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A Qualitative Study of First-Generation African American and Latinx College Students' Experiences in College

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MS, CUNY-Lehman College, 2015

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

First-generation college student (FGCS) can be defined as students from families in which their parents did not earn a four-year degree. An increasing number of FGCS enroll in college each year. However, first-generation African American and Latinx students are faced with challenges attending a four-year institution of higher learning. For this reason, pre-college programs like the Upward Bound program provide support, resources, and guidance to help prepare FGCS for college. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and factors contributing to their academic goals. The theoretical framework for this study was Lent, Brown, and Hackett's social cognitive career theory. Purposeful sampling was used to select 10 FGCS who participated in an Upward Bound program. Virtual one-on-one interviews were used to gather data for open and axial coding data analysis. Themes derived from an analysis of individual interviews with 10 participants. After analyzing all factors, themes were labeled and defined. Themes were vital factors for enrolling into a four-year college. Findings revealed that mental health, sense of belonging, building connections with faculty, and academic programming supported the drive of first-generation students. Capturing participants' perspectives will help Upward Bound directors, secondary school counselors, and college admissions advisors better understand how providing structure and resources positively affects FGCS and their transition from high school to college.

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Acknowledgments

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). God you are worthy, I thank you for everything. God thank you for your covering, protection, wisdom, and giving me the strength to make it in this far in my academic career. Throughout the tears, challenges, obstacles, and sleepless nights, God thank you for keeping me and instilling faith throughout this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Higher educational attainment is a significant gateway to upward mobility. Low-income first-generation college students (FGCS) are underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities as well as among those completing four-year degrees (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). When it comes to the potential transition to college, low-income FGCS parents have less access and resources involved in their children's education and have a diminished capacity to transfer valued cultural and social capital (Hamilton, 2016). Information provided in this study involves the experiences of FGCS, specifically African Americans and Latinx, and how they can assist implementing programs and providing resources to help FGCS in college succeed. This chapter includes the background of the problem and social and theoretical contexts that contribute to challenges and obstacles faced by FGCS. Chapter 1 defines and explains the problem experienced by FGCS and data to explain this phenomenon.

Furthermore, this chapter describes the purpose, significance of the study, and motivation behind this study. This chapter concludes with a discussion regarding the importance of the research plan and essential vocabulary. Not every student who matriculates into college is likely to graduate. Although college access has increased, FGCS continue to enroll in postsecondary education (Holland, 2020). Garriott (2020) discussed no matter how first-generation is defined, students with parents who have not completed a bachelor's degree are disadvantaged compared to their continuing peers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2017) said 69% of 2017 high school graduates were enrolled in college by October of 2017. In 2017, about 44% of high school completers

joined in 4-year institutions, and 23% enrolled in 2-year institutions. As the U.S. strives to remain competitive globally, a college degree is necessary for the U.S. workforce (McFarland et al., 2019).

Earning a college degree is a way to attain upward social mobility and the American Dream. In 2018, median earnings of those with a master's or higher degree were $65,000, 19% higher than the earnings of those with a bachelor's degree ($54,700). In the same year, the median earnings of those with a bachelor's degree were 57% higher than the earnings of high school completers ($34,900), and the median earnings of high school completers were 25% higher than earnings of those who did not complete high school ($27,900; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). While pursuing a higher education level may increase income and lead to social mobility and financial protection, finishing college and graduating is not the norm for all. Sixty-nine percent of students tend not to complete their bachelor's degrees within a 6-year time frame (McFarland et al., 2019). FGCS and social mobility is a discussion that is more significant than ever before. If a college student's parents have not attended college, they fit into the classification of FGCS (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

A college degree serves as a critical pathway to economic and social mobility. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was developed and signed into law by President Obama. The ESSA took effect for the 2017-2018 academic year. President Obama and the U.S. Administration emphasized that all students deserve a first-class education to assist in the global economy. According to ESSA (2015), students placed at at-risk for academic failure need special assistant and ESSA provides resources to address the

student need. The main goals of the ESSA are as ensure that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities and advance equity for America's disadvantaged and high-need students. With ESSA, all students in America must be taught high academic standards to prepare them to succeed in college and careers. In addition, ESSA empowers local and state legislators to maintain accountability and action to help low performing schools. Data implementation and continuous improvement on providing proper support in schools to students and their families are critical to identifying and addressing opportunity gaps.

The Upward Bound program is a federally funded program that prepares high school students from low-income communities and assists with their postsecondary education. Upward Bound aims to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from postsecondary education institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). It is designed to help high school students acquire the necessary skills to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education and beyond (Upward Bound, 2019). The Upward Bound program provides all-year support for students and a 6-week intensive summer program, SAT/ACT prep, counseling services, academic tutoring, and college tours. High school students in the 9th and 10th grades are recruited to join the Upward Bound program. For students to be eligible for the Upward Bound program, a student must be enrolled in a local high school and qualify as a low-income first-generation student. The creation of Upward Bound programs is to help students achieve their education goals and reduce achievement guilt (Muñiz, 2020). As

the researcher, my goal was to understand factors that FGCS perceive as academic progress.

This study explored how FGCS at a 4-year college describe their college experiences and factors contributing to accomplishing their academic goals. Much of the study is focused on FGCS attending two and four-year colleges. Research focused on FGCS attending college-access programs is limited. The mission of college access programs is to offer guidance and support for high school students. There are about 960 colleges and universities with college access programs such as Upward Bound (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) FGCS who participate in college access programs and pursue college afterward have increased. Colleges and universities must be awarded funds to help implement college access programs to increase college enrollment for FGCS.

There needs to be expanded research on FGCS and their precollege experiences. The issue is experiences of African American and Latinx FGCS in college-access programs such as Upward Bound. There is an increase of FGCS enrolling in college, which means implementation of more college bound programs, providing resources, tools, and accessibility to support FGCS academically. The goal of the study was to explain challenges low-income FGCS have that may hinder them in terms of academic preparation and retention. Low-income and underrepresented students are less likely to begin college academically prepared for success and are the most likely to leave college before earning a degree (Adelman, 2006).

Background

A large and growing population within the United States, FGCS comprise one out of five (20%) of all college attendees. the percentage of low-income students and students of color, many of which are first generation college students (FGCS), enrolled in college increased by 8% and 18% respectively, from 1996 to 2006 (Pew Research Center, 2019). Minority, low-income, and FGCS have lower baccalaureate achievement rates than nonminority, higher-income, and non-FGCS (Le et al., 2016; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Only about half of first-generation students complete a bachelor's degree (Redford & Hoyer, 2018). Among Latinx ages 25-29, only 15% have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 22% of African Americans, 41% of Whites, and 63% of Asians (Pew Research Center, 2016). FGCS often experience limited access to college information, poor academic preparation, and lack of family support (Clayton et al., 2019). Despite the overall increase in degree attainment at the national level, a significant gap in college attendance and degree attainment remains between underrepresented students and their peers (Babineau, 2018). Although colleges and universities have increased their endeavors to implement access and support for first-generation college students, these institutions have found that retention issues remain a problem (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Problem Statement

Research related to FGCS participating in precollege programs such as Upward Bound is limited regarding African American and Latinx experience and factors contributing to their academic goals. Due to less rigorous pre-college preparation and

college guidance, FGCS arrive on college campus academically less prepared than their peers (Choy, 2011; Engle & Tinto, 2008). FGCS are those for whom neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Low-income FGCS are more likely to be students of color (Kantamneni et al., 2018). FGCS are more likely to have a high level of academic need, come from racial minority groups and low-income backgrounds, and be considered at-risk (Castillo-Montoya, 2017). FGCS have disadvantages and stressors that can limit their experiences in terms of applying to college (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). FGCS also lack social capital and are less likely to reach out to faculty for help and have family commitments, which can add to challenges that can potentially disrupt college transition (Schelbe et al., 2019). FGCS disproportionately come from underrepresented backgrounds and have been found to have lower degree attainment rates (Schelbe et al., 2019).

To prepare first generation low-income students for college, many high schools, after-school programs, colleges, and universities target precollege programs, such as the Upward Bound program, to provide resources to increase college enrollment. Across the country, there are thousands of college access programs that assist underserved students. These programs provide supports to over two million students annually (National College Access Network, 2017). Upward Bound operates on a national level and is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. According to the Department of Education (2016), nationally, 91% of Upward Bound participants who graduate from high school enroll in a postsecondary degree program the year before graduation. This is compared to 41% of students not enrolled in an Upward Bound program (U.S. Department of Education,

2016). Percentages of Upward Bound participants who were apart of the 2013-2014 high school graduation cohort show the following: 85% of participants were low-income and first generation, 88% of participants were low-income, 87% of participants were first-generation (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Data on Upward Bound performance for the 2019-2020 academic year are still being collected, and information has not yet been released. Since there is limited research on Upward Bound participants and enrollment in college, more research is needed to best support FGCS.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative descriptive study involved exploring how African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and factors contributing to their academic goals. As FGCS are disproportionately from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, institutions have developed programs to increase the academic retention of FGCS. Educational research on this population has focused on personal challenges and systematic barriers they confront as they access, navigate, and persist in college. My goal was to study FGCS in the Upward Bound program and describe their college experiences by interviewing them. The setting was the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Developing an understanding of how African American and Latinx FGCS perceive their experiences involving academic and nonacademic success will help secondary schools and higher institutions create resources and services to increase enrollment and retention.

Research Question

Using the lens of the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and themes that emerged from literature, the research question that guided this study was:

RQ1: How do African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and factors contributing to accomplishing their academic goals?

Conceptual Framework

This study was framed using SCCT. Developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett, SCCT was designed to help and support individuals form career interests, set vocational goals, persist in work environments, and attain job satisfaction. SCCT was developed to discuss career development through sociocognitive constructs. Grounded in Bandura's general social cognitive theory, SCCT involves how academic and career choices are justified. The theory also involves how career and educational interests mature, career choices are developed, and decisions are turned into actions. I incorporated additional features of Bandura's theory (outcome expectations, goals) and highlighted a range of "person input" (gender, race/ethnicity, ability, trait) and contextual (support and barrier) factors. Given the unique challenges and experiences first-generation students encounter, SCCT can be a useful framework for recognizing how both distal and proximal contextual factors influence their academic and vocational decisions. Social and economic factors, personal perceptions, belief systems, and critical issues for first-generation students are all accounted for within SCCT model. SCCT is a framework for understanding how certain aspects of persons and their socioeconomic status become

constructed in ways that shift career-relevant learning experience. SCCT involves

outcome expectations as contributing to future performance and persistence indirectly via

levels of performance goals people set for themselves (Lent & Brown, 2019).

Three interrelated social cognitive mechanisms serve as the building blocks of

SCCT. They are relevant for understanding career development, self-efficacy beliefs,

outcome expectations, and personal goals. Self-efficacy beliefs refer to students'

"judgments of their abilities to build and execute courses of action required to attain

designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Grounded in Bandura's

concept of self-efficacy, career decision self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief that

they can complete tasks necessary to make career decisions. Pullliam et al. (2017) said

self-efficacy rates are lowest among first-generation students. Finding an academic self-

efficacy intervention can close the gap between FGCS and their peers. Low-income

FGCS have fewer and lower quality learning experiences in math/science compared to

their peers, experience less support for attending college, and report low confidence

regarding their academic performance (Lee & Kramer, 2013). Students with lower levels

of career decision self-efficacy often make initial career choices based on parent

expectations and salary outlook without considering career factors involving their skills,

interests, personality traits, or abilities (Alika, 2012).

Outcome expectations pertain to one's judgments of likely consequences

produced by performing behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Developing students also possess

specific perceptions of the social context of careers. Outcome expectations and students'

interest in realizing these goals play an important role in guiding students' behaviors

(Lent et al., 2003). Verdin et al. (2018) said FGCS majoring in engineering were more interested in supervising others and having job security and opportunities than their continuing-generation peers. Increased self-efficacy and outcome expectations in turn cultivate career-related goals that help career aspirations correspond with interests, capabilities, values, and environmental conditions, including family and cultural expectations and economic realities (Lent et al., 2000). Therefore, variables such as career self-efficacy and outcome expectations are potentially useful in understanding and facilitating individuals' academic and career development.

SCCT involves how students establish short or long-term goals for themselves. Given that behavior sustains over an extended period and increases prospects, individuals realize their desired outcomes. Goals allow individuals to organize and guide behavior across time (Lent et al., 1994). Valuing time with friends while also needing to work long hours to receive career advancement are goals that conflict with aspirations and plans families may have for FGC graduates (Overton-Healy, 2010).

Furthermore, the Upward Bound program provides not only academic support but also emotional and social wellbeing support. Student support and academic counseling aid students with their wellbeing to help them be successful on college campuses. Upward Bound provides mentoring and counseling designed for students with limited English proficiency, students with disabilities, and other disconnected students. SCCT is directly applicable to FGCS in that the theory involves linking academic and career pursuits while considering background and contextual influences on these pursuits.

Nature of the Study

This research involved using a qualitative descriptive study design. Qualitative research involves understanding individuals, groups, and phenomena in their natural settings and meanings people make of their own experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Quantitative research involves numbers and statistical techniques to collect data, where qualitative data involves words, emotions, and expressions as data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Quantitative descriptive studies entail interpretation in that researchers set expectations for the study by preselecting variables. Quantitative research involves employing numbers and accuracy, while qualitative research involves lived experiences and human perceptions.

