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Maceo D. Wattley

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Exploring the Experiences of First Generation College Students

by

Maceo D. Wattley

MA, Walden University, 2009

BS, Mercer University, 2002

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Higher Education and Adult Learning

Walden University

September 2020

Abstract

At a large, urban university in the Midwestern United States, graduation rates of first-generation college students (FGCS) who are the first within a family to be admitted and attend a 4-year post-secondary institution of higher learning have declined over the past decade despite programs instituted to improve student retention. The purpose of the study was to explore FGCS's and university administrators' experiences affecting the decisions for FGCS to drop out and to examine student and administrator recommendations for improvements, based on their experiences, to prevent attrition. Guided by Knowles's theory of andragogy, which describes how adult learners are self-directed and take responsibility for their own learning, this qualitative case study design focused on FGCS' and university administrators' experiences affecting decisions by FGCS to drop out and examined their recommendations. This qualitative case study included semi structured interviews with a purposeful sample of 10 FGCS and 5 administrators. FGCS' exit surveys were also reviewed and triangulated. Data were coded and analyzed using inductive analysis. Findings arising from emergent themes related to FGCS' experiences: (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. The findings were used to create a 3-day professional development training project to decrease FGCS attrition and improve retention rates. The findings from this study will support positive social change by providing the university officials with information to improve FGCS' experiences thereby leading to higher graduation rates.

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Dedication

As a father of six children, I am often amazed at the obstacles my children overcome. I dedicate this study to my wife, children, parents, my in-laws (which I also claim as my parents), and pastor that have kept me going. I wanted to lead by example with action, because trees do not talk. I want to thank my wife of 25 years for her support of my educational journey, and I am so glad that we did it together at the same time. I am a first generation doctoral candidate and I would like to also dedicate this study to all first generation students to encourage them to do what they may not have seen done before. I thank my family, friends, and colleagues for their support and encouragement. To my dad, thanks for teaching me how to throw a baseball, pops. To my mom, thanks for your sacrifices. Most of all I thank God for allowing me this opportunity and giving me His grace and mercy that brought me through, I am living this moment because of Him. I thank my church family for the many prayers and help with family responsibilities to help me to accomplish this dream. Onward, Upward, Forward, Forever!

Acknowledgments

I am well aware that I would not be here without the support I have received. Dr. Tiffany Hamilton and Dr. Sherry Harrison -- thank you for helping me to make needed changes. Dr. Cathryn White, thank you for your heartfelt words of encouragement and positive contributions to my study. Dr. Kathy Zientek thank you for being so kind and detail oriented your guidance made this day possible. Dr. Ellis you are an inspiration! You always provided helpful advice and examples to improve my skills as a scholar. You were with me from the beginning as a role model, an encourager, and you expected the best from me. I cannot overemphasize the importance of having high expectations and positive firm feedback for your students. I have made it this far and a acknowledge your contributions and importance to this process. I could not have made it without you. You deserve a round of applause!

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

First generation college students (FGCS) are traditionally identified as the first student within a family whose parents did not graduate from a 4-year college or university to be admitted and attend a 4-year post-secondary institution of higher learning (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Additionally, research indicated that while FGCS are typically the first immediate family member to earn a bachelor's degree, they should be identified as *at-risk* students for dropping out (Jones, 2016; Terenzini et al., 1996). Compared to other identified at-risk student groups, FGCS have a significantly higher dropout rate (Jones, 2016).

The Midwestern university of study, hereafter known as Sparks University (pseudonym), has created an at-risk program to offer FGCS retention support. However, the graduation gap between at risk student groups is not closing despite the increased attention by Sparks University. At risk students include those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, FGCS, English language learners, minorities, and students with children. Currently, according to Jones (2016), about 24% of all college students are first generation. Considering FGCS make up almost a quarter of the total college student population, defining and addressing FGCS 'needs is important (Jones, 2016). In 2015, the Critical Review Forum chair led a council comprised of university officials charged with reviewing and updating faculty on at risk students' graduation rates (Administrative Staff Member, personal communication, May 17, 2015). This occurred because, at this large 4-year urban university in the Midwest, the graduation rate of FGCS was considerably

lower than other at-risk students and had not improved since 2006 (Administrative Staff Member, personal communication, May 17, 20015). Additionally, at risk students' graduation rate improvement was listed as a top priority for the Student Support Team (Administrative Staff Member, personal communication, May, 2015). The current infrastructure at Sparks University is showing positive results for many at risk subgroups, however not for FGCS, indicating additional areas of unmet needs that may be exclusive and specific to FGCS.

York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) created a conceptual framework for examining academic success based on Astin's 1991 model, which defined student success as outcome based on achievement, persistence, and student learning that are influenced by environment and inputs (Astin, 1991; Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanath, (2015). According to Sparks University's Director of Student Success, concerns existed in the annual faculty conference regarding the increase in FGCS' attrition (Director of Student Success, personal communication, January, 2018). Introducing the Persistence Initiative Program developed to manage at risk student performance metrics could increase FGCS' retention rates (Director of Student Success, personal communication, January 12, 2018). Following the 2015 Critical Review Forum's report, Sparks University officials implemented programs to recruit, support, and promote at risk FGCS to help with student retention while introducing faculty to their roles (Department Head, personal communication, May 17, 2016).

All newly enrolled students at Sparks University are provided academic, financial, and psychological support when they enroll (Administrative Staff Member, personal

communication, April 7, 2015). Some students are identified as at risk because they demonstrate a need for additional support based on poor attendance and academic performance during the first 3 weeks. Following this initial enrollment review by Admissions, students are grouped, categorized, and filtered by any shared similarities and differences, to determine how to best serve their needs. FGCS with problems in performance, participation, and persistence have been labeled as students that are at risk of discontinuing their education (McCann, 2017). Students can be identified as at risk prior to arrival to college as a result of test scores or post enrollment using class performance, entrance exams, or if they are failing any courses at the 3-week period (Lewis, 2017).

At risk students' characteristics include minority, low socioeconomic backgrounds, FGCS, English language learners (ELLs), and having children (Sandoz, Kellum, & Wilson, 2017). Traditionally, administrative officials refer at risk students to various student support programs to improve retention. FGCS in general do not have sufficient support from family members who have experienced college and may not have academic success. Researchers' data shows that FGCS have increased attrition rates unlike their peers that have support from their families (Tate et al., 2015).

Although considerable research has been conducted on factors that cause FGCS attrition, some questions remain on how to help support them and increase graduation rates. University officials have tried to address factors that contribute to attrition, such as financial, social, emotional, academic, biological or experiential (Academic Counselor, personal communication, January, 2015). Examining how to best support this local

population could potentially improve the experience of these students and also assist with improving attrition and graduation rates.

Student recruitment programs at Sparks University have been successful in increasing application and enrollment rates, which increased by 18% of FGCS but have not been successful in increasing the graduation rates which decreased by 55% for FGCS from 2011-2017 (Administrative Staff Member, personal communication, January 6, 2017). As Jehangir, Stebleton, and Deenanath (2015) stated, change cannot come without "moving beyond access to success [and that] requires knowing more about the experiences of these students" (p 1). Failing to improve graduation rates could lead to at risk FGCS having difficulty improving their economic power. Therefore, examining FGCS' drop out experiences might identify intervention support services offering a positive impact. Since other groups included in the at-risk population responded positively to interventions, selecting FGCS as the target for inquiry is justified (Harackiewicz & Priniski, 2018).

Definition of the Problem

The problem at Sparks University is that despite established corrective measures, support programs, and increased enrollment, attrition rates are increasing among FGCS. This problem with FGCS attrition rates negatively impacts first generation student dropouts, their families, and the Sparks University faculty and administration. A possible cause of this attrition is competing priorities. FGCS conventionally differ from other college students due to experiencing personal and family related financial challenges, parenting children, supporting a spouse, partner, or aging parent, while starting their

education later than traditional 18 to 22-year-old (Ishitani, 2016). Additionally, Dennis (2016) indicated that another potential cause for higher attrition rates with FGCS could be poor academic preparation. Dennis (2106) also noted that many FGCS have not been exposed to rigorous educational experiences and lack time management skills, which might lead to attrition. Therefore, a study, which explores FGCS' attrition by examining their experiences and the experiences of university administrators could identify recommendations for support programs that would improve academic success and improve student retention.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The rationale for exploring FGCS' dropout experiences is to identify opportunities to increase degree completion and improve and restructure current student support systems. First generation college students, who typically identify with lower socioeconomic families, consistently attain bachelor's degrees at much lower rates compared to non- first generation college students from higher socioeconomic families (Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos, & Ditzfeld, 2017). First generation college students are typically Black or Hispanic, and usually come from a low-income background (Lee, 2016). Although students from all socioeconomic backgrounds are earning bachelor's degrees, over the past 20 years, students from higher socioeconomic families are graduating 50% more often than students from low socioeconomic families (Page & Scott Clayton, 2016).

The cause of high attrition rates at Sparks University should be explored from FGCS' perspectives to develop an understanding of the problem, and to develop support services directed toward these at-risk students. Improvements and additions to current Sparks University student support programs have yielded improved retention results for other at-risk subgroups, however, to date have failed to affect FGCS' attrition. From the 2010 to 2015 academic years, the at-risk groups' attrition rates that improved were African American students (from 57.44% to 66.67%), English language learners (45.68% to 55.56%), and Hispanics (45.68% to 57.44%), (Administrative Staff Member, personal communication, March 17, 2015). First generation college students, however, did not improve in their rates; rather, retention rates declined from 38.98% to 33.33% (Administrative Staff Member, personal communication, March 17, 2015). To better understand reasons for this decline, the efficacy of student programs could be examined and compared against an account of FGCS' experiences (Kinzie & Hurtado, 2017).

Dropouts and university officials recognize that first generation college student attrition is a problem (Xu, 2018). Staffing and funding have been affected and have caused Sparks University to modify program offerings based on enrollment. Furthermore, FGCS who do not graduate with a college degree incur student loan debt without the benefits that a degree provides (Ruecker, Shepherd, Estrem, & Brunk Chavez, 2017). Nuñez and Sansone (2016) found that students with a college degree found higher paying jobs and employment stability leading to increased credit ratings, which provided opportunities for obtaining lower interest rates and increased disposable income than nondegree completers. Additionally, Sherraden (2017) supported Nuñez and Sansone

(2016) by describing the benefits of home and automobile ownership as well as long term savings from a college degree. However, FGCS failing to graduate may incur student loan debt leading to their inability to take advantage of long-term financial stability (Meschede, Taylor, Mann, & Shapiro, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. The central phenomenon is generally defined as the increase in college attrition by FGCS.

Definitions

Accreditation: Ensuring higher education common quality standards are met across programs and institutions (Alstete, 2004).

At risk college student: Students that share a set of defining characteristics that make them more susceptible to failure (Levin, 2017).

Attrition: Dropping out of school prior to graduation (Beer & Lawson, 2017).

Exit examination: A survey of questions that students take when alerting the school of their intent to withdraw from the school. The exit survey consists of questions that are demographic, academic, social, procedural, emotional, financial, and professional in nature, aimed at identifying the reasons students are leaving (Director of Student Success, personal communication, April 12, 2015).

Retention: The practice of maintaining student enrollment through graduation (Sutter & Paulson, 2017).

Significance

While 40% of college graduates began careers in positions not requiring a college degree, their lifetime earnings exceed noncollege graduates (Agopsowicz, Robinson, Stinebrickner, & Stinebrickner, 2017). When universities were first established in the United States, education was reserved for the privileged class; however, today a college education is accessible for all social classes (Jacques, 2017). The need for academically prepared professionals is necessary in many fields requiring a higher level of expertise (Wechsler, 2017). Sparks University system provides students with training to achieve certification, employment, and access post-graduation employment. Upon reviewing the number of at-risk students with similar challenges, a pattern emerged indicating that FGCS' success was unique and disproportionately low compared to the success of any other at-risk subgroups (Lo, McCallum, Hughes, Smith, & McKnight, 2017). This problem is significant because approximately 25% of all undergraduate students are FGCS (Kena et al., 2016). Therefore about 25% of the total Sparks University student population might benefit from insight provided by researching this problem. Additionally, the findings may be useful to the local educational setting because understanding FGCS experiences could be used to isolate relevant issues that have a positive or negative effect on FGCS' academic success and overall persistence (Kena et al., 2016).

Guiding/Research Questions

Because FGCS' attrition rates continue to be a problem, changes are needed. Due to high attrition rates for FGCS, they may have unique unaddressed needs that should be

explored by examining their experiences. A complete examination of FGCS' experiences may help to describe circumstances that affected their decision making. Guiding this project study are the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' positive experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out?

RQ 2: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out?

RQ 3: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' recommendations for improvements based on their experiences?

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the current body of knowledge regarding FGCS' challenges with attrition. I will discuss the characteristics shared by FGCS and present a profile of FGCS, based on the literature. In this section, I will compare the results of research on FGCS' belief systems, family structures, life responsibilities, and aspirations (see Simmons, 2016) and contrast approaches to helping FGCS succeed. I will dissect results from research related to at risk students to show gaps in research and a need for further inquiry, presenting these areas using Knowles's theory of andragogy as a lens. First generation college student dropout experiences will be explored through students' attributes, behaviors, and characteristics. The Walden Library, Google Scholar, ERIC, Sage, ProQuest, and other educational journal sites will be used to conduct research. The keywords and search terms used to research this topic are: *first generation*

college students, at risk students, higher education, adult learning, Malcolm Knowles, FGCS' characteristics and *attrition.*

Conceptual Framework

Researchers discussed that FGCS generally begin their education later than traditional 18 22-year-old college students (Ishitani, 2016). Entering college as nontraditional adults might present different challenges that traditional college students experience (Ishitani, 2016). For example, FGCS often identify with personal and family related financial challenges, have children, extended family responsibilities, and maintain a job (Ishitani, 2016). The conceptual framework that guides this study is Knowles's theory of andragogy (1998). In 1999, Knowles identified the need for adults to be "propelled to learn, to engage in the learning process, and to have their past experiences regarded in the learning environment" (p. 31). In other words, adults need to be engaged in the learning process to learn.

Relevance is a very important part of the educational motivation for adult learners. According to Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2015), adults are motivated to "learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values, and attitudes, most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real life situations" (p. 61). Knowles's (1984) developed andragogy theory aimed specifically for adult learners. Knowles et al. (2015) further purported that adults are self-directed and hope to assume liability for their own decisions. Further, in 1999, Knowles (1999) stated that adult learners can be intrinsically motivated to participate in the learning process. Adult learners want to see the connection to their immediate circumstance and are more likely

to be motivated to work when they are respected for what they already know (Knowles, et al., 2015).

Applying Knowles's (1999) theory of andragogy as the conceptual framework is important because it provides a lens through which FGCS experience the educational environment, their success and challenges, while providing insight for student support programs. By determining which student support programs are currently working for FGCS and which programs need to be improved, university officials could make changes to improve student retention rates and lower attrition. Rowan Kenyon, Blanchard, Reed, and Swan's (2016) study used social capital theory as the conceptual framework, highlighting the link between support and success. In addition, essential academic and social support frameworks are imperative for FGCS' successful in the secondary to postsecondary school transition (Gibbons et al., 2016). Although social capital theory is a viable option for a lens, the theory of andragogy provides the basis for the areas of study more effectively.

The importance of support for FGCS demonstrates the necessity for resources (Wibrowski, Matthews, & Kitsantas, 2017). Understanding how adults learn will help highlight any deficits that exist (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). To clearly explore the experiences of FGCS, examining their perspectives, performance, program support, and problem-solving skills can be helpful (Baiduc, Drane, Beitel, & Flores, 2017). Additionally, the specific perspectives of individual FGCS will serve to determine how they view the world around them (Duncheon, 2018). Even if a student support program exists, it may not be helpful if students do not view it as supportive (Blackburn, 2017).

College graduates are more likely to maintain a healthy relationship and raise children than noncollege graduates (Lehrer & Son, 2017; Thompson, 2017). These ideals are not achieved without a plan (Meschede, Taylor, Kelly, Maslin, & Mong, 2017). First generation college students should be focused on the planning aspect of goal achievement (Goetsch et al., 2017). Leaders in high school programs in the Boston Public Schools created graduation plans for all students (Madden et al., 2017). Officials examined factors that affected college persistence as it relates to the role that high school planning and educational expectations play in the lives of students (Kilgore, 2017). Officials outlined the benefits of college graduation and they averred the correlation between prior planning would point to the importance of high school graduation program planning in college entrance and persistence for FGCS (Feldman, 2017). Public school officials showed the importance of planning and preparing students for the academic, personal, and social responsibilities that await FGCS (Sum, Khatiwada, O'Brien, & Palma, 2009).

Review of the Broader Problem

Perspectives and Behaviors about First generation College Students

According to Terenzini et al. (1996), FGCS are identified as the first student within a family whose parents did not graduate from a 4-year college or university to be admitted and earn a bachelor's degree. FGCS' perspective about their educational experience could determine graduation success or lead to attrition. For example, researchers found that students' perceptions might motivate or inhibit behaviors related to academic achievement (Sherraden, Frey, and Birkenmaier, 2016; Wheeler, 2016). When at risk FGCS perceive faculty members to be helpful, they may be more inclined to reach

out to them. If FGCS perceive them as competent in an area, FGCS may work through issues with a positive confident attitude. Sherraden et al. (2016) also examined the expectations of FGCS' parents from various socioeconomic backgrounds and determined that the expectations parents had for their children were related to their own experiences i.e. parents who went to college expected their children to do likewise while parents who entered the job market post-secondary expect their children to seek employment. Parents' experiences had an effect on their expectations for their children. Additionally, Wheeler (2016) suggested that the amount of assets and liabilities a family had was a determining factor in the type and level of expectations parents had for their FGCS' classroom attendance and graduation. The educational expectations of the family, based on amount of assets and liabilities, provided a level of expectations that created a mindset and motivation for students (Thurman, 2016). Researchers provided insight by examining and comparing parental expectations from those of various socioeconomic backgrounds to the motivation to review college opportunities, based on educational expectations whose foundation is assets and liabilities (Sherraden et al., 2016). Parents with more assets than liabilities had greater expectations for their students to attend classes and graduate on time (Sherraden et al., 2016).

Hutchinson, Wright, Jenkins Guarnieri, and Murdock (2012) indicated that as students took measures to increase self-efficacy, greater levels of success demonstrated that first semester's end was associated with significantly higher odds of persisting into the spring semester. The link between self-efficacy and success diminished the effect of other relevant variables, i.e., gender, ethnicity, first generation status, high school grade

point average (GPA), and initial level of college self-efficacy. Increasing self-efficacy had the greatest affect success (Hutchinson et al., 2012).

The problem of FGCS attrition is not the sole responsibility of university officials; students should accept responsibility in the process to develop levels of self-efficacy that may not have fully developed prior to college entrance (Hutchinson et al., 2012). By using sustained efforts, FGCS enhance self-efficacy and ultimately success. Also, important to note is that student belief systems may need to change as well. As students experience success, their confidence improves and they are encouraged to continue which may lead them to be more successful in college tasks and academic coursework (Hutchinson et al., 2012). Programming changes could positively influence student success if correctly applied.

Relationships

First generation college students earn bachelor's degrees at a much lower rate than students who are not FGCS (Choy, 2001). The online student support department at Sparks University, which handles exit surveys for FGCS dropouts, identified an increase in FGCS' attrition. Student Satisfaction Committee members believe that the exit surveys have been created by Sparks University to gather student feedback but are not providing enough information needed to improve the needs of FGCS (Director of Student Success, personal communication, 2015). Garcia (2015) noted race, socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity are areas where FGCS are different from other students.

Ishitani (2016) further explained that FGCS were more likely to be part time students and to choose private, for profit or public 2-year institutions (Ishitani, 2016). The

challenges that FGCS demonstrated were visible by monitoring performance, participation, and utilization of support programs. The impersonal and bureaucratic nature of educational institutions was different FGCS and resulted in a tendency to describe instructors, counselors, financial aid advisors, and general staff as non-caring. First generation college students used emotional words describing feelings in filed complaints. Research data demonstrated that FGCS that are from minority backgrounds have higher stress levels than other students (Turner & Smith, 2015). In addition, FGCS further expressed feelings of alienation and isolation from individuals that care for their wellbeing.

Time Management

Turner and Smith (2015) noted that FGCS lacked time management skills and often sought help or were referred to receive help for this problem after a considerable amount of time. A review of issues showed a lack of understanding of how to plan for projects, out of class assignments, and test preparation (Thibodeaux, Deutsch, Kitsantas, & Winsler, 2017). First generation college students might understand the material presented in class, however, lacked the experience in time allocation within schedules that would be sufficient to meet deadlines (Thibodeaux et al., 2017). If student failure was based upon late submissions rather than quality of work then this may indicate that students need help with time management rather than cognition (Good & Lavigne, 2017). The direction of support development will be more effective by understanding why the failure occurred in order to provide help to students (Becker et al., 2017). Those FGCS that worked while attending school experienced additional difficulty with time

management and overestimated abilities to commute, work, and study within a given time (Ardoin, 2017).

Finances

Denning (2016) researched the college attendance rates of students from various economic and racial backgrounds focusing primarily on students from low income backgrounds and research findings showed a correlation between the high cost of tuition and fees and the lack of participation from these groups. The reduction of tuition and fees had the largest effect on FGCS' decisions to enter college. Blacks entered college at half the rate of non-Hispanic Whites, and Hispanics at a third less than Whites. Denning (2016) focused on the expense involved in college attendance as a major contributing factor to success. The reduction of fees and tuition proved to have the largest effect on study results and student success. Because lowering tuition and fees had the greatest effect on entrance to college, this area needs further attention.

Educators preparing students for college should include information on ways to help pay for a college education (Page & Scott Clayton, 2017). However, if educators discuss grants and scholarships combined with financial aid programs, FGCS could see the possibilities that are available to those who lack the financial means to pay for education, and could also benefit families of FGCS (Clotfelter, Hemelt, & Ladd, 2018). As families understand the available financial aid resources for FGCS, they may be able to provide additional support without fear of failure to pay, and begin to see education for its rewards and not solely for its costs (Page & Scott Clayton, 2017).

Sherraden, Frey, and Birkenmaier (2016) compared the relationship between parents' saving and preparing financially for a child's education to the expectations they hold for a child's education. A direct link emerged between saving for college and expecting those children to go to college (Sherraden et al., 2016). To understand which recommendations would be most helpful in other environments, Sherraden et al. (2016) tried to reproduce these types of results in other families. This information related to environmental influence may signal a determining factor because it may point to a decision parents made years ago as the true indicator of whether FGCS will ultimately decide to go to college. Destin (2016) profiled 34 studies about the relationship between savings and educational expectations. Based on financial preparation, the researcher examined the difference in motivation, answering why certain recruitment tactics for FGCS are more effective if the student has been expected to attend college throughout life (Phillips, Stephens, Townsend, & Goudeau, in press).

Clancy, Beverly, Sherraden, and Huang (2016) identified that personal and home-based financial issues may directly affect academic performance more than other factors described. Financial success or challenges at home could directly affect student attendance and therefore, success in the classroom (Clancy et al., 2016). First generation college students may experience more financial challenges than other students, which may directly affect their ability to remain in a program of study leading to graduation (Clancy et al., 2016).

Reid and Moore (2008) found that approximately 80% of FGCS experience financial stress paying for college and find it necessary to obtain additional employment

while taking college courses, which adds additional stress. Employment demands on the first generation college student's time, energy, and resources may lead to missed classes, labs, study group sessions, group project meetings, and tutoring opportunities, which can further complicate the transition of FGCS once they begin to have difficulties with schedules preventing students from seeking available help (Reid & Moore, 2008). These schedule conflicts can frustrate students that are trying to use university resources.

Financial Aid. First generation college students face unique challenges as they enter college and there are many components that affect attrition. In anticipation of potential problems, officials at Sparks University unsuccessfully established support programs to help FGCS. Additionally, Ishitani (2016) noted within the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study report that FGCS' characteristics affect the persistence levels within postsecondary education, and attainment of credentials at lower rates compared to their non first generation counterparts. First generation college students that enrolled in a four year college made their decision to attend by examining ease of commute, proximity to their home, and the availability of financial means to pay their tuition (Ishitani, 2016). Students that enjoyed the benefits in financial compensation and employment were there for those who avoided attrition and obtained degrees (Boudreau, 2017).

In the mid-1980s, high school completion was a factor in attaining a middle class lifestyle, however, in the 21st century; completion of college is a key to attaining a middle class lifestyle (Perry, Martinez, Morris, Link, & Leukefeld, 2016). Perry et al. (2016) discussed cost as a significant factor in the lack of attendance for FGCS from low income backgrounds, and researchers identified the results of grant programs aimed at

subsidizing college costs for low income families (Chetty, Friedman, Saez, Turner, & Yagan, 2017). The highlighted efforts of federal programs to financially support students from low income families, who are typically FGCS, to promote low income students' college attendance and results is relevant to student achievement (Perna, Kvaal, & Ruiz, 2017).

Fitzpatrick and Schneider (2016) provided details on an experiment based on the theory that college entrance for low income families who are typically FGCS is further complicated by the lack of visibility and information. Fitzpatrick and Schneider (2016) purported that H & R Block, a financial institution, helped a group of low income families by providing a consultation that included giving information and helping the family complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA). The control group received information, however families were not assisted in the completion of the FASFA, and those participants who received help in completing the process, as well as the FASFA, had a significantly higher acceptance success rate, demonstrating a need to simplify the process and to provide information to those who lack experience in securing funding for higher education (Fitzpatrick & Schneider, 2016). Bird and Castleman, (2016) exposed another factor about why FGCS from low income families fail to attend college and may suggest it is not enough to have programs if the programs are not within reach of those who will benefit. By simplifying and explaining the FAFSA, the success rate showed a major improvement. The value of information and guidance cannot be underestimated in preparing students from FGCS to enter college (Bird & Castleman, 2016). The control group did not receive assistance in filling out the FASFA and their

success was compromised, demonstrating that a lack of information affected students' choices for education, preparation, certification, and employment in chosen career paths; thus, more attention needs to be placed on career development and services (Means, Bryant, Crutchfield, Jones, & Wade, 2016).

