caroline had heard throughout her time on campus about the resources available, building up her knowledge and personal agency, but it took some time for her to recognize she should actually utilize those resources:

All of these seminars and people telling you about resources on campus and how to interact with your professors and to actually go to their office hours. Having that constant message being told to you over and over and very different, like, in

every different aspect of your experience in college, kind of ingrained in my brain they might be onto something here, I might actually have to do this. So, I think, I finally just took it upon myself and actually did that. I found that very helpful, to ask questions and seek out the help that I need in whatever aspect.

(CJ10720_2:11)

Resource Systems

Institutional Resources. Specific offices and departments at the institution were identified as being helpful for the first-generation college students. This included on-campus tutoring, campus offices specific to student support services, and academic departments.

On-Campus Tutoring. Participants found value in the various tutoring services provided on-campus. For Andi, she frequented supplemental instruction sessions, free tutoring by upperclassmen who have previously succeeded in the specific course. She felt having the free supplemental instruction tutoring demonstrated the university cares about its students. The institutions willingness to pay someone to help you do well in a class, was something she was grateful for. Matt has also attended supplemental institution sessions throughout his first two semesters, he said he shows up to every session he can, even if he doesn't think he needs it. The math center, which offers free tutoring specific to several math classes, has been helpful for Casey. She hadn't done well early in the semester and decided to attend their sessions. She heard about the math center during her mandatory orientation, but what really encouraged her to get help was her instructor mentioning the service during class.

Campus Offices. Participants utilized offices such as the career center and academic success center to get help with a variety of questions and concerns. Caroline & Melissa both utilized the academic success center, which provided information about academic specific resources for students. At first Melissa did not really know what the academic success center could help with, but once she figured it out, she better understood the specific benefits and services. She looked on the website to get a list of helpful resources and Melissa said she still uses those resources. Kendall was trying to determine what major she wanted to be, and with a recommendation from an academic advisor, she visited the career center to better understand career options based on her academic major. Addison was also trying to determine what major he wanted to pursue and visited the counseling center. They were able to direct him towards various personality tests that guided him towards his major of kinesiology.

Academic Department. Melissa was very complimentary of her academic department in providing guidance and support. At the beginning of her first semester the department held a first-generation college student breakfast. She got to meet other first-generation students which she really enjoyed. Melissa's department was the most visited resource she had, getting advice about classes she had trouble with, and the department constantly provided insight and recommendations. She talked through challenges she had with classes and was encouraged to speak with the professor or the department offered to connect her with students' who had already taken the course. Melissa felt the department was a big help especially during her first-year.

Online Resources. Google was specifically mentioned as a tool many participants used to look for information and resolve questions they had about specific class assignments, student employment, and even courses to take. Google was often a starting point for student to land on an institutional website. However, some participants went directly to institutional websites.

Casey said, “you can Google anything ... Google is the foundation of life” (CT91520_1:5/7). She also utilized the forum Reddit to search for answers to questions. Additionally, Casey stated she goes directly to institutional websites and looks at their frequently asked questions page. Her experience in the military taught her to use any available resource to find answers, including the internet. Caroline used Google with search terms specific to her institution and added “student worker” when she was exploring job opportunities on campus. Similar to Casey, she would also go directly to an institutional department website to look for answers and see what services were available.

Other online resources students used were emails from the institution and social media. Casey received emails from her academic advisor and would save them in various folders in her email account so she could go back and reference them. She knew at some point she might find a need for those emails and the information her advisor provided. Lizzie remembered getting emails about opportunities specifically for first-generation college students, and she felt having that information was nice and connected her to opportunities. Addison said even though there are a lot of emails sent by the institution and it can be kind of annoying, at least they send them with lots of

information about tools to get involved and get help. While he might not have read the details of all the emails, he read those which he thought were applicable to his needs.

Introspection

There were several “ah-ha” moments first-generation students had during their time in college. As they reflected on their experiences, they referenced several personal moments and realizations they had during their college career. They recognized their ability to help other first-generation students, acknowledged moments when it was more obvious their families and themselves had limited knowledge of how higher education functioned, and frequently perceived that other students around them knew more about college. Throughout their time thus far in college, they were navigating their own emotions and reflections, including impacts of COVID-19 on their experience. And from this introspective mindset, their reflections and personal experiences enabled them to communicate their needs as first-generation college students.

Allies

Helping Other First Gen Students. Upon reflection about their own experiences throughout college and acknowledgement of their limited knowledge, the first-generation college students in this study frequently stated their desire to help others navigate college. While not a direct example of how participants in this study gained cultural capital in a higher education framework, but instead a manner in which they distributed their cultural capital to others. They saw an opportunity to help, similar to how they had received help and guidance from various individuals. Most often they

helped younger siblings who were exploring college and working on the application process.

Aaron mentioned his sibling also wants to attend the same institution where Aaron is about to graduate. He's been walking her through everything she needs to do to apply. Additionally, Aaron reached out to a first-generation student from his hometown who was a first-year student at his institution. Aaron was aware the student was stressed, so they went to dinner and Aaron showed him around campus. He wanted to distribute his cultural capital to another individual who was in need.

Melissa has also been helping a younger sibling through the college application process. She said: "... if things do get too complicated, like, I'm there to help him explain the process and go through things, like... he calls me all of the time, 'have you heard of this' and 'will you read my essay'... I definitely help him as much as I can without being too overbearing" (MH2221_2:17). Their experiences and expertise as first-generation college students is something they wanted to share in an effort to redistribute cultural capital to future first-generation college students.

Personal Agency

Participants reflected on their own personal skills and knowledge during their time at the institution. They had unique perspectives about their own knowledge, their parent's knowledge, and the knowledge of continuing generation students. Additionally, they were frequently navigating their own emotions and processing how those played out as a first-generation college student. As participants reflected during the interview

process, they shared needs they felt would benefit future first-generation students and also the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic on their college experience.

Limited Knowledge. It may seem evident that first-generation college students and their families lack knowledge about higher education. What is interesting is the frequency in which participants made statements regarding their limited knowledge throughout interview, which warranted acknowledgement. The first-generation college students who participated in this study were keenly aware of their limited knowledge in a higher education framework and referenced it throughout interviews and conversation. This included statements regarding their personal limitations and also their parents' limited knowledge about college, which they sometimes regarded as a barrier to their experience.

Aaron shared how he frequently did not know what things were or what he was doing. He talked about how tuition and bills were new to him and how he did not know things about involvement on campus and student organizations specifically for first-year students:

I didn't know much about organizations either like, I didn't have anyone to tell me to join [first-year organizations]. I didn't really know what to join or what to do, you know, I didn't know what a men's org was yet. I was like, completely green. (AL221_1:5)

He continued on, referencing how he just did not know much during his first-year:

My second semester I kind of picked it up. But like I had no idea how to study or no idea how to do any of that. I didn't know how to join orgs, I didn't know how to, really, know how to do anything. (AL221_1:7)

Caroline felt like she was behind in understanding things about college such as grades and classes. Unfortunately, she didn't know what to do or what resources to use: "there's so many resources available that I would have wanted to take advantage of those, and not understanding what was available, that other people might have known" (CJ10720_1:19).

Melissa captured the concept of having limited knowledge succinctly and directly: "I was just a little late to the party" (MH2221_1:13). She felt behind everyone else around her and like she was always trying to catch up. Melissa admitted it has been hard to figure out what other people already know. Todd shared an analogy about being a first-generation college student and finding his way around the higher education setting: "It's like you're reaching around in the dark looking for the light switch" (TW91720_1:11). Participants felt a little behind, unaware, and lost as they navigated college and were very cognizant of their lack of knowledge about higher education.