The goal of descriptive analysis is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015). The qualitative research design involves simultaneous collecting and analyzing data, developing, and modifying theory, elaborating, or refocusing research questions, and identifying and addressing validity threats (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2). A qualitative research design provides useful data and depth in terms of understanding the experiences of FGCS. Qualitative research evolves by using emerging questions and collecting data via themes as the researcher attempts to interpret the meaning of data (Hayes & Singh, 2012). Having a structured and designed approach can help lead to rigor and validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This research study involves former Upward Bound program members who completed the program and achieved postsecondary success and their perspectives and experiences. Chaney and Lake (2020) defined postsecondary success as graduating high

school, enrolling in college, persisting in their program of study, and attaining a bachelor's degree with 5 years of their enrollment date. Gaining employment after graduation is part of postsecondary success (Chaney & Lake, 2020). This study aims to provide valuable information to strengthen practices that can be implemented to improve the program and student outcomes.

Definitions

The following terms are defined for this study:

Academic self-efficacy: College students' beliefs in performing intellectual tasks (Solberg et al., 1993).

Continuing-generation student: Students with at least one parent who attended college (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

First-Generation: Students who have not had any parent who has attended college (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

Latinx: of, relating to, or marked by Latin American heritage —used as a gender-neutral alternative to *Latino* or *Latina.*

Low income: Individuals whose family income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty line (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Persistence: Completing at least two semesters of college or developmental studies work (Karp, Hughes & O'Gara, 2008).

Social capital: the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively.

TRIO Programs: Federal outreach and student services programs implemented to identify and provide resources for individuals from disadvantaged low-income backgrounds. There are eight educational programs within the TRIO platform which assist and serve low-income students, FGCS, and individuals with disabilities to support them through the academic and postsecondary pipeline.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions in my study. First, the focus of my study was first-year full-time students. I assumed they were making progress toward graduation. Second, I assumed that all participants understood interview questions and answered questions truthfully and honestly. Interviewees answered interview questions to the best of their ability. Third, I believed they shared similar experiences based on their needs, obstacles, and family background. Additionally, I did not influence interview participants' responses, and information gathered through interviews was unbiased. Although I attempted to capture the true meaning of data shared by participants, meaning can be subjective.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I explored perceptions of African American and Latinx FGCS, attending college in the northeastern region of the U.S. who were in an Upward Bound program. For this study, first-generation students are students whose parents did not participate in college. I did not include students whose parents began but did not complete a degree or certification. I emphasized contributing factors involving college experiences and academic goals.

I focused on what challenged and maintained FGCS in college. Only students who were first-generation qualified for this study. I excluded transfer and international students from the prospective study sample pool. Since the study is limited to one Upward Bound program, results did not represent all FGCS who also participated in Upward Bound programs at other campuses or four-year institutions.

Finally, transferability refers to applicability to broader contexts while maintaining context richness (Lincoln & Guba, 1981; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My study was qualitative and involved a four-year college setting. The focus point of this study was African American and Latinx FGCS. Results may not be generalizable to other settings. My intention was to understand what participants perceived. This study could gain attention from administrations, researchers, and educators at similar institutions and college-bound programs to implement new changes related to FGCS.

Limitations

This study had the following limitations. First, this study had only two data collection sources. The primary sources were virtual interviews I kept a reflective journal with thoughts and notes I took during the interview process. As a high school counselor, I was careful about my perceptions. Second, I interviewed only 10 students who were part of an Upward Bound program. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and numerous demands, availability was an issue. Results may not be representative of all FGCS who attended other college access programs.

Significance

Access to a college education is critical for improving people's quality of life and society. This study will provide higher education institutions a better understanding of how students with similar issues learn how to address retention challenges and implement strategies to increase graduation rates. Without such insight, higher education scholars, teachers, and practitioners may overlook fundamental ways to support these students as learners. Students from under-resourced backgrounds have greater college participation and academic achievement when provided with guiding practices involving social skills, academics, financial skills knowledge, and academic enrichment (Liang et al., 2017).

Howard (2017) said African American FGCS might experience additional higher education barriers compared to their majority counterparts. While African American first-generation students demonstrate challenges, Latinx students also face college enrollment inequalities. Increasing Latinx college access and graduation should be a national priority. Latinx students enroll in college at higher rates than other racial/ethnic groups but continue to lag other bachelor's degree attainment rates (Pew Research Center, 2016). This study is significant because it focuses on discrepancies involving low-income minority populations.

Summary

Chapter 1 includes national data and research involving FGCS on college campuses. This chapter includes a brief history of how income, retention, and graduation rates are variables that affect what higher educational institutions need. A bachelor's degree is intended to be 4 years or less. Only 40% of first-time full-time college students

complete bachelor's degrees within 4 years at a public institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Given the obstacles FGCS faces, it would be valuable to investigate what factors contributed to their success, what hurdles they faced, and how they overcame them. The study involved exploring how college students perceive their experiences related to their academic and nonacademic achievements based on the Upward Bound program. Results of this research can help to inform administrators, faculty, and academic advisors to help connect FGCS with educational resources in ways to provide them with opportunities to be academically successful and earn their college degrees. Furthermore, it is essential to make data-driven decisions to increase student retention, graduation rates, and student success.

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature that is related to FGCS. It also includes information about the conceptual framework used for the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review was designed to highlight research exploring experiences and challenges of African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program. My vision was to understand how African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and factors contributing to their academic goals. Literature included current peer-reviewed articles used to address the various challenges FGCS perceive to have while pursuing a degree. Also, the conceptual framework guiding this study, SCCT, was defined and discussed. Topics within this chapter include academic and racial disparities, lack of parent support, financial challenges, and proposed solutions to retention.

Literature Search Strategy

The following key terms were searched for this literature review: *academic challenges*, *college preparation*, *educational barriers*, *African Americans*, *first-generation*, *Latinx first-generation college students*, *postsecondary success*, *college retention*, *student attitudes*, *outcomes of education*, *academic aspiration*, *college readiness*, *social cognitive career theory*, *degree attainment*, *academic persistence*, *student experience*, *self-efficacy*, *student engagement*, and *social capital*. Databases used were ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis Online, and Google Scholar. Peer-reviewed articles and books were reviewed by searching their topic and abstract.

Theoretical Foundation

SCCT is a theoretical framework used to explore individuals from diverse backgrounds and their career processes. Anchored in Bandura's general social cognitive theory, the SCCT involves three linked variables (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals). These variables interact with other aspects of the person and their environment (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social supports, and barriers) to help shape career development. SCCT has been used in multiple education and career-related research studies since its foundation in the 1990s. SCCT is a lens through which to view how people form interests, make choices, and achieve varying success levels in their educational and occupational pursuits (Lent et al., 1994).

Given the unique challenges and obstacles FGCS face, SCCT involves how both distal and proximal factors can influence their academic and career choices. FGCS have continued to face challenges that hinder their persistence, engagement, and retention success. These challenges include limited social support, financial problems, lack of parent involvement, and limited access to resources. Obstacles such as family responsibilities, navigating the undergraduate experience on their own and pursing a college education that can complicate family dynamics can hold FGCS from attending college and pursing their goals. According to Camp et al. (2019), school counselors and educators are vital resources when supporting students and families to help them with their needs and alleviate barriers they might face. Using SCCT framework related to FGCS research has been successful in terms of high school to college transition process (Gibbons et al., 2019). As such, SCCT has been used as a theoretical framework for

empirical research related to FGC students, specifically the career decision-making self-efficacy of Upward Bound students (O'Brien et al., 2000); the college-going anticipations of prospective first-generation middle school students (Gibbons & Borders, 2010); the academic success and college transition of FGCS freshmen (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007); and academic success of FGCS sophomore students (Vuong et al., 2010). I examined how African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program described their college experiences and factors contributing to their academic goals. This descriptive qualitative study will include an extensive overview of student success and how higher education institutions can better understand how barriers can lead to dialogue and increase research and resources for FGCS. With the focus on the Upward Bound program in this research, findings may positively impact students' retention.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 35% of undergraduates were the first in their families to go to college in the 2015–16 academic year. Despite improvements in college admissions rates over the last few decades, college persistence and attainment gaps persist between low-income FGCS and their more affluent counterparts with college family histories (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). For example, 53% of first-generation students enrolled in a two-year institution, compared with 39% of students whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree. Only 39% of first-generation students attended four-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education. (2017).

According to a Pell Institute study of students who first enrolled in fall 2003, only 21% of low-income, first-generation college students will have a college degree within six years of enrolling in school, compared to 57% of their peers who were not

low-income or first-generation students. **A**cademic difficulties, lack of self-esteem, social challenges, financial challenges, and family obligations hinder FGCS and end their higher education careers prematurely. FGCS make -up one-third of the U.S. college-going student body, yet only 56% earn a baccalaureate degree within 6 years, compared to 74% of students with parents who graduated college (Cataldi et al., 2018). FGCS are more likely to leave college without a credential after 3 years of enrollment. Six years after postsecondary entry, fewer remain enrolled compared to continuing-generation peers, and nearly 90% fail to graduate (Cataldi et al., 2018; Holland, 2020).

SCCT involves overcoming challenges to pursue academic, personal, and social achievement. Self-efficacy beliefs relate to outcome expectations, as people tend to expect positive outcomes when they believe they can execute a goal. This study was evaluated on SCCT and how FGCS use characteristics that motivate decisions to persist. The framework of SCCT was used to address possible research regarding internal and external factors that contribute to career development, thereby providing a context for understanding the perceptions of African American and Latinx FGCS.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

First-Generation Student Challenges in College

Attending college for the first time can be intimidating and lead to anxiety for college students. First-year retention rates range from 61% to 95%, depending on the institution (Wibrowski et al., 2016). For FGCS, attending college can be more overwhelming. Some FGCS attend college to bring satisfaction to their family members (Covarrubias et al., 2020). Many FGCS are faced with difficulties and anxieties such as

navigating the college process, academic concerns, mental health issues, financial concerns, and cultural and social adjustments (Ricks & Warren, 2021).

Furthermore, FGCS face more difficulty transitioning into college, feeling guilt, have limited communication with family members, and experience homesickness. FGCS face numerous barriers to their success but can change their academic success and future mindset based on their experiences and perceptions while in college. The study's impact demonstrated on how FGCS used their obstacles to create a successful college experience.

FGCS are faced with more challenges than their college peers. Moreover, FGCS experience more anxiety, emotional distress, and less academic satisfaction during their college process than their continuing generation peers (Covarrubias et al., 2015). FGCS are inclined to experience emotional distress due to their family's sense of betrayal and abandonment at some point in their college journey (House et al., 2020). FGCS have experienced a sense of pressure to continue fulfilling the goals they discussed with their families to satisfy their expectations. Yet, FGCS transitioning to the university may be driven by a cultural focus of interdependence for low-income, including maintaining relationships and obligations to the family (Covarrubias, & Fryberg, 2015). Higher education is necessary for upward mobility. For FGCS to be successful, they need to experience a positive college environment, including a positive support system, to help them pursue academic success.

Academic Barriers

FGCS are often academically underprepared for college. Foundational research by Tinto (1975) indicated that pre-college experiences such as academic preparation were vital to whether a student continued college. Two major factors that hinder FGCS are high school preparation (GPA, ACT, or SAT scores) and the college-selection processes. Low-income and underrepresented students are less likely to begin college academically prepared for success and are the most likely to leave college before earning a degree (Rutter, 2020). Furthermore, when they enroll in college, FGCS are less likely to ask for support from advisors or faculty members.

It is unsurprising for FGCS to enter college less academically prepared and take minimal courses to pass. FGCS are less likely to enroll in rigorous coursework and enroll in the science, technology, engineering, or mathematics fields (Dika & D'Amico, 2016). FGCS struggles to accomplish academic success, such as high-grade point averages (Reford & Hoyer, 2017). Many FGCS have received a lack of information to enroll in advance placement courses, impacting their college enrollment and college preparedness. Access to and enrollment in challenging courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) classes would allow them to prepare for college-level work (Le, Mariano, & Faxon-Mills, 2016).

DeAngelo and Franke (2016) measured the relationship between academic achievement and college readiness by rigorous course work, high GPA, and standardized test scores. College readiness is defined as students who "have a B+ or better high school GPA and have completed four years of English, three years of math, two years of a

foreign language, one year each of biological and physical sciences, plus an additional year of one or the other (in total three years of science), one year of history/government, and one year of arts" (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016, p. 1596). This study's findings have revealed that academic readiness matters, and that readiness mediates the relationships between social background factors and retention in the first college year. High school course-taking patterns provide a measure of exposure to the content knowledge needed in introductory college coursework; high school GPA measures the development of core academic skills and content knowledge, and test scores provide a standard measure of ability and core academic skills (Roderick et al., 2009).

FGCS are likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, with less preparation toward college and minimal access to information regarding college expectations (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2016). Moreover, first-generation students are often recommended to occupational, educational programs, which provide higher education and career advancement for individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Zhang, 2018). Despite the academic barriers, FGCS perceptions on their decisions to attend college is essential. Regardless of demographic, socioeconomic status, and life experiences, FGCS continues to struggle with educational attainment.

FGCS struggle to adapt to the college experience because they lack the context to face obstacles academically and face racial difficulties as a minority and FGCS (Means & Pyne, 2017). More specifically, FGCS may face higher number of stressors than many non-FGCS. Researchers shared three implications for practice. First, colleges and universities should implement comprehensive programs for low-income, first-generation

college students. These findings can help identify the different aspects of the college transitions for FGCS. Second, as universities seek to improve academic success for low-income, first-generation college students, attention to the role of belonging in educational spaces is another crucial facet to developing comprehensive support opportunities. Professional development, such as cultural competence for academic advisors and faculty, can help them build better relationships and educational care for student progress and increase student self-efficacy. Lastly, when staff members ignore diversity, social justice issues can disrupt the sense of belonging for minority student populations (Means & Pyne, 2017). Because institutions have little influence over individual characteristics, college programs should be focused on improving the academic and social integration of FGCS.