U. S. Federal Regulations

Dynarski and Scott Clayton (2016) examined reasons for the disparity in results from the federal government's primary method of supporting low income families. Bonin (2017) highlighted that some financial aid programs experience high rates of success in improving college attendance for students from low income families. However, results indicated that the programs created by the government to facilitate college attendance have not had the same success as college programs in the presentation and allocation of resources and factors that create the difference in success rates for FGCS (Bonin, 2017).

Goldrick Rab, Kelchen, Harris, and Benson, (2016) agreed with Dynarski and Scott Clayton (2016) regarding the role that information plays, but took the notion a step further, stating that research needs to continue so programs may improve. Bird, Castleman, Goodman, and Lamberton, (2017) studied the process of improving college attendance for low income families by subsidizing through financial aid focused on the need for more research to drive the creation and modification of policy and practice. Goldrick Rab et al. (2016) aimed to improve the distribution and use of resources allocated by testing theories and practices currently in use. Differences in success of students with similar resources provided in distinct manners can be evaluated and changed to optimize the system for better efficacy (Goldrick Rab et al., 2016).

Furthermore, student financial aid programs need modification to reach and affect the educational futures of students from FGCS with low income backgrounds (Kramer & Ortagus, (2017)

Gratuitus Tuition

Scott Clayton and Zafar (2016) tested the notion that college attending students from low income families could succeed by removing the barrier of the financial burden. Financial concerns affect the lives of FGCS (Scott Clayton & Zafar, 2016). Scott Clayton and Zafar (2016) examined the PROMISE program, a radical West Virginia program that equated student effort with the financial benefits. The program provided a tuition free educational opportunity for students who maintained compliance with the specific requirements of the program. Students in the PROMISE program were required to maintain a minimum grade point average and course load per session (Scott Clayton & Zafar, 2016). Program success occurred by removing the burden of costs, and including academic motivation incentives. First generation college students benefited from the removal of the financial strain, as it detracted from student success (Gorny, 2017).

Cultural Stereotypes

Due to a large percentage of first generation college students coming from low socioeconomic minority backgrounds, they could experience cultural stereotypes in higher education, which might lead to challenges for success (Demetriou, Meece, Eaker Rich, & Powell, 2017). Stereotypes could cause FGCS to experience feelings of not belonging, and researchers suggested a connection between proximate social structures and a student's academic performance (Demetriou et al., 2017). Without the benefit of

high expectations and measures in place to ensure FGCS have an equitable share in the hospitality afforded other students, FGCS often find the workload is insurmountable (Demetriou et al., 2017).

Graduation Gap

Education is a possible driver of financial prosperity for college graduates (Rock Klotz & Miller, 2016). As the graduation gap widens between traditional college students' graduation rates and FGCS attrition rates, issues of financial prosperity should be investigated (Rock Klotz & Miller, 2016). To prevent the graduation gap from widening, identifying needs of FGCS is important for student financial success. First generation college students' needs require adjustment through program development for student academic success (Cherry, Lloyd, & Prida, 2015). First generation college students' needs may differ from those of other at-risk groups, which makes success particularly challenging. For example, first generation Latina students may feel a lack of belonging due to financial problems, stereotypes, low expectations, ineffective family support, and unwelcoming campuses (Gloria et al., 2019). However, these influences could affect students' ability to navigate through the college system. Lacking sufficient financial backing may cause the student's focus to continuously identify on how to pay for the education rather than how to best perform. Familial support may be limited as a result of economic or social factors, but mainly in the area of lack of experience in this endeavor (Patton, Renn, Guido, Quaye, & Forney, 2016). While support programs directed specifically toward Latino students may be successful, they may not adequately

address the needs of FGCS, leading to attrition (Patton et al., 2016). Since not all at risk students are FGCS current program offerings may not meet their needs.

Mentors

In higher education, students typically identify mentors that share common interests (Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016). Failing to introduce mentors that can connect personally and professionally with FGCS could lead to difficulties transitioning to the rigors of college, which attribute to attrition (Patton et al., 2016). Research determined the need for FGCS' first year mentor support; however, after the first year, the effect of mentorship does not have a significant effect on their ability to adjust and manage college related stress (Gregg Jolly et al., 2016). In order to provide effective support early intervention is imperative.

Stress Management Coping Skills

First generation college students cope with stress by directly following planned actions, whereas second and third generation college students communicated with others about problems (Gloria et al., 2019). To address the challenges FGCS face, a direct plan of action in student support programs can be a resource to help students identify issues and then plan the most appropriate course of action.

First generation college students have a need to participate in group activities where they are comfortable enough to interact and ask questions (Kodama, Han, Moss, Myers, & Farruggia, 2016). Kodama et al. (2016) completed individual qualitative interviews and biographical questionnaires on FGCS. First generation college students communicated a desire to become more knowledgeable in a safe environment.

Additionally, FGCS noted students' level of comfort affected decisions to ask for clarity, help, support, and assistance. Even if proper support programs are available, students may not use them if students are uncomfortable asking for guidance. Understanding which factors cultivate a feeling of safety and comfort may allow students to be effective at advocating for their needs (Schwartz et al., 2016). Self-advocacy is a skill that must be practiced successfully in order to benefit the student.

Creating a safety group to nurture FGCS offers these at-risk students a chance to garner benefits prior to college enrollment. The family or group of origin provides the framework students seek to feel safe. In a different setting, such as college, the group of origin or family dynamics must be replicated for student success. Several methods exist for success to be achieved (Sebastian, Moon, & Cunningham, 2017). For Latina FGCS to cope and engage, students need to connect with and have the opportunity to involve family, peers, and university personnel (Gloria et al., 2019). Educational coping relates to the methods students use to accept differences and to make necessary adjustments for success (Gloria et al., 2019). Not all coping strategies work with the same efficacy for all students.

Examining three themes may help create a reflective analysis of the current university programs designed to support FGCS (Gloria et al., 2019). The first theme described for FGCS was needs specific and uniquely different from those of other at-risk students. Gloria et al. (2019) determined a unique way to view experiences that highlighted a different set of unmet needs specific to FGCS but were unanswered by the current student support programs (Wibrowski, Matthews, & Kitsantas, 2016). As

traditional students described the ways experiences are not like those of their first generation counterparts, educators can identify the need for changes in support protocols and procedures related to FGCS. First generation college students might feel guilty for the benefits that college achievement provides when they leave friends and family behind (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). First generation college students' needs and belief systems provide insight into how to better support them.

Family

By isolating the areas of need, leaders can devise strategies to minimize the differences FGCS feel. First generation college students consider family to be one of the most complicated factors that affect academic persistence (Gloria et al., 2019). Acknowledging that a student's family of origin plays a role in completing their education can open a discussion regarding how to support the ideal, while helping the student to persist. According to Curtis, Fuller Rowell, Doan, Zgierska, and Ryff, (2016). FGCS have a higher level of attrition than students from college educated households. For many FGCS, family cultures is held in high regard, which could make separation from the family difficult and negatively affect a student's educational experience and success (Curtis et al., 2016). While FGCS' family may lack common educational experiences, many parents stated that they maintained an important role in the student's decision-making process (Curtis et al., 2016).

Unlike other groups entering college, FGCS may have to negotiate a balance between family and school (Gloria et al., 2019). For FGCS, college is not the time to be selfish; rather student must balance and negotiate academic needs with those of the

family. First generation college students may continue to hold roles significant to the provision and sustenance of the family, which may create additional demands on time and resources (Gloria et al., 2019). First generation college students may also have added pressure to perform for the group, as they may have a sense of duty to succeed and represent the family. First generation college students may feel the entire family is counting on their academic success since they are the first to be accepted and earn a degree (Gloria et al., 2019). The pride and support families provide may also create a measure of tension or stress as FGCS' view that individual academic failures will reflect poorly on the family (Kumar & Mattanah, 2018). In contrast, success will uplift and improve the status of the entire family, based on the FGCS' performance (Gloria et al., 2019). One student surmised "I gotta make them proud" (Gloria, & Castellanos, 2019, p. 279). For some FGCS, the responsibility of success or failure for the family can provide motivation, but for others it increases stress about academic performance.

Carroll (2017) noted that FGCS tend to maintain strong family connections rather than participating in academic and social activities to their detriment. Lack of separation from families for FGCS of Latino decent may explain disparities in success since failing to separate from family and connecting with Sparks University curriculum means Latino students are not taking advantage of offered support (Lundberg, Conrad, Gasman, Nguyen, & Commodore, 2018). Even if FGCS receive firsthand information regarding the requirements of college, that may not be enough to prepare them for the rigors of college academic demands. Gay (2019) described the importance of FGCS having a personal college experience prior to graduating from high school through extension

programs and community college offerings. Additionally, Gay (2019) indicated that although there are studies that focus on student performance from high school to college, there are a lack of studies that determine if there are deficits from middle school through high school that affect future academic achievement. Perhaps the link between prior performance issues and how to support students are demonstrated by examining the record beginning in middle school through to college performance for FGCS (Gay, 2019). The relationship between past academic performance and continued educational success may provide an opportunity for additional program support creation.

Programs Leading to Success and Challenges

The academic preparation of FGCS differed from that of other students as evidenced by entrance exam performance. Damico (2016) reported the difficulty in written and verbal language communication and required remedial English courses at a rate of 73% of 100% of incoming FGCS. The difficulty in verbal and written expression exhibited by FGCS may have contributed to a lack of participation in the established support programs and also may have led to additional conflicts with instructors and advisors. When students are skilled in how to minimize conflicts with their peers it is easier to use those conflict resolution skills with staff. Damico (2016) outlined that academic, social, financial, and counseling are areas that were most effective in supporting students and that lifestyle practices are should be examined. In general, FGCS expected that university officials would explain assignments, documents, deadlines, and opportunities in a simple, easy manner (Damico, 2016). Damico (2016 determined that standard academic language was not equally received and clearly understood by FGCS

and remedial coursework was necessary in order to support at risk FGCS for credit course success.

Recruitment Practices

Ward (2016) found that FGCS' participation and graduation were directly related to the recruitment practices and resources offered. Students who benefit from university recruitment and resource programs might have areas of need that persist when beginning the course of study (Ward, 2016). Student needs have been explored from various perspectives quantitatively (Green-Eneix, 2016). Green-Eneix (2016) concluded that understanding the experiences of FGCS is necessary prior to making changes to support programs. Relevant factor isolation is critical to determine influences that have a positive or negative effect on FGCS' academic success and overall persistence (Ward, 2016).

Societal progress made by expanding educational availability to those who previously were excluded is important (Nguyen et al., 2016). Initiatives to promote FGCS admission to 4-year institutions have been successful. The increase in admission and enrollment of FGCS is evident; however, graduation rates have declined (Nguyen et al., 2016). As a result of the continued decline, additional support for learners through application, admission, and enrollment is needed (Nguyen et al., 2016). Determining reasons for these improvement gaps in performance, persistence, and graduation rates for FGCS requires discovery of where improvements can be effective in creating support structures for FGCS.

To facilitate transition into college life, a more comprehensive examination is imperative to determine why FGCS' graduation rates have diminished compared to other

at-risk groups (Nguyen et al., 2016). However, while college graduates might contribute greatly to the local community, in number and quality, and contributions may diminish as attrition increases, the effect college graduates make on the lives of dependent family members are undeniable (Nguyen et al., 2016). In contrast, detrimental effects to the larger academic community occur when students receive financial aid or grants and then are unable to graduate. First generation college students failing to graduate could become a burden to them self and their families with the obligation to repay academic financial obligations (Nguyen et al., 2016). Nguyen et al. (2016) determined that FGCS paying for a degree that has not been earned could have negative implications for future generations that may see the financial burden without the benefit as a reason not to pursue higher education as a means to a higher quality of life (Nguyen et al., 2016).

Elliott et al. (2018) discussed FGCS subgroups based on race and discovered a disparity in performance between Black and White youth between the ages of 17 and 23. Of this race subgroup, 62% of White youth were where they should be whereas only 37% of Black youth were at that level (Elliott et al., 2018). Researchers discovered a race proof factor in that FGCS who had a college savings account by middle school age were more likely to be on track for college than those who did not; and race was not a factor. Regardless of race, college savings had the greatest effect on success in college and could affect FGCS (Elliott et al., 2018).

O'Connor, Polnariev, and Levy (2016) suggested that student performance provides indicators that can be used to gauge success First generation college students' performance on entrance examinations, tests, projects, written assignments, discussions,

or debates may help narrow areas of concern (Chubin, & DePass, 2017). Once a student's aptitude is determined, a specific learning path is created and tailored to support specific needs (O'Connor, Polnariev, & Levy, 2016). Some students may bypass beginning courses whereas others may have to pass no credit remedial courses before moving forward into an official program of study (McDonald, 2016). Following enrollment, students continue to need different types of support programs from a variety of sources (Parise et al., 2017).

Social Problems

Academic preparation is important but is only one component to college readiness and a more comprehensive approach is necessary to achieve the desired results (Cutter, 2017). Students may later choose to be on a college bound track, however, may not have always worked with the same degree of intensity. Parents of FGCS may not have understood the importance nor have stressed the need to enroll in the courses with the highest degree of difficulty (Stokes, 2017). Having overcome difficulties, students may still make an error in deciding on which college to attend. Merely seeing college as a means to an end instead of a tool, they may select the wrong one. FGCS' needs sometimes caused them to select a school based upon location and finances instead of what was really in their best interest. A poor school selection often leads to student attrition (Harlow & Bowman, 2016). A poor school selection may influence the student into believing him or herself to not be cut out for college instead of realizing that a particular school was not the right fit. First generation college students lacking college readiness confidence influence future attendance, retention, and graduation decisions

(Gabriel, 2018). Internal components also affect FGCS' success and cause them to struggle with self-esteem or social acceptance (Gabriel, 2018). Being accepted and feeling connected can affect the quality and quantity of the effort FGCS' use in regard to their academic performance. In contrast to other at-risk groups, FGCS may live at home or need to work part time while they study (Gabriel, 2018). Working while pursuing a college degree may create additional challenges for FGCS.

Living at home creates a physical distance from positive peer pressure, campus resources, and access to support, which may exacerbate a student's sense of isolation and complicate efforts to obtain program support (Wilson & Devereux, 2018). Off campus living might also make the demands of home life greater than or equal to those demands for study. Wilson and Devereux, (2018) described how competition between home and school life may detract from students that are academically prepared, and lack of available time to study may negatively affect students' commitment and ultimately performance. Living on campus and surrounded by peers may offer a tangible example of how to successfully work at school which may not have been previously observed in a first generation student's past experience. First generation college students' living arrangements may affect learning, for example some skills are garnered by simply observing successful students' study habits. Students may miss impromptu study group sessions to gain additional practice (Wilson & Devereux, 2018). Additionally, when FGCS plan to meet with traditional college students to complete group assignments and projects, public transportation schedules or other personal home related responsibilities may keep them from participating (Wilson & Devereux, 2018).

Rigorous evaluations help provide success (Heinrich, 2000). Problems experienced by disadvantaged youth later caused them to disconnect from work and school (Flennaugh, Cooper, Stein, & Carter Andrews, 2018). Declining graduation rates were affected by programmatic strategies implemented to help reach these students before they ended academic careers and became affected by unemployment and social problems (Heinrich, 2000). Evaluations may be more significant than previously thought because parents' decisions made years ago were the true indicator of whether students would ultimately decide to go to college, especially prospective FGCS (Singer, 2016). Highlighting the problems of students from low income families and how those decisions could ultimately affect decisions to attend college might be more effective in addressing which issues have the greatest impact on prospective FGCS (Williams, 2017).

Problem Solving

Destin and Kosko (2016) determined that FGCS struggle with personal and academic problem differently than other at-risk groups. Student with better problem-solving skills might be more likely to resolve issues, which could allow them to remain in school rather than dropping out and support structures make an effect on attrition (Destin & Kosko, 2016). In choosing types of support programs that have the best benefit to students, cognitive and emotional aspects could be examined since both have a significant effect on FGCS success. Educational leadership may be at odds when trying to determine who should focus on these critical areas of need. Shepherd (2016) deduced that student developed self-efficacy, college scores were more important in determining student success than self-efficacy scores taking at admission and showed that the skills

students had at the time of admission were not as important as those skills they developed and employed by the end of the first semester. These findings suggest that growth during the first semester is more indicative of college success than preparation.

Future support measures may even be concentrated to focus on the first semester rather than what students attain prior to admission. Findings suggested that first generation students' attrition was due to unmet deadlines for example may indicate that there is a window during the first semester that is crucial to self-efficacy and ultimately academic performance for FGCS (Shepherd, 2016). Having students connect and be engaged during the first semester might have a large affect success. Students are able to form effective measures of self-efficacy and may signify that the focus of FGCS' retention strategies and support programs need to be aimed at that first semester for FGCS (Shepherd, 2016). Support programs seem to be established in a way that delays intrusive support to allow students to adjust to the first semester. Perhaps the delay in implementing support may be causing them to miss a critical time of change.

Opportunity and Access

Destin and Kosko (2016) examined the effects the efforts by the federal government to equalize opportunity, access, and support for student from low income families, and concluded that the attainment of college degrees facilitates economic transition and empowerment. Even with knowledge of the benefits of college completion, a staggering statistical difference exists among socioeconomic subgroups. Considering traditional factors such as college preparation, deficiencies persist in efforts to recruit members of the underrepresented low economic group. However, a responsibility

remains to recruit and retain FGCS from low economic means (Destin & Kosko, 2016). First generation college students from low economic means may have a different set of needs that Sparks University must consider when creating support programs for incoming students.

Researchers determined that the factors affecting perspectives, performance, problem solving skills, and program support for FGCS is multifaceted (Denning, 2016; Destin, & Kosko, 2016; Page, & Scott Clayton, 2017). Each area of concern raises questions that affect FGCS' success (McCann, 2017). Students who use federal student loans and grants contend with new criteria that affect students and maximum amounts loaned (Dika, & D'Amico, 2016; Page, & Scott Clayton, 2017). Reviewing studies provided some answers, but to fully comprehend the factors affecting FGCS, more inquiry is may be needed.

Implications

The purpose of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. First generation college students have not demonstrated the same academic and graduation success, following implementation of current support programs, as have other minorities. Determining areas of unmet need is beneficial so university administrators can change the disproportionate results in the areas of student achievement, student persistence, and overall student satisfaction. Sparks University created support programs to change and provide additional resources to support student groups deemed to be at

risk, introducing FGCS to additional resources and resources, tracked to study changes in progress. Following the initial review, Sparks University identified an anomaly, however, further understanding was needed. Success rates of FGCS could identify successful supports to improve student retention.

The project that resulted from the findings was a 3-day professional development training designed to identify FGCS and some of the challenges that they face, improve the conditions for first generation students with regards to the challenges they faced related to information, procrastination, and motivation. Key stakeholders such as instructors, academic counselors, and support staff will participate in this 3-day professional development training that discusses strategies, current program modification possibilities, current resource reallocation possibilities, and create action items in order to improve the positive experiences of first generation college students.

As a result of budgetary constraints, the cost of implementing a new component of the existing program may require the intervention of community leaders. Perhaps some staff will be required that could be provided on a volunteer basis. Additionally, if program support requires additional human resources; using graduate students performing internship activities could offset salary costs. The development of additional programming may be of significant use to other industries. Problems that may be identified can continue to plague FGCS in other settings.

Strategies could be shared to help include families, communities, and schools to identify or create a project that supports programs and procedures that improve FGCS' participation, performance, and persistence. By understanding FGCS' experiences, I

could possibly create a 3 day professional development seminar to support FGCS' success for instructors, staff, and stakeholders. Each group could be educated regarding FGCS' challenges and strengths. Combining efforts, Sparks University community can provide a description of how student support programs should be formatted to increase FGCS' retention rates.

Summary

First generation college students' application, admission, and attendance have increased with the implementation of recruitment and information dissemination (Davari et al., 2016). Despite these strides, significant work is needed to improve retention rates. Because many students benefit from a college education, methods should be employed to identify opportunities to improve the application and admission process, while encouraging attendance and graduation. First generation college students' retention and graduation is a key objective for university growth (Davari et al., 2016). Unfortunately, when FGCS fail to remain in college and earn a degree, they are often burdened with the obligation to repay student loan debt without the benefit of post-graduation job (Davari et al., 2016).

To minimize FGCS dropping out prior to graduation, universities should consider developing student support programs to support educational opportunity. By discovering areas of need, student programs can change to provide an effective foundation. These results may indicate that FGCS' needs are unique and require additional investigation and support program implementation. By evaluating the current program, program

improvement may be inevitable. FGCS who are willing to provide their experience can serve as a standard by which to measure the efficacy of the program.

First generation college students have distinct characteristics such as limitations in their academic preparation, experience, support, and knowledge of bureaucratic systems. Additionally, they may have other personal issues that affect their ability to focus exclusively on their studies. Some may have families, financial responsibilities that require them to work, or experience learning or language barriers. Despite recruitment and improvements in admission statistics, FGCS' graduation rates have declined (Morrison, 2017). The school of study currently focuses on data from entrance examination performance, class grades, and length of time enrolled. Because all college students at Sparks University are provided specific supportive resources, and additional remediation support is provided to all at risk groups, a deficit of qualitative information persists to understand disparities for FGCS. Other at risk student subgroups have shown improvement in graduation rates, unlike FGCS (Administrative Staff Member, personal communication, August 10, 2014). Comprehensive qualitative research of potential geographical barriers, financial need, or possible distrust of systems, organizations, and the administrative staff is needed. Operational systems or rules may exist that compete with FGCS' values and cultures. Reviewing data from this type of qualitative inquiry may provide greater insight into how support or curricular programs may be restructured for improved success.

Results of further inquiry may affect the total success FGCS achieve. Issues of FGCS' engagement could be traced to their performance prior to college acceptance. The

effects college graduation has on first generation students can be more profound than for other students because they may begin at a financial disadvantage that can be exacerbated by incurring student loan debt without graduating. First generation college student support could improve, but to define what areas of the student support need to change, a qualitative in depth research study, based on the student experience is needed. Perhaps, studying the student experience in greater depth will also help increase student performance overall, because other at risk students may be experiencing similar difficulties. A critical review of the current body of knowledge shows a gap exists in the available information. Without further investigation into the parameters of FGCS performance, it is difficult to identify with certainty where changes may be needed.

In Section 2, I will describe the qualitative methodology design and approach to research including participants, data collection and analysis and limitations. In Section 3, I discuss the project that was developed based on the data collected and findings from the analyzed data. I will provide a scholarly review of the literature supporting the need for professional development training. Finally, in Section 4 I will provide my reflections about the strengths and limitations of the project with recommendations for alternative approaches considering lessons learned or needs for further research.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

Experiences of FGCS may differ from those of traditional students or other at risk student groups. Knowles (1999) noted that to reach students effectively, faculty should understand how they learn. Differences may emerge in the way FGCS learn compared to other students. Experiential knowledge can be shared in a family but when a family lacks this sharing, it could affect a student's preparation, performance, or persistence. To garner knowledge related to the experiences of FGCS, their experiences should be detailed from their own perspectives. Additionally, understanding administrators' perceptions about FGCS positive and negative experiences affecting their decision to drop out could lead to support programs or to interventions that could lower the attrition rate problem. In Section 2, I provide an overview of the study, and discuss the research design, the potential participants, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis. This section concludes with an explanation of the assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

Before making any changes to a program for FGCS at a traditional 4 year university in the Midwest, it was necessary to determine the experiences of FGCS. Attrition could not have been fully understood when focusing only on specific areas of concern rather than considering the relationships between those factors (Herrmann, Bager Elsborg, & McCune, 2017). Therefore, a qualitative case study allowed for an in depth examination of FGCS' drop out experiences from their perspectives. A qualitative study

provides researchers the opportunity to compare occurrences and their relationship to existing data (Gustafsson, 2017). Case study research provided a means to establish the need for further study and examine previously used methods to show efficacy (Setiawan & Barrett, 2016). I conducted a case study to investigate in depth individual students' experiences to provide needed insight into the FGCS' attrition problem (aligned with Gustafsson, 2017). Using a purposive sampling, for this study data were collected from Sparks University exit surveys and individual semi structured interviews with 10 FGCS and five university administrators.

I considered using a quantitative method but this type of study would not allow for in depth understanding of FGCS' dropout experiences. There were five qualitative traditions and I explored how each one might provide data. If I would have used ethnography, it would require observation of behaviors and this type of access would not be feasible for this study. Because FGCS dropouts may not have chronicled their journey narrative research would not be effective. Without specific knowledge of events in FGCS lives, phenomenological research also would not provide the answers because it lacks an occurrence with which to compare data. I considered using grounded theory, however, the goal of this study was not to develop a theory but to explore FGCS dropout experiences. The most effective and appropriate way to understand the experiences of FGCS was to perform a qualitative case study where FGCS' interviews could be discerned first and see how these findings relate to current program offerings.

Students who were at risk for higher attrition rates in college tend to exhibit weaknesses in areas that other students do not (Director of Student Success, personal

communication, February 14, 2015). Student needs may be similar but vary by group and by individual (Director of Student Success, personal communication, February 14, 2015). While examining existing literature helps, looking at statistical data on file from exit surveys was not conclusive (Setiawan & Barrett, 2016). Students in the at risk subgroup may have had additional needs and areas of concern. For this study, the best way to collect, explore, and analyze experiences, as well as make any necessary changes to improve support and decrease FGCS' attrition, was to complete in depth interviews using a case study methodology. Because first generation student graduation rates continued to be a problem, changes were needed.

Administrators provided another perspective on the same research questions. The questions that administrators answered during the semi structured interviews were based on their experiences in the admission, instruction, and support of FGCS. Guiding this portion of the project study were the following research questions for administrators to describe their experiences with FGCS:

RQ 1: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' positive experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out?

RQ 2: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out?

RQ 3: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' recommendations for improvements based on their experiences?

Research Design Choice Justification

In an effort to select the most appropriate qualitative design choice, I reviewed the five types of qualitative designs, including phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, action research, and case study, and revisited the goal of this study. Phenomenology was rejected because there was no specific phenomenon to be explored in this context since no specific happening or appearance exists (Kaivo-Oja, 2017). I rejected the use of grounded theory techniques because I was not trying to develop a theory or eliminate any data that could be examined (Collins, 2017). Ethnography was developed to study a phenomenon related to culture; however, this population did not necessarily share the same culture thus this type was also excluded (Schein, 2011). Action research is focused on solving problems while emphasizing those that are immediately relevant but preventing first generation student dropouts was not the purpose of this study (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018). The purpose of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition.