Additionally, students reflected on their parents' lack of knowledge regarding higher education and often felt it meant they were behind or at a disadvantage. Kendall believed not having a parent who was familiar with how college operated, impeded her experience:

I feel like one of the barriers is you don't have someone personal to you that can lead the way in a sense... sometimes it just sucks because you want somebody

that knows you really well to listen to you, or give you advice about college in general, and you don't really have that support system. (KD91720_1:9)

Matt also discussed how he didn't have a parent to lean on for help or advice, that he would teach himself and figure it out on his own. He said:

My parents, they can help me to a degree, but they can't help me, like, navigate through what it means to be like a college student... how to juggle my courses, my classwork, trying to find a way to cope with the stress of multiple professors. (ML2121_1:10)

Multiple participants echoed the sentiment their parents did not have college knowledge and therefore it limited their support. They explicitly stated their parents didn't know much, including the concept of what a full four years at a university looks like and overall how it works. This included calling home and parents mentioning they did not know how to help; they would need to ask someone else. Leah would explain things more thoroughly to her parents because they weren't familiar with how college functioned and they would refer her elsewhere: "I would ask them [parents] and they'd be like 'I have no idea, you're gonna have to ask somebody or Google it or look on their website or something'. I just wish they had some kind of idea to help me" (LH2221_1:17).

Continuing Generation College Students. Participants had a perception those around them knew more than them about higher education, especially the continuing generation college students. First-generation students referenced being at mandatory orientation, looking around the room, and wondering if everyone else knew what was

going on and understand the content. Their perception others knew more than them occurred throughout their experiences thus far in college.

Andi felt like her friends all knew how to study, that they knew it was important to study at least a week early for a test, but she thought starting the day before was okay. She later learned she needed to change her studying habits. Andi felt like it was a barrier that her friends already knew how to study and she just did not know the full ropes of college. Melissa had friends who would talk about how they heard so much about college related things from their parents. That made her believe they knew what to do already and how to be successful in college. She also stated that during the application process she could tell that people knew more than her.

Caroline remembered being at mandatory orientation, looking around and thinking “does everybody else understand what’s going on and I just don’t” (CJ10720_1:12). She felt like everyone except her knew what was going on; that they knew about campus resources and she did not even know she should be looking for them. Caroline felt like there was an assumption she understood and knew what was going on, but she had no idea. The sentiment was echoed by participants, that there were moments they would look around and believe other students knew much more than them, in the classroom and outside the classroom. In a simple reflection, Kendall said she looked around the lecture hall and thought “wow, they know so much more than me” (KD91720_1:9). She felt like her classmates were smarter and knew more about what was going on in class.

Aaron felt continuing generation students had it all together. He mentioned walking around campus for hours the day before classes trying to figure out where his courses were being held. However, from his experiences the continuing generation students previously had their parents walk around with them and show them campus. Aaron didn't have anyone to help him figure out classes or the environment and felt like that was a disadvantage. He described his feelings: "I was like the new kid at school, where everybody knows each other, like, I felt like, it was like walking in a high school junior year, when everybody's like, had the whole time together" (AL2221_1).

Overall, the perception of how much continuing generation college students knew, real or otherwise, felt like a disadvantage to the participants in this study:

One of the girls that I work with, her parents also worked here when they were students. And they know people who are still working in these departments and it kind of, like, gives you an advantage that we don't really think about when you have that experience. But when you don't, and you know, from the outside looking in, it's like 'oh I don't have that experience, I don't have that advantage. (CJ10720_2:14)

Navigating Emotions. Various feelings such as guilt and pressure surrounding participant experiences as a first-generation college student became apparent throughout interviews. However, there were also comments regarding the pride participants felt as first-generation college students and the opportunity to be the first in their immediate family to graduate from college.

While participant family members did not express any type of expectations, the students felt guilt and pressure to succeed because they were the first in their families to attend college. Andi stated that doing bad in college was a different level for her compared to a continuing generation student, that there's a sense of guilt for a first-generation student if you do poorly. This guilt came because she knows how hard her parents worked to get where they are and they're helping pay for college. Andi admitted her parents had not expressed any specific expectations or disappointment previously, but she still feels an unspoken need to be successful. And if she's not, "I dread telling them when I do bad because I just feel like I'm disappointing them" (AH91820_2:2). She continued on, discussing how much work her parents put into getting to where they are and how they've never taken a hard test, so she does not want to disappoint them saying the guilt is "just something that I feel (AH91820_2:2). However, even with the high expectations and guilt, Andi also feels like she has the opportunity to make her family proud of what she's doing: "I know I'm making them proud because even like, and even now, when I talk about school or when I talk about... like, a couple weeks ago when I got into the honor council I told [my dad] and he was teary eyed" (AH91820_2:7).

Stacy felt a similar type of pressure to succeed, she stated she was not supposed to be at college, she had come from a challenging upbringing for a variety of personal reasons and knew the statistics were stacked against her. Yet, everyone was proud of her and would constantly give her praise. She felt that if she returned home, not finishing college, people would say "oh, she came home" because a friend did, and the community

reacted negatively to her leaving college. These aspects seemed to become a motivation for Stacy to succeed.

The sense of pride Andi mentioned was also shared by many other participants. Being the first in their family to attend college they were excited for the opportunity to be in college and graduate in the future. Kendall mentioned she was proud she has accomplished as much as continuing generation students, even though she didn't have the same insight or advantages as them. Leah felt like being a first-generation college student has been a positive experience because she made it somewhere her parents did not get a chance to be and therefore, she was proud of her accomplishments and for sticking through the challenges of being a first-gen.

That pride and sense of accomplishment by participants leads them to feeling encouraged and excited about what they've done. Stacy summarized her positive feelings about going to college as a first-generation college student:

I am so proud of myself for going to school. But to me, it's like, this is what I had always thought for my life. So yes, I'm proud of myself for being a first-generation college student graduating. And when I truly think about it, I'm like dude, go me. (SF91720_2:13)

Casey went as far to describe her experience as a first-generation college student being similar to going to a new country and how that brings excitement for success. Higher education has its own language, hierarchy, environment, and political landscape, which Casey captured through her analogy:

As a first-generation student it has been at times, overwhelming, but mostly exciting. Kind of feels like, I'm the first person who is going to this new country, see you guys on the other side. See you when I get back. (CT91520_2:13)

Needs. Participants were clear about needs for first-generation college students and believed the institution could find ways to meet those needs. If the institution did, participants felt their experience would have been better, and it would also improve the experience for future first-generation college students. The needs participants identified include having a mentor, participating in a pre-enrollment immersion program, having a first-generation center on campus, and providing an optional class for entering first generation college students during their first semester.

Caroline felt having an older student to sit and talk with about what college is like, including the various new responsibilities she would have, and gaining an understanding of academic majors from that upperclassman would be helpful as a first-generation college student. She also explained having a program similar to mandatory orientation but only for first-generation students with seminars and the institution explaining things more in depth would be helpful. Kendall had similar thoughts about hosting a one- or two-day type program prior to the semester to meet other first-generation college students and talk about the various challenges they might run into in the first semester. This could occur in alignment with mandatory orientation or immediately before classes started, she said. Kendall also felt a pre-immersion program would be a good opportunity to connect with a mentor who could help guide first-generation college students through the college process. She felt alone as she started

college and wished someone, like a mentor, had been around to check in on her every once in a while. She felt like having an individual to talk to would have made a big difference for her.