Racial Disparities

With racial differences in college attendance, racial inequality in income, occupational and institutional access, and other aspects of life are likely to persist, as are patterns of race/class residential concentration in areas of declining and stagnant economic opportunity and limited institutional resources (Charles et al., 2007). Race and ethnicity shape experiences related to belonging in higher education and being successful. (Strayhorn, 2012); for example, Students of Color in their first year of college reported a lower sense of belonging than White Students. Low-income, first-generation college students are also likely to be Students of Color (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Additionally, FGCS has academic disadvantages with limited knowledge of college coursework in the content areas of math, reading, science, and writing (Pulliam,

Ieva, & Burlew, 2017). For the 2018 SAT takers, 10% of Asian-American students met

the benchmark and were identified as college-ready, compared to 44% of White, 23% of

Hispanic, and 12% of African American students (College Board, 2018). The Scholastic

Assessment Test (SAT) has been used as a valid predictor of college readiness, successful

completion of a student's freshman year, and, ultimately, the successful completion of a

4-year degree (College Board, 2013). Among first-generation college students, 57.3% are

Latinx then 27% of African Americans and 10.5% of Whites (Eagan et al., 2017).

Considering these foundational barriers, FGCS tend to enter the postsecondary process

with disadvantages.

Researchers have argued that postsecondary education options for students of

color and low socioeconomic status have lowered their chances and opportunities to

succeed in higher education (Falcon, 2015). FGCS, including minority, racial or ethnic

groups, or low-income families, find themselves comparing to continuing-generation

students, such as race, perceived family income, family connections, and access to

opportunities based on systemic issues (Loeb & Hurd, 2019). Minority students,

including FGCS, are not all from economically disadvantaged families; however, they

have been historically underrepresented in higher college institutions and the empirical

college students. This underrepresentation has been linked to limited attention to

students' needs, and therefore to underutilization by these students of campus resources

often associated with academic success (Poosti, 2019). African American FGCS are

having more difficulty gaining more access to college institutions, which can also be true

for Latinx FGCS. Given the differences in the race gap, African American, and Latinx

FGCS still are motivated to be successful today.

African Americans FGCS

African American FGCS often face challenges when preparing for and attending

college. African American FGCS lack the resources and support necessary to succeed in

college (Flores, Park, and Baker, 2017). African American FGCS have a challenging time

acclimating to the demands of their academic and personal lives, have lower expectations

of themselves, and lack family support as they transition to higher education (Malott et

al., 2019). African American FGCS have trouble navigating the college system, lack

knowledge on finding available resources and feel a sense of not belonging in the college

environment. African American FGCS lack guidance when locating resources to succeed

in college (Horowitz, 2017). African American FGCS often spend more time working,

which places a constraint on their academics. Besides, African American students

attending a predominantly White educational setting for the first time may struggle with a

sense of isolation and alienation, which can negatively impact their sense of belonging

and desire to persist (Havlik et al., 2017).

African American FGCS continue to face challenges when trying to obtain higher

learning, resulting in low statistical numbers compared to other ethnic groups. Low-

income African American FGCS usually do not have family members or neighborhood

contacts who know or can explain college's nuances or capitalize on professors' career

knowledge, career counselors, and other university personnel (Longmire-Avital & Miller-

Dyce, 2015). Specifically, low-income FGCS are nearly four times more likely to leave

higher education after the first year than other students. Eleven percent of FGCS earn a bachelor's degree after six years of higher education (Lewis, 2020). Moreover, FGCS have lower grade point averages, lower self-confidence, and demonstrate weak math skills than other groups. Considering the academic challenges faced by African American FGCS, they also experience financial challenges.

For African American FGCS, their socioeconomic background is also a critical factor in the college application process, enrollment, career decision skills, and completion process. African American FGCS lack the tools and resources necessary to succeed on a college campus. FGCS disproportionately come from households with lower incomes, earning $20,000 or less (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Additional challenges exist for FGCS, who is African American (Havlik et al., 2017). Therefore, it is critical to explore how African American FGCS develops positive perceptions between personal value and academic persistence. It is imperative to understand how African American FGCS conceptualized their socioeconomic status as they experience college amongst their peers.

Latinx FGCS

While there has been an increase in Latinx enrollment, these students often face challenges once they enroll in postsecondary education. Even though Latinx are entering higher education in more significant numbers than in prior years, enrollments increased from .7 million to 2.9 million (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017), many are still not obtaining a college degree. Sixty-seven percent of Latinx students enroll in college (McFarland et al., 2017). Still, only 48.5% earn a college degree within six years

(Shapiro et al., 2017). In 2014, Latinx students' perception of completing a bachelor's degree was substantially lower than Whites, Blacks, and Asians (Krogstad, 2016). Overrepresenting Latinx students in two-year colleges may lead to different educational and career pathways, which can explain the gap in postsecondary educational attainment. As of 2014, only 15% of Latinxs between the ages of 25-29 had a bachelor's degree or higher than 41% of whites and 20% of blacks (Krogstad, 2016). Out of all racial/ethnic groups, Latinx students are proportionally the most prevalent among FGCS but are severely understudied, given their prominence in the postsecondary system. They have limited information about the college admissions process, including financial aid, making them more likely to work more hours and risk not graduating. In addition to academic barriers, gender role barriers may hinder their college aspirations and career decision-making skills.

Gender and cultural pressures to fulfill family obligations can also compromise their academic goals while experiencing external stress from home. These include working to help pool wages and resources to support their families (Marrun, 2020). Latinx FGCS students are often burdened with familial obligations, which conflicts with school demands. For instance, motivation and family are a vital factor in academic success. Latinx FGCS often must choose between family demands or academic demands (Vasquez-Salgado et al. 2015). Espinoza (2010) discussed those mothers had embedded a high level of aspirations and expectations for male sons (p. 11), while daughters are expected to contribute to their family while in college. Nevertheless, it is crucial for high school and college counselors to understand that placing family responsibilities above

school does not mean Latinx students and their families do not value education. Counselors must tailor their approaches to consider the client's cultural expectations for assisting the family in times of need.

Latinx FGCS hold high standards for their cultural upbringing, leading to difficulties in balancing their culture and college success. Students chose educational needs because they recognized that it was crucial for being successful. Experiences of being from a low-income, immigrant, and Latinx student hinder their academic success with university demands, social engagement, and family responsibilities. Arbelo-Marrero and Milacci (2016) highlighted the importance of family for this group of students. They found that students seemed to persist in reaching graduation if they had support from their families. Clayton et al. (2019) shared that Latinx students are more likely to attend schools with limited sources and struggling with academic, social, and cultural challenges. Latinx students often experience difficulties with college adjustment with inadequate parental support and involvement. These are critical areas that will be addressed to increase self-efficacy among Latinx FGCS to promote postsecondary success. This study contributes to understanding FGC Latinx students' personal and educational experiences by centering students' voices.

Lack of Parental Support

Parents play a vital role in their children's lives, especially during the college application process. Peralta and Klonowski (2017) synthesized the literature on college student retention for first-generation college students, revealing variance in the definition with an evolution from parental education of no college attendance to parental education

of no college completion. FGCS do not get as much college information from their parents; however, students benefit from their parents' emotional support as they prepare for college. However, parents who struggled with poverty may not expect their children to attend college. At-risk students receive less family support when applying to college, lack crucial college knowledge, are less academically prepared, have less information about college life, and are less informed about financial aid. The lack of cultural and social capital experienced by first-generation students translates to a lack of knowledge about college degrees, persistence, and retention resources (Tello & Lonn, 2017). For non-first-generation students, parents are advantageous to the cultural and social capital aspects regarding academic and career attainment.

FGCS experience family challenges than their non-FGCS peers. Mitchall and Jaegar (2018) investigated how parental support and involvement play a critical role in postsecondary success; when parents do not emphasize the importance of education, they send mixed messages to their children. Considering this, FGCS often feel disconnected from their social support system and receive less support from their families for attending college. First-generation families do not participate in college visits and financial aid and planning workshops, as do continuing-generation families. FGCS are often unaware of the academic rigor of specific majors such as computer science, biomedical, and engineering. Additionally, the educational level and socioeconomic status also play a role in students' majors (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017).

In contrast, the family environment could inspire a student's self-efficacy through encouragement and support. The understanding or lack of parental consent shapes the

decisions and experiences that FGCS that can shift their determination on degree completion. FGCS often face unique challenges in a quest for a degree, such as family obligations and lack of preparation or support from family members. Family involvement in low-income, underserved students' education is limited by cultural, language barriers, resources, and time. Parents or relatives who have no college experience may challenge their child's mindset to attend college, causing a resentment in relationship interactions. Current research suggests that FGCS different in significant ways compared to their non-generation peers including, academic and college readiness, socioeconomic status, and family/parental involvement (Kilgo et al., 2018).

Family involvement is a vital step for creating a successful college experience before and during the process. Parents who have earned their degrees from college are more likely to guide their children with their college application process. FGCS, without college experience, struggled with committing the time and resources to assist their children. To better serve the family community, academic advisors, and school counselors must be creative to find ways to increase family involvement for FGCS. Financial aid workshops, SAT prep courses, career counseling, and student-parent educational programs are several opportunities where parents can receive the information and resources they need to succeed throughout this transition.

Financial Challenges

Low-income status for students plays a crucial intersecting factor. For example, the research found that among full-time employed young adults between the ages of 25 and 34, those with a bachelor's degree earned more, on average, than those with a high

school diploma ($48,500 vs. $30,000) (Kena et al., 2015). First-generation college students are more likely to come from low-income backgrounds, with 27% coming from households making $20,000 or less and 50% from families earning between $20,001 and $50,000, as compared to 6% and 23% of continuing- generation students, respectively (Redford & Hoyer, 2017). First-generation students are impacted by limited financial and social literacy, student loan debt literacy, and inability to afford college. Students of color who come from low-income families are more likely to depend on scholarships, grants, and loans to attend school. More first-generation students (54%) than continuing-generation peers (45%) cite not being able to afford college as a reason for leaving without a credential (Redford & Hoyer, 2017). Concerning educational attainment, FGCS also lack the financial knowledge and resources and perceived as low-income.

Financial boundaries affect FGCs in several ways. Many low-income parents view college as a venture for the rich (Korsmo, 2014). Many low-income FGCS often feel manipulated by the college as they are saddled with extreme college debt. Loans make up a higher proportion of financial aid packages for low-income first-generation students. FGCS take out student loans more often and in higher amounts than their continuing-generation peers in their first year of college (Furquim et., 2017). When FGCS receive complete financial aid packages, they have higher retention (Ishitani, 2016). Students who are both low-income and FGCS often work throughout college to balance economic challenges.

One problem is the lack of financial resources, which sometimes contributes to students' need for employment (Schelbe, Becker, Spinelli, & McCray, 2019). Financial

education plays a significant factor in postsecondary success. Low-income FGCS have limited to no knowledge of financial literacy, affecting economic issues and high dropout rates. A lack of financial resources, adjusting to college, and feeling out of place in the college environment contributes to why FGCS experiences may shift their decision to complete their college degree.

Social Capital

Social capital is an integral theory for understanding the experiences of working-class, first-generation college students. Social capital encompasses the norms, informational channels, and relational trust with a social institution's organization that, through social networks, influence individuals' capacity to navigate (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995). Social capital plays a significant role in college and career success. Research indicates that a lack of campus connection contributes to challenges first-generation college students face in effectively navigating the college environment (Schwartz et al., 2018). There has been a keen interest in increasing access to higher education, especially for low-income and FGCS. Approximately 32% of students at 4-year institutions come from families where neither parent/guardian completed an associate's or bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education 2019). Despite efforts to increase enrollment in postsecondary education, disparities persist in retention and degree completion, particularly between FGCS and their CGS peers, leaving students not only without a degree but leaving students with a high amount of debt.

FGCS in terms of college completion is not eliminated even as socioeconomic status increases because of factors such as family stressors (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016).

These postsecondary education disparities contribute to income inequality (Gamoran, 2015; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Research and theory signify that social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) plays a critical role in academic achievement and success. The unequal distribution of social wealth contributes to the lower completion rates of FGCS. Social capital has been associated with a range of positive outcomes among college students, from academic indicators such as retention and GPA to feelings of comfort or satisfaction to school. College students, including FGCS, learn to maintain an academic relationship with advisors and establish connections with peers. For example, on-campus connections with advisors, faculty, and staff are considered valuable social capital forms. Students with supportive interactions with advisors and faculty both in and outside the classroom contribute to academic success and retention.

The importance of connections with higher education representatives or advisors in critical positions gives FGCS access and resources to succeed on campus (Jack, 2016). FGCS tend to stay to themselves or not report staff relationships. FGCS tend to have a lower level of belonging, impacting their academic and life satisfaction and well-being (Allan, Garriott, & Keene, 2016; Nicholas & Islas, 2016; Stephens et al., 2015). On-campus FGCS are less likely to interact and initiate contact with advisors and faculty members, including contributing to classroom discussions, asking for help, and seeking teaching positions on campus (Schwartz et al., 2016). FGCS are more likely to live off-campus, be enrolled part-time, and work (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Because of these factors, FGCS limit themselves from developing relationships with faculty and peers and gaining a real college experience.