Case Study Design

Using a qualitative case study design will help to support or challenge conceptual frameworks held prior to gathering data (Thompson et al., Vannatta, Scobey, Fergeson, Humanities Research Group, & Crow, 2016). The first goal was to invite 10 former FGCS and five administrators to participate in this qualitative case study. The number of students chosen and the amount of time allotted provided an opportunity to conduct

participant interviews without jeopardizing the depth of inquiry. Case study methodology was appropriate when the researcher seeks to answer why and in this instance; why did FGCS drop out (Yin, 2003). Even novice researchers could study complicated issues and challenges using the case study methodology (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I used bounded individual cases around the topic of FGCS attrition (Crowe et al., 2011). The case study approach, as Creswell (2012) noted, was used for in depth inquiry into an actual situation occurring and the investigation of central phenomenon. The purpose of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition.

Creswell's (2009) work supported my research methodology by providing information applicable to this study. Creswell (2009) defined the qualitative process and was useful for my collection of data, as I used this process as a guide to determine limitations and best practices for data collection and study structure. A case study approach was selected because it involved small groups or individuals within a group and documentation of their experience in a specific setting (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). For this case, all participants were FGCS and administrators from Sparks University. Semi structured interviews were conducted with 10 FGCS who dropped out within the last 5 years. The interview questions were designed with open ended questions to elicit an understanding of their perceptions, which best fits a qualitative case study. Additionally, five administrators who work all work with programs that support FGCS were interviewed with open ended questions to elicit their perceptions about FGCS.

The qualitative method included various options for exploring a phenomenon. One qualitative option was the case study design (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), a qualitative study was appropriate when the researcher chooses to look at a program, event or activity involving individuals instead of a group. The FGCS and Sparks University administrators were individuals within a bounded system (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Therefore, this research design was appropriate. Yin (2011) believed that in case study research, collecting multiple types of data was typical. For this study, interview data was collected along with member checks.

Participants

Setting

The study took place at a private nonprofit university situated in the Midwest and established in 1915. Sparks University had approximately 17,000 students. Arts and sciences, education, communication, business and technology, and fine arts made up the five divisions of Sparks University. This study included a possible setting sample of FGCS dropouts who may have attended any number of locations or may have attended a combination of campuses as well as online. The administrators who participated in the study all work with programs that support the FGCS and were all located at Spark University main campus. The administrators work with traditional campus based students and fully online students. Although Sparks University serviced 60 cities and had students from approximately 150 countries, the sample setting focused on FGCS dropouts from online and the Midwest region. Interviews were conducted at the public library in a reserved conference room near the Midwestern campus and public transportation hub.

Sample Participants

While willingness and availability were important, a convenience sampling was ruled out because it was critical to purposefully select those participants that fit the first generation dropout criteria. Therefore, selecting participants from a purposeful sample of FGCS dropouts and administrators who worked in programs supporting FGCS best fit the study criteria (Patton, 2005). Once participants were selected, they participated in a brief 15 minute screening call to ensure they fit the study's focus (Sargeant, 2012). Additionally, snowball sampling was considered as a possible sampling technique as a part of the prescreening technique, but due to ethical concerns, I abandoned snowball sampling (Baltar, & Brunet, 2012). For this qualitative research study design, I used purposeful sampling (Boeije, 2002) to select former student participants and administrators to be interviewed. The participation criteria were that participants must have been FGCS, and they must have discontinued their education without graduating.

Student Participation Criteria

In order to participate, students had to meet the criteria for the study. The participation criteria were participants must be first generation college students, and they must have discontinued their education without graduating. If potential participants answered yes to these questions during the 15 minute screening call, then they were eligible to participate in this study

The criteria for selecting the student participants were that they were former first generation students, Sparks University students, and have discontinued their education before graduating. There were 10 participants students who were FGCS who were

previously enrolled in Sparks University's student support service FGCS dropouts' experiences and thoroughness of the interview. The sample size was adequate because fewer participants generally allowed for deeper inquiry. Using larger numbers would have prevented this type of in depth individual participant experience exploration. By using fewer participants, a more in depth inquiry was possible. In order to establish a good researcher participant relationship:

- I ensured that each participant had already signed the informed consent document.
- I welcomed the participant and explained their rights.
- I explained all of the procedures to the participant.
- I allowed participants to ask any questions.
- I asked participants to silence electronic devices.
- Certain measures that were taken to protect rights, confidentiality, informed consent and protection from harm.

Administrator Participation Criteria

The criteria for administrator participants was that participants must be members of the undergraduate administrative staff who worked primarily with at risk student groups that included FGCS, and administrator participants must have had experiences with those FGCS whom discontinued their education without graduating. If administrative participants answered *yes* to these questions during the 15 minute screening call, then they were eligible to participate in this study.

University officials granted permission to email the faculty and administrators in the College of Undergraduate Studies for potential participants. Administrators in the College of Undergraduate Studies were emailed and invited to participate in this study using the informed consent form since they work primarily with first generation college students. Interviews with administrators were conducted via the phone for 60 minutes regarding their experiences with FGCS. I used five administrators and 10 FGCS to gain additional perspectives while examining the positive and negative experiences of both participant groups. Using fewer participants permits deeper inquiry per individual. Smaller numbers are justified in this study because the purpose of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. In order to effectively explore this topic, smaller numbers of participants and in depth descriptions provided the necessary balance for this study.

Access to Participants

Accessing participants for this study required three levels of permission. The first level was to obtain permission from the Walden University and the Institutional Review Board (IRB # 10 30 18 0133599). The second level of access was to be granted permission from the Director of the Office of Student Success at the 4 year university. I sought permission to review exit surveys to contact students regarding their first year experience. Once former FGCS verbally agreed to participate they were prescreened to ensure that they fit the research criteria.

The third level of access required gaining participants' consent to participate in this study. I was operating as a student researcher; not a school official. I did not have any prior contact or supervisory role over participants. Administrative staff members that work exclusively with at risk student groups, which included FGCS volunteered to participate after being invited. I also obtained permission from the Walden University and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I went through the second level of permission by contacting the associate vice president to obtain written permission to solicit administrative staff members that work exclusively with at risk student groups which included FGCS to obtain administrative staff participants for the study. I emailed a consent form that explained the purpose of the study to administrative staff that worked exclusively with at risk student groups which included FGCS to solicit volunteers to participate in the study to explore FGCS dropout positive and negative experiences and examine their recommendations to prevent attrition. Those administrative staff working with at risk student groups which includes FGCS that verbally agreed to participate, I prescreened them to ensure that they fit the research criteria of being a member of the administrative staff and that they worked exclusively with at risk student groups, which included FGCS. For administrative staff that worked exclusively with at risk student groups which included FGCS, the third level required receiving participants' signed consent form to participate in this study. Each participant had the process outlined, was provided sample questions and had an opportunity to ask any questions. I assured them of confidentiality by assigning each one a pseudonym. Security measures were explained to

each participant. They were informed that their participation was at will and they could have terminated their participation at any time.

Demographic Data

This project study included interviews with a diverse group of first generation students. The diversity was apparent in age, experience, economic stability, gender and race. There were five female participants and five male participants. Approximately 30% of the population was under age 20. Another 40% of the participant population were between the ages of 20 and 25 years old. The last 30% of the population that participated in the student interviews were over the age of 25. African American first generation college students made up 60% of the participant pool, and 30% of the participant pool were of Hispanic heritage. Only 10% of the participant pool was Caucasian, which is consistent with the overall population of the university (see Table 1). Despite the diversity in age, experience, economics, gender or race this participant pool of first generation college students shared many similar positive experiences as well as many similar negative experiences. Their recommendations for improvement reflected these similar experiences that they expressed during the interviews. It is apparent that the greatest contributing factor to their experience was the fact that they were FGCSs and the resolution of these challenges that they described could impact the greater student population. Improving conditions for FGCS could be beneficial to them regardless of race, gender, economic status, or age.

Table 1

*FGCS Participant Demographic Information (*N*=10)*

Demographic	Total responses (%)
Race	
African American	60%
Caucasian	10%
Hispanic	30%
Gender	
Female	50%
Male	50%
Age	
0 20 years	30%
20 25 years	40%
25 years or older	30%

The demographic makeup of the administrators who participated in the study, was consistent with the population of administrators at Sparks University. Three males and two females completed the interviews. Four of the participants were African American and one participant was Caucasian. All of the administrator participants had been working at Sparks University for more than 5 years.

Researcher Participant Relationship

I used positive nonverbal and verbal communication methods to calm participants as Dempsey, Dowling, Larkin, and Murphy (2016) suggested to ensure the participants that I would not judge them based on any comments that they shared. I took specific steps to establish a researcher participant relationship. In order to ensure their comfort, I selected a time and location of the interview that best suited each participant. Before the

interview I explained the rights, roles, and responsibilities of the participant and researcher. Participant safety was important and required a nonreactive method of data collection (Janetzko, 2016). I used of speech recognition software as an aid in maintaining an accurate account of what was said. Each participant was issued a consent form outlining the process and even given them sample questions. I assured them regarding confidentiality by assigning each one a pseudonym. Security measures were explained to each participant, and they were informed that their participation was at will and may have been terminated at any time.

Protection of Participants

For the purpose of this study, I followed the policies of the Walden University IRB guides for Archival Researchers and Research Ethics for Educational Setting. The IRB guide contained protocols for students conducting a research study on behalf of Sparks University and when I reviewed and analyzed data that was included in the study. The IRB is a board established to protect participants from harm during research studies. All studies conducted by university officials or students were required to submit a thorough application with documentation on the specific proposed study details. To protect participants' identities, numeric pseudonyms were used, progressing from participants 1 10. Participants were assigned a case study identity (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) and no identifying information was shared, to protect confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from each participant and I told participants that they could discontinue participation at any time. The consent letter also gave information regarding the duration of the interview and the terms. Only I knew the identity of

participants, and direct quotations used in the analysis of information were attributed to confidential sources and will be held in a secured digital format as back up material for 5 years from the completion of the study. All information was stored on a password protected computer or in a locked secured file cabinet to maintain the safety and confidentiality of all study participants including FGCS and administrators.

Data Collection

Data Collection Introduction

While FGCS are the first within a family to be admitted and attend a 4 year post-secondary institution of higher learning, they may experience lower retention and higher attrition rates compared to other at risk student groups. In order to explain this discrepancy of how other at risk student groups improved and FGCS did not, it was important to explore the problem from their perspective. At a large, urban university in the Midwestern United States FGCS' graduation rates have declined over the past decade despite programs instituted to improve student retention. University officials had already created support programs to reduce attrition rates among FGCS unsuccessfully. The purpose of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. Using interviews with FGCS would provide their perspective. By inviting administrators to discuss FGCS' participation in support programs or reactions to interventions, it provided additional perspective to this high attrition rate problem. The exit survey archival data

further added important descriptions such as demographic information, participant availability, and confirmation of FGCS status.

Data Collection Description

The semi structured interview questions were carefully designed as *open ended* in order to elicit thorough and thoughtful information. Prior to the beginning of each interview with an administrator, I: (a) verified the prescreening, (b) welcomed each participant, (c) explained that all participation was voluntary, (d) assured participants of their anonymity, (e) provided opportunities for questions, (f) reviewed the procedures, and (g) explained administrators' rights as participants.

The research design and data collection instruments were justified choices because they allowed me to organize the interview process, answer the questions regarding first generation undergraduate student dropouts' positive and negative experiences. Open ended questions allowed students the liberty to offer recommendations for improved student experiences. Using a case study qualitative design tradition was appropriate to answer the research questions posted because it allowed students to express their experiences and perceptions in a bounded system. During the 60 minute interviews, data was collected and recorded using speech recognition software. All participants were assured of confidentiality and told that the interview could be stopped at any time before the interview starts (Creswell, 2012).

Data collection procedures included document analysis of university exit surveys and individual semi structured interviews with ten FGCS and five university administrators. Face to face interviews were the most appropriate form of data collection

because it allowed participants to describe their experiences and offer recommendations for improving conditions for FGCS. This data collection method is justified because of its efficacy in collecting in depth descriptions from the with 10 FGCS and five university administrators. Data were then available to use to compare and contrast and thus a qualitative case study design was chosen.

Individual semi structured interviews with 10 FGCS and five university administrators were conducted. Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes via a face to face meeting. For the interview, I used two different interview protocols and the data collection tools and included the interview guide (Creswell, 2009. The questions for FGCS participants and the administrator participants questions were used to guide the interviews. While the questions in each appendix were differently stated for FGCS and administrator participants, the themes were the same. The one piece of archival data used was an internally unpublished exit survey provided and previously conducted by the university that was used to identify FGCS and demographic information. A researcher journal was maintained throughout the interview process. Another collection instrument was the speech recognition software which transcribed each interview from oral to written form. The researcher journal was researcher produced and used as a reflective organizational tool. The speech recognition software transcriptions were produced during the face to face interviews. The archival exit survey was university created by university officials.

Data Collection Sufficiency

Asking FGCS and administrators to describe their positive and negative experiences provided an additional perspective and a more complete picture of FGCS experiences as well as their recommendations. In order to ultimately improve conditions for these students, examining the in depth responses from interview transcripts with those involved with these students experiences as well as familiar with the current student support offerings was beneficial to a more in depth understanding in this study.

FGCS were able to share their experiences and administrators were able to describe the interactions they had with these students and if they participated in university sponsored student support programs if they encountered challenges. First generation undergraduate student experiences related to their decision to leave school before graduating were shared during the interviews. Five university administrator's individual interviews were conducted with those members of the administrative staff who worked the most with FGCS.

Data Collection Generating, Gathering, and Recording

Participants met with the researcher at the predetermined location, a reserved conference room at the public library near the campus. Each participant was assigned an interview scheduled time. During the interview, a speech recognition software was used. This speech recognition software transcribed the oral interview into a written document. The written documents were stored on a password protected computer in a locked office. Standard interview times were approximately 60 minutes to provide participants with adequate time to fully describe experiences. I was flexible with time extensions to gather

the most complete picture of each participant's experience. Unless some extenuating circumstances arose, I collected the data from participants at one time, requesting to hear individual experiences in successes, failures, fears, and opinions. Ideally, individual interviews were completed in one session so participants could answer interview questions without interruption (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Finishing the interviews in one session also protected the data and diminished the possibility that something could have happened such that participants could not return to complete the 60 minute interview.

Data Collection Tracking Research Log and Reflective Journal

Data from each interview were transcribed using speech recognition software during the interview. The results of multiple transcript reviews were grouped, categorized, and created emerging themes which became the basis for the findings. Manually transcribed data, field notes from the interviews, and coded data from the exit interviews were entered into a research log. I included basic information about the date and time of each interview at the beginning of each entry. I also made entries in a reflective journal, which was useful for documenting thoughts, reactions, and other emotions that arose during the study (Lodico et al., 2010). The purpose for writing reflections into the journal was to allow my process, beliefs, and values to as they relate to the data collection experience (Lodico et al., 2010). According to Lodico et al. (2010), the researcher's awareness about how their personal feeling could influence data collection and analysis appears through the journaling process. All content in the research log and the reflective journal was transferred to my computer, which was password

protected. The hard copy research log and reflective journal was stored in a locked file cabinet at my home and destroyed five years after the approval of the project study.

Gaining Access to Participants

FGCS and administrators who worked primarily with FGCS were invited to participate in a study created to explore possible reasons for the increased FGCS attrition rates despite the efforts of the university support team. The Sparks University officials asked students to complete an exit survey where students gave permission to be contacted so procedures for gaining access to participants was to contact students from that list. Administrative staff members in the College of Undergraduate Studies were invited via email to consider volunteering to participate in this study. Flyers were placed in the online coffee common for faculty and students as well as on the community board at the nearby public transportation hub.

Ethics, Privacy and Protections

All participants identities remained confidential by using pseudonyms provided by the researcher. All materials associated with the study were electronically password protected and physically protected by locking office doors. No identifying information was used (Seidman, 2013). Participants could have terminated their study participation at any time. I remained professional and clearly explained each part of the study that affects participants. I followed all IRB procedures as approved.

University Administrators' Criteria

Data were collected through a qualitative semi structured 60 minute face to face interview with five administrative staff members who worked exclusively with at risk

student groups which includes FGCS. The questions for administrators and FGCS were related by theme but stated differently, in order to provide the perspectives of students and staff about their positive experiences, negative experiences and recommendations. University administrators were prescreened to ensure that they fit the criteria and would have the most experience with FGCS. Administrative volunteers were asked:

1. Are you a member of the administrative staff who work primarily with at risk student groups that include first generation college students?
2. Do you have experiences with some FGCS whom discontinued their education with graduating?

Once the administrators agreed to participate in the study, they were assigned a time and date to meet at the public library in a private conference room for the face to face interviews. Administrative participants were able to share their experiences with FGCS from another perspective in their interviews. Once the interviews were completed, I checked the interview transcriptions for accuracy, performed thematic hand analysis, coded and recoded to identify emerging themes. I provided each administrator with a copy of my initial draft so that they could clarify or add anything that they felt was not properly communicated. Once participants were screened using the screening guides, FGCS and Sparks University administrators were invited to participate in the study exploring FGCS experiences. Administrator volunteers participated in face to face interviews where they shared their experiences and offered recommendations.

First generation College Students' Criteria

Data were collected through a qualitative semi structured 60 minute face to face interview with ten FGCS to explore their positive and negative experiences as well as their recommendations for improvement. Interview questions provided the 10 respondents the opportunity to detail their experiences as FGCS. I used a prescreening process to ensure that participants met the criteria for participation. FGCS volunteers were asked:

1. Are you a first generation student?
2. Did you discontinue your education without graduating?

Each FGCS was then assigned an interview time and date to meet at the public library in a private conference room to participate in the interview. Participants were informed that their interviews would be transcribed. Following the interview, I met again with each participant to give them an opportunity review my initial draft to ensure accuracy. During this second meeting participants were able to review a copy of the transcript to validate accuracy of their responses and to member check the results for accurate representation of their responses. The FGCS participants were asked the questions included in the interview guide as well as additional probing questions for clarity. FGCS participants were informed of their rights, protections, and anonymity. Following the thematic hand analysis and use of coding strategies I shared my initial draft with FGCS to ensure their experiences and recommendations were properly reported.

Role of the Researcher

My prior experience with youth in community educational outreach programs facilitated my ability to work with FGCS or other at risk group members. I have assisted several first generation youths to be admitted to colleges who were introduced to me in personal or community settings. Although I served as an unofficial pseudo consultant to families unfamiliar with college admission procedures, those students chose to attend other universities and were part of the reason I was interested in FGCS. An interest in FGCS' success fueled the curiosity and desire to research ways to help FGCS achieve. Because a chance of bias was always present, I offered the facts, considered alternative possibilities, and tried to present a complete picture. Acknowledging my position may have illuminated areas so I could be more critical in my analysis.

Data Analysis for FGCS and Administrators

FGCS' Data Analysis Procedures

Ten first generation college students were purposefully selected to participate in qualitative face to face interviews regarding their experiences. First generation college students describe their experiences and those experiences were compared to the perceptions and experiences of five members of the administrative team at Sparks University. Each interview was conducted and the audio was automatically transcribed. The data were gathered using speech recognition software. The researcher generated initial findings stats were reviewed by participants and they were allowed the opportunity to make any edits, additions, or eliminations from the initial draft findings. The transcripts from the 10 first generation college students' interviews and the data from the five administrative staff interviews were collected, compared, contrasted and analyze

using thematic hand analysis as well as the code and recode strategies. The exit surveys were archival data that served as a means to invite students to participate in the study as they indicated that they were FGCS.

FGCS' Archival Data Triangulation

The exit survey information was general information collected by Sparks University in unpublished internal studies where students provided feedback on their experiences. The data analysis and results of these exit surveys provided additional insight into the positive and negative experiences of first generation college students. Comparing the findings of these survey results with the findings from this study provided a more complete description of the needs of FGCS.

FGCS' Document Analysis Exit Survey

Exit survey participants were asked to rate the university on a five point scale in three areas: (a) remediation opportunities, (b) support services, and (c) faculty interaction. Five was the highest and 1 was the lowest rating students could assign in each area. Remediation opportunities included testing and academic support, peer tutoring, remedial course offerings, and faculty willingness to help. Support services referred to counseling, academic planning, technical support, and financial aid help. Faculty support was the third area surveyed and included faculty approachability, availability, and clarity during instruction time. I divided the data results into the three main areas: (a) remediation opportunities, (b) support services, and (c) faculty interaction.

Administrators: Data Analysis Generated, Gathered, and Recorded Findings, Problem, and Research Questions

In this section, I will discuss the findings following the interviews with the first generation college students and the administrators that work directly with first generation college students. From the problem three main themes emerged supporting difficulties first generation college students experience: (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. The study purpose, problem, and gap in practice guided the developments of the three research questions.

The problem at Sparks University was that despite established corrective measures, support programs, and increased enrollment, attrition rates were increasing among FGCS. This problem with FGCS attrition rates negatively impacted first generation student dropouts, their families, and the Sparks University faculty and administration. The purpose of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. A complete examination of FGCS' experiences may help to describe circumstances that affected their decision making.

RQ 1: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' positive experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out?

First generation college student interview questions that supported the findings for RQ1 included: (a) describe your positive and negative experiences as you decided to go to college, (b) describe your positive and negative experiences in preparation before you

chose your university, and (c) describe your positive and negative experiences with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Participants described issues obtaining information and felt ill prepared for some situations that they faced during the application, enrollment and admission processes. Additionally, first generation college student participants expressed frustration with family, social, or professional support for their decision to pursue a college education. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following: (a) obtaining information, (b) processing information, and/or (c) acting on information.

FGCS' Responses to Research Question 2

RQ 2: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out?

FGCS were asked to describe the negative experiences that affected their decision to drop out in RG3. Participants were asked to describe negative experiences with the following interview questions. Describe your negative experiences as you decided to go to college? Describe your negative experiences in preparation before you chose your university? Describe your negative experiences with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid? Describe your negative experiences with student support resources? Describe your negative social interactions or relationships you had? Describe any negative experiences with your health and wellbeing? FGCS noted experiencing some challenges that affected their decision to persist. Participant 3 stated that "no one ever helped me" as she referred to the support staff following her admission and enrollment. Participant 7 said, "I felt lost" because "the school was so big". Participant 3 added that

"they gave me too much information at one time" while Participant 10 appreciated the information but "wished it was given to them in writing" as well. "I didn't understand" and "I tried to get help" but "I didn't know who to ask". Once "I asked for help and was told to go online and make an appointment I just got frustrated" and "wanted to quit" shared participant 5. This frustration gave way to a lack of motivation and a confessed "lack of effort" as participant 1 noted. Participant 8 described how feelings of isolation and frustration made them "procrastinate or not even turn anything in" which led to "low grades". Using the results of the data collected from these questions FGCS described experiencing challenges related to 3 main areas; information, procrastination, and motivation that significantly affected their success and persistence.

FGCS' Responses to Research Question 3

RQ 3: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' recommendations for improvements based on their experiences?

Lastly, RQ 3 explored first generation college students' recommendations for improvements based on their experiences. The interview question that provided data to answer RQ3 included: If you were to give advice to someone who was planning to go to college using your experiences what would you say? First generation college students indicated that they struggled to maintain their motivation both intrinsic and extrinsic. Participant 4 said "in college you are alone no one is cheering you on". Participant 7 stated that they "missed the competition within high school classrooms" since "I am a very competitive person I never like to lose". This indicated that competition may be a motivating factor for some FGCS.

First generation college students perceived a lack of extrinsic motivation due to the changing nature of their relationships and responsibilities as college students. Participant 2 stated that “I miss my friends and family” because “they used to encourage me”. “I even miss my teachers nagging me” at least “they reminded me to get started on projects early” expressed Participant 9. Participant 6 admitted that “my coaches used tough love to motivate me” the coaches kept repeating “no pass no play”. “All of the teachers knew I was an athlete” shared Participant 3 because “my coaches visited the teachers all the time to check up on my grades and behavior”. Additionally, FGCS also struggled to self-advocate and create intrinsic rewards for themselves that would promote continued dedication to academic pursuits and nurture positive feelings that would maintain the original feelings that motivated them to pursue a college education. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with maintaining extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation.

Administrators’ Responses Research Question 1

RQ 1: What are the first generation college students and university administrators’ positive experiences affecting FGCS’ decision to drop out?

Administrators’ responses were helpful for RQ1 as they: (a) described their positive and negative experiences with FGCS as they decided to go to college, (b) described their positive and negative experiences in preparation as FGCS enrolled into the university, and (c) described their positive and negative experiences with how FGCS completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and participated in the orientation process. Administrators felt confident in the existence of vital information.

They admitted that FGCS may have found that the information was disseminated in inconsistent formats. Administrators also agreed that FGCS may have received some conflicting information after orientation depending on which academic counselor they received since all academic counselors did not have the same training. There was a consensus among administrators that standardizing the policies and procedures could benefit FGCS and improve staff efficacy with students.

Administrators' Responses Research Question 1

Administrators as a whole, found FGCS to be excited about starting college. Administrator Participant 1 said that FGCS "quickly purchased and wore school paraphernalia" exhibiting their excitement. Administrator participant 2 recalled one FGCS who "school purchased a bumper sticker" even though the family did not own a car. Administrator Participant 3 stated that 1 FGCS showed them pictures of "just how excited their family was" when the family through them a "going to college party". Administrator Participant 4 said that some FGCS called repeatedly just to hear that "all of their information was received". Administrator participant 5 agreed by sharing that one particular FGCS asked "if they could repeat that they had been admitted because they wanted to record it". Administrator participants also indicated that FGCS reported feeling positive about their decision to enroll. Administrator participant 3 said that one student stated, "I haven't always made the best decisions but this one [referring to college enrollment] was definitely the right one". Some administrators shared that FGCS appeared to project a positive outlook about their future success. Administrator Participant 5 noted that 1 FGCS student said, "now I can be anything I want". Most

administrators noted that FGCS reported feeling positive about being admission to college despite not knowing exactly what to expect. Administrator Participant 4 remembered one FGCS who said, “I don’t know if the work will be too hard for me but I’m gonna do my best”. Administrators commented that FGCS’ families seemed eager to help and expressed positive feelings of pride associated with their FGCS family member’s acceptance, admission, and enrollment to college. Administrator Participant 1 said that several FGCS came to orientations or meetings “with their entire immediate family”.