Several other students felt getting a mentor as a first-generation college student would be helpful. They stated potential benefits of an individual who could take them under their wing, specifically someone they can go to who has also been through experiences as a first-generation college student. Aaron said:

If I just had, like, someone like taking me under their wing when I was, like, a [first-year] and I was lost, it'd have made my process so much easier...when you have someone that you can go to that has, like, been through it and thrived in it, then it's easier to get through that. (AL2221_2:17)

Andi felt a first-generation center with professors or mentors from colleges who volunteer their time at the center would be helpful. They could have open office hours and be available for first-gen students to talk with and get advice. Andi said sometimes she just wanted someone to talk to, a place she could go and talk to someone who understood what she was experiencing. Leah said an optional class during the first semester for first-generation students to know they are not alone would be beneficial. She mentioned having individuals in the course she shared the first-generation characteristic with and building a community with them would be nice. Leah stated beneficial topics for the course would be how to apply to majors, details of student loans, and other things that continuing generation students just know.

Impacts of COVID-19. Data collection for this study began in September 2020 and concluded in February 2021. This timeframe was in the midst of a Global Pandemic which began in March 2020. Participant thoughts and emotions regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on their collegiate experience are important to their story. The pandemic had an impact on participants, for some it was positive, others negative, and some indifferent. Navigating life through a global pandemic, with changes to how higher education and society operated, impacted all students and for some first-generation college students, there were some unique impacts.

Aaron remembered going home in March of 2020 and trying to help his parents understand the time commitment of school. He said: "I'd go home, my parents, and they didn't understand, like they understood that I needed to study and I needed to work, but I don't think they comprehended how many hours I had to put in" (AL2221_1:18). Andi also reflected on being in a new environment and trying to adapt:

I think just being at home, a different environment than what I had already acclimated to, you know I had already, I was finally feeling okay in College Station, and then getting sent back home, it was rough. Because I didn't, I had to find a new balance. (AH91820_1:8)

While Andi was completing her coursework at home she was in an anatomy lab that required dissection. She was sent a lab kit in the mail and used her kitchen table to dissect the contents. Her mother was less than pleased with Andi dissecting on the kitchen table, telling her to get it out of the house. This was all recorded so Andi's assignment was sent in with her mom yelling in the background of the video.

Several participants felt COVID had overall negatively impacted their college experience. Melissa stated: "I feel like my college experience was ripped away from me on a random Friday in March" (MH2221_1:15). Matt stated it was hard because there aren't personal connections with his professors unless he sends them emails. He also talked about technology and how his classes relied so heavily on different technologies and the concerns he felt if the internet might stop working or his phone might die. This was especially stressful for him during exams because so many things could go wrong.

While Matt felt some negative impacts of COVID to his college experience, he also felt a positive aspect: "Actually it's made it easier because I kind of lump courses together back-to-back on Zoom. So, I can just jump between both of them and I don't have to run" (ML2121_1:13). Addison and Casey felt like the impact was minimal. Casey said it wasn't bad because she gets pretty anxious in large settings. Addison said he had a strong community so he wasn't secluded and maintained good personal connections, but he did acknowledge it has prevented him from meeting new people in class.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the key findings and themes from interviews of twelve White/Caucasian first-generation college students at a large, public, research university in the South. Their experiences prior to attending college and once classes began reflected their reliance on allies, purposefully structured educational programs, personal agency, and resource systems to navigate higher education. Additionally, throughout their time in college they reflected on their own personal skills, emotions, and needs.

They were keenly aware of their limited knowledge as a first-generation college student, but used those around them, the resources they were aware of, and their own determination to be successful and learn to navigate the higher education environment. It should be noted that the participants of this study were White, the dominant race of the institution of study. While not analyzed for this research, their white privilege at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) may have impacted their willingness to approach gatekeepers, such as instructors or staff, and navigate an environment which looked like them.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to better understand how White/Caucasian first-generation college students at a large public four-year institution acquired cultural capital in navigating college. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature and based on the experiences of the twelve participants interviewed for this study. Additionally, the implications of these findings and their relevance to practice in higher education will be discussed. The chapter concludes with limitations of the research, recommendations for future research, and a summary of the study.

Summary of Findings

The discussion of findings in this chapter correspond to answering the following research questions:

1. Prior to their first day of class, what aids White/Caucasian first-generation college students in learning to navigate the college environment?
2. What strategies do White/Caucasian first-generation college students use after their first day of class that enable them to navigate the college environment?
3. What introspective experiences do White/Caucasian first-generation college students have as they learn to navigate the college environment?

Based on Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory, the study researched how White first-generation college students acquired cultural capital within the framework of higher

education. Bourdieu stated individuals gain cultural capital most naturally in the home environment (Bourdieu, 1977). Applying this concept to first-generation college students, which for this study meant their parents/guardians did not attend any college, they would have to look outside the home to acquire cultural capital in a higher education framework. This led to participants gaining knowledge of how to navigate and succeed in college from friends, siblings, instructors, structured educational programming in high school and college, their own personal skills and determination, and other formal resources on-campus such as offices and tutoring centers.

Interpretation of Findings

First-Generation Students Rely on Themselves and Believe They Can Succeed

While the focus of this study was on building cultural capital within a higher education framework, the students brought their own personal skills as a type of cultural capital which aided them. This included their independence, self-agency, and determination which they often learned from their parents. As Bourdieu states, cultural capital is learned most naturally in the home and parents have a strong influence on the type of cultural capital their child gains (Bourdieu, 1977; Weininger & Lareau, 2003). While parents were unable to provide cultural capital specific to a higher education environment, they were able to provide capital in skill development and determination which aided their students in college.

First-generation college students using their own self-agency to be successful is lightly discussed in prior literature, often broadly referenced as being independent. However, the first-generation students in this study went deeper than independence and

made frequent statements about how they learned valuable life skills either because their parents taught them those skills or because they had to learn on their own in order to succeed. The students believed they could be successful. Participants consistently stated they relied on their own self agency throughout their time in college thus far. Their self-sufficiency helped them ask questions, seek answers, and find a way to get through challenges. They were resilient even when they felt like it was an uphill road or they were lost.

Current practitioners and academics would likely coin this concept as “grit,” a term defined as “a combination of passion and perseverance for a singularly important goal,” and “the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals,” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). The advantage of an individual with grit is their stamina. No matter adversity or challenges along the way, a person with grit will stay the course and find a way (Duckworth et al., 2007).

These first-generation college students had a goal of making it through the challenges of learning to navigate college along with a long term goal of graduating from their institution. There were moments they simply kept trying, moving forward, and figuring it out. Their cultural capital is simply explained in grit, a determination to succeed, and independence which they often learned from their parents.

However, an institution cannot sit back and expect first-gen students to use their grit to constantly find ways to succeed in higher education because not all first-gen students have the grit to adapt or should be expected to have it. While clearly a valuable tool for these first-generation college students, it creates an emotional burden as they

continually persevere through challenges and learn to navigate institutional culture and processes. Grit should be an added bonus for first-generation college students, a piece of a larger puzzle in which the university plays a role in helping them. There is a partnership between the institution and the student, an agreement where each plays a role and works together to achieve student success. The institution must build a supportive system, one where resources are widely and readily available, where unnecessary obstacles are removed, where individuals can learn, and where students can combine their grit with a multitude of resources to navigate college.

First-Generation Students Find a Way to Create Their own Higher Education

Habitus

As described previously, habitus is an instinctive understanding of how a social environment operates. Habitus shapes an individual's expectations in particular settings (McDonough et al., 1997). First generation college students do not have an inherited habitus like their continuing generation peers and they don't have a "feel" for college (Dumais & Ward, 2010). This was evident as participants frequently referenced an awareness their families were unaware of how college operates or where to go when their student needed help.