Social capital increases the attention that educational institutions need to build compassion and collaboration for FGCS (Clemens, 2016). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of social capital for college success, particularly among first-generation college students, academic advising remains the most common strategy to connect students with faculty and foster supportive relationships (Schwartz et al., 2018). The significance of FGCS experience and transition to college can improve the connection to receive access to opportunities, resources, and services to a successful college experience. FGCS tends to have a limited relationship with advisors and faculty. While there is a demanding factor for FGCS on academic preparation and success, social capital is an effective strategy to help increase FGCS college persistence.

Motivation

With more than 4.5 million low-income FGCS enrolled in higher institutions, understanding the motivation factor is essential to postsecondary retention and success. Student persistence and retention are vital for a successful college experience. However, several factors can improve or affect students' FGCS first year in college or their academic performance. For example, lack of self-esteem, lack of parent support, comparison of peers, and struggle to fit in can impact one's success. Lower academic engagement rates affect students' sense of belonging on college and university campuses and negatively impacts students' retention at the institution (Green & Wright, 2017). FGCS needs to have the academic ability, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving techniques to be prepared for college.

For many higher institutions, retaining underrepresented minority FGCS is a challenge. First-generation students, particularly first-generation underrepresented minority students, have more threats to their motivation during their college experiences (Petty, 2014). FGCS often struggles with a sense of belonging, making it difficult to adjust to a college environment. When students have a lower sense of belonging, it can decrease their confidence and motivation to be engaged in their academics. While personal characteristics play a role in shaping motivation, it is also imperative to understand how context may influence initial levels and development of expectancy, values, and college costs. For many FGCS, attending college is a commitment they chose to experience. Therefore, the connection between faculty and students is fundamental to students' motivation beyond the classroom and college expectations. Peer to peer relationships is also imperative to improve social integration on a college campus.

Cultural consciousness is needed by faculty, staff, and administrators at colleges and universities to successfully incorporate culturally responsive teaching and practices for their first-generation, underrepresented minority students. To meet these students' needs, researchers must begin to align how to assess and teach to complement their cultural ways of knowing and learning (Green & Wright, 2017) successfully and effectively.

Racial and ethnic differences also play a significant predictor for motivation. Among the unrepresented monitories, African American and Latinx student's motivation change over time. Research suggests that White and Asian students are more likely to exhibit high positive motivation (Robinson et al., 2018). A study investigating ethnically

diverse college students' academic achievement and cause found that motivation and extrinsic motivation contributed to lower grades among first-generation college students, but not for non-first-generation college students (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). The use of SCCT can be a positive framework for resources of African American and Latinx FGCS. The appropriate tools and resources are necessary for FGCS to navigate their college and career experiences successfully. Implementing pre-college summer programs, academic outreach programs, and workshops can improve student confidence and self-efficacy (Wibrowski, Matthews, & Kitsantas, 2017).

Upward Bound

Upward Bound provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits. Upward Bound serves high school students from low-income families and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. Upward Bound's goal is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from postsecondary education institutions (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Upward Bound began in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" and is currently administered through the United States Department of Education. In the federal government's fiscal year 2003, 770 Upward Bound project sites provided 56,324 students with intensive summer programs at four-year or two-year colleges, as well as tutoring and counseling services at their high schools during the academic year (U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Council for Opportunity in

Education, 2004). Research has demonstrated that regardless of such factors as income and race, "first-generation" youth (those whose parents have not completed a bachelor's degree) are likely to face certain obstacles to college access that youth whose parents have completed college are unlikely to encounter. First-generation youth are likely to have limited access to information about the college experience, either first-hand or from relatives (Willett, 1989). Upward Program initiatives include many opportunities where students, specifically, FGCS learn about post-secondary factors such as assistance with the college application process, academic tutoring and preparatory for the college exams (SAT/ACT). Gaining knowledge on financial literally and career building workshops play a critical role for students to build on social capitol and closing the opportunity gap. Upward Bound program also allows students to participate on college tours throughout the United States. College exposure increases the academic and cultural enrichments for FCGS (TRIO Profile, 2008).

Upward Bound is one of the longest-running college access programs for first-generation and underrepresented students. Research shows that Upward Bound program participants have higher success in graduating and earn an undergraduate degree than students who did not participate in the program (Grimard & Maddaus, 2004; Neely & Smeltzer, 2001; Muñiz, 2020). With the implementation of college access programs such as Upward Bound, students who are active and engaging in the program can succeed in their college and career goals.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature review highlights the challenges African American and Latinx FGS face and how they affect their academic growth, goals, and success. Students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds are among the least likely to be retained and complete a degree. African American and Latinx FGCS face several obstacles when transitions from high school to higher education institutions. FGCS are known to have academic, financial, and interpersonal barriers before and during college. Due to a high FGCS enrollment increase, colleges and university administrations progressively recognized that they face different challenges and needs than their peers (Cox, 2016). However, educational research on this population has focused on the personal challenges and systematic barriers they confront as they access, navigate, and persist in college (Chen, 2005; The Pell Institute, 2016).

Institutional retention efforts must implement programs and resources to improve students' needs and consider equitable attainment rates for the future. Scholars, teachers, and practitioners have a responsibility to understand that these students are learners. Higher-education institutions must bridge the gap between educational leaders and first-generation college students by incorporating programs to provide the students with resources that assist with barriers during college. This study aims to learn and expand the literature on how FGCS experiences navigate college, adapt to a higher education environment, and pursue academic achievement.

Increased access to higher education can lead to more first-generation students enrolling in college. Institutions can prioritize first-generation teaching students and

expose students to instructors committed to students' academic and social adjustment to college, resulting in success (Hutchinson, 2017). First-year programs can assist with college transition by providing educational resources for broader social capital issues. Furthermore, faculty contact with students is essential to student retention. Failing to understand these students as learners may lead scholars and professors to overlook critical ways to support them in their academic pursuits (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020). While many institutional programs offer support for FGCS, advisors must recognize these students' unique challenges to increase their comfort when helping students to identify, deal with, and resolve them (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Using SCCT as a framework, this research addresses the literature gap on the experiences, persistence, and challenges.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Research related to FGCS participating in Upward Bound programs in the U.S. is limited. Data on FGCS in college access programs such as Upward Bound programs is still sparse. Even after gaining college admission, first-generation students still confront additional obstacles as they transition into college, including lower matriculation and increased stress and marginalization (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Gibbons, 2020; Phillips et al., 2020). Compared with their continuing-generation peers, FGCS perform less well academically and are 51% less likely to graduate college in 4 years (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Dyce et al., 2013). College preparation and college access programs can help bridge the gap between underserved and low-income FGCS students in Upward Bound.

This chapter included an overview of the methodology. I employed descriptive qualitative research as an approach to collect data. The qualitative methodology was selected because I am interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how those experiences affected their worlds, and how they process their experiences to move forward. Qualitative methodology is an effort to understand situations in their unique as a part of a particular context and the interactions there (Patton, 1985). This chapter also includes the research design, data sources, information on the data collection process, and ways data are managed, compiled, and reported. In addition, this chapter includes ethical considerations, procedures for data analysis, the role of the researcher in

this investigation, and trustworthiness of results. The chapter ends with a summary of the methodology.

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative descriptive study involved exploring how African American and Latinx first-generation college students describe their college experiences and factors that contribute to accomplishing their academic goals. The research question that guided this study is:

RQ1: How do African American and Latinx FGCS who participated in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and factors contributing to accomplishing their academic goals?

Qualitative descriptive research is the best method to explore the research question. Sandelowski (2000) said qualitative descriptive research enables researchers to understand a phenomenon and its characteristics instead of seeking to know how or why something has happened. Additionally, Sandelowski said that a qualitative descriptive study is an effective method of describing an experience. In seeking to understand students' perspectives, gaining clarity regarding their experiences and factors contributing to their experiences will provide a holistic view. Using qualitative descriptive research gives the researcher the opportunity to address participants' thoughts, feelings, and understanding of their behaviors. Furthermore, this qualitative design provides valuable data and depth in terms of understanding human experiences.

In this study, I explored how participants perceive the Upward Bound program, whether it helped them in terms of their postsecondary success, whether they achieve

success, and how their experiences can help other students in the program. Qualitative

researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences,

construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). Qualitative descriptive research involves understanding individuals, groups,

and phenomena in their natural settings and meanings people make of their own

experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The qualitative research design involves

simultaneously collecting and analyzing data, developing, and modifying theory,

elaborating, or refocusing research questions, and identifying and addressing validity

threats (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative research evolves through developing problems and

gathering data via themes as the researcher attempts to interpret data. Qualitative

description is more interpretive than quantitative description, which typically entails

surveys or other prestructured means to obtain a common dataset regarding preselected

variables and descriptive statistics (Sandelowski, 2000). Unlike quantitative research,

qualitative research can offer insights regarding why people engage in actions or

behaviors (Rosenthal, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, certain biases shape my worldview and perceptions of higher

education and its treatment of FGCS. My experience as an African American FGCS who

transitioned to college influences my opinion regarding issues encountered by African

American and Latinx FGCS pursuing postsecondary degrees. African Americans and

Latinx experience additional challenges such as stereotyping, discrimination, and

socioeconomic status in their academic and safe spaces. Experiences influence how

students feel about higher education and how this can affect their ability to flourish academically, mentally, and socially. Higher education institutions can and should do more to implement programs and add resources to advocate and support this marginalized population in terms of excelling, navigating, and persisting in college.

Furthermore, I am an educator within the K-12 field with over 9 years of experience, with 8 of these years in high school counseling. As a high school counselor, my role is to aid students academically, emotionally/mentally, and socially and support them during their postsecondary track. Additionally, my position allows me to advocate for underrepresented and marginalized student populations, like students in this research study. Students who were annoyed and frustrated about academia and the college application process challenged me to consider how my school, and more specifically, my department could support this student population. Using interviews, I collected data involving their experiences. The primary goals of qualitative interviews are to gain focused insight into individuals' lived experiences, understand how participants make sense of and construct reality concerning the phenomenon, and explore how individuals' experiences and perspectives related to other study participants and prior research on similar topics (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

As a FGCS, I acknowledged my principles and participants' principles may influence the study. Moreover, I anticipated unknown factors or phenomena in this research. Therefore, I used an emergent design. Unlike quantitative research or highly structured surveys, qualitative inquiry allows for a deeper perspective at the phenomena of how FGCS share their collegiate experiences. During my time in college as a first-

generation African American student, I experienced pressure, wanting to fit in, and understanding other students. I was conscious of my own experiences and put aside preconceptions regarding my personal experiences. Verbatim quotes from the transcript's themes were used to provide contextual and descriptive information of each participant's experience.

Both my personal and professional roles serve as motivation for studying this target population. It is my goal to highlight the experiences of study participants. College advisors and program directors can implement additional resources as well as tools, services, programs, and policies to assist in the retention and perseverance of African American and Latinx FGCS. As a part of reanalysis of data, bracketing was used to reduce my personal opinions, biases, and assumptions. I kept a journal to reduce my biases and assumptions. Engaging and listening to the study's participants without assumptions, labels, or biases allowed me to maintain focus and obtain a clear understanding of experiences they share.

Methodology

Participant Selection

In this section, the sample population, the sampling methods and procedures, access to participants, and participant rights were all identified. I used purposeful sampling to identify which FGCS in the Upward Bound program can participate in one-on-one interviews. Through purposeful sampling, qualitative research provides a rich context and detailed accounts of specific populations and locations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling involves selecting participants

who have experience and knowledge about the study's phenomenon study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) further stated that purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be helpful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources (Patton, 2002, p. 244).

Once potential participants had been identified, an email was sent to them with the informed consent form that included the description of the research study, research procedures, risks, and benefits of the participation in the study, participant rights, and protection of confidentiality. Each participant received a reminder email to remind them time and interview location (see Appendix C). Individuals who signed the consent form became participants in the study and received details about the interview process, sign-up link, and procedures, along with the copy of the Interview Guide (Appendix D). The day before the scheduled interview, I sent follow-up with each participant by sending an email reminder of the discussion.

The study population for the participant interviewed included African American and Latinx participants, first-generation, and currently enrolled at the target setting. Individuals' participants in this study were recruited by word of mouth and by flyer detailing the nature of the study and my contact information. The flyer was posted on social media accounts including, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In response to the inherent challenges of time, cost, and low response rates, Internet-based social media recruitment has become increasingly popular, mainly as more and more of the general population uses this type of media (Topolovec-Vranic & Natarajan, 2016).

Twenty first-generation college students within the age bracket contacted me through email or completed the google form questionnaire. After receiving prospective participants, the flyer was removed. Furthermore, the participant responses were reviewed to make sure they fit the criteria. I ensured that students met the criteria necessary to participate in this study and then contacted them. Criteria for participation was as follows: met first-generation college student definition (i.e., neither parent may have continued their education beyond high school) and were not a transfer in or international student. Fifteen students confirmed a time and date for their interviews. Out of the fifteen confirmations, ten participants completed the one-on-one interview.

Instrumentation

I used semi structured interviews to collect data from FGCS African Americans and Latinx. Targeted demographic questions that determine age, ethnicity, gender, and education were used to identify participants. The qualitative research process preserves the focus on learning what participants hold, not what the literature presents, or the researcher brings to the study (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured, open-ended questions were designed and used to obtain data. Ravitch & Carl (2016) describes semi-structured interviews as the researcher uses the interview instrument to organize and guide the discussion but can also include specific, tailored follow-up questions and across interviews. The semi structured interviews had an interview protocol (see Appendix D).

Appendix E shows a list of questions developed for this study that were open-ended questions. In addition to a few demographic questions, the interview allowed me as the interviewer to explore and respond to the participants opinions, thoughts, and

emerging themes (Ravitch & Carl,2016). Signupgenuis was used to create and manage appointments for participants. I conducted each one-to-one interview virtually using Zoom. The duration of the interview session was approximately to 45 to 60 minutes. I recorded and took notes in my reflective journal as well after the interview. Each recorded interview was transcribed using otter.ai.