Administrators’ Responses Research Question 2

RQ 2: What are the first generation college students and university administrators’ negative experiences affecting FGCS’ decision to drop out?

In RQ 2 I explored first generation college students’ negative experiences affecting their decision to drop out. Resulting from data analysis, I found 2 specific categories under the emergent theme of issues with procrastination. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included: (a) issues scheduling their time to do their work, and (b) organizing their work. The questions that provided the data for RQ2 included: Describe your positive and negative experiences with student support resources? Describe your positive and negative social interactions or relationships you had? Describe any positive or negative experiences with your health and wellbeing? Describe any positive or negative experiences relationships with the faculty members, advisors, students and family and their effect on your education? FGCS had positive and negative interactions with students, staff, and

community members that influenced their behavior and ultimately performance in college. The interactions and the resulting relationships created competition for their time, talent, and resources that significantly affected their persistence.

Administrator Responses Research Question 2

Administrators' responses were helpful for RQ2 as they provided feedback from their perspectives regarding experiences, they had with FGCS and their interactions with staff and services. Describe your positive and negative experiences with student support resources that you became aware as an administrator with FGCS? Describe your positive and negative social interactions or relationships that you became aware as an administrator with FGCS? Describe any positive or negative experiences that you became aware as an administrator with FGCS' health and wellbeing? Describe any positive or negative experiences relationships with the faculty members, advisors, students and family and their effect on your education that you became aware as an administrator with FGCS? Administrators reported that FGCS appeared to be intimidated by the process and frustrated when they were unsure of who to contact. Administrator Participant 2 recalled an instance when a FGCS who asked "me to call their instructor for them" because the student did not want to bother the instructor. Administrator Participant 1 was shocked by "how frustrated FGCS became when they called the wrong department" and then they just gave up.

FGCS also told administrators about perceived or real difficulties they experienced as they interacted with faculty. Administrator Participant 3 shared that a FGCS confessed that a FGCS said "I can just tell that the instructor doesn't want to help

me" despite the fact that the FGCS had admittedly "never spoken to the instructor personally". The depth of rapport felt by FGCS varied but challenges were widely reported to administrators especially when FGCS became at risk of failing. Administrator Participant 5 reported a FGCS stated that "these teachers don't like me" and "they never answer my questions". Administrator Participant 5 asked the student whether visiting office hours would help with the situation, and the student emphatically said "no". Financial difficulties due to difficulties with balancing family and academic responsibilities were described by administrators as they worked with students during academic or health challenges. Administrator Participant 4 reported that a FGCS shared "it's hard to pick my work over my family". While Administrator Participant 2 recalled another student saying, "how can I study for school if I have so much to do for my family" because "they need my help with the bills". Overall, the administrators felt that many of the FGCS put family responsibilities above their education.

Administrator Responses Research Question 3

RQ 3: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' recommendations for improvements based on their experiences?

Administrators' responses were helpful to answer RQ3 as they used their experiences with FGCS to make recommendations for program improvement. Administrative Participant 3 stated that "the university is committed to continuous improvement". "We take student recommendations very seriously" added administrative Participant 5. Administrative Participant 1 shared that "we have tried based on historical analysis to anticipate student needs and create programs to support them". University

officials were aware of many programs that could support FGCS during many challenges but found many areas where these programs were not used. Administrative Participant 3 expressed “disappointment in the underutilized program offerings” because “student success could be improved just by using the programs that we already offer”. FGCS reported to administrators that they did not remember where to go for help. Administrative Participant 1 agreed with FGCS that “a better resource could be created to show students where to go for help.” FGCS also shared with administrators that they were discouraged by the time they sought help and felt that it was too late to pass the class. Administrative Participant 2 was also frustrated that “earlier intervention for at risk students could prevent attrition” but “the current structure depends on students to ask for help”. Some FGCS that were at risk of failing a course reported to administrators that they could not access the information or were fearful to ask questions with certain faculty members based upon how far behind they were. Administrative Participant 2 summarized that “faculty and student rapport creating opportunities are key components” to “decrease fear and increase effective communication”. Administrators saw varying degrees of motivation and reported that theses variations appeared to be tied to their weekly performance.

RQ 3: What are the first generation college students and university administrators' recommendations for improvements based on their experiences?

Lastly, in order to improve first generation college student experiences RQ 3 provided FGCS the opportunity to make recommendations. The interview question that provided data to answer RQ3 included: If you were to give advice to someone who was

planning to go to college using your experiences what would you say? First generation college students indicated that they struggled to maintain their motivation both intrinsic and extrinsic. Participant 4 said “in college you are alone no one is cheering you on”. Participant 7 stated that they “missed the competition within high school classrooms” since “I am a very competitive person I never like to lose”. This indicated that competition may be a motivating factor for some FGCS.

First generation college students perceived a lack of extrinsic motivation due to the changing nature of their relationships and responsibilities as college students. Participant 2 stated that “I miss my friends and family” because “they used to encourage me”. “I even miss my teachers nagging me” at least “they reminded me to get started on projects early” expressed Participant 9. Participant 6 admitted that “my coaches used tough love to motivate me” the coaches kept repeating “no pass no play”. “All of the teachers knew I was an athlete” shared participant 3 because “my coaches visited the teachers all the time to check up on my grades and behavior”. Additionally, FGCS also struggled to self-advocate and create intrinsic rewards for themselves that would promote continued dedication to academic pursuits and nurture positive feelings that would maintain the original feelings that motivated them to pursue a college education. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with maintaining extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation.

Combined Themes and Findings as Described by Administrators and FGCS

Theme 1 Information Issues as Described by Administrators and FGCS

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following: (a) obtaining information, (b) processing information, and/or (c) acting on information. Thus, FGCS perceived that a communication barrier existed with college officials. Participants indicated that there was a lot of information that they simply did not know. They used phrases like I didn't know, or no one told me, or I didn't understand. When they said that they didn't know it often referred to a lack of experience with the most commonly understood information. They also experienced issues with a lack of understanding from which sources information should proceed. Even one student said actually received information they often had trouble understanding. The issues first generation college students experienced significantly influenced their decisions to discontinue their education.

First generation college students had difficulty obtaining information. Although all students were required to attend orientation programs where student support programs were presented, they often forgot that this information was shared. Participants 1, 2, 5, and 8 all expressed that the orientation provided so much information at once that it was difficult to remember when it was needed later. Participant 1 expressed that the information given in the orientation said, “I felt overwhelmed” while Participant 2 added that “I knew I would not be able to remember everything.” Participant 5 said that once the academic counselor suggested it, “I remembered that they told us about available tutoring in the orientation.” “It would have helped me if I could have remembered”

sooner added Participant 8 regarding support programs. If they remembered that there were programs they forgot how and when they could contact individuals that were responsible for providing the support that they needed. The difficulties that the participants described affected the way in which they communicated with their instructors. First generation college students reported that they were reluctant to contact instructors to get clarification on information that they received. Participant 2 indicated that he felt he would "look stupid if he asked a question to his instructor" that he felt that other students already understood. Participant 7 indicated similarly that they did not want to appear "less intelligent to other students by asking questions". Participants 4 described feeling intimidated and having a perception that "everyone else understood the instructions" the first time and "knew what to do". Additionally, participants wanted to have a sense of belonging to the group and felt that asking too many questions would draw negative attention to them.

First generation college students had difficulty processing information**.** Some participants gave examples of terminology or acronyms that they were not familiar with. Participants 9 and 10 provided specific examples about vernacular that was specific to Sparks University or to the education system that word unfamiliar to them. Participant 10 said that they "didn't know the what the FASFA stood for or how it could help them". Participant 9 "didn't know what a LASA assignment was or why it was important". Participant 2 stated that painstaking time and effort were used to ensure that any anticipated needs that students had would be addressed by one of the resources provided. All administrative participants agreed that the information provided in the orientation was

substantial and may be difficult to retain. Participants 5 insisted that “contact information is readily available to all students” but also admitted that regardless that “many first generation college students we're not taking advantage of the programs offered.”

First generation college students had difficulty acting on information. Participant 6 indicated that they did not seek help from the math lab “until the last week of class”. The help that they received from the math lab was very beneficial and could have really helped them had they sought out that support and used the information about the mass lab sooner. This difficulty extended and affected their relationships with their instructors and other students. Several respondents indicated that they had not considered that other students could be a resource to help them remember, obtain, or act upon information that was needed. The majority of the administrators also expressed their concerns with how a first generation college student processed information. All administrators referred to the orientation program as “an opportunity” to provide information and acclimated all students especially first generation college students to the college environment. Most participants indicated that the orientation program provided all students with the information about all of the student support programs available.

Theme 2 Procrastination Issues as Described by Administrators and FGCS

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included: (a) scheduling time to do their work, and (b) organizing their work. All administrative participants agreed that first generation college students like all students struggle with one form or another of procrastination. Administrator Participant 2 reported having meeting with FGCS where they one said, “I don’t have time

to study; I have to work". Administrators asked students to identify some *down time* where they could possibly study. Once prompted, Administrator Participant 3 said that "students were able to see how much available time they had where they could have had if they had just started earlier". Administrator Participant 1 asked a FGCS why they lost late points on so many assignments, and the FGCS replied "I didn't know the work was going to take so long to do". All students shared how procrastination affected their academic performance and overall perceptions related to their persistence. Administrator Participant 5 shared how a FGCS, after attending a scheduling seminar, explained that "I never had to do that before". Administrator Participant 4 agreed because another FGCS said, "my grades would have been better if I had not waited until the last minute". Examples of these first generation college student experiences supported this as a theme. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included: (a) scheduling time to do their work, and (b) organizing their work. The supporting subthemes are discussed below.

Subtheme 2a: Issues with scheduling as described by administrators and FGCS. First generation college students procrastinated and experienced challenges related to how to schedule their time to do their work. Participant 1 stated, "when I was in high school the school made my schedule" and when I played sports "the coaches gave us study hall to do our homework first". The majority of respondents said that they felt that they always had time and they could simply do the assignment later. Participant 10 indicated that "I should have copied my high school schedule" being allowed to "choose my classes was cool" but "no one told me when or how to make time to do the work".

This type of scheduling all activities in assignments to be done later created extreme amount of stress and pressure. Participant 2, 3, and 4 used similar language that indicated that they often ran out of time and either had to submit substandard work, incomplete work or incorrect work due to the lack of time to complete the assignment. Most participants also admitted to using many different types of excuses to validate the need to procrastinate on working on assignment, project, or studying for exams. Several participants describe work and other responsibilities outside of academics intruding upon their schedule and causing a pseudo involuntary procrastination. All participants indicated that they could have made improvements in their performance and participation academically if they had not procrastinated.

Subtheme 2b: Issues with organizing as described by administrators and FGCS. First generation college students experienced issues with procrastination related how to organize their work. Participant 4 stated that "students may procrastinate" unknowingly "because they lack" proper organizational skills. Participant 4 continued by saying that one of the first classes offered to all students focuses on helping students improve time management and scheduling help. Despite this orientation Participant ten said, "I heard what they said but I still didn't know what to do" indicating that they needed additional practice. Participants 2 and 6 disagreed that the university provided sufficient remediation for students who struggled in areas of time management organization. All participants indicated that Sparks University officials are always looking for ways to improve the type of preparation and are aware that students struggle in this area. Participant 7 indicated that he "struggled to know exactly what to do" in

reference to his work. Participants 1 and 8 shared concerns about "being confused about what they needed to do first" and "being stressed because I wasn't sure how to start my work". "I spent time for one class" but then "fell behind on the other" shared Participant 5. Therefore, participants struggled to balance competing academic priorities.

Theme 3 Motivation Issues as Described by Administrators and FGCS

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with maintaining: (a) extrinsic motivation and (b) intrinsic motivation. First generation college students blamed others for their lack of motivation sighting decreased self-confidence because of something that someone else could have done to make things easier for them. Participant 2 blamed "the instructors for not explaining assignments well". Participant 7 added that "instructors take forever to answer questions then give us late points." All participants described either real or imagined causes for their lack of motivation in some areas. Getting low grades "killed my self-confidence and made me not even want to try," shared Participant 5. Most participants indicated that their relationship with their instructors and administrative staff directly impacted their motivation. "When I feel like no one cares I don't even want to try" stated Participant 1. Participants 6, 9, and 10 said that the instructors and other "traditional students seem to have a connection" and that those students were treated and graded more favorably than they were. Participant 2 asked "why they should work harder if they were not informed or if they were not going to receive the same support as other students." FGCS that participated in the study also agreed that they shared themselves with friends and family members that did not attend school. Participant 8 stated that "my friends that didn't go to college just didn't

understand and couldn't help me." While Participant 7 expressed that "even though their families were proud of them they weren't much help". Also six out of 10 participants made statements that included the phrasing "at least I". When they said "at least I" they were referring to the fact that they had gone farther than their peers, family, or counterparts and took some sort of consolation or pride in that fact.

Extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation maintenance presented significant issues for FGCS and the administrators that try to support their success. Administrative Participant 5 remarked "if we could only bottle up the initial motivation for later use, I believe we could significantly improve FGCS' success". The majority of administrative participants shared that first generation college students on the whole are extremely motivated upon admission and enrollment. "Once the novelty wears off", commented Administrative Participant 3, "the work ethic must take over" and that "requires motivation." Throughout that process however, at varying levels first generation college students may begin to lose their motivation due to issues and challenges they face. "Not all challenges decrease motivation," explained Administrative Participant 3, "when FGCS successfully meet challenges motivation increases." All participants shared an example regarding how financial difficulties negatively impact the motivation students have. Administrative Participant 1 said that it is "difficult for first generation college students to concentrate and remain motivated in class if they are fearful about how they will be able to pay for that course." Administrative Participant 10 stated "money or lack thereof is a strong motivator" and will either "help or hurt a student's commitment." And oftentimes issues with financial aid, grants, and scholarship information may not be

completely resolved until several weeks into a class. Administrative Participant 2 agreed that “financial aid issues contribute significantly to persistence or attrition.” “When FGCS begin to work to try to compensate for financial deficiencies their academic performance suffers greatly,” noted Administrative Participant 4. This uncertainty created an extreme amount of stress and pressure for first generation college students, shared Participant 3 and 5. Overall, first generation college students experienced challenges related to (a) information, (b) procrastination, and (c) motivation issues, which affected their performance and persistence significantly. Administrators who work primarily with FGCS also reported observing the effects that FGCS’ challenges with (a) information, (b) procrastination, and (c) motivation had on student success.

FGCS Salient Data

In this study on the experiences of first generation college students there were no discrepant cases. The salient data that were collected included many similar codes that were able to be categorized under the three major themes that emerged in the data. First generation college students experienced issues related to information, procrastination, and motivation as evidenced in their description of their positive experiences, common negative experiences, and recommendations for future first generation college student success. The positive experiences that were described by first generation college student included ample information provided during the orientation session. Negative experiences related to information included instances that so much great information was provided during the orientation but was not reinforced or was forgotten by the time that information became necessary.

Despite all participants agreed that the university provided abundant resources and information, they also agreed and recommended that the university as well as incoming students should had this information reviewed, repeated, available in other formats other than verbal how to improve student use of university support programs. First generation college student shared similar issues with procrastination describe this procrastination in terms of scheduling, planning, and time management issues. It was procrastination or a pseudo positive experience because first generation college students always we're optimistic about the amount of work to fix the conflict in a short amount of time. Conversely procrastination contributed to an increase in stress and a decrease in productivity when trying to submit assignments.

First generation college students recommended that incoming students have more practice with planning, scheduling, and reminders to avoid the distress caused by procrastination. First generation college student more positively affected by the motivation because they tended to be excited about the prospect of attending college. This excitement provided encouragement and motivation for students and this fueled their interest in academic performance.

Evidence of Quality and Discrepant Cases

The initial draft findings created by the researcher were shared with all participants at which time they had the opportunity to make any corrections. This contributed to the accuracy and validated the findings. In addition, the code recode strategy and thematic hand analysis provided the second check to ensure that similar codes and themes were extracted from raw data. The researcher maintained an electronic

journal to record thoughts, ideas, and observations. The information shared from both administrators and first generation college students was triangulated to provide additional support and strengthen findings.

As I used thematic hand analysis to capture emerging themes similarities and differences were noted. As themes developed in the data participants noted some conclusions. Any anomalies or non-shared characteristics offered an important difference that strengthened the conclusions by its contrast. According to LeCompte, and Preissle, (2000) discrepant case sampling strengthened a theory as it emerged by challenging the data since it was different. I employed discrepant case sampling methodology to confirm or disconfirm themes after the data collection had been analyzed (Hackett, 2015).

Member Checking

After completing the interview portion and the audio transcripts had been transcribed, participants had an opportunity to review the transcripts of my initial findings. Each participant received an email with the transcribed interview attached and was asked to review the transcripts along with my initial findings for accuracy (Merriam, 2015). Participants clarified any statements that they felt were contrary to the messages they conveyed. During the review participants were able to voice any concerns or ask any questions that they may had. Since their participation was voluntary, they may have opted out of this review. Comments were analyzed and shared confidentially. The member checking process involved the review of preliminary analysis and interpretations of the data by some of the participants (Merriam, 2015).

Triangulation was used to ensure validity, credibility, and accuracy. First generation college students and members of student support, faculty, and staff had an opportunity that did not to exceed sixty minutes to read the transcripts of the recorded interviews to ensure accuracy and add strength to the study (as indicated by Creswell, 2012). Participants had the option to schedule a 60 minute session to discuss any concerns about the transcript of researcher's initial draft findings. At that time participants clarified any responses by offering further explanation. During the 7 days following interview completion, colleagues could have read the paper and identified any areas where my personal bias was affecting actual data analysis. I was aware of any biases and declared them so that as my initial findings were peer reviewed we could discuss any appearances of bias in the writing.

Document Analysis Triangulation

Some administrators, faculty members, and student support staff members participated in the original committee that created the areas to be surveyed. Only students participated in the exit survey. The internal unpublished survey was designed to allow students to rate their experiences with the university from the student perspective. Administrators planned to use the results to improve student success, retention rates, and overall satisfaction. The survey was created as a part of the continuous improvement initiative and students provided a firsthand perspective and objective evaluation of the university staff, services, and support. The majority of students surveyed, reported positive experiences in remediation opportunities because 80% students gave the university at least a 4 or higher. The first level of interaction that students experience with

application, admission, enrollment, and financial counseling had even higher marks with 90% of students reporting positive experiences in the support services area. The area that received the lowest response of positive experiences was in the area of faculty interaction where 75% of respondents reported having issues with faculty interaction by giving a three or lower. The analysis of these findings could indicate that students struggle in the area of faculty interaction and experienced some difficulties with approachability, availability, and clarity during instruction time. The survey did not include an area for comments so that students could be more specific regarding the issues they encountered. This lack of specificity further supported the need for the semi structured interviews with FGCS. The interviews included questions designed to provide FGCS an opportunity to share their positive and negative experiences as well as provide recommendations for improvements.

Summary of Findings

The problem at Sparks University is that despite established corrective measures, support programs, and increased enrollment, attrition rates are increasing among FGCS. Manzoni, and Streib, (2019) assert that despite the challenges faced by FGCS if they are able to persist their success can equalize great disparities that would have otherwise greatly affected these FGCS. This problem with FGCS attrition rates negatively impacts first generation student dropouts, their families, and the Sparks University faculty and administration. Administrators and FGCS shared positive and negative experiences as well as recommendations for improvement. By including the administrators' perspectives along with the FGCS' experiences a more complete picture of FGCS challenges emerged.

(Çetin, & Halisdemir, 2019) This study yielded data and findings which were consistent with both FGCS and administrators. Current literature indicates that FGCS need information in order to improve their success rates according to House, Neal, and Kolb (2020). In this study FGCS used phrases like I didn't know, or no one told me, or I didn't understand. When they said that they didn't know it often referred to a lack of experience with the most commonly understood information. These terms supported issues with information as a major theme. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following: (a) obtaining information, (b) processing information, and/or (c) acting on information.

Gillen O'Neel, (2019) noted the affect FGCS procrastination has on student performance. The results of this study also indicated that procrastination has a negative effect on FGCS' work habits. The difficulties associated with providing students with training to help them avoid procrastination pitfalls and work effectively are numerous and assisted adjustment. (Gibbons et al., 2019) The second major theme of issues with procrastination was developed from participants' use of terms like; I thought I had more time, later, turned in late, didn't know it would take so long, didn't have time, and I had to work. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included: (a) scheduling time to do their work, and (b) organizing their work. Shay (2020) suggested that organization is a prerequisite to effective academic performance. Malott, Havlik, Gosai, Diaz Davila, and Steen, (2019) added that creating schedules is imperative but ineffective without practice in ensuring FGCS

college readiness. In the absence of this skills FGCS may struggle and be challenged to be successful.

Covarrubias et al., (2019) noted that FGCS unlike their traditional counterparts may never be fully independent due to the strong family ties and observed familial obligations. Therefore, learning to balance personal, academic, family, and professional responsibilities is an even more critical component to their success. Issues achieving that success may negatively affect FGCS' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Gaudier Diaz, Sinisterra, and Muscatell, (2019) suggest that FGCS will have increased levels of anxiety or lack a sense of belonging which in turn may hinder efforts to maintain motivation. All of these issues also resulted in categories and themes during this study on first generation college student perceptions and experiences. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with maintaining extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. This third major theme was established because FGCS participants used phrases like, I didn't feel like it, I was down, I lost my confidence, no one cared, lost my motivation, lost interest, and didn't know how. According to Prat et al., (2019) these issues define the challenges that FGCS face and create increases in attrition rates among this student population. Noyens, Donche, Coertjens, Van Daal, and Van Petegem, (2019) identified a link between FGCS' academic performance, motivation, and their social integration suggesting that social integration is an important factor for FGCS success.

A complete examination of FGCS' experiences may help to describe circumstances that affected their decision making. Additionally, these administrators' perceptions provide a more complete picture of the FGCS' experiences because they

describe FGCS' use of student support programs and efficacy of intervention programs when students are at risk of failure. This project study was guided by three research questions that explored FGCS and university administrators' positive experiences and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out. Also, FGCS and university administrators' recommendations for improvements based on students' experiences were investigated. The findings on this study about exploring FGCS' experiences indicated that FGCS experienced challenges related to: (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. Each of these issues was examined using the 3 research questions through the qualitative research including interviews with first generation college students and the administrators who work primarily with them.

According to Mahon (2019), Knowles's principals of andragogy when applied to adult learning, describe how successful adult learners need to be involved in planning and evaluation of instruction, experience provides the basis for learning activities, subjects have relevance and impact, and learning is problem centered, guided the qualitative case study. These principals of andragogy not only guided the study but support the project deliverable being a 3 day professional development seminar. Professional development sessions allow local professionals to use their expertise, experience, and collaborative efforts to create strategies for FGCS success. Therefore, according to Choi and Kang (2019) a professional development would be an effective method of delivering strategies administrators, instructors, and support staff can implement to reduce attrition rates and improve conditions for FGCS. These newly implemented strategies resulting from a professional development may result in greater levels of self-regulation by FGCS as

defined by Antonelli, Jones, Burridge, and Hawkins, (2020). Professional Development would allow university officials, instructors, and administrators the opportunity to collaborate on best practices after learning about the needs of FGCS and the findings of this study.

Project Deliverable

First generation college students struggled with information, procrastination, and motivation. The issues that first generation college students had with Information, Procrastination, and Motivation or IPM (a) information, (b) procrastination and (c) motivation could be shared in a 3 day professional development where faculty and staff could be made aware of issues with information motivation and procrastination that affect first generation college students' persistence, performance and participation. The 3 day professional development could focus on how issues with information procrastination and motivation negatively impact first generation college students and what measures faculty and staff can employ to support first generation College Student Success. Study results and findings could provide a clearer picture of first generation college student needs and what faculty and staff can do to help strengthen first generation college students' skills in the area of information, procrastination, and motivation. Practical solutions can be presented, discussed and practiced creating plan for implementation to improve student performance academically and otherwise. Improving student conditions is an important topic since more than a quarter of all new students are first generation college students. First generation college students need maybe unique but they may also have shared

characteristics with other students that may provide insight on how to improve the educational experience for all students.

Conclusion

First generation college students may have presented with an alternative view of the student support program in higher education. By monitoring individual experiences in greater detail, any needs that were previously unrecognized could be examined to yield clues needed to help FGCS succeed at rates that were similar to other members of at risks groups; however, educators were uncertain as to the factors that hinder success. Section 2 described the methodology for the proposed project study, discussion of study participants, sample size, and sampling method; measures to ensure adherence to ethical standards; the data collection procedures and instruments; data analysis process; and the role of the researcher. The qualitative method and case study design were determined to be the most appropriate options for achieving the purpose of the study and answering the research question to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. After receiving approval from Walden University's IRB to conduct the study, I recruited ten first generation undergraduate students to participate in an individual, semi structured interview with open ended questions.

The results of this qualitative case study were used to develop a 3 day professional development program designed to support FGCS' success for instructors, staff, and stakeholders. Each group could be educated regarding FGCS' challenges and

strengths. Combining efforts, Sparks University community could provide a description of how student support programs should be formatted to increase FGCS' retention rates. In Section 3, I discuss the project that was developed based on the data collected and findings from the analyzed data. I will provide a scholarly review of the literature supporting the need for professional development training. Finally, in Section 4 will provide my reflections about the strengths and limitations of the project with recommendations for alternative approaches considering lessons learned or needs for further research.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The problem at Sparks University was that despite established corrective measures, support programs, and increased enrollment, attrition rates were increasing among FGCS. The purpose and intent of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. This qualitative study featured semi structured one on one interviews with first generation college students generated several categories and themes in the data about the positive and negative experiences. The findings from this study indicated that first generation college students experienced difficulties related to: (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. In this section I outline the professional development project that I designed to share the results of this study about first generation college student experiences and recommendations for improvement in an effort to offer suggestions to improve FGCS' experiences with (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. I provide a project description, rationale, limitations, and possible improvements. I complete a review of literature which further justify the themes. The implications for the positive social change that may occur if findings provide universities with information that could be utilized to improve FGCS' experiences leading to higher graduation rates will conclude this section.