First-generation college students, however, found a way to gain habitus from their friends, roommates, classmates, peers, instructors, and other connected individuals. They learned from those who had the cultural capital relevant to higher education to better understand the norms, environment, and operations of higher education. Habitus is considered to be a natural skill, in the background of an individual's thoughts and

actions, however students in this study made it a focus in order to learn how to navigate their environment.

“An individual’s social community directly contributes to the amount of habitus that individual possesses,” relevant to their specific social setting (Padgett et al., 2012). Participants in this study exemplified this by continually discussing how the individuals around them impacted their ability to better understand higher education. Their community, defined in this study as one degree of separation from the individual, and network, two degrees of separation from the individual, constantly aided them in learning how to get help, how to succeed, and providing advice. The broader social community was a way for first-generation students to learn and build their own cultural capital.

In addition to using connected individuals who were insiders in the new habitus, first-generation students gained an understanding of higher education, building their capital, through involvement and engagement on campus. Previous literature indicated first-gen students were less engaged with campus compared to continuing generation students (Padgett et al., 2012). However, many of the participants in this study held campus jobs, were involved in multiple campus organizations, were elected to leadership positions, participated in first-year programs, and interacted with faculty and staff. This is not representative of the entire sample, as some students attended courses and participated in events, but were not necessarily involved on-campus. Because the participants in the study were first-generation students who had succeeded thus far in

continuing through college, it is possible their involvement on-campus is an outlier to first-generation college students overall or in part explains their success.

Pascarella et al. (2004), acknowledged first-generation students can acquire cultural capital through various activities and involvement on campus. This was evident with participants as they engaged with campus through the previously mentioned manners. The environment and culture of the institution, in which involvement is constantly encouraged, potentially influenced these first-generation students to find ways to engage on campus.

Another way students gained cultural capital was through formal programming such as mandatory orientation and learning communities. This aligns with previous literature from Sanacore & Palumbo (2017) who stated, “if institutions offer events for students to gain cultural capital it helps create a sense of belonging and retention of first generation students.” The events the institution offered, at minimum, introduced students to the campus resources and higher education environment. Learning communities provided the resource awareness along with community building and support. Based on the findings from this study, learning communities were most beneficial as a comprehensive method for participants to build their cultural capital. They provided resource awareness over the course of several months, allowed for network building, and created a manner for participants to build a relationship with a connected individual, their instructors.

Organizational habitus. McDonough’s (1997) research explored the concept of organizational habitus, described as organizations transmitting class-based dispositions

to individuals in an organization. This is similar to acculturation which Jenkins et al. (2013) stated is required for those entering a formal organization. Within higher education we utilize programs such as mandatory orientation, extended orientation, and welcome weeks to acculturate students into the norms and expectations of higher education and transmit the dispositions of individuals already in the organization.

First-generation students stated mandatory orientation, an acculturation program, was overwhelming and confusing. Bourdieu (1977) discussed how the educational system expects students to be familiar with the culture of the organization. This was clear as first-generation students stated they felt behind, uncertain about what was being discussed, and had a perception that everyone around them knew more. Those continuing generation students have the benefit of a baseline knowledge about college because of their parents and guardians. They come into mandatory orientation with a sense of what's going on and basic understanding of college terminology.

For first-generation students, however, the acculturation needs to begin prior to the formal programming all students attend. We expect students to have a baseline familiarity with the culture, norms, and terminology of higher education when they show up for their first formal program, usually mandatory orientation. We should be preparing first-generation students for that moment, educating them on the basics prior to attending a program ultimately created for continuing generation students. That could be through a series of emails, using a website specific to first-generation students, a variety of virtual session, or a pre-orientation program.

“The educational system values the inherited advantage students bring from their cultural capital acquired in the home,” (Bourdieu, 1986). One size fits all programs, which is especially frequent at large institutions, disadvantages first generation students. However, smaller focused programs, such as learning communities and first-generation specific first-year seminars, help craft experiences and education for first-gen specifically. Institutions need more of these programs, those that are focused on the specific needs of first-generation students. This need is even more prominent with large institutions, where first-generation college students can easily fall through the cracks because institutions focus on the average student in the larger population of incoming students.

Parents/Guardians are Important in Supporting First-Generation Students

Prior literature from Jenkins et al., (2013) stated when family members transmit cultural capital to children it reinforces the value and importance of education. What is unique is that the participants in this study validated this statement, even though their parents did not attend college or have cultural capital specific to higher education settings. Parents were a source of encouragement for participants to attend college. Parents were aware of the benefits of college, perhaps from friends, or their own professional experiences, and they wanted their children to attend college. Jenkins et al. were focused more on formal cultural capital, but participants clearly indicated their parents had enough knowledge to recognize college was important even though they had not attended.

Participants frequently mentioned how their family was a source of support, encouragement, and a listening ear. Literature states first-generation college students are disadvantaged because of a lack of family support, finances, and academic preparation (Jenkins et al., 2013; Pascarella et al., 2004). The participants in this study, however, had parents who benefited their success in college. Parents were willing to talk through issues and problems, provide support, listen, and give words of encouragement when students were frustrated or stressed. Some parents were supporting their students financially, several students mentioned being financially stable, which challenges the generalization that first-generation college students lack finances for college.

First-Generation Students Know Resources Exist, but Do Not Necessarily Know When or Why to Use Them

Pascarella et al., (2004) stated first-gen students enter college unaware of how to access resources and have limited information about what resources can assist them. For many first-generation students in this study, they utilized dual credit courses and high-school leadership programs to better understand how institutions operate and become familiar with the college setting and available resources.

Additionally, participants stated mandatory orientation made them aware of campus resources and the various offices where they could visit to get help or guidance. However, they do not always remember the specifics or details of how those offices and resources can help them. Something like the math tutoring center was obvious to participants that it would help with math courses. The counseling center was mentioned by participants; however they were unaware of the specific services or how the

counseling center would actually help them. Several of the first-generation college students in this study spoke of emotional challenges that could have been supported by the counseling center. This included stress, anxiety, loneliness, and one participant even mentioned being aware she was depressed.

Participants would reach out to their community to better understand what services were offered at specific offices. As mentioned previously, one participant reached out to a friend to ask what the career center would actually do to be helpful. Another participant asked their classmate what happens during professor office hours. The office for academic success was a resource one participant knew existed but didn't understand what services they provided. Once they learned what the office actually did, they started using their services. Therefore, an institution needs to provide outreach and programming about campus resources to first-generation students throughout their first-year, which is discussed later as first-gen first-year programming.

First-Generation Students Have a Lot of Emotions They are Processing, in Addition to the Emotions Continuing Generation Students Also Experience

Perhaps a combination of being first-generation and interviews aligning with a global pandemic, the participants shared a variety of emotions they have felt during their time in college. Most prevalent in the first-year were emotions such as stress and feeling overwhelmed.

Several participants were keenly aware of advantages continuing generation students had in college. Jenkins, et al. (2013) stated the academic culture at institutions was created for children of college-educated individuals. This aligned with the

perception of many of the participants as they reported feeling like everyone around them knew what was going on and they were behind.

Additionally, participants were reconciling their status as a first-generation college student. Some felt guilty about leaving their house and family while balancing internal pressures to succeed and not let down their parents. Prior literature has referenced these types of emotions. However, alongside those emotions, they felt pride about the journey they were on and looked forward to representing their families well by succeeding. Their feelings were often positive about getting through challenges with a determined and independent mindset.