When I interviewed each participant, I introduced and gave background knowledge about myself, I thanked them for agreeing to join the interview session and participating for this study and asked them how they were feeling (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the interview process, I provided vital information about the research study and asked if they have any concerns or questions. I used the interview guide (Appendix D) to ensure interviews questions were addressed. During the interview questions, I gave participants the opportunity to as for clarity or if they needed me to repeat the question. This was establishing a trusting and safe space for each participant.

Procedures for Participation and Data Collection

In pursing qualitative interview design research, I implemented a series of phases and procedures. Ten out of fifteen confirm their interview with me through email. I emailed each participant a link to Signupgenuis, where they had the opportunity to choose and manage their appointment slots. Zoom link was provided for each participant. The day before interview session, I sent an email reminder to each participant (see Appendix C). Before each session, I tested for the quality of sound, device functionality, and screen recording. I recorded, took notes, and coded the participant responses to the

questions to acquire information for the descriptive study. I used otter.ai to import all participant interviews and transcribed each one.

To ensure detailed and accurate records, I recorded the interviews on the Zoom application. Zoom is a collaborative, cloud-based videoconferencing service offering features including online meetings, group messaging services, and secure recording of sessions (Zoom Video Communications, 2016). I used the voice memo application on my phone as a backup plan, just if there were any technical difficulties. Handwritten journal notes were also used as an additional backup for the recordings. Once the interviews were completed, I used otter.ai and Microsoft Word to transcribe each interview within 24 hours. I emailed the transcripts to each participant and asked them to respond to the email if they reviewed the transcripts to ensure that their discussion was documented accurately. None of the participants responded to the e-email regarding any discrepancies within their transcripts. After the interviews were transcribed, I placed all recordings, consent forms, and journal notes in a locked case in my home office. I also uploaded all audio recordings on my password-protected laptop.

Data Analysis Plan

In this study, the data analysis procedures included organization and coding. Data analysis is the intentional, systematic scrutiny of data of different research process moments (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Unlike quantitative research and structured questionnaires, qualitative descriptive research allows a deeper connection and investigation of the phenomena of African American and Latinx FGCS perceptions of their Upward Bound experiences. A study applying qualitative interviews holds the

potential to give voice to minorities and groups in society that may not be heard elsewhere (Reeves et al., 2015).

The qualitative descriptive method explores experiences' perspective and meaning, seeks insight, and identifies social structures or processes that explain people's behavior meaning (Pope & Mays, 1996). Data analysis in qualitative research is defined as systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, observation notes, or non-textual materials that the researcher accumulates to increase the understanding of the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Transcription makes interpreting data a simple process in a qualitative descriptive study by allowing the interviewers to read, analyze, and interpret information. Transcription can be described as reproducing spoken words, such as recorded data from an interview, and converting it into written form so the data can be analyzed.

After collecting the data, I used my laptop to transcribe the interviews using otter.ai, which is a software tool that transcribes audio using artificial intelligence. I transcribed each interview immediately by taking the recording and uploading to otter.ai which did the transcription. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), it is vital to transcribe each interview within 24 hours to maintain accuracy. Reading through the transcriptions and my journal notes allowed me to examine the data and identify emerging patterns. The "researcher-transcriptioner" role allows the interviewer multiple opportunities to hear the interviewee's words, pauses, silences, and non-verbal expressions such as sighs or crying (Matheson, 2007). While reviewing the transcripts, I made notes in my journal. I edited the transcripts by removal personal identifies and verbal sound effects that were not

related to the study. I divided the remaining text into several sections to identify key

concepts. After listening to each audio, I cleaned and revised each

transcription. Furthermore, I emailed a copy of the transcriptions of all discussions to

each participant. They had the opportunity to read and respond if there are any

inconsistencies or questions.

To ensure the data collected accuracy, I first edited the transcripts, by reading and

reviewing each participant response. Sentences and phrases that did not seem relevant to

the study was omitted. I wanted to keep participant responses accurate to the interview

questions. Secondly then I documented the segments into a document on Microsoft Word

to begin the coding process. Coding is a process of assigning meaning to data. A code can

be a word or phrase that explains or describe what is going on in the data (Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). Coding or categorizing the data is the most vital stage in the qualitative data

analysis process. Coding involves subdividing the vast amount of raw information of data

and assigning them into categories. I assigned codes to sections of the participants'

responses related to the research question. A qualitative inquiry code is often a word or

short phrase that symbolically sets a summative, salient, essence-capturing attribute for a

portion of language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2013).

The second stage of coding used axial coding. Axial coding is established when

codes come together into coding categories (Saldaña, 2013). Axial coding makes

connections between categories that reveal themes, new categories, or new subcategories

(Allen, 2017). I assigned codes to the sections of the text that were related to the research

question. Continually reviewing the transcripts allowed me to analyze the data and

extract recurring codes. In the first stage of coding, I transferred the responses from a Microsoft Word document to Microsoft Excel, allowing me to determine what information was redundant. I captured the participants' comments unseeing the participants' words to label data segments of the researcher creating words or phrases (Saldaña, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Categories emerged to identified themes. Themes from the participants' responses can support the research with evidence (Saldaña, 2013).

Reading, journaling, and reflecting on the transcripts allowed me to distinguish certain parts of the data that was related to the research. The data was arranged in several groups before developing into themes. Throughout the observation, I looked for codes that can connect to the research questions and categorized them into themes. Some themes that were created first had to be deleted or reexamined because they did not fit with the research question or there was not enough data to support the research question. I carefully evaluated each theme to make sure they connected with the data I have collected. Lastly, I found it vital to make sure I used participants voice so they reader can understand their lived experiences.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Trustworthiness is important to evaluate the worth of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). According to Kornbluh (2015), the researcher's aim is to develop an understanding of the phenomenon by examining the ways in which participants experience, perceive, and make sense of their lives. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted that guaranteeing credibility in a qualitative research study is important in

establishing trustworthiness its findings. I ensured the credibility of this study using several strategies.

According to Guba (1981), a qualitative study is credible when the researcher can consider all the complexities that present themselves in research and to do with patterns that are not easily explained. Credibility is an integral part of critical research design. I used member checking to guarantee the credibility of the study. Member checks are often discussed as a validity measure to establish credibility (Ravitch & Carl 2016). Member checking included clarifying focus group participants' responses during the sessions and reviewing completed themes with participants through email to depict their experiences accurately. After the interviews were transcribed, I provided manuscripts to the study participants to read and check for accuracy.

Transferability

Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe transferability as a way qualitative study can apply to broader contexts while still maintaining context-specific research. Qualitative research attempts to establish credibility by implementing the validity strategies of triangulation, member checking, and presenting a thick description (Toma, 2011). To start the process of thick description, I independently read and re-reach each participant transcript. While re-reading the transcripts, I have acknowledged and identify new ideas from SCCT framework and literature review. In this study, I established transferability by ensuring thick description of the participant voice and the data collected.

Dependability

Dependability is like reliability, which aligns with consistency and stability over some time. To determine trustworthiness, I emailed a copy of sample interview protocol to the interview questions and provide feedback to see if the participants will understand the questions. Dependability entails a reasoned argument for collecting data and consistent with my statement (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I provided detailed explanations of how I collected and analyzed the data. I collected the data through a virtual interview process using Zoom and recorded it using otter.ai and with detailed journal notes. The method for achieving dependability are the triangulation and sequencing of methods and creating a well-articulated rationale for these choices to confirm as a researcher I have created the proper data collection plan towards the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Using triangulation, researchers can gain a better and broader understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). Thus, I matched participant perceptions and compared them to developing categories which transition into specific themes.

Confirmability

Confirmability is also referred to as neutrality; confirmability is the degree to which findings are solely the participants' expressions and are without bias, motives, or personal perspectives (Guba, 1985). One goal of confirmability is to acknowledge and explore how biases and prejudices map into interpretations of data and fully mediate those through structured reflexivity processes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure confirmability, I used the notes from my reflexivity journal to check and confirm the

during throughout the entire research process. I continually to use my notes to check the

data, by doing this, I increased the rigor of confirmability in my study. Within themes, I

included participant direct quotes for the purse of confirmability. I made sure the findings

are based on the participants' voice and not potential biases as the researcher.

Ethical Procedures

The researcher is responsible for protecting participants from any potential harm

while participating in a study. When I applied and received IRB approval, I followed the

procedures listed on the IRB application regarding the study's protection and

confidentiality. I obtained consent from each participant who completed the google form

and consent form before collecting any data. Pseudonyms were assigned to each

participant to protect their identity. As outlined in the consent, I also reminded the

participants that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time. I

enforced confidentiality to establish a safe and grounded environment of trust and

encourage participants to share meaningful experiences.

I informed each participant that the data collected were stored on a password-

protected computer, and I am only the person who has access to the computer. All

documents will be deleted and shredded five years after this study for the protection and

privacy of everyone. In addition, there was no compensation to participate in this study.

Before conducting the study, I went through Walden University Institutional

Review Board (IRB) process. I received approval for this study (I04-02-21-0991436)

from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research. With the

use of interviews as the data collection method, I had the opportunity to understand the

attitudes, opinions, and experiences related to this study. I used qualitative one-to-one

interviews to encourage open dialogue and engagement within a safe virtual setting. I

conducted ten semi- interviews with open-ended questions.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the methodology that was used in

this study. This qualitative descriptive research study attempted to understand the

Upward Bound experiences and their impact on past participants' postsecondary success.

The problem of limited scholarly research on African American and Latinx FGCS and

their perceptions in a college environment has been discussed. I chose to use the

qualitative descriptive method because it explains how the participants perceived their

experiences. The selection process for study participants, instrumentation used, data

collection, data analysis methods, and confidentiality protocol have been addressed. Data

gathered from this study of FGCS academic and nonacademic experiences will improve

higher institutions, administrators' advisors, school counselors, and faculty to implement

programs to increase retention and college completion for this significant group of FGCS.

Additionally, the data collected will help develop programs and policies to improve this

specific college student population's retention and completion rates. Chapter 4 includes

the results, findings, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether college bridge programs such as Upward Bound are productive and successful for African American and Latinx FGCS. By listening to and analyzing their experiences, I gathered valuable information about precollege programs and students' perceptions of how stakeholders influenced them to complete high school, apply to college, and attend. Using quotations and feedback from each participant, themes were analyzed that were relevant to the research question. I used participants' backgrounds to understand better how they navigated college as first-generation college African American or Latinx students and how this shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research question that guided this study was:

RQ1: How do African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and factors contributing to accomplishing their academic goals?

In this chapter, I survey methods used to conduct participant interviews, the setting, participant demographics, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter also includes detailed descriptions of the data analysis process, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

Setting

FGCS face inequalities and trauma related to their college transition (Jenkins et al., 2013). COVID-19 was a significant barrier for millions of students that affected many

FGCS. Many FGGS did not have the opportunity to move on campus, make new friends, sit in a classroom, experience social gatherings, or meet their academic advisors face to face (Liu et al., 2020). Many students shared their personal experiences, traumas, and culture shock throughout interviews involving their high school to college transition. Participants also discussed how their college transition shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews took place virtually over Zoom.

Demographic Data

This qualitative study included interviews with a diverse group of FGCS. Diversity was apparent in terms of age, gender, experience, and race. Individuals selected for this study were first-generation African American and Latinx college students who were freshmen, sophomores, or recently graduated. Although the first year of college is vital, I studied individuals who persisted in school for more than 1 year of college. There were six female and four male participants. Seven participants were between 18 and 20 years old. Three of the participants in the student interviews were over 21 years old. African American FGCS made up 40% of the participant population, and 60% of the participant pool were Hispanics (see Appendix E). Despite diversity in terms of age, gender, experience, and race, participants shared many similar positive and negative experiences, and recommendations for improving these experiences were expressed during interviews. Challenges they described could impact other student populations and not just FGCS.

Data Collection

Ten FGCS were purposefully selected to participate in qualitative one-on-one interviews regarding their experiences and perceptions. Each interview was conducted and recorded using Zoom. Otter.ai was used to transcribe voice recordings. I sent initial findings to each participant to make edits, revisions, or eliminations. Transcripts from the 10 participant interviews were compared, contrasted, and analyzed. Member-checking took place via email. I emailed copies of transcripts to each participant to confirm their accuracy. Member-checking helped in terms of triangulating data involving observations and statement accuracy. Participants had the opportunity to review written summaries and provide feedback or edits if they did not feel the data represented their statements. I did not find any discrepancies or errors with participants. A qualitative study involves not eliminating influence but understanding it and using it productively (Maxwell, 2008). My goal was to describe a rich, detailed, and complex account of data involving participants' ideas, perspectives, and experiences and how they communicate them.

While FGCS are first in their family to apply or be admitted and attend a 2- or 4-year postsecondary institution of higher learning, they may experience lower retention and higher attrition rates than other student groups (Gibbons et al., 2019). As of the academic year 2015-2016, 56% of undergraduates in the U.S. were FGCS, and 59% of these students were also the first sibling in their family to go to college (RTI International, 2019). My goal was to explore what challenges both positive and negative experiences that low-income FGCS face in terms of academic preparation.

Data Collection Description

Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were used to gather detailed information. Before the beginning of each virtual interview with participants, I greeted each participant, explained the interview was voluntary, assured their confidentiality and anonymity, allowed time to ask questions, and reviewed procedures.