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this 3 day professional development seminar is to define first generation college student experiences and discuss strategies to improve support for FGCS so they can better manage information, procrastination, and motivation to the faculty and staff who support them. The participants will be instructors, administrators, and student support team members in admissions, enrollment, and academic support. By the end of the collaborative professional development session, participants should be able to create a list of at least three actionable items, establish a timetable for implementation, schedule three follow up local sessions to evaluate progress, and plan to make modifications to action item goals as necessary. Ultimately, after participating in the professional development (PD), participants should be able to create a list of best practices to use with FGCS to support them through their program of study. The goals for the participants in the PD is to develop a clear understanding of the needs of FGCS at Sparks University to be successful from acceptance through graduation. During the 3 day PD, participants will learn strategies to work specifically with the FGCS population and opportunities to improve retention. At the conclusion of the PD, participants will be able to do the following:

- The participants will be able to define the seven FGCS' characteristics with 100% accuracy,
- The participants in the professional development sessions will discuss FGCS' positive and negative academic experiences at Sparks University and identify five

recommendations for improving retention. Based on those recommendations, FGCS retention will increase by 5% over the next 3 years.

- The participants in the professional development sessions will collaborate to identify three new strategies and three new approaches to improve student support services to increase academic performance for FGCS. Based on these strategies and approaches, FGCS' overall GPA will increase 0.5 on a 4.0 scale over the next 5 years.
- The participants in the professional development will create an action items list to share with Spark University leaders to improve retention of FGCS. The action items list will include academic support, faculty and staff needs, support services, and financial supports for the goal of improving retention of FGCS. The action items list will be submitted to Sparks University leadership for development over the next 3 years. A FGCS action team will be created with administrators and faculty across the campus to meet monthly to identify completion of the action items. Specific deadlines for each action item will be listed along with an evaluation plan to determine success of each item.

I will provide professional development participants with information to improve FGCS performance and persistence. First generation college student faculty and staff will be introduced to who FGCS are by examining their unique characteristics. Faculty will review FGCS's challenges that they face related to (a) information, (b) procrastination, and (c) motivation. Finally, participants will discuss strategies and practical solutions can be presented, discussed, and practiced creating plan for implementation to improve

student performance academically, socially, and professionally. The participants will be administrators, trainers, instructors, and student support staff which are the members of the faculty. The goal of this project will allow administrators to develop skills to support FGCS from admission through graduation. The goal from the PD will be greater understanding about issues FGCS deal with at Sparks University. Long term, the administrators will develop skills to improve interactions with FGCS to focus on retention and increased graduation rates. Opportunities for student success will be discussed and a plan for implementation will be developed for university leadership.

This project will allow a solution to be developed for the problem of academic challenges delaying graduation for African Americans because it provides an opportunity for the student support services director and staff to engage with the presenters and learn from the training resources provided. Any effective professional development training should be focused on long term results and accompany the university's vision (Davis, 2015). The professional development training is an advancement toward improving support and graduation completion times for African American students and increasing the student support services department staff rapport with students.

First generation College Students' Day 1 of Professional Development: Information Issues

Day one of FGCS professional development will begin with an activity so that all participants can become familiar with each other and their roles in the organization. I will present an overview of the days scheduled events. I will explain the goals for Day 1 including understanding the challenges FGCS face related to information. First

generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following: (a) FGCS had difficulty obtaining information, (b) FGCS had difficulty processing information, or (c) FGCS had difficulty acting on information. We will discuss first generation college student characteristics and allow participants to anticipate which needs these shared characteristics might create. I will present the overview by defining what it means to be a first generation college student. I will complete the presentation about information challenges. Participants will collaborate in groups to process and review the information presented. We will have a question and answer session and recap the events of the day. I will end Day 1 by thanking the participants and giving them a preview of Day 2.

First generation College Student Professional Development Day 2: Procrastination Issues

Day 2 of the FGCS professional development will begin with an icebreaker activity to ask participants to recall information from the day before and remind the group of the members and their roles. After recapping the issues that FGCS face related to information, we will begin to discuss the issues related to procrastination. FGCS experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included: (a) issues scheduling their time to do their work, and (b) issues related to organizing their work**.** I will present the information about how FGCS are affected by their procrastination behaviors. In collaborative groups, I will discuss strategies for improving FGCS conditions which may affect participation, performance, and persistence. I will

summarize new information and strategies from Day 1 and Day 2. I will conclude the session with a preview of Day 3 following time for questions.

First generation College Student Professional Development Day 3: Motivation Issues

The final day will begin with another icebreaker activity and a recap of Day 1 and Day 2. We will revisit the goals of the professional development session which are to understand the experiences of first generation college students and strategies that will improve those experiences based upon their recommendations. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with motivation. We will discuss extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation so we can identify sources of motivation and resources for students. I will present the behaviors instructors may observe and some counter indications that they can employ. Participants will break into groups to discuss strategies and resources both existing and nonexistent programs that could provide the support FGCS need to improve their success rates. We will end the professional development after question and answers with a confidential evaluation to offer suggestions to improve the presentation and conditions for all students.

Rationale for Choosing a Professional Development Workshop

Sparks University recruited, admitted, and enrolled students from at risk groups and created support programs by anticipating their needs. Despite all of these measures, graduation rates did not improve for these at risk groups specifically first generation college students. The problem at Sparks University is that despite established corrective measures, support programs, and increased enrollment, attrition rates are increasing

among FGCS. This problem with FGCS attrition rates negatively impacts first generation student dropouts, their families, and the Sparks University faculty and administration. This in depth qualitative study interviewed first generation college students to discover their positive and negative experiences that may contribute to their success. I considered several options to share my findings. After careful consideration, I decided to use a 3 day professional development seminar and created a session designed to initiate a dialogue amongst faculty and university officials and to understand FGCS experiences. During the 3 day professional development, participants will be able to break into small groups and collaborate in order to implement new strategies, improve existing support, and or modify orientation or continued support.

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The problem at Sparks University is that despite established corrective measures, support programs, and increased enrollment, attrition rates are increasing among first generation college students. This problem with FGCS increased attrition rates, negatively affects first generation student dropouts, their families, and the Sparks University faculty. First generation college student success has been a priority, following the challenges they encountered as an at risk subgroup. The findings from this study indicated that first generation college students experienced difficulties related to: (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. Key terms like *first generation college students, at risk, strategies, motivation, student engagement, procrastination, student performance, performance, persistence, and undergraduate success* were used to

complete this review of literature of the current body of knowledge surrounding FGCS performance. Databases including SAGE JOURNALS, PsycINFO, ProQuest, and ERIC, were used to research the emerging themes and convert them into these findings following data collection, data analysis, thematic hand analysis, coding and recoding strategies.

Professional Development

Faculty members are required to participate in courses and sessions to; improve teaching ability, engage students, increase student academic performance, and teacher effectiveness as expressed by McKeown et al. (2019). New information about the positive and negative experiences of first generation college students and recommendations for improvement will provide the justification for using a professional development session as the most appropriate means to improve FGCS' perceptions, experiences, and persistence. Professional development is a familiar part of the continuous improvement initiatives supported by the university (Wells, 2019). According to Spagnola, Dickerson, and Harper (2019), using professional development allows for standardized information to be disseminated to the faculty. According to Jackson, Purvis, and Finn (2019), faculty is accustomed to collaborating, finding implementation opportunities to use with students. Sprott (2019) noted that professional development allows participants to ask questions. Palermo and Thomson (2019) stated that during professional development sessions participants receive clarification on information and learn new instructional strategies in a collaborative environment. Professional development also promotes facilitator growth since participants provide feedback, ask

questions that can be used to improve the presentation for future use, and develop closer relationships with one another described Tingle, Corrales, and Peters (2019). Faculty members can continue to work together within departments to establish best practices and identify the most effective strategies.

Information Issues

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following: (a) obtaining information, (b) processing information, or (c) acting on information. Students can be bombarded by the amount of new information that they receive. According to Gibbons, Rhinehart and Hardin (2019), information however helpful and complete cannot be fully processed or retained during a short time span such as orientations or welcome meetings. For example, students can participate in the one hour online orientation but the information may be too concise for students to connect with. Important information may be misplaced as FGCS process new information for each course and instructor. Often, questions develop later as students transition from admission to course enrollment and thus cannot ask questions until challenges arise. Students can even be distracted by all of the exciting new parts of attending college. Schwartz et al., 2018, noted that FGCS may compare their university experience to their secondary educational experience and expect to have the same level of support that was previously provided to them (Araújo, Gomes, Almeida, & Núñez, 2019). FGCS' families and teachers may have been an integral part of supporting their education and providing reminders regarding important information (Epstein et al., 2018).

Gist Mackey, Wiley, and Erba (2018) shared that FGCS needed socially supportive communication. This same communication is not as easy for FGCS to employ with those support faculty members that could help the most. Cooper, Ashley, and Brownell (2018) shared the importance of breaking down barriers between FGCS and instructors to facilitate communication, access to information, and academic success. Cooper, Ashley, and Brownell (2018) even suggested that social events like eating lunch together would improve engagement and make instructors more approachable to FGCS. FGCS experienced challenges processing information. Herbert, Baize Ward, and Latz (2018) noted that FGCS may think that the information is understood only later discover that it was incorrect. Once students discover that they don't understand, additional preparation is needed according to Froggé and Woods (2018) but FGCS were unsure of where to go for help. Students may feel confident in resolving a situation but later realize that it is too difficult noted Luna (2018).

When FGCS receive information, the next challenge is how to act upon that information. University officials must develop a rapport with students. Ung (2019) suggested and Brown (2018) agreed that instructors must anticipate FGCS' needs, provide information in multiple forms, and make it readily accessible. Gay (2019) found that it was important to use reminders. Oreopoulos and Petronijevic (2018) suggested using technology to help students remember that there are centralized locations for information and personnel who are willing and available to help.

Procrastination Issues

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included: (a) issues scheduling their time to do their work, and (b) issues organizing their work. According to Gibbons et al. (2019), FGCS struggle with self-efficacy related to creating schedules that are specific and include the preparation time necessary to attend classes, read, study, prepare and listen to lectures. Successful habits such as time management, scheduling, and organization may be underdeveloped due to a lack of practice during FGCS' secondary education tenure (Scisco, McCabe, Mendoza, Fallon, & Rodriguez, 2019). According to Gay (2019) FGCS also tend to have strong family connections which can cause a competition between college academic work and family needs and obligations (Covarrubias, Valle, Laiduc, & Azmitia, 2019). FGCS can find it difficult to schedule family time and maintain boundaries to protect academic work time even when schedules are created.

First generation college students often lack basic study skills stated Cottrell (2019). Thompson and Verdino (2019) found that FGCS may procrastinate on work that they are capable of doing simply due to being unskilled and lacking practice in effectively organizing their workload. Holschuh (2019) stated that students need to read, understand the assignment instructions, and allow sufficient time to complete all related tasks. FGCS may understand the directions but not allow themselves enough time to finish assignment. This lack of preparation can cause students to become frustrated noted Torres (2019) and not turn work in at all or turn it in and receive a reduction in points due to lateness. Seeing a lower grade can affect the students' academic self-esteem and

overall self-efficacy can be affected by students' perception of performance being lower simply because the assignments were turned in late (Bowman, Jarratt, Jang, & Bono, 2019).

First generation college students also may have difficulty balancing the work between classes. If students have a project in one class, FGCS may focus all their time on completing that project and neglect a writing assignment for another class. Although FGCS may have been diligently working on the project and have turned that one in on time, the lack of practice in balancing all priorities resembles the same effects of procrastination, when students receive low academic scores in the classes that they neglect (White, 2019). First generation college students may have some organizational skills such as creating list to help them. According to Dillon (2019) FGCS may however not know how to; prioritize the list, complete the tasks in the right order, allow sufficient time to process the material, complete assignments, make revisions, and ask clarifying questions. Being unable to effectively use skills related to scheduling, organizing, and self-advocating can cause students to procrastinate (Wong & Chiu, 2019). First generation college students may become overwhelmed when they see the amount of work that needs to be done, lack understanding, or have unanswered questions (White, 2019). Once FGCS become overwhelmed, it is easy to procrastinate and then inadvertently compound the workload to a point where frustration and unproductivity is inevitable (Cho, 2019).

First generation college students need to practice balancing their academic and social priorities but according to Byrne (2019) students must also balance these academic

priorities with family obligations related to very strong family connections. First generation college students may feel obligated to the family of origin to help out with daily tasks that compete with the time allocated to work on course assignments, study, and ask questions. This competition between academic work and family needs often results in poor academic performance. Students need examples of how to; create study schedules, create reminders for action items on their lists, and use available university resources to improve FGCS academic performance such as the writing center math lab, or tutoring (Fukuda, Sakata, & Pope, 2019). Students tend to separate social, job, and schoolwork calendars. This separation can create last minute urgent situations for students that interrupt plans to complete schoolwork. Since first generation college students tend to have very strong family connections, may feel a sense of guilt when choosing academic pursuits over family requests for help and attention. The results of procrastination can result in poor academic performance, discontinuing enrollment, frustration and decreased academic confidence (Moreno, 2019).

First generation college students may see planning as a waste of time. Students may not see the value in spending limited academic work time to; list, organize, estimate time required, schedule activities on a calendar and outline necessary action items. According to Montgomery et al. (2019), once first generation college students create a plan to avoid procrastination, students must diligently execute that plan in order to successfully. In order to execute their plan, students must; complete the action items, manage distractions, identify ways in which they are wasting time, and identify opportunities to complete assignments, discussions, projects or assessments (Rodriguez,

Garbee, & Martínez Podolsky, 2019). The effective use of time while waiting for medical appointments, transportation, and other moments can mean extra time that students were previously unaware was available noted Lovell, Shelton, Draper and Wait (2019). In addition, the constant exposure to helpful material can increase FGCS' attention and understanding. Students should have identified items to read, study, or prepare even while waiting instructor responses to assignment questions (VanDer Schaaf & Shifrer, 2019). The more organized students are the more effective students can be. Usually students who had always planned on attending college, incorporated activities that required the practice of these types of scheduling, organizing, prioritizing, and listing action items as a part of secondary education experience.

Motivation Issues

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with motivation (Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos, & Ditzfeld, 2019). According to King, Hamilton, and Johnson (2019) first generation college students blamed others for the lack of motivation, citing decreased self-confidence because of something that someone else could have done to make things easier. Motivation can be a complex issue. Intrinsic motivation is motivation that originates from within the individual (Shin & Grant, 2019). Extrinsic motivation is motivation that originates and is dependent upon external reward factors, according to Hebbecker, Förster, and Souvignier (2019). Horowitz (2019) noted that extrinsic and intrinsic motivation must be obtained, maintained, and often regenerated. First generation college students may find it difficult to obtain the motivation necessary to complete a college education due to many factors. FGCS may

have a lack of expectations from family and educators to attend college. Second, once first generation college students are admitted and enrolled in courses their motivation must be maintained despite the challenges that faced (King, Hamilton, & Johnson, 2019). First generation college students may feel unprepared for the academic, social, or organizational challenges. If FGCS feel uncertain about the requirements or unsuccessful in efforts exerted, it may be difficult for students to maintain the initial motivation possessed upon entrance to the university (Thomas & McKenzie, 2019). Without early intervention, first generation students may struggle to reestablish or maintain the motivation that students originally demonstrated once enrolled to the university stated Kahn, Solomon, and Treglia (2019).

First generation college students have demonstrated difficulty in developing rapport with instructors and understanding what has been referred to as a bureaucratic system. These difficulties can make it difficult for students to maintain motivation, sustain academic focus, and provide consistent effort (Dibbs, 2019). According to Vetter, Schreiner, and Jaworski, (2019) first generation college students who were well connected to families, social networks outside of the university, and secondary education teachers typically relied heavily upon the encouragement and reminders previously provided. Without this continued support having to develop these new support systems within the university, first generation college students may find it challenging to maintain sufficient motivation to complete coursework and remain enrolled (Ma & Shea, 2019). Once first generation college students realize that they may be losing their motivation, faculty member intervention may be required (Barnett et al., 2019). Some intervention

types may include connecting socially with other students who are performing well, communicating difficulties to faculty staff or counselors, and soliciting support from those who previously provided a source of strength, direction and guidance (Wittrup & Hurd, 2019). If these students are able to identify when their motivation is decreasing and self-advocate early enough their motivation can be regenerated.

Project Description

First generation college students have many perceptions and experiences that affect their performance and persistence within the university system. Sparks university currently has an annual conference designed for overall professional development and are focused specifically on issues affecting the local campus. Improving conditions for first generation college students which constitutes 48% of the student population could be very effective and beneficial two students and instructors alike. This project is a 3 day professional development designed to identify first generation college students and some of the challenges that they face, improve the conditions for first generation students with regards to the challenges they faced related to information, procrastination, and motivation. Key stakeholders such as instructors, academic counselors, and support staff will participate in this 3 day professional development where we will discuss strategies, current program modification possibilities, current resource reallocation possibilities, and create action items in order to improve the positive experiences of first generation college students. The first day will focus on the challenges first generation students face related to information. The second day will focus on challenges first generation college students face related to procrastination. The third day will focus on challenges first generation

college students face related to motivation. Each day will end with a recap of the information provided and a preview of the next day. Daily there will also be a question answer section, opportunities for participants to work in groups to collaborate on feasible, reasonable, and achievable goals to help increase success for first generation college students. Each day participants will provide an exit ticket to ensure that the goals of each day were met and that participants understand the information presented. Each evening I will review the exit tickets, in order to provide clarity for any information that participants were unable to understand. On the final day participants will provide overall feedback on the presentation.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Faculty, staff, and members of the training department spend exhaustive amounts of resources creating academic support programs for first generation college students. The current programs include a Math tutoring lab, a writing lab that will review student work prior to instructor submission, a counseling department, financial and career counseling and a community resource center. First generation college students indicated awareness about the offerings of support but the information was not accessible when it later became necessary. Also, FGCS did not seek help early enough. By the time students reached out for support, it may be too late. Instructors hold regular office hours although some participants shared about being too nervous to ask for help or unsure of which questions to ask.

Potential Barriers

Professional development time occurs annually and faculty members make many submissions. Some barriers to the presentation of this project include being selected to present, having appropriate facilities and technological support. In addition, some key stakeholders may not be available due to their own presentations or required courses in which individual stakeholders must participate. FGCS' issues with information, procrastination, and motivation have some possible solutions that we can implement but there may have some barriers. The potential barriers that exist for this project include priority, fundability, and sustainability. The university is multifaceted in its approach to improvement. There are curriculum, human resource, community, and budget initiatives. Some initiatives take precedence over others at various times. FGCS' concerns are important but one potential barrier is that it may not be the first priority. Inevitably each initiative requires an investment of time, resources, and money so fundability may also be an issue. Finally, there are issues surrounding how to maintain the strategies and best practices we decide to use, beginning a program may be easy but sustaining the momentum or volunteers may also be a barrier for the success of the program.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Sparks University's training department created an annual Meeting of the Minds Symposium in May, where faculty members from the university attend a weeklong conference and choose sessions to attend. All instructors have a minimum number of faculty development 24 credit hours that they must meet each year. Their participation in this symposium is one way that they are able to achieve these required hours. I will

submit a proposal as outlined in Table 2, to become a presenter at the symposium and invite those who have the most contact with first generation college students to attend.

Table 2

Proposed Timeline

Date	Task	Person	Deliverable
January	Submit application to present at the May Meeting of the Minds Symposium	Training Department, Academic Counselors, Instructors	Email request for support and attendance
February	Advertise content and relevance of attending the professional development	Researcher	Speak with key stakeholders for support and suggestions
March	Confirm faculty development hours each faculty member will receive for attending Create schedule	Researcher	Make announcements during faculty meetings, email reminders
April	Practice presenting Professional Development Project	Researcher and volunteers	Power Point and Handouts for the Professional Development on first generation college students
May	Present Professional Development at Meeting of the Minds Symposium Reflect on feedback and make modifications for future use	Researcher	Feedback and Evaluation Forms,

Roles and Responsibilities

I will review the literature associated with strategies to improve first generation college student success. I will create a 3 day professional development session to be

presented at the May Meeting of the Minds Symposium. I will be responsible for garnering support for the project, defining the problem and its impact on student success, and conducting the 3 day PD that will allow key stakeholders to share their knowledge about best practices after having participated in the informational section which will discuss the purpose, goals, and issues with information, procrastination and motivation that first generation college students experience.

Project Evaluation Plan

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment will be used as one means of project evaluation. Based upon these assessments, corrections and clarifications can be made. In order to ensure that the participants in this 3 day professional development regarding the implications based on the findings from the study on first generation college student experiences, frequent feedback is imperative. Exit tickets will be provided to participants daily to check for understanding of the key concepts presented. I will review these exit tickets and prepare to address any areas of concern or lack of understanding during the recap time. Although each day ends with a time for questions and answers, just like students, participants may be confident with the content comprehension but may not be correct. Formative assessments provide a means to capture participant learning and understanding by asking key questions. At the conclusion of each day, I will read the exit ticket answers and create notes to clarify any miscommunications. I decided to use formative assessment in addition to the questions and answers time because the experiences of first generation college students affect a significant portion of our student population. Participants

becoming more effective in working with these students will affect more than 48% of the total student population. It is important that key stakeholders are introduced to the characteristics, challenges, contributions, and needs of first generation college students. On Day 1 participants will learn strategies to improve student persistence related to the findings that first generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following:

a) obtaining information,

b) processing information, and/or

c) acting on information.

On Day 2 participants will learn strategies to improve student persistence related to the findings that first generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included:

a) scheduling time to do their work, and

b) organizing their work.

On Day 3 participants will learn strategies to improve student persistence related to the findings that first generation college students experienced challenges associated with extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

a) Should be obtained

b) Should be maintained

c) Should be regenerated

Using formative assessment exit tickets will allow me to make immediate modifications to the Power Point or my manner of explanation to include clear, concise,

and complete understanding for participants working with first generation college students.

Summative Assessment

I have also decided to use a summative assessment. Summative assessment is important to the local and larger community. After reviewing the findings of the study on first generation college student experiences, modifications should be made to improve conditions for these and other students through faculty development and new skill implementation. Learning all of the information about issues first generation college students face and collaborating in groups on best practices is good but the most productive part is the summative assessment where participants identify how this new information can be used to improve student success. Participants will discuss in collaborative groups throughout the 3 day professional development. Following these collaborations participants will create a list of actionable items to implement. A summative assessment will allow me to see the efficacy of this professional development with regards to how to modify current curriculum and programs. We can also discuss ways to improve support, technology integration, and community involvement.

Overall Evaluation Goals

Perry Smith and Mannucci (2017) assert that there are 4 stages of evaluation where professionals must plan, implement, complete and report findings. This professional development on FGCS will include these 4 phases. Following the problem exploration, participants will plan which instructional strategies and approaches to use, implement the plan, complete the necessary steps, and report the results in order to

improve the plan. Rossi, Lipsey, and Henry (2018) indicate that the evaluation process must be systematic, ethical, and include rigor. According to Fullwood, Rowley, and McLean, (2019) professional development provides an opportunity for participants to combine their expertise, experience, and efforts to solve the educational challenges that FGCS' face. Following the collaborative effort of key stakeholders in the professional development, new instructional strategies or approaches can be selected for implementation (Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2019). The plan for implementation requires an action items list, a timetable, and an evaluation process (Balzer, 2020). Frequent and complete evaluations are necessary in order to determine the efficacy of implemented programs (Guraya & Chen, 2019). Once program efficacy or challenges have been evaluated, according to Bamberger and Mabry (2019), modifications can be made to create or improve existing support structures.

The outcomes based evaluation plan encompasses program guidelines and provides a means for participants to discuss strengths and deficiencies of the professional development (Finney & Horst, 2019). Participants will have an opportunity to anonymously reflect on how effectively were the goals of the professional development met by analyzing the a) content, b) presentation, and c) strategic usefulness (Seifert & Feliks, 2019). Participants will have the opportunity to complete daily formative assessment exit tickets and an overall summative assessment including a Likert style point scale and an anonymous descriptive feedback form (Blankinship & Ehlen, 1997). The formative assessment exit tickets provide a daily feedback noted Fowler, Windschitl, and Richards, (2019) that I will use to make any necessary corrections to the professional

development facilitation to insure presentation efficacy. Participants must be clear about the goals and timelines when collaborating during professional development and this affects the quality of feedback and development of a strong team mentality that begins during the professional development and continues throughout the evaluation process (Love, & Crowell, 2018). At the end of each professional development, I will review the summative assessment forms and make improvements to the content, collaboration time or cumulative activity.

The overall goal of this professional development is that by the end of the collaborative professional development session, participants should be able to create a list of at least 3 actionable items, establish a timetable for implementation, schedule 3 follow up local sessions to evaluate progress, and plan to make modifications to action item goals as necessary. Ultimately participants should be able to create a list of best practices to use with FGCS. In order to improve this presentation for future use, I will need to carefully review the overall evaluation provided by the participants. While I will be reflective in my analysis and be mindful as I facilitate this professional development, the feedback of participants is invaluable. On the evaluation form participants will have an open comment area where participants can provide feedback that will help me to improve my presentation. Key stakeholders may also ask questions that may prompt further research. Each trainer, instructor, and support staff participant can use their perspectives to increase the effectiveness of this presentation.

During the 3 day PD, participants will learn strategies to work specifically with the FGCS population and opportunities to improve retention. At the conclusion of the PD, participants will be able to do the following:

- ✓ The participants will be able to define the 7 FGCS' characteristics with 100% accuracy,
- ✓ The participants in the professional development sessions will discuss FGCS' positive and negative academic experiences at Sparks University and identify 5 recommendations for improving retention. Based on those recommendations, FGCS retention will increase by 5% over the next 3 years.
- ✓ The participants in the professional development sessions will collaborate to identify 3 new strategies and 3 new approaches to improve student support services to increase academic performance for FGCS. Based on these strategies and approaches, FGCS' overall GPA will increase 0.5 on a 4.0 scale over the next 5 years.
- ✓ The participants in the professional development will create an action items list to share with Spark University leaders to improve retention of FGCS. The action items list will include academic support, faculty and staff needs, support services, and financial supports for the goal of improving retention of FGCS. The action items list will be submitted to Sparks University leadership for development over the next 3 years. A FGCS action team will be created with administrators and faculty across the campus to meet monthly to identify completion of the action

items. Specific deadlines for each action item will be listed along with an evaluation plan to determine success of each item.