While most participants felt a sense of pride in being a first-generation college student, a few students felt a need to hide their first-generation characteristic. They felt individuals, including their faculty, would look at them as less than other students, underestimating their capabilities. One participant explicitly stated she hated the term first-generation college student and would not tell anyone she was first-generation. There was concern other individuals would act entitled because they were continuing generation and she was first-generation.

Prior literature indicated first-generation students are not prepared to interact with faculty, they see them as intimidating and are hesitant to approach them with questions (Padgett, et al., 2012). In this study one first-generation student was particularly intimidated by faculty, she referenced them as “untouchable” and therefore was unwilling to ask them questions. Her emotions and negative feelings about interacting with the faculty in her courses were very prevalent and limited her interaction

with faculty. However, many of the other students were comfortable speaking with instructors; multiple of the participants referenced interacting with instructors from their learning community courses. In general, they had no issues approaching instructors when they needed, usually communicating with them through email.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, there are multiple ways in which we as institutions of higher education can assist first-generation college students in learning to navigate higher education. There are opportunities to build cultural capital within a higher education environment prior to first-generation college student arriving on-campus and during their critical first-year. Additionally, the institution can enhance the environment for first-gen students and find ways to engage the entire campus community in supporting first-generation college students. And lastly, working to better educate first-gen parents is an opportunity for institutions to better serve first-gen students.

However, before any of these practices begin, the institution needs to create a consistent definition of first-generation college students for inclusion in programs and opportunities. There are varied definitions depending on offices and in order to best serve all first-generation college students, an understanding of how they are defined is crucial. This will aid in recruitment and tracking of first-generation college students during their time at the institution. This study utilized a definition in which a parent or guardian did not attend any post-secondary institution for any amount of time, focusing on the students who have the greatest gap in knowledge about higher education from

their parents. Therefore, it is recommended that institutions use the same definition in order to capture those with the greatest need based on no prior knowledge from parents.

Prior to the Beginning of the First Semester

Getting information about college to first-generation students prior to them arriving on campus and allowing an opportunity to build cultural capital in relation to higher education early on is important. Institutions need to get into the high school environment and help first-generation students understand how higher education operates. This can occur by hosting meetings at the high school specifically for first-generation college students and their parents during recruitment fairs. Recruitment for these meetings should include students from all four-years of high school, with significant targeted recruitment of high school juniors and seniors as they are very close to entering college. These sessions would certainly vary as each institution has its own cultural capital to be learned, but there is enough overlap in institutional language and norms for it to be beneficial. Additionally, providing this service even if the student does not attend the hosting institution, serves the greater good in higher education.

During sessions, institutions can discuss higher education terminology, requirements of applying, resources during the application process, and build a community of support. Inviting high-school teachers, who attended the same institution, can foster a supportive and connected network. Those teachers should attend training by the institution and receive materials which discuss the resources available at the institution and relevant information for first-generation students. The alumni of the

institution are a valuable tool, but they must be educated on the institution as processes, environment, and culture may have changed since their graduation.

Another recommendation is to work with incoming first-generation college students prior to their arrival on-campus for mandatory orientation. To help first-gen students gain knowledge about common verbiage, the higher education environment, and acculturate them to the norms, the institution needs to work with them earlier than continuing generation students. This should include an email introduction from the institution's orientation office and first-generation center, if applicable. Additionally, providing a publication, electronic or print, with an overview of general terminology around academics, finances, and the institution. The publication should also give an overview of mandatory orientation, basic details in preparing for orientation, awareness of key first-year resources, and an introduction to first-gen specific programming at orientation.

Prior to mandatory orientation formally starting, the institution should provide a session specifically for first-generation students and their parents. Ideally this would occur in alignment with when the student is already travelling to campus for orientation. Therefore, hosting the session the day or morning before orientation begins would be beneficial. The purpose of this session is to introduce students and their parents to the first-gen center and resources available specifically for first-gen students. It's also an opportunity for students and parents to ask questions and seek clarity as they head into the formal orientation program. Having upperclassmen first-generation students attend and provide testimonials helps incoming first-gen students see they also have the ability

to succeed. Additionally, those first-gen upperclassmen can lead community building activities with the students. Then the parents can meet separately from the students with first-gen center staff or orientation staff if there isn't a first gen center, ask questions as needed, and build community with each other.

As students begin arriving for the fall semester, the institution should host a variety of meetings and socials for first-generation students to attend. Hosting these programs during a traditional welcome week on campus limits competition with courses and other commitments of students. However, there may be some groupings of incoming students who have obligations which conflict during that week, such as Greek recruitment. Thus, consideration of alternative first-generation programming for those should occur. Looking strategically at other broad based commitments students have is important so the institution can provide alternative days/times for those students to attend.

A key aspect of the programming is building social connections with each other but also with upperclassmen. Connecting students to upperclassmen first- and continuing-generation students would be helpful. Participants referenced interacting with someone who had experienced the same things as them would be beneficial. However, they also mentioned the knowledge they gained from continuing generation students. Therefore, a mentorship program where an incoming first-generation student can identify whether they want to be paired with an upperclassmen first-generation student or continuing generation student would allow greater opportunity for the incoming student to build a community of their choosing. This pairing should be assigned/occur

prior to welcome week allowing the mentors to reach out prior to welcome week via text or email, introducing themselves and offering support to the student as they transition. Additionally, the mentor should highlight any upcoming programs specifically beneficial to first-generation college students and offer to meet the incoming student to attend the programs together.

Programs specifically hosted by the first-generation center during welcome week should include networking, community building, education on why key campus resources are helpful, encouragement to ask for help, a first-gen faculty and staff social, and discussion on ways to engage on-campus. Each of these programs relates to the previously identified needs and sources of gaining cultural capital for first-generation students. In alignment with the programming specifically for first-gen students, the institution should code welcome week programming that would specifically benefit the needs of first-generation students.

First-Generation First-Year Programming

As the academic year formally begins it is important to continue engaging first-generation students with the resources on-campus. Front loading resource awareness and providing opportunities to build cultural capital is important, but it must continue through the critical first-year. Participants from this study stated mandatory orientation was somewhat overwhelming and had trouble remembering the specifics of the experience. They reported if the support is present when it is needed, they are better able to use the resource. There were times when first-generation college students in the study did not use resources even when they knew they existed. A just in time model of

resource awareness and reminders throughout the year of their existence would prove beneficial.

In addition to the traditional first-year transition issues, first-generation students face additional challenges such as balancing their home and school environments, feeling an obligation to their families to succeed, and learning to understand college terminology. First-generation first-year should include programming and education as well as ways for first-generation students to engage with connected individuals and social agents such as upperclassmen, mentors, faculty, and staff.

As previously mentioned, coordinating a mentorship program between incoming first-gen students and upperclassmen first-gen students builds the community of resources for new students. Data from this study indicated the community and networks of first-generation college students had aided in their understanding of higher education and built their cultural capital. Institutions can support these mentorships by providing funding for low-key social interaction such as providing an allocation to take a first-gen student to a campus dining facility. Depending on the institution, an agreement between the first-gen center and dining services for discounted or free meals to support the mentor interaction could be discussed. The institution can also support these informal gatherings by providing an allocation to host social gatherings off-campus. A group of 4-5 mentors and their first-gen mentees could attend programs, events, or meals off-campus to build an affinity for the local off-campus community.

The more formal programming for first-generation students throughout the year should consist of varying types of learning communities. Dependent on the prior

commitments of first-gen students they may be unable to fully participate in a time consuming learning community. Their academic major, involvement, or engagement in other areas of campus may limit their ability to attend weekly meetings or programs. Therefore, an institution can offer programs which meet weekly, monthly, or even twice per semester. At minimum the students know there will be an opportunity to engage with the first-gen programming at least a few times when their schedules allow.