I used one-on-one interviews to enable students to share their experiences, feelings, and opinions. Qualitative interviews involve developing holistic descriptions of perspectives, realities, experiences, and phenomena (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One-on-one interviews were designed using SCCT. SCCT framework was selected for three reasons. I chose SCCT because it provides a framework when working with FGCS. Secondly, SCCT acknowledges how individuals' characteristics, environmental factors, and behaviors that influence their career decision and planning. Lastly, SCCT addresses career concerns when one is facing obstacles, specifically, school – work issues, transition from high school to college, and college to work transition. Specific questions were asked about navigating the college application process, what challenges they faced in college, how the Upward Bound program affected college choices, and what supports are needed to help FGCS and higher institutions.

During 60-minute interviews, data were collected and recorded through Zoom and Otter. All participants were assured of confidentiality and told that interviews could be stopped at any time.

Data Collection Tracking Research Log and Reflective Journal

Results of transcripts were grouped, categorized, and used to create emerging

themes which became the basis for transcribed data and journal notes. According to

Annink (2017), the researcher's journal is a tool for observing, questioning, critiquing,

synthesizing, and acting. All research was transferred to my computer, which was

protected. The hard copy research log and journal were stored in a locked file in my

home and will be destroyed 5 years after approval of the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process consisted of transcribing the data, coding the data,

synthesizing codes into larger themes, and writing up the findings. Analyzing data

involves organizing the data, coding, synthesizing the codes into themes, and identifying

patterns (Bogdan, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) discussed analyzing data as a two-

stage process. The first step is the data analysis, described as the "process of

systematically searching and arranging the data" (p. 147), in which the researcher

organizes the data into manageable units. Interpretation is the second phase of data

analysis. The phases and techniques for accomplishing each step will be described. Using

the 6-stage Saldana coding process allowed me to organize and process the collected

data.

First, I used otter.ai to transcribe all interviews and converted the data into a

Microsoft Word document. I read and reviewed transcriptions to obtain a general

understanding of the participant's responses related to the research question and started

taking notes on the initial codes. Secondly, once each transcription was assigned with

codes, I used the Doctools feature on Microsoft Word to extract the initial group of

codes. Once the codes were extracted, I was able to visualize the initial codes and their

respective frequencies. I started generating codes that were relevant to the research

question. Third, I started determining which codes could lead to potential themes. In

addition, I was able to identify meaningful information within the data and set them to

different codes using axial coding to see how the codes came together.

Furthermore, using the coding categories on Microsoft Excel, the relationship

among the codes allowed me to identify which those that best addressed the research

question. Finally, I took the initial codes and transferred the data over into a Microsoft

Excel spreadsheet. I was able to filter the codes and see which categories specifically

addressed the research question. After reviewing the spreadsheet, I filtered and reduced

codes to look for redundancy, and there were thirty codes. Themes that were determined

for the data analysis captured the nature of the responses from the participants fit the

research questions as showing in Table 1 below.

Table 1

List of Common Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes	Categories	Themes
Positive engagement and interactions, support from counselors, academic advisors, faculty-student relationships, communication	Best practices and strategies	Sense of belonging
Limited interactions with faculty, building relationships, experience, outside support, academic advising, exploring higher education	School Administration	Faculty
Support system/motivation from friends/family to apply and attend college, college preparation,	Support	Family
Self-determination, consistency, life choices, confidence, outcome expectations, self-efficacy, drive,	Background factors	Motivation
Pressure to be successful, self-discipline, being under-prepared, scared of failing, personal issues	Barriers/Obstacles	Mental Health

Results

This qualitative descriptive study explores how African American and Latinx first-generation college students describe their college experiences and the factors that contribute to accomplishing their academic goals. The research question that will guide this study is: How do African American and Latinx first-generation college students who participated in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and the factors contributing to accomplishing their academic goals?

The research question and the findings are the foundation of this study. Ten former program graduates were interviewed for this study. The goal for this study is to benefit secondary school counselors, school administrators, and higher education faculty and staff better understand why college preparatory programs are vital and why first-

generation low-income African American and Latinx students need the resources and tools to succeed in their post-secondary careers.

Emerging Themes

By listening to and analyzing their experiences, I gathered valuable information about the pre-college programs and students' perceptions of how stakeholders influenced them to complete high school, apply to college, and attend. With supporting evidence, including both quotations and feedback from each participant, themes gathered from data analyzed and explored. I used the participant's backgrounds to understand better how they navigated college as first-generation college African American or Latinx students and how their college transition shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This section divides the analysis into five themes that emerged from the data collected. Quotes were collected to understand how first-generation African American and Latinx students used the Upward Bound program to prepare for college and factors that supported their academic success. The results of this analysis deep dived into the experiences of ten first-generation African American and Latinx students in colleges around the Mid-Atlantic Region. Five major themes emerged from the data collected on the responses of the participants' lived experiences related to their transition from high school to postsecondary planning. The themes included: (a) sense of belonging, (b) mental health, (c) family, (d) faculty, and (e) motivation.

Sense of Belonging

During the ten interviews, the word *belonging* appeared 20 times, with several instances of being a first-generation college student on a college campus, feeling dumb

during classroom lectures. Eight out of 10 participants mentioned feeling a "cultural shock" and eye-opener seeing other students being prepared, ready, and successful. Participants described various factors for a sense of belonging. Strayhorn's (2012) working definition of sense of belonging in terms of college is as follows: students perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus, community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers) (p. 122).

Participants describe their experience being on campus and voiced similar experiences of not fitting in. They understood as FGCS they had to get adjusted to being on campus and understanding how the system works. All participants agreed that social belonging and seeing people who look like you in high school are drastically different if you attend PWI or go out of state where people of color are not high in numbers. P7 said:

Sometimes I feel my confidence drops when I hear my classmates talk. We were working on a group chat and were talking about it through Groupme. After my White classmates shared their ideas and giving out tasks, I shared my opinions and thoughts, and no one responded. I felt so down. Imagine getting ignored through text messages. You're like, okay. Wait. They suck. When my voice was overpowered, and I felt neglected. I knew I had to build up my self-esteem. Do I have to speak for all the Latinx population?

Mental Health

Participants shared their experiences related to their mental health and well-being while being on campus. For most students entering college, embarking on this new chapter is a time of great stress; however, first-generation students experience these stressors very differently than their continuing-generation peers.

As having immigrant parents, who haven't been to college, don't understand scheduling, or FASFA, they don't understand what stress looks like in college. I just learned how to deal with it. -P8

Building connections with college coach in high school and advisor in college has improved my mental health. Even dealing with classes, friends, and family members, I am learning to communicate move and be emotional and mentally available. - P6

Family

Unfortunately, first-generation students often lack such resources at the ready since they are the first in their families to experience the transition and demands incurred during this progression from high school to college (Swanbrow, Schelbe, Romano, & Spinelli, 2017).

Participants share their experiences as first-generation African American and Latinx college students.

Even with COVID, being first gen, the oldest, and in college, I am still responsible for taking care of my parents and siblings. Everyone looks up to me for support as a role model. It is so hard adjusting to this new life, balancing my

schoolwork, and it's just difficult. I would reach to my advisors for support, but it's just not the same. As a daughter of immigrants, you just learn to be hopeful and be capable of getting the job done. - P8

Being a first-generation college student and African male, it was very hard to get adjusted to school. The program I have participated in high school was relatable because other students and staff looked like me. I looked to my counselor and advisor for guidance. Having those conversations about scheduling, filling out FAFSA, and choosing classes before college was vital. My family and parents, on the other hand, did not understand what I was talking about. There are hardly any conversations about school now because they do not understand the process of it. They just know I am going to school to be a doctor, that's it. My black friends at school are my support system. I go to PWI, so its small group of us. – P10

Some participants shared the support from their family drives them to keep it going to be successful.

My grandmother is my biggest cheerleader. Even with her passing away last year, I am very inspired to keep going. There is pressure being the first in your family to attend college. I love my family so much, and I do want to break the cycle. I want my family members to look up to me as a role model, so you know they can do it too. - P5

Since my mom passed away, I have been very independent. I made it through high school and college on my own. No one in my family went to college, so I relied heavily on my teachers, school counselor, and college coach in high school.

When I go to college and working, it was an eye-opener to see so many Black

women successful. I looked to some as a mentor. Going to an HBCU made me

realize that other kids look like me that were destined to be great; I did not want

to be a dropout, and I wanted to "beat the odds. -P9

Faculty

Tinto (2010) identified expectations, support, feedback, and involvement as

conditions necessary for student success. He described the importance of the faculty and

institution communicating expectations for students and having clear expectations of

what they need to do to succeed. When students learn in a supportive environment, they

can develop self-efficacy that leads to future success (Tomasko et al., 2016).

Participants describe their experience with faculty members.

My school counselor and college coach in high school got me prepared

for college. I had an idea of what it is going to look like. I am a first-

generation Latina college student in an honors program. Right now, I am

expected to understand the everything-the ins and outs of college because

I am in a particular college program. It is a lot of pressure to ask for help

from faculty. I am learning to ask for help. Between registering for classes

and renewing FAFSA every year, this is a lot. I need more help. We as

first-generation college students, students of color, need all help and

resources out there. - P7

Other participants shared their challenges with faculty members

The support system in high school was great. If it weren't for the Upward

Bound program and being a part student group in high school, I would not

have made it to college. They pushed to apply to college and be

successful. People were accessible when I needed help. Now in college, I

do not even know who my advisors are. I send emails to several people,

and I get no response. How am I supposed to learn when they don't reach

out to me? My experience with professors and advisors has been

stressful. I just found out I had a mentor. Months later when it's too late

for the support. These adults don't care about us, especially the first-

generation college students. The whole college system needs to be

revamped. - P4

Motivation

In addition to the challenges that FGCS face in their collegiate experiences, there

are emotional and motivational barriers to overcome (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013; Stephens

et al., 2012). FGCS experienced trials and success associated with motivation. On the

other hand, FGCS motivation to attend college derives from parental encouragement and

motivation (Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017).

Participants described their drive and motivation throughout their college

experience.

When I was in high school, my school counselor, college coach, and

other school advisors kept me motivated. At first, I did not have the

energy nor gave me a talk. She believed in me and with my grades and

being on the football team, she knew I would be great potential for

college. My motivation to apply for college gave me hope that I can make

it. When I got to college, I built a great relationship with my advisor who

always keeps me motivated. If I didn't have them by myside, I don't think

I would be in college right now. They increased my confidence to do

good. - P1

 When I joined the program in high school, I was so determined to go to

college especially with the help with my advisors. They believed in me,

helped me with everything. When you do not have the right support

system, your motivation to do good goes out the window. - P6

Based on participants' experiences, having a nurturing and supportive

environment is necessary to achieve academic achievement and feeling successful. FGCS

need to exhibit a deep sense of inner motivation and building self-confidence to obtain

college achievement (Dryden et al., 2021). Student motivation and persistence are major

aspects to retention and college student success. However, FGCS face more challenges

that limits their motivation during their college experiences. This study provides a need

for colleges and universities to create long term interventions that keep students

motivated throughout the college experience.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The initial draft findings created by me were shared with all participants through

email. Each participant had the opportunity to review the initial transcripts and make any

changes. In this qualitative study of first-generation African American and Latinx college

students, there were no discrepant cases. I maintained a journal to record notes, thoughts, and observations. The information shared from all ten participants was triangulated to provide additional support and strengthen findings.

Credibility

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability establish critical factors of ensuring the value of research (Connelly, 2016). The systematic nature of this study, included the use of standard interview protocol for data collection and Saldana's approach to data analysis, was to attain its credibility. In addition, I performed a member-checking with all 10 participants by emailing them a copy of the transcript to review and make sure interpretations were accurate.

Transferability

To accomplish the transferability of the study, I made sure the data gathered from the interviews were comprehensive and reflected participants' perceptions. This data came in the form of students' perceptions, stories, and examples, which confirmed the generalization necessary to convergent and deviating data collected and analyzed. As the researcher, I made sure each theme narrated had an authentic account.

Dependability

Furthermore, to ensure the study's dependability, I used open-ended interview questions for each participant and engaged in member-checking to validate each participate experience. To understand each participant perspective, I reviewed the research's purpose, participant demographics and the data analysis that supports the research question. The triangulation process for evaluating data for authentication

included participants, virtual interviews, reading and revising the transcriptions and comparing participant interviews.

Confirmability

Lastly, to ensure the confirmability of the study, I implemented research steps to verify that the process was accurate and revised to match the intended research. I reexamined the instruments used in both the data collection and data analysis. First, I reviewed the interview protocols to establish. I used open-ended questions to develop the data collected from all 10 participants. Second, I reassessed the data collected, using Saldana's approach to verify the intended study.

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Summary

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First-generation African American and Latinx college students interviewed navigated the college campus experience they are present on and how using the resources available helps them adapt to be successful beyond the classroom doors. Resources included tutoring services, wellness centers, workshops, and academic advisors to get adjusted as a first-generation student. The virtual one-on-one interviews reinforced past research, citing a strong sense of self-efficacy that encourages first-generation students to prosper in college. A common theme associated with all ten participants was they believe that their drive, determination, and effort helped them through the challenges and struggles they combated in college, on campus, in their personal lives, and to advance. Chapter 5 will present a discussion of the results of the study, implications, suggestions for programs and resources to support first-generation African American and Latinx college students, conclusions, and areas for further implementations for research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This qualitative study involved understanding how African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences throughout the Mid-Atlantic region and how these experiences impacted their academic and nonacademic success.

Ten first-generation African American and Latinx college students participated in virtual one-on-one interviews involving what experiences and factors impacted their academic and nonacademic success. Developing an understanding of how first-generation students perceive their experiences and how these experiences affected their academic and nonacademic success will help school counselors, academic advisors, faculty members, and school administration implement services and programs to increase academic retention, support student wellbeing, and increase student engagement on campus.