Key Stakeholders

The purpose of this 3 day professional development project was created to define FGCS characteristics, discuss strategies and approaches to serve this population, and identify actionable items that can be implemented by the organization. FGCS described their experiences in this study which lead to the creation of this 3 day professional development to establish, improve, or modify strategies and approaches to improve instruction and interactions with FGCS. During the sessions, the key stakeholders which are trainers, instructors, and support staff will have time to collaborate and create a plan to help students.

Instructors

Instructors have direct contact with students and may have a significant effect on FGCS success. By evaluating current practices following learning about the needs and experiences of first generation college students, instructors can modify their approach to the challenges these FGCS and other students face. The relationships between FGCS and instructors can also be improved as instructors learn more about FGCS shared characteristics and unique needs. Instructors have complained to the administration about a lack of opportunities to collaborate and interact especially during online training sessions. This professional development includes group work and many opportunities to collaborate.

Trainers

The training department is responsible for providing professional development throughout the year as a part of our organization's continuous improvement plan. Trainers will be very important participants in this specific professional development because they create training modules for instructors and support staff. As they see the actionable items list that the participants collaborate and create, the trainers can provide curriculum and supportive content to enhance the faculty members' ability to implement the strategies and approaches that will most effectively help the FGCS population.

Support Staff

Support staff members include those who admit, enroll, tutor, complete financial aid and counsel first generation college students. These support staff members can bring their past experiences with FGCS and combine those experiences with the findings to create support program policies that will be most effective in improving conditions for students. Support staff will have an opportunity to share their insights with trainers and instructors to provide a more complete picture of the challenges, needs, and opportunities to increase student performance and persistence.

Project Implications

Social Change Implications

The purpose and intent of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. Knowles's principals of Andragogy, which stated that adult learners

needed to see a value and personal benefit to the information they study in order to be successful guided the study. By interviewing with ten first generation college students and 5 university administrators the following themes emerged from the findings which indicated that first generation college students experienced difficulties related to: (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. The findings were used to create a 3 day professional development training project to decrease FGCS attrition and improve retention rates. Positive social change may occur if findings provide universities with information that could be utilized to improve FGCS' experiences leading to higher graduation rates. FGCS shared their positive and negative experiences and they offered recommendations for improved success. FGCS success will benefit faculty, students, staff, the community and FGCS' families. The economic, educational, and societal benefits are important for all students.

Importance of the Project to Local Stakeholders

Local stakeholders are concerned with the success of first generation college students. When students are struggling academically it places enormous amounts of extra work on instructors and takes time away from other students that need support. Instructors are required to document when students are not performing well by contacting struggling students and document the outcomes. If students turn in assignments late, they must do their grades twice. In addition, scheduling of faculty members is based upon the number of students continuing in the program. Instructor performance is also partially evaluated by student success. All of these reasons make the problem of FGCS success

very important to local stakeholders and through this project they have an opportunity to create real solutions to help students.

Importance of the Project to the Larger Context

First generation college students at one university made up more than half of the incoming freshman population. Therefore, this study and the findings could offer ideas to improve FGCS success and may also benefit the larger context. The findings from this study indicated that first generation college students experienced difficulties related to (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. These issues are not unique to our local setting but may also apply to the general student population not just to first generation college students. Making changes that improve FGCS' abilities to effectively use information, avoid procrastination, and maintain motivation are skills that could benefit all students locally and abroad. Positive social change may occur if findings provide universities with information that could be utilized to improve FGCS' experiences leading to higher graduation rates.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this section, I cover three main reflections related to my study. First, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the project. Second, I provide recommendations for alternate approaches. Last, I reflect on the role of scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership and change as I completed this doctoral study.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Project Strengths

Using face to face meetings and allowing time for everyone to brainstorm ideas to solve this problem is a key strength of this project. In the interest of time efficiency, face to face meetings are reserved for the most important topics. Most communication is distributed via email and conference calls. This professional development project strengths include; collaboration, information dissemination, and faculty member commitment. In general, the staff in the training department and throughout the university work diligently and collaborate well on projects. Once they are informed through the concise, research based information that directly affects their students the stakeholders will be able to use the new strategies to help support FGCS. Each professional included to participate in this professional development is uniquely qualified both with education and experience to make a significant improvement as they collaborate on best practices. The commitment of the faculty members is based upon the execution and facilitation of the project.

Project Limitations

I decided to conduct a 3 day professional development to inform faculty and training department members about the ongoing challenges faced by first generation college students. Although this is a good start it is also a limitation. Three days is insufficient time to make permanent changes to the process to address all areas of concern for FGCS including issues with information, procrastination, and motivation. As key stakeholders, we can begin the process through this professional development but I would like to see it implemented as a series so that we can revisit the topic and see what progress we are making on it. In addition, to the positive and negative experiences described by study participants, the recommendations made by the FGCS in this study may be unavailable to report back on if the changes implemented were helpful to them.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Alternate Approaches to the Problem

First generation college student success could be approached in various ways. In this study the positive and negative experiences of FGCS were examined. The efficacy of this study depended largely on these students' ability to accurately self-evaluate and the honestly report their shortcomings as well as those of others. This problem could be approached in the recruitment and preparation of FGCS by making contact or informational campaigns to increase interest in college attendance much earlier in their educational career. Community members and families could also be informed early about the benefits of college attendance and what they could do to help prepare FGCS for the decision to attend college.

Alternate Definitions of the Problem

The problem at Sparks University is that despite established corrective measures, support programs, and increased enrollment, attrition rates are increasing among FGCS. The problem has been examined from an external perspective by the university by looking at the increased enrollment and still increasing attrition rates of FGCS. This study explored the positive and negative experiences of FGCS from their perspective. The proposed solutions have looked at how university officials could better support them academically however the problem may not be academic in nature. One alternative definition of the problem might include FGCS' extracurricular or personal obligations that distract them from academic pursuits. Another alternate definition of the problem could include secondary education counselors placing these students on academic tracks that are not college preparatory or lack sufficient rigor.

Alternative Solutions to the Local Problem

Just as there are multiple perspectives to the problem of first generation college student experiences, there are also many alternative solutions to the local problem. When students are enrolled, they are introduced to many different staff members that are responsible for different facets of the admission, enrollment, and support processes. One alternative solution to the local problem could be to assign a group of students to one person that could manage that process for them. This would facilitate the development of a rapport and a relationship between students and staff. This staff member could direct these students to the existing resources that may better support their academic success

and prevent FGCS from having so many issues with information, procrastination, and motivation.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

This study and subsequent project were important to administrators, instructors, trainers, and support staff because almost 48% of freshman students are FGCS and job requisitions depend on student retention. The issues that affect them essentially affect a quarter of the college population and cannot be ignored. Indications from this study, and data analysis showed that FGCS struggle in the areas of information, procrastination, and motivation. These emerging themes were shared by participants interviewed during this study. This study on the perceptions and experiences of FGCS provided important insights into the issues that have a significant effect on student performance. Knowles's principals of andragogy, which stated that adult learners needed to see a value and personal benefit to the information they study in order to be successful, guided the study and served as the conceptual framework.

I have been a trainer and instructor for more than 20 years. During my tenure, I noticed many FGCS encounter challenges that other more experienced students did not. Non first generation college students seemed to be at ease during the application, admission, enrollment, financial aid process, and also during class attendance. Conversely FGCS tended to miss the start of coursework due to issues like not having their financial aid processed correctly or not have course reading materials. I saw their frustration affect their morale and effort and ultimately their performance or persistence. Although my parents graduated from college, they did not pursue further degrees and

thus, I found myself needing guidance and support from others as I pursued higher degrees. My experiences taught me that something like financial aid delays can create large amounts of stress which distracted or discouraged me from focusing and performing at my best. Despite my personal experiences, the training I received has prepared me to accurately report the findings with any undisclosed bias.

Despite the training and preparing I received, conducting the actual interviews as difficult to do at first. I struggled with feelings of privacy invasion although all participants volunteered and participated at will. I wanted to ensure that I remained unbiased, unemotional, nonreactive, and accurately reported my findings. I found that my journal and anecdotal notes seemed biased but I was able to sift through my comments and simply report what each participant shared. The more interviews I conducted I became more comfortable and effective at developing a rapport with participants.

Reflective Analysis of Personal Learning

Exposure is important to first generation college students however it was equally beneficial to me for my personal learning. I am a planner I tend to write things down step by step and create checklist. These rituals are helpful to me so that I will not forget anything. At the beginning I was worried that my process might make me seem robotic or unapproachable but that was not the case. My reflective analysis of my personal learning is that exposure, preparation, checklist, arriving early and eliminating distractions were key elements that improved my performance and thus my ability to maintain a professional yet warm and rapport developing researcher. Also, as I reflect and analyze

the data and my performance improved and was accurate since none of my initial findings that I shared with participants required any corrections.

Growth of Self as a Scholar

It is inevitable that if you are an honest self-evaluator you will always find areas that you would like to improve. Although I arrived early and prepared my materials in advance, I still noticed each interview required that I consider making additional changes. As I continued to throughout the process, I became more relaxed, more familiar with the process, and less afraid that I would make a mistake. I chose purposeful sampling to select the ten participants for this study. I gradually improved my interview skills and began to know when to ask additional questions to get rich text and in depth responses. I was careful not to infer meanings or to assume I understood what participants were trying to express. I focused on accurate reporting without any additions or clarification of meanings on my part. I grew as a scholar each time I was sought answers and accurately reported them without prejudice of any kind either for or against participants' statements.

Growth as a Practitioner

As a part of my job I have to perform many tasks. Each member of the training department participates in professional development, curriculum development, member engagement and individually assigned tasks toward training module maintenance. During this research project I had to lead and conduct the interviews with each first generation college student participant. In a short period of time I had to develop a rapport, follow the procedures and ask probing questions. With each passing interview I became more comfortable and can truly see my growth as a practitioner.

I could identify easily with the challenges described by the FGCS participants. Being unsure of where to locate necessary information is something I have experienced as I joined different organizations. Because I lacked this information, I tended to procrastinate on work assignments. Once I realized that I was running behind schedule on a project I lost motivation and felt discouraged. These experiences caused me to easily understand the frustrations experienced by FGCS and to eagerly look for ways to address their concerns. I was aware that I had some shared experiences so I was very careful not to allow my bias to show and to simply accurately report the results from the study. My growth as a practitioner was evident to me because I could see how I could transfer this knowledge to my practice and also expect that some of my students and colleagues might be experiencing the same things.

Growth as a Project Developer

My growth as a project developer took some time. I considered many options for ways to share this information with the decision makers. First, I wanted the staff to see the value of the study. I felt that if they could see the benefit of helping FGCS it would facilitate their participation in the professional development and the strategies for improvement. The project which ended up being a 3 day professional development would need several parts to discuss the issues. The findings from this study indicated that first generation college students experienced difficulties related to: (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. Although staff members may not have been FGCS everyone has had some personal experiences that caused them to experience

difficulties related to the acquisition and use of information, avoiding procrastination, maintaining motivation throughout projects.

During the design of this project I wanted the participants to share what they knew, learn something new about the issues, but most importantly to a plan with action items on how to increase the positive experiences and decrease the negative experiences. I allowed ample time for training and education professionals to collaborate and find workable, achievable solutions to the issues shared by first generation college students. Finally, I wanted to highlight the recommendations provided by the FGCS during their interviews as direct feedback to our performance as a faculty. I understand that by acknowledging their recommendations and implementing as many as possible we will be creating better educational outcomes for FGCS and all students.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

My reflection on the importance of the work with first generation college students' experiences also causes me to reflect on our current preparation process for students. Education is an important part of human development. Access to education has not been equally distributed. Some individuals are raised with the expectation that they will attend college, while others are not expected to participate. As a result, first generation college students are trailblazers within their family as the first members to attend college. There are many subjects that students would never have the opportunity to be exposed to without going to college. It is therefore imperative that students have the option to attend. Working with first generation college students, to capture their positive

and negative experiences is an important way to improve their preparation and encourage them to pursue higher education.

Educators and interested stakeholders can work together based upon the findings to improve support, recruitment, and preparation of first generation college students. The current student support practices can also be improved based upon the recommendations from the findings in this study. First generation college students themselves might serve as great liaisons to between the faculty, student support, and faculty. Those students exhibiting success might also serve to mentor incoming students and help direct them to information, prevent procrastination, and sustain their initial motivation.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Recruitment practices for first generation college students have changed. Financial aid has allowed previously excluded students to be able to finance their education. This study on the positive and negative experiences of first generation college students produced findings which indicated there are ways in which their needs could be better met. Implementing these changes could result in higher graduation rates for this group of at risk students. Thus, further research on implications that these changes are having is an important step. The findings are not limited to the local university but their applications could serve to improve conditions for other institutions as well. Positive social change may occur if findings provide universities with information that could be utilized to improve FGCS' experiences leading to higher graduation rates.

Students that were not successful and decided against finishing their education might be a valuable resource for further research to discuss the reasons that they left

school. Another direction for future research might be to ask first generation family members for their ideas about the importance or availability of educational access for their children before they actually entered the university. Secondary education professionals might provide additional insight into why first generation students might be at risk. Finally, first generation college students that were successful at attaining their college degrees may provide some strategies that they used.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore FGCS and university administrators positive and negative experiences affecting FGCS' decision to drop out, and examine their recommendations for improvements based on their experiences to prevent attrition. While first generation college students (FGCS) are the first within a family to be admitted and attend a 4 year post-secondary institution of higher learning, they may experience lower retention and higher attrition rates compared to other at risk student groups. University officials made specific strides to recruit first generation college students as an underserved previously disenfranchised population. Their characteristics created some special needs and those unmet needs classified many FGCS as at risk. I interviewed ten FGCS about their positive and negative experiences that contributed to their decision to discontinue their education and tried to garner their recommendations for improvement from their perspectives. Upon the data collection and analysis completion some themes emerged and created the findings that first generation college students experienced difficulties related to: (a) information issues, (b) procrastination issues, and (c) motivation issues. By examining these findings officials can modify support programs to

support FGCS needs and to address their recommendations. First generation college students are an important part of the student population and deserve further exploration as to how they can receive greater support and in turn produce greater results.

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Appendix A: The Project Exploring the Experiences of First generation College Students

Key Stakeholder participants are invited to participate in a 3 day professional development designed to explore the positive and negative experiences of first generation college students. Based on the findings from this research, strategies and approaches will be discussed. Following these discussions, participants can create a list of actionable items to be implemented within the organization. An evaluation process to provide feedback and determine which strategies and approaches are most effective and create best practices.

Day 1 Information

Professional Development Session Schedule Day 1 Information

Time	Activity	Method
8:30 – 9:00	Sign in Fill out a name tag Locate seating arrangement clusters by content areas	Sign in for PD attendance verification to receive credit Label name and position and affix to clothing Use table colors to sit in departments
9:00 – 9:30	Continental Breakfast Provided	Sign in table in the Conference Room
9:30 – 10:00	Welcome, Individual Introductions, Outline and Overview of each day	Lead by PD facilitator using PowerPoint slides
10:00 – 10:45	Ice Breaker – Let's discuss your own experience when you began college.	Group activity, participants will use the questions on the ice breaker slide to discuss with their group and relate to the theme
10:45 – 12:00	Information Management Exploration Activity	Lead by PD facilitator

	Challenges and Opportunities	
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch	Not Provided On your own
1:00 – 2:00	Breakout Group Collaboration, Whole Group Collaboration,	PowerPoint presentation presented by PD facilitator.
2:00– 2:30	Closing Question and Answer Session Preview Next Day	Assessment: Exit Ticket

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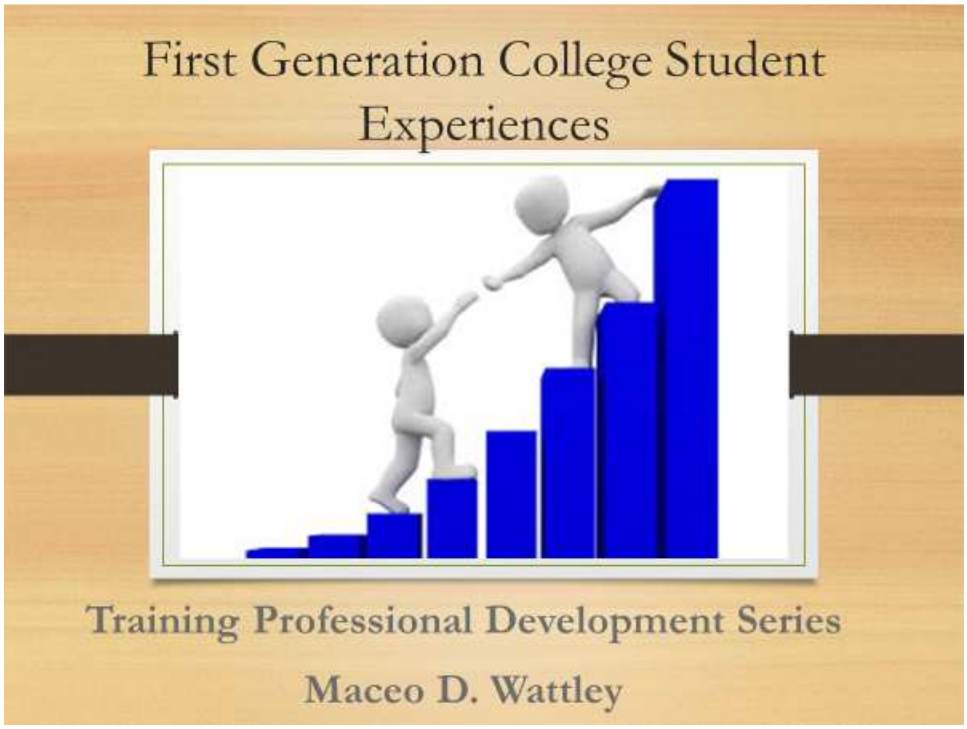
Professional Development Session Trainer Notes Day 1 Information

- ❑ Participants will begin the day by signing in, creating name tags, and sitting in assigned seats.
- ❑ Participants will introduce themselves to the group and eat breakfast.
- ❑ Participants will do ice breaker activity.
- ❑ Facilitator will review goals for the professional development and objectives for the day.
- ❑ Facilitator will explain FGCS and share characteristics, needs, and their challenges. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following: (a) obtaining information, (b) processing information, and/or (c) acting on information.
- ❑ Participants will discuss strategies to help FGCS organize the information they receive in small groups of five and then share with the entire group.

- ❑ Participants will discuss current programs and curriculum that could help FGCS with processing information.
- ❑ Recap the day, question and answer session. Preview Day 2 FGCS Procrastination Issues
- ❑ Participants will complete exit tickets.
- ❑ Facilitator will review exit tickets to check for understanding and note issues that need to be clarified.



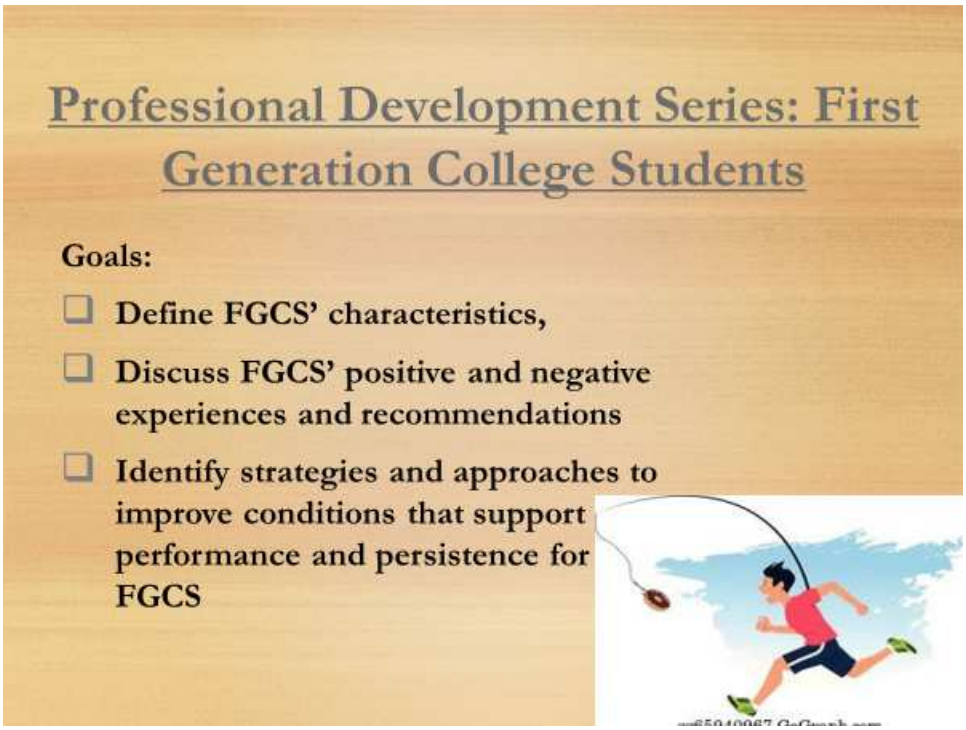
First Generation College Student Experiences

Training Professional Development Series

Maceo D. Wattley

It's so nice to meet you!

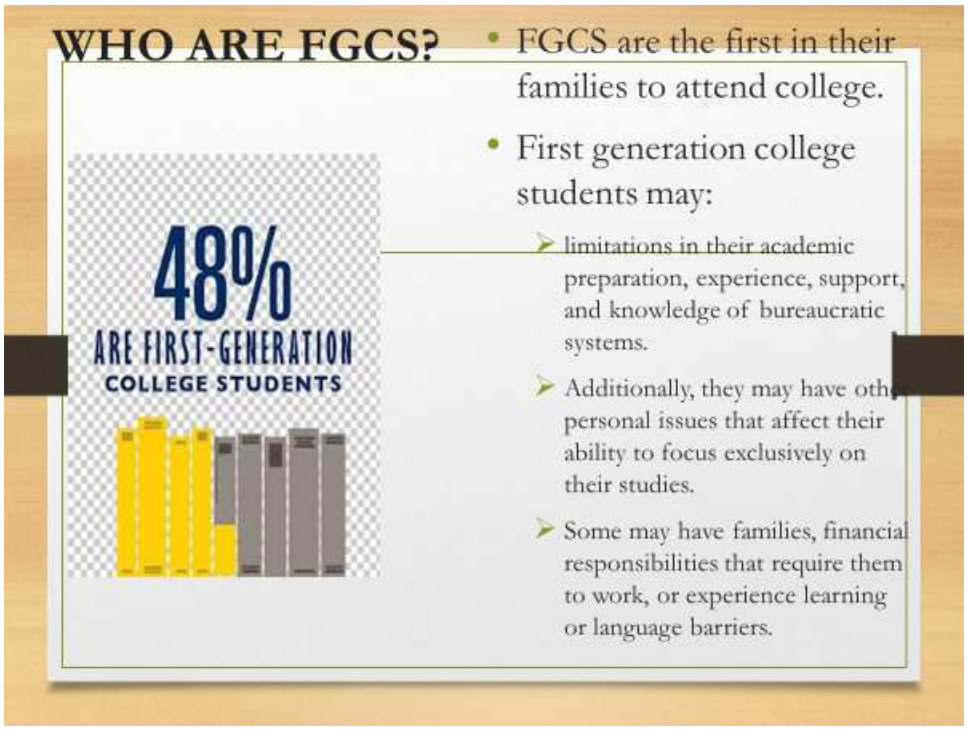
1. **PLEASE INTRODUCE YOURSELF.**
2. **EXPLAIN YOUR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.**



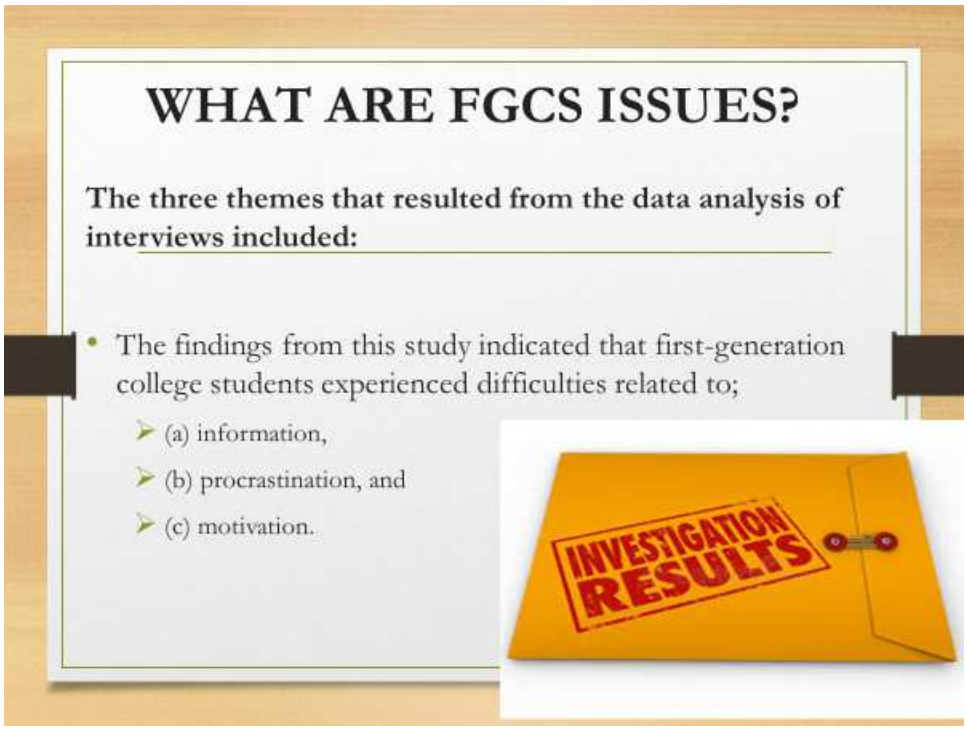
Professional Development Series: First Generation College Students

Goals:

- **Define FGCS' characteristics,**
- **Discuss FGCS' positive and negative experiences and recommendations**
- **Identify strategies and approaches to improve conditions that support performance and persistence for FGCS**



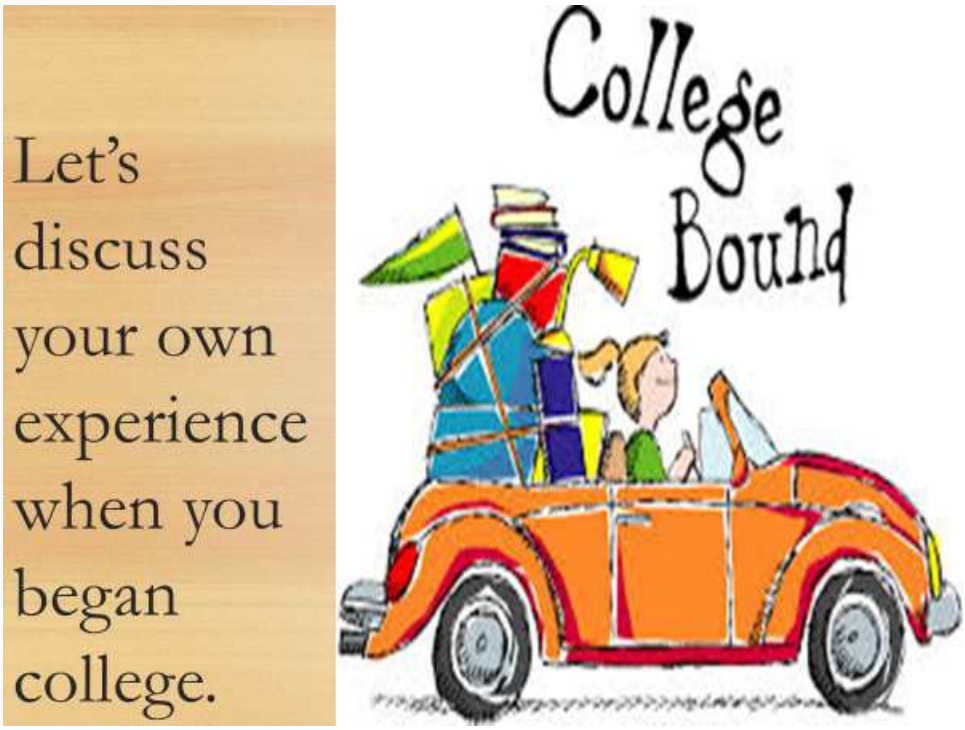
- **WHO ARE FGCS?**
- FGCS are the first in their families to attend college.
- First generation college students may:
  - limitations in their academic preparation, experience, support, and knowledge of bureaucratic systems.
  - Additionally, they may have other personal issues that affect their ability to focus exclusively on their studies.
  - Some may have families, financial responsibilities that require them to work, or experience learning or language barriers.