A first-year seminar program for first-generation college students which meets weekly is one method of providing a learning community opportunity. Data indicated students benefitted from the loosely connected networks they established inside the classroom. Their peers in classes helped them resolve issues and provided a frame of reference for resources on campus. Additionally, the course instructors provided information about campus resources for participants in this study. These first-year seminars should meet weekly, utilize peer mentorship, and provide a series of educational and social opportunities. In order to provide an opportunity for interaction and community building, which was of value to participants, seminars should aim to be smaller in size, such as 20-25 students per section. This means the number of sections offered will vary depending on the class size of incoming first-gen students. As part of the first-year seminar program for first-generation college students, institutions will need to be mindful of whether the seminar counts for course credit and the number of hours to be considerate of degree plan and hourly requirements for academic majors.

First-generation college students should be auto-enrolled in this first-year seminar course. Participants of this study indicated they did not participate in a learning

community because it was optional and they didn't understand why they should take the course. Auto enrolling students in the course as a part of their first-semester course schedule presents an idea of required. The student would, at minimum, attend one class before being allowed to drop the course. If the student elects to drop the course during their opportunity to add or drop courses, that is at their discretion.

Other learning community programs which are less of a time commitment can include monthly or twice a semester meetings. Because these meetings will occur less frequently, they will need to include a combination of resource awareness, support, and community building. The institution should invite all first-generation students to these programs, whether incoming or upperclassmen first-gen students. This allows an opportunity to foster informal mentoring relationships across all class years. And as necessary or desired, the group can be divided into smaller groups based on class year, academic college, or personal interests. Ultimately, there are a variety of ways the institution can take the larger group of all first-gen students and determine the manner in which they want to divide students into smaller groups.

Engaging the Institution and Enhancing the Environment for First-Generation Students

A first-generation college student center on-campus is a must for an institution of higher education. Colleges and universities have centers for Veterans, transfers, underrepresented races, and many more student identifiers. These centers serve as a resource and advocate for those populations. While supporting first-generation college students is everyone's responsibility on-campus, there should be a champion of first-gen

students in the form of a first-gen center. While having physical space would be valuable, the center, at its core, needs individuals who can guide the work across campus.

First-gen students are engaging with individuals, offices, and resources throughout the institution. They are reaching out to instructors, staff, friends, and peers. It is evident the individuals they interact with are key to their retention and support, aiding them in building their higher education cultural capital. As institutions we highly value our formal programming, sometimes forcing highly structured programs and expecting students to attend. As this study began the research aimed to focus on informal and formal programming that aided first-gen students. However, as the study progressed it was clear the institution and its system has created a lens in which we define programming as formal or informal. To the participants they just saw ways to get help, answer questions, and keep moving forward.

Therefore, as an institution we should find ways to value and promote the informal interactions and experiences for first-generation students that aid in their knowledge of the institution. Based on the data of this study and participant statements, these organic interactions are clearly beneficial and likely more comfortable ways for students to build their cultural capital within higher education. Data demonstrated that first-generation college students in the study were constantly engaging with individuals, often one-on-one, to get help or a better understanding of their environment. Thus, encouraging first-generation college students to become engaged on-campus in low profile ways such as joining a student organization, having a part-time job on-campus,

participating in intramural sports, attending campus wide programs, and interacting with individuals in class or a living environment would benefit their experience. Overall, finding ways for first-generation students to build their network in informal methods allows opportunities to organically interact with connected individuals.

All first-generation college students will interact with instructors on their campus. Therefore, the institution should be educating all instructors about first-gen students and how to reduce unnecessary barriers during their time in their courses. At minimum a two-page handout discussing first-generation college student facts and ways to support first-generation college students should be provided to all instructors. This handout could include common systemic barriers that hinder first-generation college student success. Instructors should also be encouraged to introduce themselves as first-gen students, if they identify themselves in that manner. A few participants indicated they learned of staff or faculty who were also first-generation and that brought a sense of comfort and connection. Lastly, if a first-gen center exists on campus, instructors should be encouraged to provide that information on a syllabus or in introductory course modules.

It is not lost that faculty of upperclassmen specific courses may be less willing to engage with the aforementioned suggestions, given that first-gen support is often focused on the first-year of college. However, we know first-generation students are always first-generation students, not just in their first-year. Therefore, all undergraduate instructors, no matter their course level, should utilize the methods mentioned above.

Lastly, encouraging individuals within the institution who self-identify as first-generation college students to let others, especially students, know they are first-generation creates a welcoming and open environment for first-generation students. This includes utilizing a placard on an office door, introducing oneself as first-gen before starting a lecture or program, and adding an icon to email signatures and syllabi. Additionally, hosting first-gen celebration programs across campus is a way for students to see other first-generation college students and create a first-gen welcoming campus. This is important because my data showed participants want to know there are other individuals on campus who have the first-generation identifier. They expressed an appreciation and connection when staff or peers stated they were also first-generation college students. It provided a sense of camaraderie and a vision for success.

Educating Parents and Guardians to Support Their First-Generation Student

Parents play a valuable role in supporting first-generation students. As we have seen a majority of that support comes outside the realm of the students' academic career. The encouragement, listening ear, motivation, and emotional support from parents to first-generation college students is critical. However, as an institution we can also aid parents in supporting their student in a higher education setting by educating them about college and connecting them to institutional resources.

A session specifically for first-generation parents during the student's mandatory orientation is one step in providing education to families about the institution and higher education environment. Breaking down higher education nomenclature helps parents understand the specific terms and norms of the institution. This includes discussion

about academic based terms, financially focused terms, other campus specific terminology or traditions, and the key offices which parents are likely to interact such as the financial aid office and bursar's office. Staff who have worked at or attended college likely understand the difference between those two offices. However, for a first-generation family member, it's less probable they know the unique differences among the bursar and financial aid.

Another opportunity for ongoing education for parents of first-gen students is to provide regular email communication about current events on-campus and discuss why those events are important or relevant to students. This digital education opportunity is low maintenance and can be supported by a third-party email communication platform where indicators such as first-gen can be noted in the system. In addition to email communication, a series of virtual based programming for parents of first-gen students can be utilized to educate and also provide a forum for questions. Institutional staff can host virtual programming at varying times through the semester and also provide open question and answer sessions. These semi-structured avenues for first-gen parents to have access to institutional staff fosters an environment to get guidance for their students and get their own questions resolved.

In addition to providing education, connecting parents of first-gen students to parents of upperclassmen students can be helpful. Ideally an institution would have an application process and training for the parents of upperclassmen to educate them on ways to answer difficult questions, offices to refer parents, and ways to build community with the parents of first-gen students they are supporting. The institution should attempt

to vet the upperclassmen parents to ensure they are good representatives of the institution and can speak to the resources available. This community can also gather together in-person at parents/family weekend at their respective institution. The more opportunities first-gen families have to connect with each other and upperclassmen families, the better connected they are to find ways to support their students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study utilized a narrative inquiry method within a qualitative research design which produced rich descriptive data. However, the results are not generalizable and therefore provide an opportunity for future research around first-generation college students.

First, this study focused on the experiences of White first-generation college students in an effort to prevent explaining away first-generation college student challenges as a racial issue. Therefore, future research which isolates a different race may help us better understand how certain races experience being a first-generation college student. Furthermore, it may provide opportunities to cater programming based on a first-gen plus identifier, such as race.

Additionally, aligning a study with Schlossberg's Transition Theory may provide unique insights into the transition of a first-generation college student to an institution of higher education. Aligning the study within the framework of situation, self, support, and strategies may bring forth new perspectives on how first-generation students cope with the transition to college.