In the following sections, I summarize and interpret the findings, implications, limitations of the study, and future research. Also, I address first-generation African American and Latinx college students and their struggles with lack of support from family, socializing on college campus, and feeling out of place.

The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research involving academic growth, college and career readiness, and postsecondary success. Five major themes emerged from data collected regarding participants' lived experiences relating to

their transition from high school to postsecondary school. Themes included: (a) sense of belonging, (b) mental health, (c) family, (d) faculty, and (e) motivation.

Interpretation of the Findings

According to Arch and Gilman (2019), FGCS are generally more likely to come from a low socioeconomic background, differ from their peers in both attributes and college experiences. I addressed findings relating to how African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and factors contributing to their academic goals. I interviewed 10 male and female participants by conducting one-on-one interviews in a virtual setting. I was driven by the following question:

RQ1: How do African American and Latinx FGCS in the Upward Bound program describe their college experiences and factors contributing to accomplishing their academic goals?

Although most of the findings support existing research, this study includes information regarding what factors impact first-generation African American and Latinx college students' experiences. A review of findings provided emerging themes that were relevant to this study.

Limitations of the Study

Factors Affecting First-Generation Student Success

Variables that students in this study said supported their success confirmed past research. Students cited faculty, self-efficacy, family support, motivation, and self-esteem as critical factors in terms of academic success.

Faculty

First-generation students are just as committed to earning a college degree as their peers with college-educated parents, with a few differences. They lack confidence in in math and science and are more receptive to academic assistance. For example, 54% of FGCS in the U.S. have received some type of academic tutoring (Levitz, 2019). Students of color come to college wanting assistance. A constant theme heard from study participants was faculty wished to them to be successful. Many participants were grateful they had academic advisors and coaches to provide them with academic support. P3 said, "I am appreciative of office hours and tutoring services. Math and science courses can be difficult, so taking advantage of tutoring opportunities gives me the chance to advance in the coursework and to stay academically engaged in the nursing program." P1 said, "my academic advisor and the faculty on my campus are beneficial. When I need help, I send an email, and they get back to me within 48 hours." P6 said, "having individualized attention, I am more dedicated and productive with my schoolwork."

Study participants determined that faculty help them establish connections on campus and assist in navigating academics and peer groups. Museus and Quaye (2009) said first-year college students' level of engagement and educational attainment was

correlated with their interactions with faculty, staff, and other students. Connecting with aculty increases student engagement when they schedule advising, have mentoring and tutoring sessions outside the classroom.

Some participants in this study did not feel support of other students. P10 said, "I do not have any connections to faculty or professors on campus. I learned to figured out everything on my own. Sophomore year of college is when I started building connections with professors."

Not all interactions with staff were reported positively in this study. P4 said, "my academic advisor is not a good fit for me. Sometimes, I feel uncomfortable working with them. I also feel unprepared and lost when I am talking to them. I believe they mistreat me because I am a first-generation Latina student."

Self-Esteem

Study findings confirmed past research that self-esteem and motivation are key factors in helping FGCS succeed and increase student retention. FGCS often suffer from a lack of confidence regarding their academic college preparation. Students with lower academic self-efficacy have lower GPAs than their peers and are significantly less likely to complete their degrees (Gore, 2006). First-generation students have lower confidence in their abilities (Cushman, 2007).

Most participants in this study shared mixed reactions about their self-esteem, motivation, and confidence levels. P2 said: "I am very confident in my school. I have been building my resources on campus and connections with friends and advisors keeps me grounded in being successful." P6 said, "I am very dedicated and motivated and know

what keeps me happy. To be happy and confident, you have to know and trust your mental state."

By contrast, P4 said, "due to my lack of support, being stressed in college, taking difficult courses, and doing everything at once, I do not have the confidence of where I want to be. I am working on changing my mindset to gain confidence and going to counseling."

Role of Family and Peers

Although the participants in the study shared positive and negative experiences related to their families and their decision to attend college, what stood out was how the support of parents, family members, and peers motivated these students. Five out of 10 studies participants discussed how they are serving as a role model for siblings, cousins, and other family members motivated them to succeed. Serving as a role model for others created a sense of pride for being "the first" to attend college. One student shared, "my siblings, parents, and cousins look up to me. Even though they do not understand the logistics of college, they want me to be successful." Another student shared, "Yes, I am the first in my family to go to college. I am doing this for my parents. They came to this country with nothing. I just want to make them proud and to be able to take care of them when I graduate." These findings confirmed that past research offering that family support and praise could influence student's self-efficacy.

Empirical data also indicate a correlation between academic self-efficacy and perceived college stress and their combined effect on academic success for immigrant and minority students from a first-generation background (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997).

Hispanic immigrants and back immigrants come enter society with high expectations of taking advantage of postsecondary education system. But options can be limited due to social and economic problems. FCGS and even undocumented immigrants have inequitable success (Baum & Flores, 2011). Intervention studies designed to help reduce barriers, raise self-efficacy and outcome expectations, or raise social supports would be helpful in determining effective means of addressing these variable issues. As high school students prepare for post-secondary success, critical factors such as grades, family income, parents' educations, and youth educational achievement influence college enrollment and success (Baum & Flores, 2011).

Challenges Experienced by First-Generation African American and Latinx College Students

Sense of Belonging

FGCS often appear to feel disconnected from typical university social structure and express fear that adopting these changes may alienate them from preexisting social support systems, namely their families (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Previous research indicates that FG students sometimes feel stereotyped and worry about "fitting in" at college, which carries detrimental consequences for their academic performance (Smeding et al., 2013). Students attending PWI or schools where there is a low percentage of African American and Latinx student population. One participant shared his experience "I had no idea college was like this. I was very lost. I would watch over my other classmates to find out what is going on. It took me a while to get comfortable on campus." These findings confirmed past research on FGCS must overcome

intimidation and obstacles are skills that first-generation students lack but must learn to survive in college (Petty, 2014).

In addition, several study participants shared how in class, they felt they had to prep their answer before getting called on, or they would not speak because they did not want to get judge for their response. A growing literature indicates that students from underrepresented racial-ethnic minority (URM; Black, Hispanic, and Native) and first-generation college (FG) backgrounds report lower belonging as well as more significant uncertainty about their belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Many FGCS were academically unprepared for college, and some had not taken college entrance examinations. Other studies report that FCGS are more likely than others to need remedial classes (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014) and are more likely to be unable to a write a paper using correct grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure and citing references correctly (Collier, 2008). Additionally, FGCS may lack a cultural framework for understanding class material.

This lack of preparation may contribute to a sense of academic inferiority (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). FGCS tend to come from low-income and lower-achievement families, and they have lower degree aspirations. Studies of first-generational college students have recognized that FGCS do not always understand the social and academic norms of college culture. Many FGCS report feeling that they do not truly belong in either sphere as revealed in this research study.

Mental Health

Lack of active coping interferes with student performance and may contribute to more inadequate adjustment to college (Shields, 2001). FGS programs include orientations and other formal and informal activities, such as mentoring, tutoring, and meeting with academic advisors, to promote active coping (Ishyama, 2007). Concerning the emotional independence component of autonomy, the first-generation college sophomores are expected to be self-reliant and not depend on their parents and family (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000).

> Being a first gen is stressful. You want to do right, you want to make your parents happy, you want to get good grades, but then imposter syndrome gets the best of you. You feel down, you feel stressed, but then you have to keep going. I should use the Wellness center on campus, but that's not a priority right now. - P8
> Participant #1 shared, I have the right supports in place to make sure I am mentally and academically doing well. The connection I have with my friends and professors is very important to me right now. – P1

> The result of this current study confirmed the Covarrubias et al. (2015) suggest they found that higher levels of family achievement guilt are significantly higher depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and a higher frequency of minimizing their academic success among FGCS. Some studies have also shown that FGCS typically endure more stress and mental health concerns.

Social Capital

Without social or cultural capital, Cushman (2007) found that first-generation students experience frustration and isolation, in addition to overall more incredible difficulty transitioning to college. Research and theory indicate that social capital (i.e., the information, support, and resources available to an individual through connections and networks of relationships (Bourdieu, 1986) plays a critical role in academic and success, and that unequal distribution of social capital contributes to the lower college completion rates among first-generation college students.

Several participants reported they experience positive relationships with their college coach in high school, describing how they felt prepared for college. On the other hand, some participants had to navigate the college process independently or with their peers. These same students experienced similar relationships within the college. Participant #5 said he felt comfortable approaching his academic advisors and track coach. In comparison to Participant #4, she expressed professors and faculty were not culturally component. She did not feel welcomed into their office and in the classrooms. During the transition to college, students' access to social capital can diminish as previously strong connections from high school and their home communities begin to weaken, particularly for low-income, minority, and first-generation college students (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of social capital for college success, particularly among first-generation college students, academic advising remains the most prevalent strategy used to connect students with faculty and foster supportive

relationships (Schwartz et al., 2018). However, a recent study showed low student satisfaction with formal advisers and noted that 12% of survey participants never met with their advisors throughout their college experience (Allard & Parashar, 2013).

Financial Aid

The study participants repeatedly mentioned access to financial aid and understanding how to apply to FAFSA as providing an opportunity to attend and remain in college. Only one of the 10 study participants did not have to worry about paying for college due to receiving an honors scholarship. Most of the participants shared they are struggling to understand how FAFSA worked and did not understand their financial aid can be affected by their GPA. One participant expressed she is working three jobs to help pay for school and to support her family. Research shows that low-income students face significant barriers to college, including inadequate academic preparation, less access to social capital and knowledgeable adults with information about college-going, fewer peers who are preparing to go to college, and less financial support for college (Astin & Osguera, 2005; Taylor & Bicak, 2020). In addition, students whose parents do not help pay the cost of higher education can try to declare themselves independent, which is an arduous and frequently impossible task (Feeney & Heroff, 2013). Participant #7 shared, if she did not get a full scholarship to college, she does not know if she would have even attended. On the other hand, Participant #4 expressed she is working 3 part-time jobs just to pay for her education. It is vital that financial aid is one factor that can determine one's post-secondary success.

This too supports past research suggesting that due to a lack of social capital first-generation college student who was eligible for financial aid, including grants and work-study do not file for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This study also reflects that educating first-generation students and their families about the benefits and resources related to FAFSA could decrease anxiety and stress associated with paying for college. According to the U.S. Department of Education, African American and Latina/o students are less likely to be enrolled in higher education institutions (2016a) but are more likely to receive financial aid. However, first-generation college students who do not complete the FAFSA could access $24 billion in financial assistance by completing the form (Selingo, 2017).

The application of Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) provided a theoretical base for this study on FCGS. The results suggest that SCCT theoretical framework predicts that an FGC student with strong family support for his or her pursuit of a nontraditional degree choice is likely to develop a strong sense of career self-efficacy regarding that degree (Olson, 2014). Literature related to Bandura's social cognitive learning plays a significant role in motivation. Moreover, social cognitive theory defines the role of self-efficacy as a person's level of motivation, affective states, and actions (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Zeldin & Pajares (2000) postulated that social cognitive theory factors, such as economic conditions, socioeconomic status, and educational and familial structures do not affect human behavior directly. Instead, Zeldin and Pajares believed the social factors affect human behavior only to the degree that they

influence a person's aspirations, self-efficacy beliefs, personal standards, emotional states, and other self-regulatory influences.

In this study, the student input are students from a specific demographic, FCGS in an Upward Bound program. Per prior research studies, FCGS have many same characteristics because of their first-generation background. Characteristics such as achievement guilt and lack of academic preparation (Horn & Nunez, 2000), a lack of social capital (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004) and value of interdependence (Stephens et al., 2012). These characteristics may add up to students not applying college or have higher chances of dropping out of college. Based on the feedback from the participants interviewed for this research study, the Upward Bound program was designed to put best practices in place and support FGCS to be college and career ready. Engle et al., Bermeo,2006) share why pre-college programs are needed to support the FCGS environment. During the interviews with students, participants mentioned a lack of motivations and structure from faculty and staff. To accomplish this goal, high school counselors, college coaches, Upward Bound coordinators, and higher education administrations, (Lent et al., 1994) believed holding high standards for outcome expectations can improve one's belief about the goals they can accomplish. Faculty members mentoring and guiding FCGS is an example of effectively providing services to help students obtain student success in college.

Recommendations

The first-generation African American and Latinx students in this qualitative study believe that a college education is a path to gaining more opportunities to better

their lives and families. These ten students shared their perceptions of what helps them be

successful in college in a virtual learning environment or on a college campus and what

obstacles they faced along the way. Participants had the opportunity to share what advice

and recommendations they would share with other students and faculty members.

Recommendations to Assist the Transition to College

First-generation college students in this study asked and provided awareness as to

the barriers and struggles they encountered in preparing to start college. Programs

designed to prepare students academically and build their knowledge about the college

enrollment process can help lessen stress while transitioning to a postsecondary career.

Providing College Preparation Programs

Not all high schools have the opportunity or resources to implement college

preparation programs such as Upward Bound. One participant mentioned that she heard

about the Upward Bound program from a friend in the program. Program coordinators

and school administrators should work together to target first-generation college students

to help with the college readiness process. If schools do not have the financial budget to

have a college-bound program on their high school campus, high schools can provide

college planning workshops targeted to all students. School counselors should participate

in professional development and other training opportunities to learn about different

resources and tools to better support students and their families. Counselors influence the

knowledge that students can draw upon when evaluating colleges and contribute to

school environments that create structural barriers (Holland, 2020).