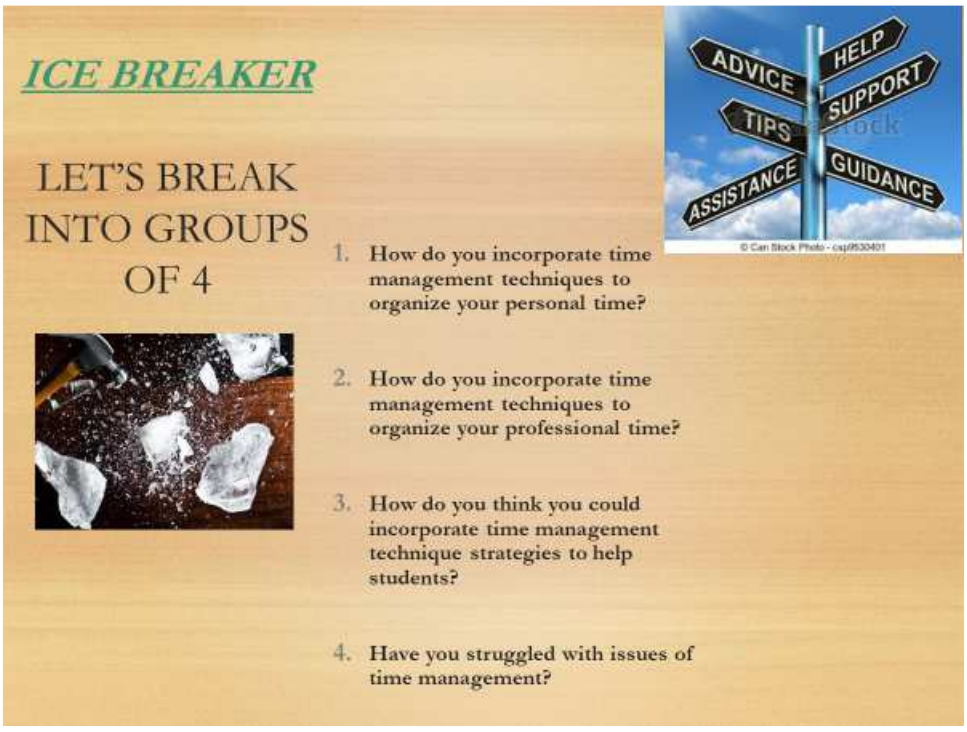
- **WHAT ARE FGCS ISSUES?**

  The three themes that resulted from the data analysis of interviews included:

- The findings from this study indicated that first generation college students experienced difficulties related to;
  - (a) information,
  - (b) procrastination, and
  - (c) motivation.



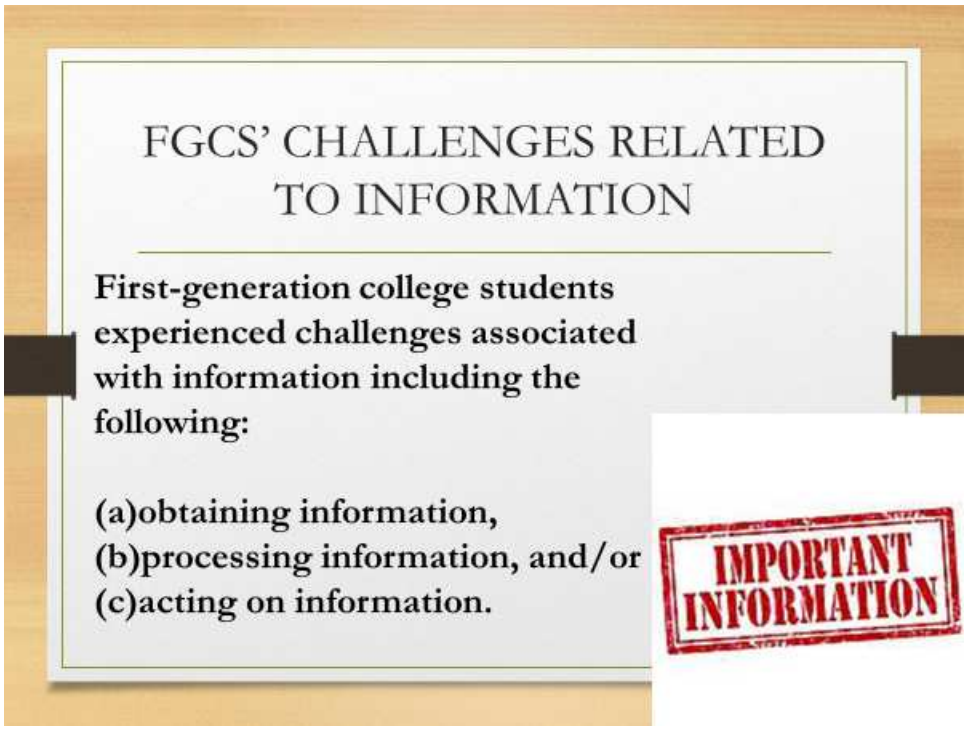
Let's discuss your own experience when you began college.



ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

1. **How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your personal time?**
2. **How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your professional time?**
3. **How do you think you could incorporate time management technique strategies to help students?**
4. **Have you struggled with issues of time management?**

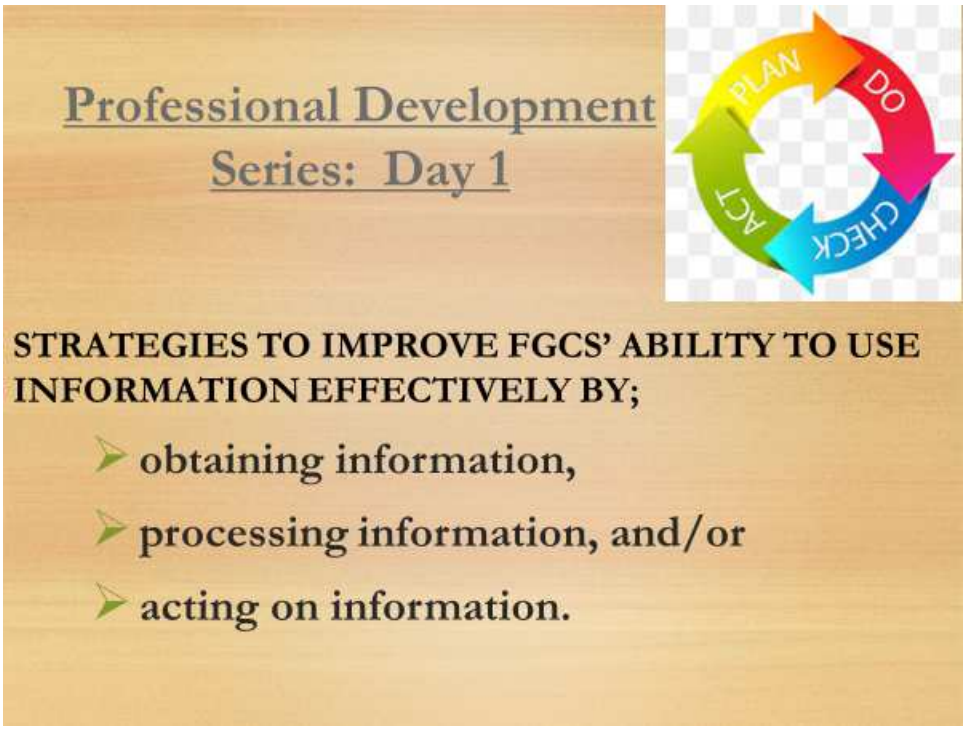


FGCS' CHALLENGES RELATED TO INFORMATION

Professional Development Series: Day 1

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE FGCS' ABILITY TO USE INFORMATION EFFECTIVELY BY;

- **obtaining information,**
- **processing information, and/or**
- **acting on information.**

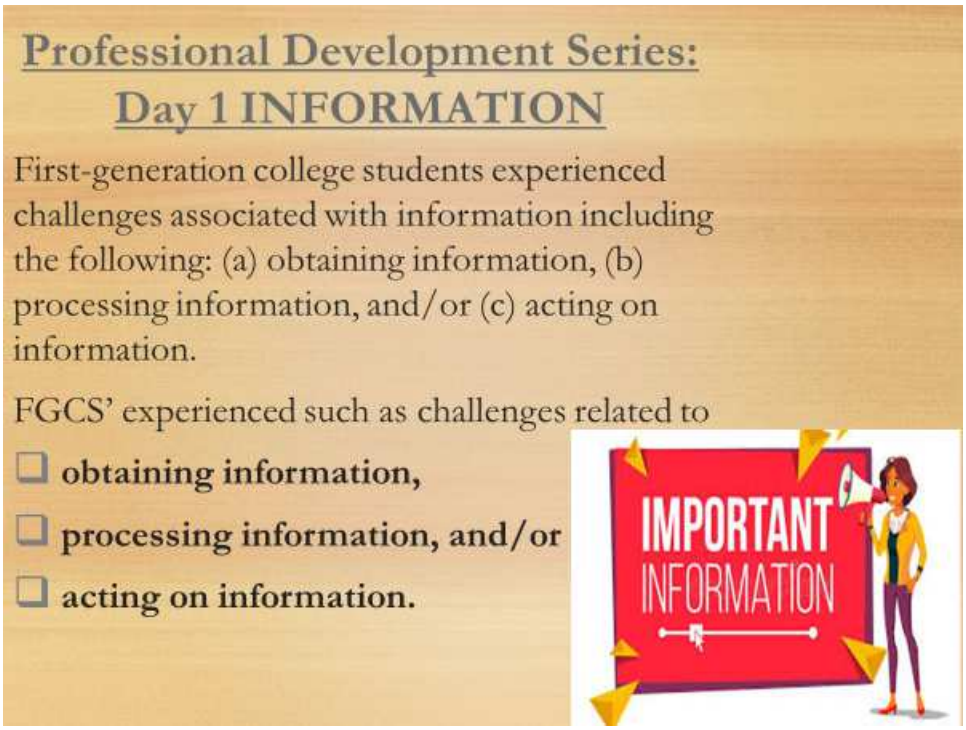


Professional Development Series: Day 1 INFORMATION

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following: (a) obtaining information, (b) processing information, and/or (c) acting on information.

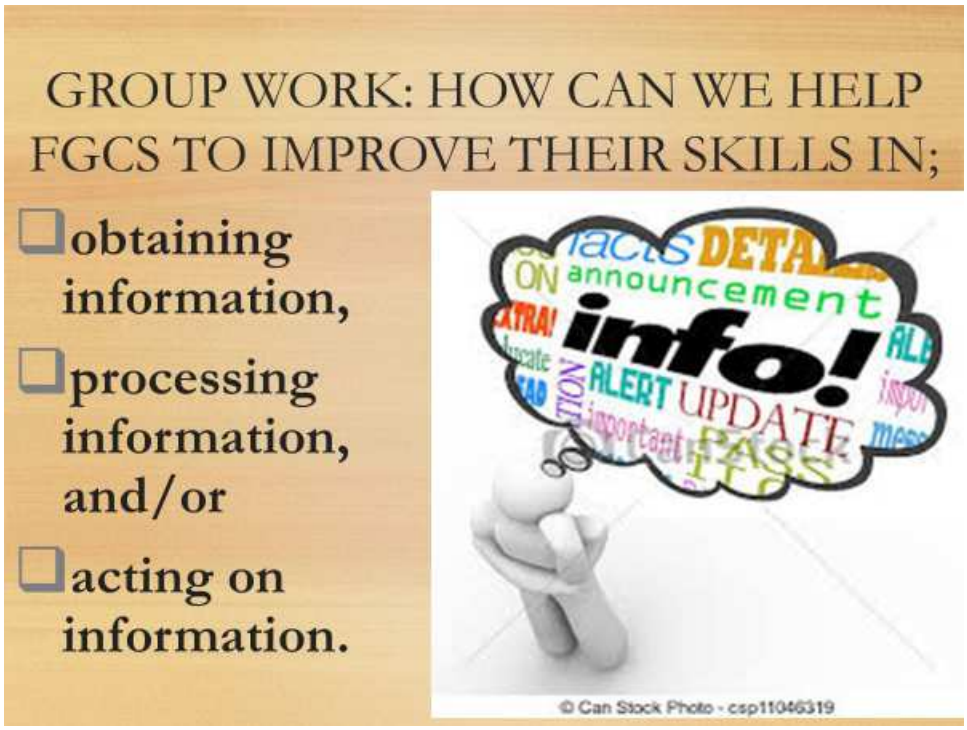
FGCS' experienced such as challenges related to

- **obtaining information,**
- **processing information, and/or**
- **acting on information.**



GROUP WORK: HOW CAN WE HELP FGCS TO IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS IN;

- **obtaining information,**
- **processing information, and/or**
- **acting on information.**



GROUP WORK: HOW CAN WE HELP FGCS TO IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS IN;

- **obtaining information,**
- **processing information, and/or**
- **acting on information.**

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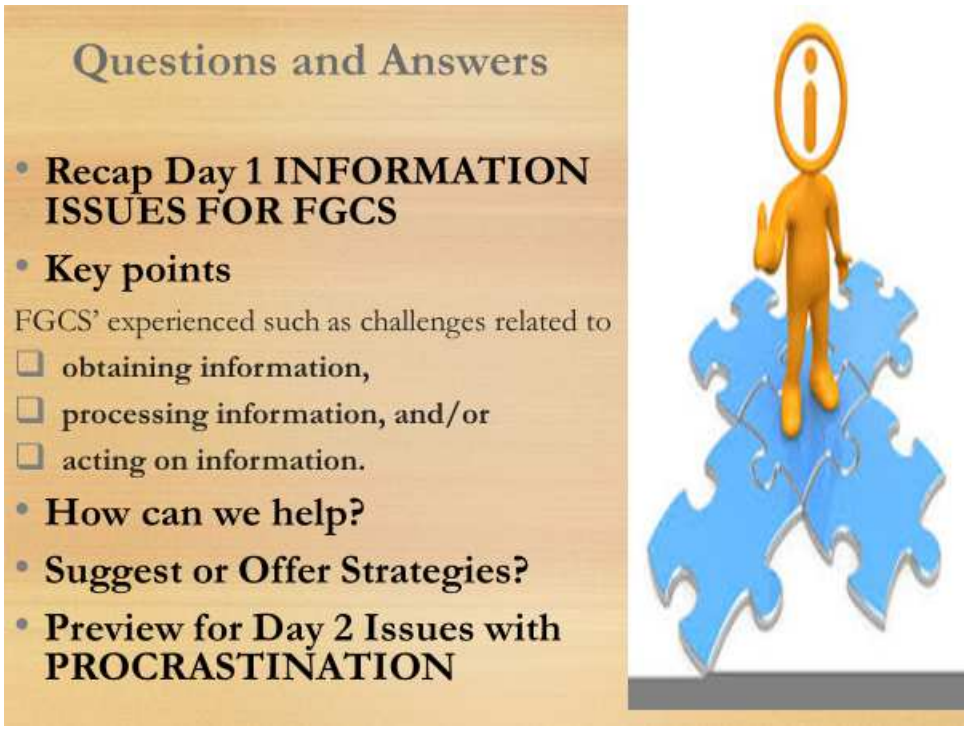


Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day 1 INFORMATION ISSUES FOR FGCS**
- **Key points**

FGCS' experienced such as challenges related to

- ❑ **obtaining information,**
- ❑ **processing information, and/or**
- ❑ **acting on information.**
- **How can we help?**
- **Suggest or Offer Strategies?**

Preview for Day 2 Issues with PROCRASTINATION

Day 2 Procrastination

Professional Development Session Schedule Day 2 Procrastination

Time	Activity	Method
8:30 – 9:00	Sign in Fill out a name tag Locate seating arrangement clusters by content areas	Sign in for PD attendance verification to receive credit Label name and position and affix to clothing Use table colors to sit in departments
9:00 – 9:30	Continental Breakfast Provided	Sign in table in the Conference Room
9:30 – 10:00	Welcome, Individual Introductions, Review Day 1 and Outline Day 2	Lead by PD facilitator using PowerPoint slides
10:00 – 10:45	Ice Breaker – Do you struggle with procrastination?	Group activity, participants will use the questions on the ice breaker slide to discuss with their group and relate to the theme
10:45 – 12:00	Procrastination Exploration Activity Challenges and Opportunities	Lead by PD facilitator
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch	Not Provided – On your own
1:00 – 2:00	Breakout Group Collaboration, Whole Group Collaboration,	PowerPoint presentation presented by PD facilitator.
2:00– 2:30	Closing Q & A Preview Next Day	Assessment: Exit Ticket

Professional Development Session Trainer Notes Day 2 Procrastination

- ❑ Participants will begin the day by signing in, creating name tags, and sitting in assigned seats.

- ❑ Participants will reintroduce themselves to the group and eat breakfast.
- ❑ Participants will do ice breaker activity.
- ❑ Facilitator will review goals for the professional development and objectives for the day.
- ❑ Facilitator will explain FGCS and share characteristics, needs, and their challenges. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included: (a) scheduling time to do their work, and (b) organizing their work.
- ❑ Participants will discuss strategies to help FGCS avoid procrastination and task management they receive in small groups of five and then share with the entire group.
- ❑ Participants will discuss current programs and curriculum that could help FGCS avoiding procrastination.
- ❑ Recap the Day 1 Information Issues and Day 2 Procrastination Issues, question and answer session. Preview Day 3 FGCS Motivation Issues
- ❑ Participants will complete exit tickets.
- ❑ Facilitator will review exit tickets to check for understanding and note issues that need to be clarified.

HOW CAN WE HELP FGCS AVOID PROCRASTINATION?

ICE BREAKER

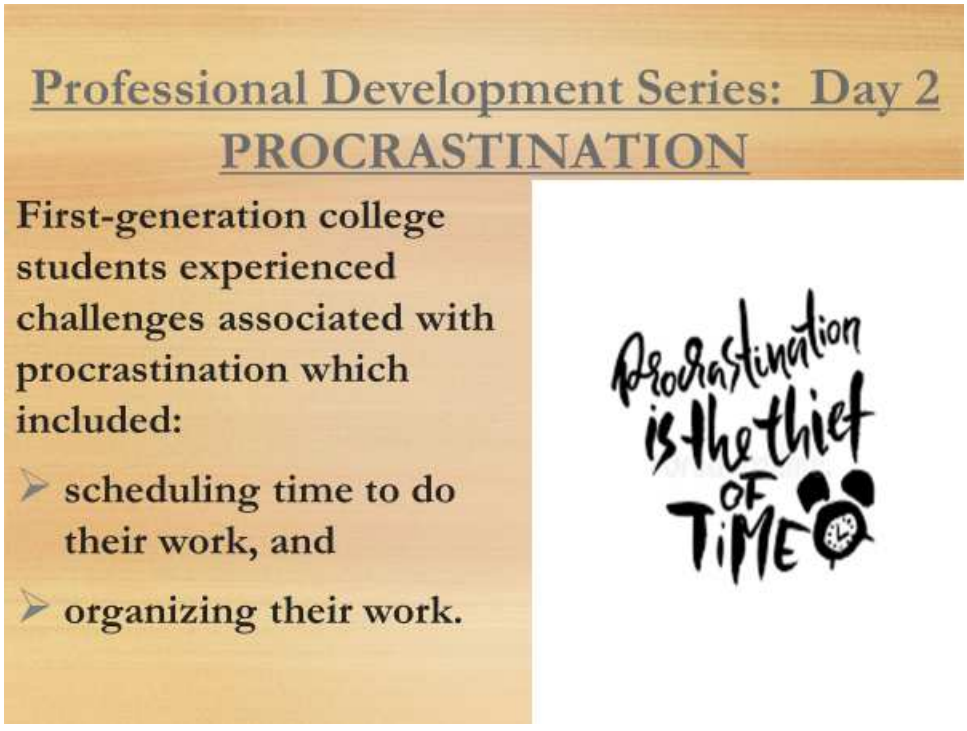
LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

1. **DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH PROCRASTINATION?**
2. **WHAT STRATEGIES DO YOU USE TO AVOID PROCRASTINATION?**
3. **HOW COULD WE HELP FGCS AVOID PROCRASTINATION?**
4. **WHAT ISSUES DID YOU FACE BECAUSE OF YOUR PROCRASTINATION?**

ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

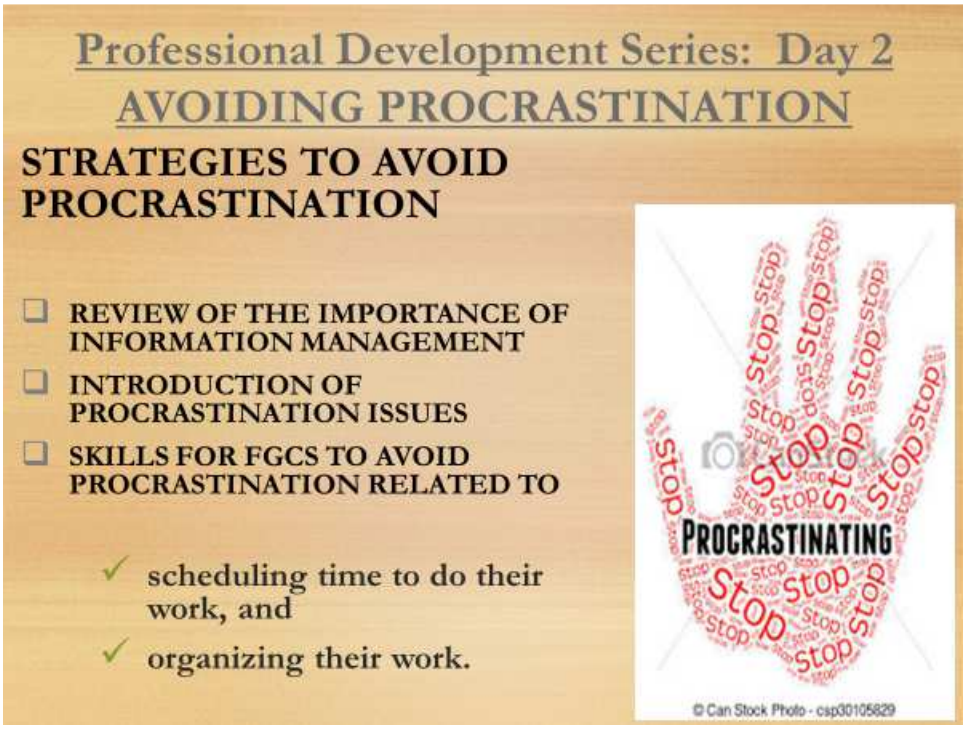
1. **DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH PROCRASTINATION?**
2. **WHAT STRATEGIES DO YOU USE TO AVOID PROCRASTINATION?**
3. **HOW COULD WE HELP FGCS AVOID PROCRASTINATION?**
4. **WHAT ISSUES DID YOU FACE BECAUSE OF YOUR PROCRASTINATION?**



Professional Development Series: Day 2 PROCRASTINATION

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included:

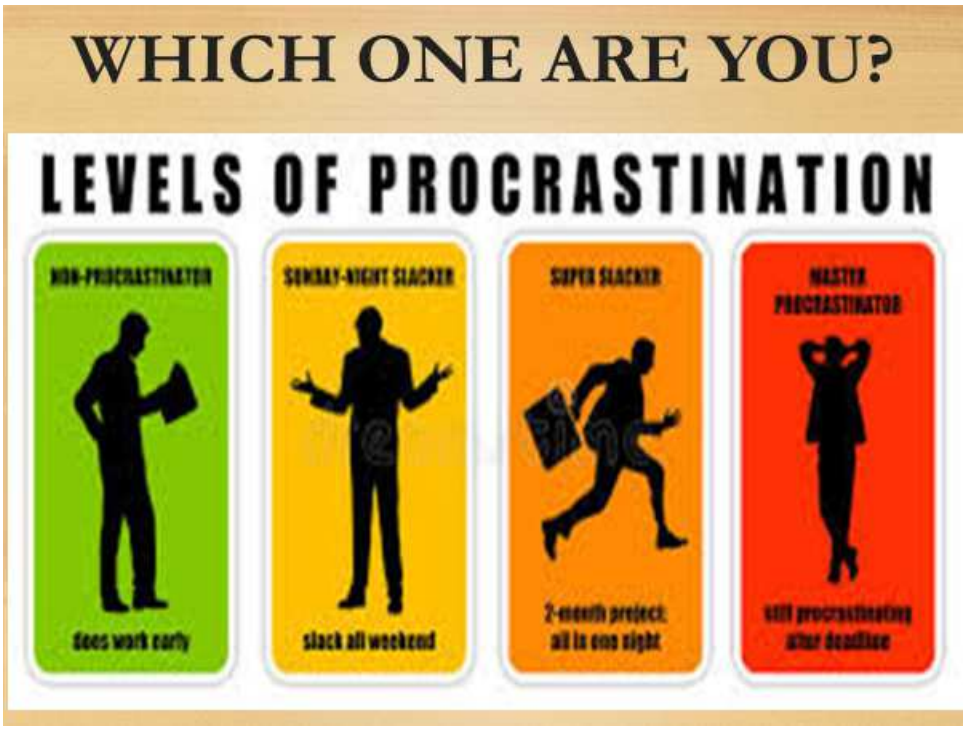
- **scheduling time to do their work, and**
- **organizing their work.**



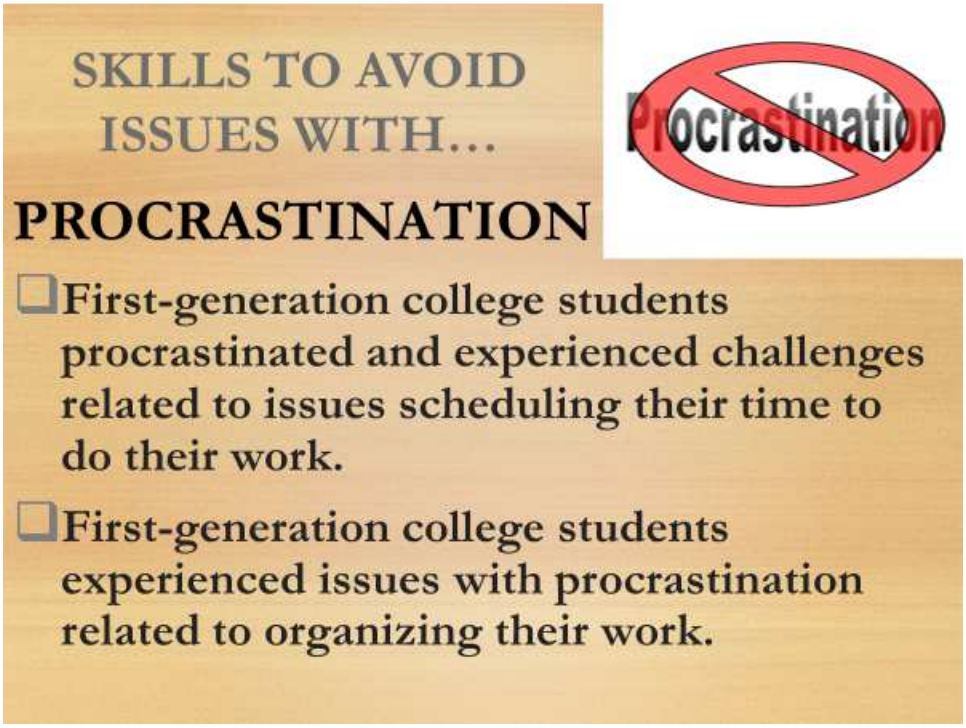
Professional Development Series: Day 2 AVOIDING PROCRASTINATION

STRATEGIES TO AVOID PROCRASTINATION

- **REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**
- **INTRODUCTION OF PROCRASTINATION ISSUES**
- **SKILLS FOR FGCS TO AVOID PROCRASTINATION RELATED TO**
  - ✓ **scheduling time to do their work, and**
  - ✓ **organizing their work.**



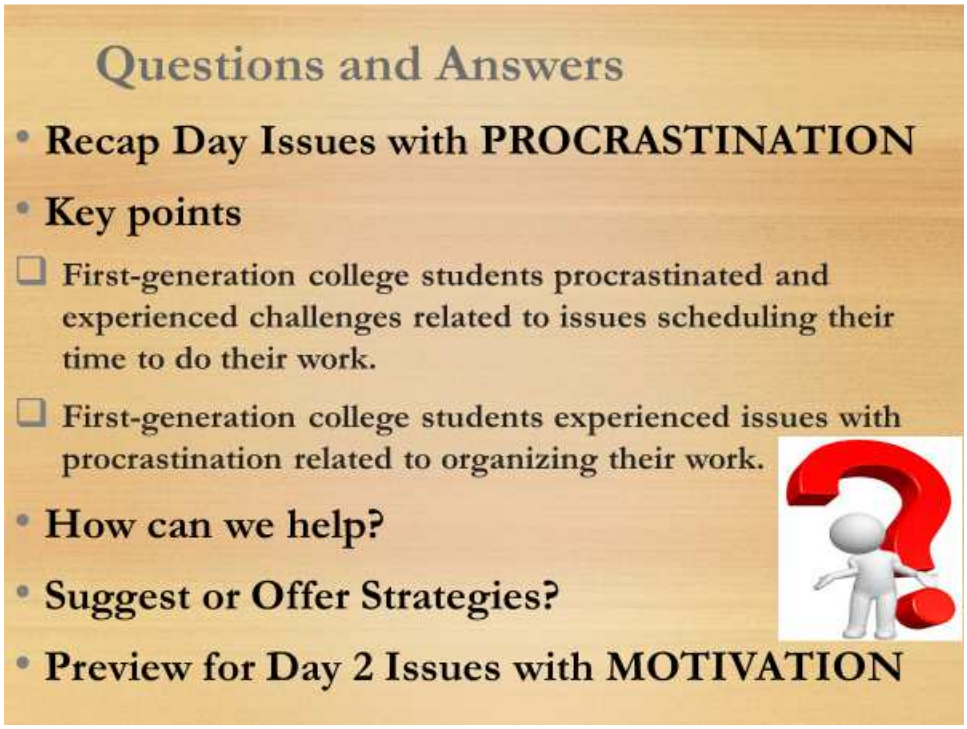
WHICH ONE ARE YOU?



SKILLS TO AVOID ISSUES WITH…

PROCRASTINATION

- **First generation college students procrastinated and experienced challenges related to issues scheduling their time to do their work.**
- **First generation college students experienced issues with procrastination related to organizing their work.**



Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day Issues with PROCRASTINATION**
- **Key points**

- ❑ **First generation college students procrastinated and experienced challenges related to issues scheduling their time to do their work.**
- ❑ **First generation college students experienced issues with procrastination related to organizing their work.**
- **How can we help?**
- **Suggest or Offer Strategies?**
- **Preview for Day 2 Issues with MOTIVATION**

Day 3 Motivation

Professional Development Session Schedule Day 3 Motivation

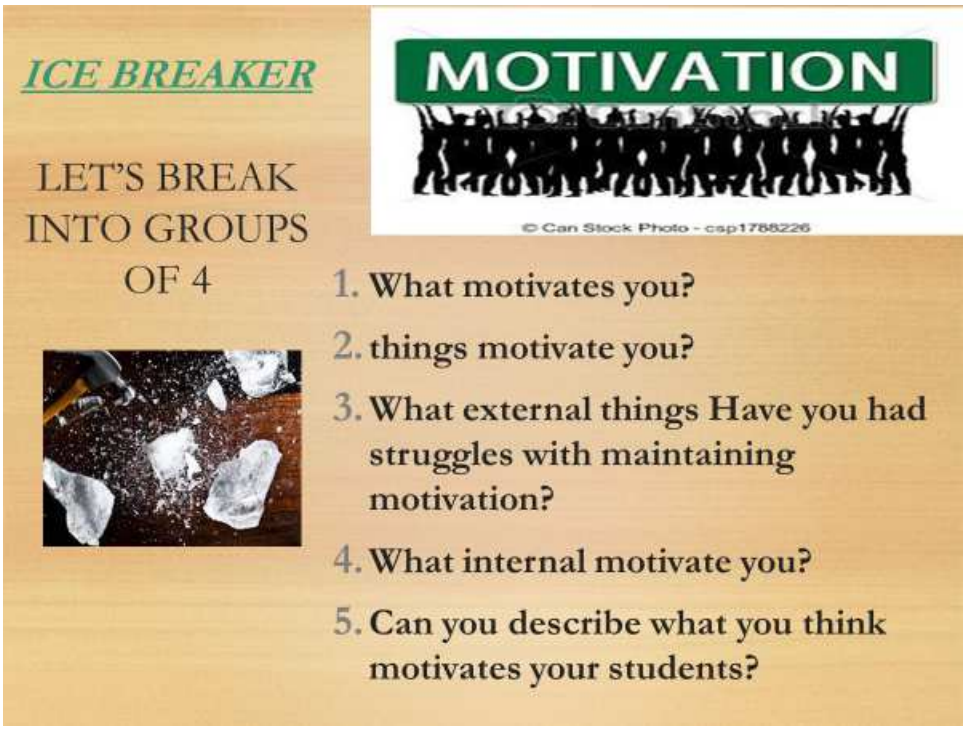
Time	Activity	Method
8:30 – 9:00	Sign in Fill out a name tag Locate seating arrangement clusters by content areas	Sign in for PD attendance verification to receive credit Label name and position and affix to clothing Use table colors to sit in departments
9:00 – 9:30	Continental Breakfast Provided	Sign in table in the Conference Room
9:30 – 10:00	Welcome, Individual Introductions, Review Day 1 and Day 2, Outline Day 3	Lead by PD facilitator using PowerPoint slides
10:00 – 10:45	Ice Breaker – Have you ever had issues maintaining motivation?	Group activity, participants will use the questions on the ice breaker slide to discuss with their group and relate to the theme
10:45 – 12:00	Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Exploration Activity Challenges and Opportunities	Lead by PD facilitator

12:00 – 1:00	Lunch	Not Provided On your own
1:00 – 2:00	Breakout Group Collaboration, Whole Group Collaboration,	PowerPoint presentation presented by PD facilitator.
2:00– 2:30	Closing Question and Answer Session Action Items List	Assessment: Overall Evaluation

Professional Development Session Trainer Notes Day 3 Motivation

- ❑ Participants will begin the day by signing in, creating name tags, and sitting in assigned seats.
- ❑ Participants will reintroduce themselves to the group and eat breakfast.
- ❑ Participants will do ice breaker activity.
- ❑ Facilitator will review goals for the professional development and objectives for the day.
- ❑ Facilitator will explain FGCS and share characteristics, needs, and their challenges. First generation college students experienced challenges associated with maintaining; a) extrinsic motivation and b) intrinsic motivation.
- ❑ Participants will discuss strategies to help FGCS stay motivated they receive in small groups of five and then share with the entire group.
- ❑ Participants will discuss current programs and curriculum that could help FGCS with maintaining motivation.
- ❑ Recap the Day 1 Information Issues and Day 2 Procrastination Issues, question and answer session on Day 3 Motivation Issues. Prepare for final evaluation
- ❑ Participants will complete exit tickets.

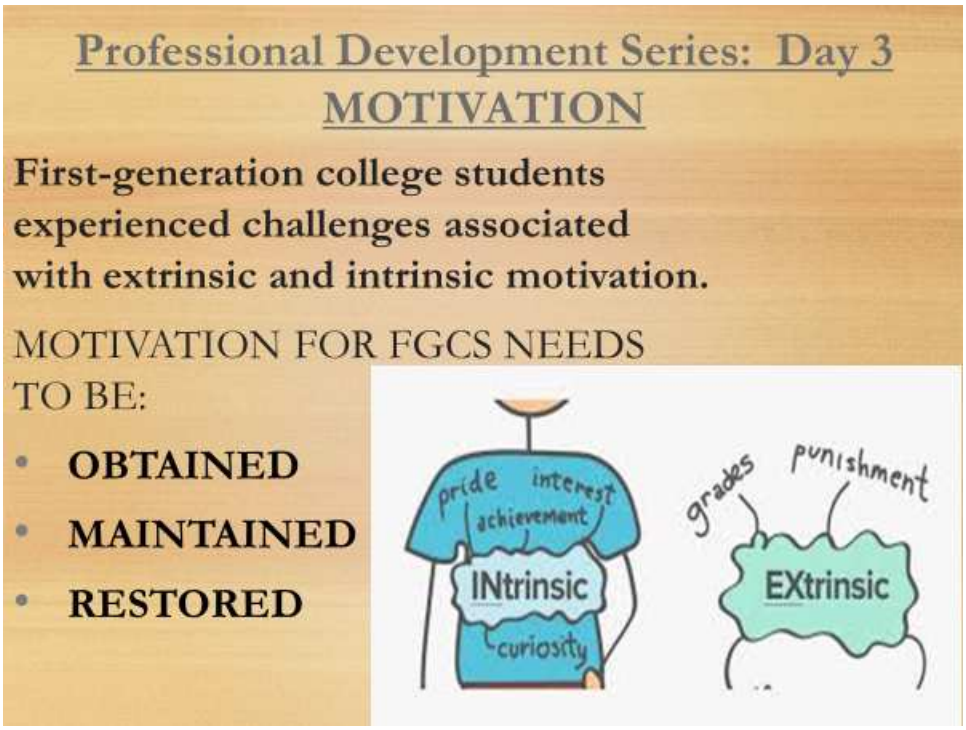
- ❑ Facilitator will thank participants for their contributions.



ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

1. **What motivates you?**
2. **things motivate you?**
3. **What external things Have you had struggles with maintaining motivation?**
4. **What internal motivate you?**
5. **Can you describe what you think motivates your students?**



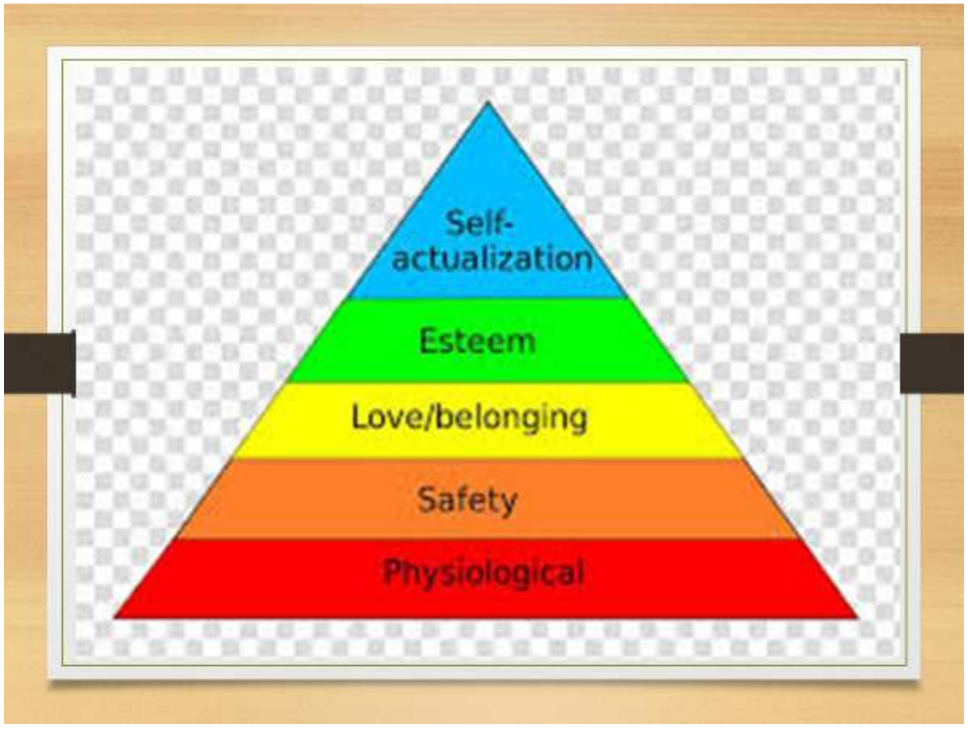
Professional Development Series: Day 3 MOTIVATION

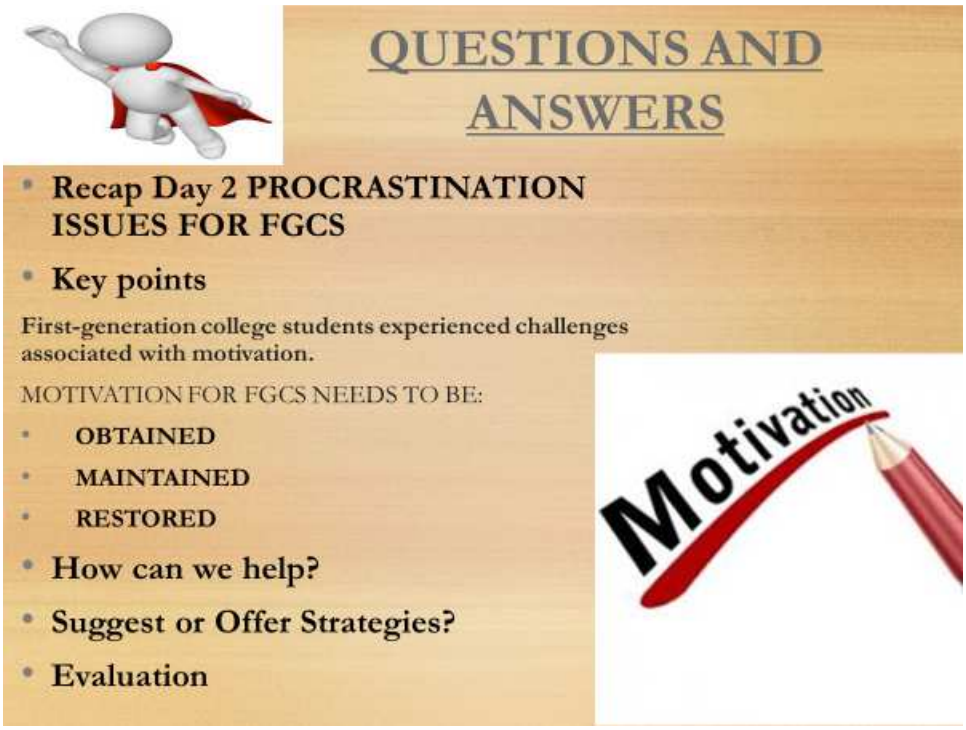
First generation college students experienced challenges associated with extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

MOTIVATION FOR FGCS NEEDS TO BE:

- **OBTAINED**
- **MAINTAINED**
- **RESTORED**

GOALS
ATTITUDE
IDEA
Motivation
SUCCESS
SUPPORT
100 %
PERFORMANCE


Self-actualization
Esteem
Love/belonging
Safety
Physiological



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- **Recap Day 2 PROCRASTINATION ISSUES FOR FGCS**
- **Key points**

First generation college students experienced challenges associated with motivation.

MOTIVATION FOR FGCS NEEDS TO BE:

- **OBTAINED**
- **MAINTAINED**
- **RESTORED**
- **How can we help?**
- **Suggest or Offer Strategies?**

- **Evaluation**

Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day 3 MOTIVATION**

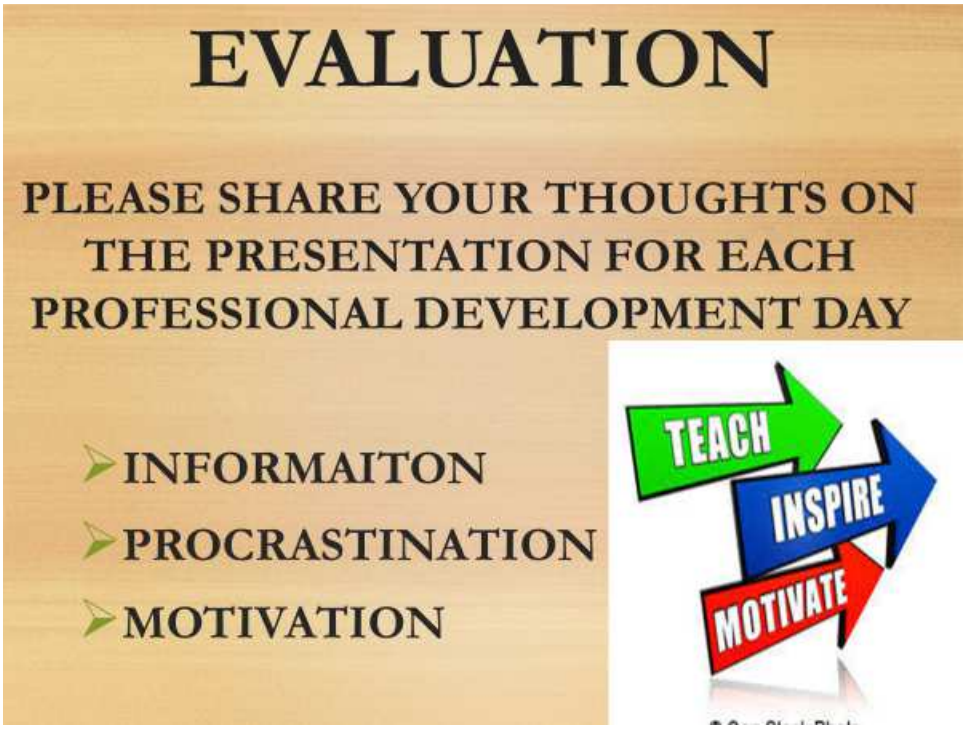
First generation college students experienced challenges associated with extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

MOTIVATION FOR FGCS NEEDS TO BE:

- ✓ **OBTAINED**
- ✓ **MAINTAINED**
- ✓ **RESTORED**
- **How can we help?**

- **Suggest or Offer Strategies?**
- **Review and Looking Forward for Change**

Evaluations

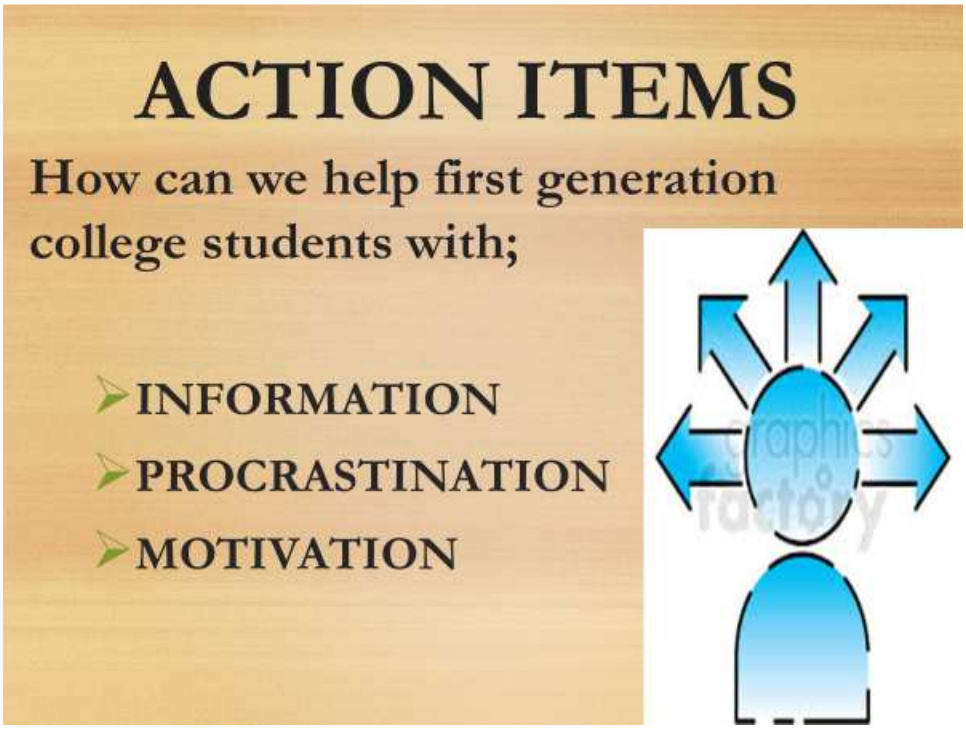


EVALUATION

PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENTATION FOR EACH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY

- **INFORMAITON**

- **PROCRASTINATION**
- **MOTIVATION**



ACTION ITEMS

How can we help first generation college students with;

- **INFORMATION**
- **PROCRASTINATION**
- **MOTIVATION**

Questions and Answers

- **Day 1**
- **Day 2**
- **Day 3**

Formative Assessment Daily Exit Tickets for Professional Development on First Generation College Student Experiences

Day 1 Exit Ticket Issues with Information

Describe the issues first generation college students had with information?

Name an approach that could be used to improve these issues.

Day 2 Exit Ticket Issues with Procrastination

Describe the issues first generation college students had with procrastination?

Name an approach that could be used to improve these issues.

Day 3 Exit Ticket Issues with Motivation

Describe the issues first generation college students had with motivation?

Name an approach that could be used to improve these issues.

Summative Assessment Actionable Items Implementation Plan

Following this professional development on first generation college student experiences related to FGCS' needs related to information, procrastination, and motivation, what actionable items can be implemented.

On Day 1 participants learned strategies to improve student persistence related to the findings that first generation college students experienced challenges associated with information including the following:

d) obtaining information,

e) processing information, and/or

f) acting on information.

Describe some actionable items that can be implemented to help FGCS with these issues.

On Day 2 participants learned strategies to improve student persistence related to the findings that first generation college students experienced challenges associated with procrastination which included:

c) scheduling time to do their work, and

d) organizing their work.

Describe some actionable items that can be implemented to help FGCS with these issues.

On Day 3 participants learned strategies to improve student persistence related to the findings that first generation college students experienced challenges associated with extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

d) Should be obtained

e) Should be maintained

f) Should be regenerated

Describe some actionable items that can be implemented to help FGCS with these issues.

Evaluation Form of Professional Development on First Generation College Students Experiences

Please provide your feedback below using a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Please rate this professional development on the content.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the presentation.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the materials.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the participant engagement opportunities.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the location.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the presenter.

1 2 3 4 5

Please share any additional comments here below.

Thank you for your time and participation!