The students in this study frequently referenced their commitment and determination to keep going, similar to the concept of grit as described by Angela Duckworth (2007). While grit proved beneficial to these students, a more thorough look at what systemic barriers in higher education are causing students to need grit to succeed would be beneficial. Identifying and then reducing those barriers would aid first-generation college students in navigating higher education.

This study was limited to first-time in college students to intentionally focus on students with no prior college experience. The exclusion of transfer students was intentional; however their experiences are still valuable to an institution. Researching transfer students, even further separating methods to focus on transfer students from 2-year or 4-year institution, may bring valuable knowledge to supporting first generation transfer students, especially at a large institution. Another first-gen plus identifier for future study is Veteran first-generation college students. One participant in this study identified as a Veteran and brought forth unique and varied perspectives from the other participants. Better understanding how Veteran first-gen students enter the college setting allows us to support their unique needs.

This study was challenged by timing of participant interviews due to unexpected implications of a global COVID-19 pandemic on the research. Some participants were interviewed in the first month of their first-year on campus. Other participants were interviewed with less than three months left of their undergraduate careers. While their perspectives and experiences were valuable, it created a broader range of experiences. A more focused data collection process, longitudinally from mandatory orientation through

the first-semester of the sophomore year, may provide richer data on how to support first-generation students through the critical first-year.

Lastly, it was evident how valuable parents were in supporting their first-generation college students. However, their voice is not included in this research study. Their voice was shared through their students, allowing the researcher to make some broad connections. Learning directly from parents of first-generation college students brings forth a new voice and perspective to supporting first-gen students. It also opens the door to better understand how institutions can support parents of first-gen students. To this researcher's knowledge, there is very little literature on how higher education institutions provide guidance, education, and support specifically for parents of first-generation students. Most programming for parents is broad based and not specific to the first-gen family member.

Conclusion

The experiences of White first-generation college students bring valuable perspectives to how institutions support first-gen students. During this study some students indicated they felt unseen as first-generation college students because they were White and in the majority population of the institution of study. They had challenges and struggles due to being a first-generation college student and found ways to build their cultural capital to navigate higher education.

When the most privileged race within the institution of study, and broadly in the country in which this study was conducted, had challenges acquiring cultural capital within a higher education framework, administrators and researchers cannot explain

away the experiences of first-generation college students as a racial issue. Prior literature takes a quick and frequent path down the underrepresented race of first-generation college student and conflates race and first-generation status. It begins to wash away their experiences as first-generation college students and instead focuses on race-based limitations. While prior literature indicates underrepresented populations face substantial challenges based on race, in addition to being a first-generation college student, this study wanted to disentangle race and first-generation status in the literature. By holding race constant to White students this study demonstrates the unique challenges of first-generation students. While these results do not represent the experience of students of color or all first-generation college students, it was important to study first-generation status within race.

Through qualitative interviews of twelve first-generation college students, we learned they utilize connected individuals, purposefully structured educational experiences, personal agency, and resource systems to gain cultural capital and build habitus in the lens of higher education.

The individuals' first-generation students interacted with, from friends to instructors to classmates, provided guidance when the first-generation students needed help or were uncertain where to get help. First-generation college students attended mandatory orientation, participated in learning communities, and engaged in high-school programs which helped them better understand higher education. And when necessary, they relied on themselves, their dedication and commitment to being successful in college, to keep going and find solutions to problems.

Additionally, first-gen students utilized their parents and guardians as sources of external support and encouragement to help them succeed. They called home for a listening ear, to problem solve, or simply vent about their experiences. And while their parents didn't know the intricacies of higher education, they were able to provide valuable emotional support and encourage their students' persistence.

This study provides insights on the experiences of White first-generation college students and opportunities to foster environments and events which aid first-generation students in gaining cultural capital specific to a higher education setting. The findings of this study provide an opportunity for greater research on first-generation college students and recommendations for higher education institutions to improve support for first-generation college students.

REFERENCES

- Azmitia, M., Sumabat-Estrada, G., Cheong, Y., & Covarrubias, R. (2018). Dropping out is not an option: How educationally resilient first-generation students see the future. In C. R. Cooper & R. Seginer (Eds.), *Navigating Pathways in Multicultural Nations: Identities, Future Orientation, Schooling, and Careers. New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 160*, 89–100.
- Bodner, G. M. (1986). Constructivism: A theory of knowledge. *Journal of Chemical Education, 63*(10), 873-878.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 487-510). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.). About Carnegie Classification. Retrieved from <http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/>.
- Cataldi, E. F., Bennett, C. T., & Chen, X. (2018). First-generation students: College access, persistence, and post bachelor's outcomes. *Stats in Brief (NCES 2018-421)*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Davies, S., & Rizk, J. (2018). The three generations of cultural capital research: A narrative review. *Review of Educational Research, 88*(3), 331-365.

- Demetriou, C., Meece, J., Eaker-Rich, D., & Powell, C. (2017). The activities, roles, and relationships of successful first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 58*(1), 16-36.
- DiMaggio, P. (1982). Cultural capital and school success: The impact of status culture participation on the grades of U.S. high school students. *American Sociological Review, 47*(2), 189–201.
- Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1087-1101.
- Dumais, S. A., & Ward, A. (2010). Cultural capital and first-generation college success. *Poetics, 38*(3), 245-265.
- 4-H. (n.d.). *What is 4-H*. Retrieved from <https://4-h.org/about/what-is-4-h/>
- Future Farmers of America. (n.d.). *The FFA mission statement*. Retrieved from <https://www.ffa.org/about/who-we-are/mission-motto/>
- Horvat, E. M., & Antonio, A. L. (1999). Hey, those shoes are out of uniform: African American girls in an elite high school and the importance of habitus. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 30*(3), 317-342.
- Jenkins, S. R., Belanger, A., Connally, M. L., Boals, A., & Duron, K. M. (2013). First-generation undergraduate students' social support, depression, and life satisfaction. *Journal of College Counseling, 16*, 129-142.

- Lareau, A. (2006). *Cultural capital and the transition to college: Unequal childhoods grown up*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Sociological Association, Montreal, Canada.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- McDonough, P. M., Antonio, A. L., & Horvat, E. N. (1997). *College choice as capital conversion and investment: A new model*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Memphis, TN.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Musoba, G. & Baez, B. (2009). The cultural capital of cultural and social capital: An economy of translations. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 151-182). City. Netherlands: Springer.
- Narayan, R., Rodriguez, C., Araujo, J., Shaqlaih, A., & Moss, G. (2013). Constructivism – constructivist learning theory. In B. J. Irby, G. Brown, R. Lara-Alecio, & S. Jackson (Eds.), *The handbook of educational theories* (pp. 169-183). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2016). *First-time postsecondary students in 2011-2012: A profile*. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016136.pdf>