Holland (2020) indicated that first-generation college students tend to lack access to sources of information about colleges and that parents, peers, and schools can limit their choices. Furthermore, academic advisors and higher education staff should partner with college prep programs and high schools to provide programs, workshops, and meet and greet college students and advisors. Moschetti and Hudley (2006) examined that social capital theory suggested students leverage their network of relationships with parents, teachers, peers, and college counselors to provide them with the resources necessary so that they can make informed decisions related to applying to colleges, enrolling in a college, and persisting through college. SAT/ACT practice testing, college tours, the importance of FAFSA, time management, note-taking, and college placement exams, and searching up colleges and universities should be offered to assist first-generation college students.

First-Generation Student Orientation

The results of this study's interviews tremendously call for supporting inbound first-generation college students with the resources they need to understand the role of a college student successfully. Many colleges offer a summer bridge program or freshman orientation week. A new NACAC survey found that 57 percent of colleges have some type of provisional-admission program, and of those, 23 percent had a summer bridge program. Other NACAC research of camp colleges (a form of summer bridge) also reported better persistence and outcomes among participants (NACAC, 2012).

Bridge programs are designed to address the personal and inhibiting institutional factors of undergraduate students as they transition into college and have been suggested

to increase academic readiness, promote inclusion and integration into the college academic and social community, introduce the students to the available supportive institutional academic support programs and services, and promote self-efficacy and persistence (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Frischmann & Moor (2017) examined students that participated in a seven-week summer program, and the results showed the program impacted on increasing retention in each cohort.

Additional tools and workshops that should be implemented to assist first-generation college students include registering for class, understanding the syllabus, using the student portal, and what resources are available on campus for them to use without a cost. These experiences could also increase and improve first-generation confidence and self-efficacy.

Recommendations to Assist Enrolled Students

In this study, the first-generation college students vocalized the importance of building connections on campus with staff, faculty, and peers and resources need to have a successful college experience.

First-Generation Student College Center

Many participants in the study shared if they had somewhere to go for help, they would not be in so much distress as a freshman. Implementation of a student center or office for first-generation students would build a sense of belonging in a positive, safe space environment. Staff and advisors will be able to connect, share resources, and get first-generation college students. The implementation of this community will balance mental health and well-being and increase confidence and comfortability on campus.

According to Uwire (2016), a First-Generation College Student Support group was created on the JMU campus. There are over 2000 FGCS students who enroll in college every year. Students need a safe space to share their experiences and get the resources from staff (Uwire, 2016).

Faculty and Student Relationship

First-generation students are motivated by faculty to be successful beyond the college campus. When first-generation college students have positive experiences and can build connections with faculty and staff, they will feel more comfortable communicating their issues and feel confident be academically successful. However, research consistently shows that college students' perceptions that teachers care about them increase their motivation to work, engagement in class, and evaluation of the teacher as credible (Chory and Offstein, 2017). In studies of teacher efficacy and student responsiveness, perceived caring consistently emerges as a significant variable shaping student engagement, teacher credibility, and student performance in these settings (Cooper and Miness, 2014).

Student mentoring programs are a commonly employed strategy to help students build relationships with instructors, advisors, and staff on the university campus. Research suggests that these approaches, particularly mentoring programs, can be effective in improving academic performance. Furthermore, research has shown that higher levels of interaction with faculty strongly correlate with improved student outcomes (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). For example, providing professional learning communities, outside trainers, and culturally responsive workshops on working with

specifically with FCGS can support faculty and advisors in rebuilding the relationships between staff and students. Monthly professional developments on improving practices such as student engagement, diversity, understanding FCGS challenges, and building a safe school community can increase student persistence and retention beyond the college campus.

Parent Workshops

Family has played a significant role throughout this study, and participants have expressed their concerns and appreciation for their parents and family members. It is essential for high schools and colleges to implement programs, workshops, and seminars to include families and guardians throughout the college application process and when they enroll on campus. First-generation college students and their parents also faces informational barriers. They may be particularly concerned about college costs and not know all the complexities of the financial aid process, limiting their choices (McDonough & Calderon, 2006). Family social capital influences who students can gain college information from and how they think about factors such as college costs and living at home (Roksa & Deutschlander, 2018). Furthermore, first-generation college students are often the least informed about ways to obtain financial aid and student loans and from families more resistant to incurring temporary high levels of debt (Furquim et al., 2017).

Perna and Titus (2005) argued that helping increase families' understanding of what is needed to make informed and timely decisions is imperative for students' pathways. The creation of partnerships can help educate families on why obtaining a college degree is essential and explaining key factors. Because college enrollment

policies and procedures are ever-changing, students benefit when parents know details, such as the various entrance exams (e.g., SAT and ACT), college application procedures, financial aid and scholarship avenues and availability, deadlines, fee waivers, and administrative systems and processes (Amaro-Jiménez et al., 2020). Furthermore, first-generation college students are often the least informed about ways to obtain financial aid and student loans and from families more resistant to incurring temporary high levels of debt (Furquim et al., 2017). Another common characteristic of first-generation college student is a lack of family support since families may not be able to relate to the college experiences. The lack of support may be greater among non-English speaking parents who have not been integrated into American culture (Purdy, 2021). All parents, regardless of background, social status, or educational level, can benefit from participating in college and career readiness programs and workshops that will positively impact minority and first-generation families and college retention.

Recommendations for Further Study

Results from this study have laid the groundwork for future research for first-generation African American and Latinx in a college environment. In the light of the importance of FGCS and their families, future research should evaluate how aiding and resources to parents early in their children education as early as middle school can influence and start the post-secondary process. Programs, college-fairs, and college/career day can provide information and workshops that can help bring light on the importance of saving money early for college and the financial aid process. Future

research should also survey if whether involving families, especially families of FGCS with college planning and transition.

Interview participants shared how advising or lack of advising experiences had impacted their college experience. Future research should compare how FGCS retention has an impact on student advisement. Lack of advisement or having structured advisement on how to choose to proper major, building a solid class schedule, and learn about internship and post career opportunities can shift the college narrative.

Throughout this study, many FGCS spoke deeply of how their interactions with faculty members and professors, or lack of interactions has made an effect with their self-esteem and building motivation. Research should explore how FGCS need guidance on how to build relationships with faculty, and the importance of faculty using outreach to support FGCS throughout their college experience. Building relationships with faculty and staff members on a college campus can shift the FGCS perspective of college and increase retention.

Finally, this study should also duplicate to include a larger sample of African American and Latinx FGCS who participated in Upward Bound program compared to students who just transition from high school to college without support. Duplicating this study can build a greater understanding of what supports FGCS need to be successful beyond the classroom doors.

Implications

In expressing their perceptions on supports and improvements to African American and Latinx first-generation college students at an Upward Bound Program,

participants shared their experiences on their college experience and provided expertise on what they faced. The study may motivate first-generation African American and Latinx college students to understand their background, social status, and other circumstances. They can be their first in their family to attend and graduate college. Despite their background, each participant was determined to "break the cycle," enroll in college, improve their lives and be a role model to their family.

The results of my study might lead to more efforts for high schools, colleges, and universities in implementing new programs, services, and support systems as well as improving the college community regarding the challenges they shared during the interview. With the rapid changes today, higher institutions need to improve their structure of recruiting students, supporting students throughout their post-secondary transition, and guiding students to college and career success. With more FCGS attending college, additional funding for resources and tools such as student center for academic support and mental health center are vital during one's transition. In this study, the sense of belonging was a theme. FCGS described arriving on campus with little to no knowledge of the college environment. For example, orientation designed for FCGS can make a major difference in student comfortability and engagement. This can also close the gap between student dropout and student retention.

Moreover, this study could help increase school counselors and higher administrators to support first-generation students, especially African American and Latinx students. Professional development, training, and professional learning communities are needed to assist teachers, faculty, and advisors on supporting FCGS and

understanding the population they work with. Fostering relationship with staff increase student confidence and encouraged them to persist on a college campus. To increase the likelihood that students will have the necessary social capital to enroll in college, higher education administrators need to develop a multi-pronged approach to provide students with the missing supports that will help them develop a college-going mindset (Le, Mariano, & Faxon-Mills, 2016). Faculty and staff could use professional development training to provide resources to increase academic engagement and retention.

In addition, high school counselors, academic advisors, program directors, and faculty may find ways to assist first-generation college students specifically. College workshops, financial aid and testing such as ACT/SAT are needed to increase test scores and college acceptances to get into college. Bridging the communication and language barrier between staff and parents can effectively gain more family engagement. Providing students and families with resources in other languages can also increase community engagement within high school or college campus. Parents need to be aware of resources and tools available in the high school setting and on a college campus, such as student centers, wellness centers, tutoring services, disability offices, and support services. Therefore, supporting students and their families can help students persist and be successful in their first year of college. Beyond the college campus, first-generation college students are taking the right step into completing their goals, being academically challenged, and preparing themselves to be life-longer learners while making a positive contribution to the socio-economic dynamic today.

Conclusion

The data gathered for this study suggest that first-generation African American and Latinx college students need resources and services implemented to support their academic and well-being needs. First-generation college students must overcome many challenges when transitioning into the college environment. Gaining a better understanding of first-generation college students' experiences with academic and social support can aid pre-college programs and universities to support their needs. Creating more pre-college outreach programs in high schools such as Upward Bound, TRIO, AVID, and SEO, just to name a few, can support academically disadvantage communities and provide college and career readiness plans to those students in need. As school counselors and academic advisors use SCCT, it presents a practical framework that will help FGCS transition from high school to post-secondary options, embrace opportunities, and explore new challenges while gaining their confidence. Ultimately, pre-college programs and support services on a college campus can increase academic attainment and retention.

As a result of this study, I have made recommendations that can increase the drive and persistence of first-generation African American and Latinx college students. Through the information gained from the ten participants, these first-generation college students have offered their insight on what is needed for them and other first-generation students being successful in college. My goal is that school counselors, program directors, faculty, and college administrators will use these findings to design and

implement new programs and training to support first-generation including African

American and Latinx college students.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Appendix B: Confirmation Email

Hello, this is Fanny M. Ballard. I sent you an email on (4/22/2021) about the research study I am completing on FGCs and the Upward Bound program. As a part of this research, I am conducting interviews that will take approximately one hour. Prior to completing the interview, I will have you complete a consent form for participation. Do you have any questions about the study or interview consent form? We will be using Zoom for our interview. Please confirm the time and date for your one-on-one interview.

Appendix C: Interview Guide

1. Researcher will ask participants to complete demographic google form - 5 mins.

2. Researcher will ask each participant to make sure the spelling of their name is accurate in the Zoom meeting.

3. The researcher will outline the progress of the interview and how it will be conducted.

4. The researcher will begin to ask participants, in alphabetical order, the interview questions listed in Appendix D.

5. Researcher will close the interview by asking participants if there is anything the researcher should omit from the interview. The researcher will thank the participants at the conclusion of the interview.

Appendix D: Upward Bound Program Interview Protocol

Section I:

Demographics:

1. Participant _____
2. Gender_____
3. Race/Ethnicity _____
4. Age_____
5. Level of education did your parents complete_____
6. Major(s)_____. Minor(s)_____
7. Live on campus, off campus, or with family: _____
8. G.P.A._____
9. Full-time or Part-time: _____
10. Type of High School attended: _____
11. University or College Attending:

Section II:

1. Describe your transition from high school to college.
2. How did you find out about the Upward Bound program?
3. When did you enroll in the Upward Bound program?
4. What has been your academic experience at the university?
5. Academically and socially: What does your academic and social life look like on campus?
6. As a FGCS please share barriers or challenges you have encountered as a first-generation student?
7. How has being an African American or Latinx FGCS affected your college experience?
8. What has helped you be successful in the Upward Bound Program?

9. What on-campus resources (academic, emotional, social) have you utilized and how have they been helpful to you?

10. Who would you identify as most influential in helping you navigate college?

11. What are the qualities you possess that you believe have helped you to be successful?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

13. What advice would you give to other African American and Latinx FGCS?

14. What do you believe the university could have done to better support you and other FGCS?

Appendix E

Participant Demographics

Gender	Race	Age	Parent's level of education	Major	Minor	Location	GPA	Student status	Type of High School Attended
Female	Black or African American	20	Graduated H.S. or GED Program	Business in Marketing		With family	3.5.-4.0	Full-time student	Public High School
Male	Black or African American	19	Graduated H.S. or GED Program	Computer Science	Cyber Security	Off-Campus	2.0.-2.5	Full-time student	Public High School
Female	Black or African American	23	Graduated H.S. or GED Program	aerospace engineering	mechanical engineering	off campus (lived)	3.0-3.5.	Full-time student	Charter High School
Male	Black or African American	22	Graduated H.S. or GED Program	Biological Microbiology	Music	On-campus	3.0-3.5.	Full-time student	Public High School
Female	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	18	Did not complete H.S	Psychology	None at the moment	Off campus with family	2.5-3.0	Full-time student	Public High School
Male	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	20	Graduated H.S. or GED Program	Fashion photography	Digital arts	With family	3.5.-4.0	Full-time student	Public High School
Female	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	21	Graduated H.S. or GED Program	Nursing		with family	2.5-3.0	Full-time student	Public High School
Female	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	18	Did not complete H.S	Sociology Anthropology	Deaf Studies	On campus	3.5.-4.0	Full-time student	Public High School
Female	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	19	Did not complete H.S	Elementary Education	n/a	On campus	3.5.-4.0	Full-time student	Public High School
Male	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	20	Graduated H.S. or GED Program	Criminal justice		Live on campus	2.5-3.0	Full-time student	Public High School