- Padgett, R. D., Johnson, M. P., & Pascarella, E. T. (2012). First-generation undergraduate students and the impacts of the first year of college: Additional evidence. *Journal of College Student Development, 53*(2), 243-266.
- Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education, 75*(3), 249-284.
- Quinn, D. E., Cornelius-White, J., MacGregor, C., & Uribe-Zarain, X. (2019). The success of first-generation college students in a TRIO student support services program: Application of the theory of margin. *Critical Questions in Education, 10*(1), 44-64.
- Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International. (2019a). *First-generation college students: Demographic characteristics and postsecondary enrollment*. Washington, DC: NASPA. Retrieved from <https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/FactSheet-01.pdf>
- RTI International. (2019b). *First year experience, persistence, and attainment of first-generation college students*. Washington, DC: NASPA. Retrieved from <https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/FactSheet-02.pdf>
- Sanacore, J., & Palumbo, A. (2017). Let's help first-generation students succeed. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 61*(36), 1-5.
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- Strange, C. C., & Banning, J. H. (2015). *Designing for learning: Creating campus environments for student success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Thelin, J. R. (2004). *A history of American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.
- Weininger, E. B., & Lareau, A. (2003). Translating Bourdieu into the American context: The question of social class and family-school relations. *Poetics*, 31(5-6), 275-402.
- Whitley, S. E., Benson, G., & Wesaw, A. (2018). *First-generation student success: A landscape analysis of programs and services at four-year institutions*. Washington, DC: Center for First-generation Student Success, NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and Entangled Solutions.
- Zuo, C., Mulfinger, E., Oswald, F., & Casillas, A. (2018). First generation college student success. In R. S. Feldman (Ed.), *The first year of college: Research, theory, and practice on improving the student experience and increasing retention* (pp. 55-89). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First Interview:

1. Tell me about your family?
 - a. Parents, siblings, etc. Clarify stepparents and their role/interaction, especially if they attended college.
 - b. Did any of them attend college?
2. When did you decide you wanted to go to college?
3. What schools did you apply to?
 - a. Who helped you apply?
4. Did you take a campus visit?
 - a. Formal or informal. Interactions with Admissions Counselors?
5. What do you wish you'd known coming to college?
6. Are you involved in any communities with other first-generation college students?
 - a. Examples: Residence Hall? Class? Organization? Mentorship? Inside your academic college? Learning Community?
7. Any involvement broadly?
 - a. Job in General or Campus Job?
8. What helped you be successful during your first-semester/year?
 - a. Help be successful overall?
9. What experiences did you enjoy most and why?
10. What challenges did you face during your transition/first six-weeks/first-semester?
 - a. Who/what aided you during those challenges?
 - b. What could have helped you navigate those challenges?
11. Which campus offices/departments did you visit during your first semester/year?
 - a. Most frequently throughout time at college?
12. Where were you most successful in your first-semester/year?
 - a. Most successful throughout?
13. Are there barriers you faced specific to being a first-generation college student?
14. Describe your best day in college and why it was your best day.
15. Describe your worst day in college and why it was the worst.
16. Are there institutional systems/processes/policies that have prohibited your success?
17. What has been the most beneficial experience you've had during your time in college?
18. How would you describe your greatest strengths?
19. How has COVID-19 impacted your experience?

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a first-generation college student?

Second Interview:

1. Since our initial interview, have you thought of any other experiences relevant to being a first-generation college student?
2. Let's discuss your high school experiences a little bit more. Where did you attend high school? Did you participate in any dual credit or AP courses?
3. During your first-year, did you live on-campus?
4. Tell me about your experience during [mandatory orientation]. What did you learn?
5. Did you attend [extended orientation]? What did you learn from that experience?
6. Reach out to the Orientation Leader or DG Leader for help?
7. Do you remember attending [Welcome Week] programs?
8. When you need help with something at [your institution]... what do you do?
9. Do you call your parents for help?
10. Do your family members participate in [institution] specific clubs or groups?
11. Do you feel connected to anyone who works for the university?
12. Describe your interactions with faculty/instructors/TAs.
13. How did you learn to navigate campus? Ask questions? Go get help from professors?
14. What moves you from simply knowing about a resource to utilizing it?
15. If there was one experience you think has helped you most as a first-generation college student, what would it be?
16. How do you feel about the identifier first-generation college student? What emotions or feelings does it produce?
17. How can this institution better serve first-generation college students?
18. Is there anything else you would like to share specific to being a first-generation college student?

APPENDIX B

OVERVIEW OF THEMES SENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Briefing of Themes

Based on participant responses for this study, four themes emerged:

- 1) **Allies** - Starting from the application process to current day, students indicated people were a tremendous help as they navigated the college environment. From an emotional support frame to asking questions to getting advice, people were a constant source of aid to participants.
 - a. Community - friends, siblings, roommates, partners, high school teachers and counselors. These are individuals with one degree of separation from participants. They have direct and frequent contact with participants and are considered close individuals.
 - b. Instructors - faculty, professors, teaching assistants, learning community instructors.
 - c. Family Support - family members listened, encouraged, and provided emotional support.
 - d. Networks - co-workers, former students, upperclassmen, classmates. These are individuals with two degrees or more of separation from participants. They are individuals whom participants interact with through structured settings.
 - e. Staff Members - mentors, academic advisors, org advisors.
 - f. Helping Other First-Gen Students - participants helped younger siblings and people from their hometown
- 2) **Purposefully Structured Educational Experiences** - Participants engagement in programming during high school, pre-enrollment, and during enrollment helped provide insight, resource awareness and knowledge of how higher education functioned.
 - a. Campus Programs - mandatory orientation (New Student Conference), campus visits, extended orientation (Fish Camp)
 - b. Learning Communities - first-year seminars, First-Gen Community (Ignite), Regent Scholars program
 - c. Pre-College Experiences - Participation in Dual Credit, 4H, and/or FFA.
- 3) **Personal Agency** - Throughout their time in college students relied on themselves, their personal skills, and self-agency to persist. They believed in themselves and recognized they had the ability to be successful.
 - a. Relying on one's self and own skills - determination, independence, self-motivation
 - b. Always planned to attend college

- c. Navigating Emotions - pressure, guilt, intimidation, pride
 - d. Acknowledgement of Limited knowledge - self and family
 - e. Perception continuing generation students knew the ropes of college
 - f. Needs for first-gen students – mentor, pre-enrollment program like mandatory orientation, first-gen center, first semester course
 - g. Impacts of COVID-19 - negative, positive, indifferent
- 4) **Resource Systems** - Students utilized formal resources, outside of people, such as campus offices and online resources to seek guidance and resolution to questions.
- a. Campus Resources - on-campus tutoring, student support services, academic departments, and specific offices.
 - b. Online Resources - Google, TAMU Websites, TAMU Email, Social Media.

APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Please read through the entirety of this form carefully before signing.

The transcriber should keep a copy of the *Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement* for their records.

As a transcriber you will have access to research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) that include confidential information. Many participants have only revealed information to researchers because the research team has assured participants every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. That is why it is of the utmost importance to maintain full confidentiality when conducting your duties as a transcriber during a research study. *Below is a list of expectations you will be required to adhere to as a transcriber. Please carefully review these expectations before signing this form.*

EXPECTATIONS FOR A TRANSCRIBER

In order to maintain confidentiality, I agree to:

1. Keep all research information that is shared with me (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) confidential by not discussing or sharing this information verbally or in any format with anyone other than the research team for this study.
2. Ensure the security of research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) while it is in my possession. This includes:
 - Keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews on a password protected computer;
 - Closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
 - Keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet;
 - Permanently deleting any digital communication containing the data.
3. Not make copies of research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) unless specifically instructed to do so by the research team;
4. Give all research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) and research participant information, back to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a transcriber;

5. After discussing it with the principal investigator, erase or destroy all research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) that cannot be returned to the research team upon completion of my duties as a transcriber.

Title of Research Study: First-Generation College Students Acquisition of Cultural Capital

Investigator: Dr. Glenda Musoba & Emily C. Ivey

TAMU IRB Number: IRB2019-1449

TAMU IRB Approval Date: 8/10/2020

By placing my initials on this form I acknowledge I have reviewed, understand, and agree to adhere to the expectations for a transcriber described above. I agree to maintain confidentiality while performing my duties as a transcriber and recognize that failure to comply with these expectations may result in disciplinary action.

Initials:

Date:

Printed Name: