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Case Study of a 2016 Upward Bound Cohort's Preparation for College

Kimberly Collins
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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Kimberly Collins

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Case Study of a 2016 Upward Bound Cohort's Preparation for College

by

Kimberly D. Collins

MPA, Walden University, 2018

BA, Virginia State University, 2016

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

Many first-generation, low-income students in the United States enter college with barriers to success related to a lack of social, academic, financial, and economic literacy skills, which leads to college dropout. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of first-generation college students who participated in the Upward Bound (UB) program in the Southeastern region of the United States and to provide recommendations to increase the program's effectiveness. The UB program is a federally supported educational initiative that aids low-income, first-generation high school students academically. Individuals who took part in the program got the chance to receive help with their academic work and would share a decrease in the dropout rates. The study was based on the theory of cultural capital developed by Bourdieu. Data were collected through informal interviews with a purposive sample of 19 students who were (a) members of the 2016 UB cohort, (b) participated in the UB program for at least 2 years, and (c) completed their 1st year of either community college or university. Dedoose was used to organize the data. The key finding of this study showed lack of pre-planning for undergraduate degree, college advising, self-sufficiency, how to read a syllabus, assignment submission, and economic and financial responsibilities. The recommendations to the study were to develop a guidance document for advisors, create student workshops on relationships, build a student resource program, create student and parent workshops on financial literacy, and build community partnerships. These programs may promote positive social change to high school graduation, college enrollment, and degree completion.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the almighty God. I would not be where I am today without your love, guidance, wisdom, and grace. For my goddaughter, Malynn S. Wooten, thank you for your never-ending love and patience. To my late brother, Ollie LaWayne Collins, who asked me to continue making a difference and impacting lives with my testimony. To the woman who encouraged and pushed me during this journey of completion and who was called home to be with her heavenly Father, Dr. Joy Grant: Thank you for every prayer, push on the back, word of encouragement, and cheer (even on days you did not feel your best), and for the love you always displayed to me through it all. "Ma Joy," it is FINISHED. We did it! I love you, NOW and ALWAYS! To my family and friends, thank you for your prayers and support.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

In the contemporary United States, postsecondary education plays an important role in individual and societal well-being. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2015), college enrollment and a completed degree are essential and necessary to achieve upward social mobility and economic status in society. Students who attend higher education institutions benefit in a variety of ways over the course of their lives; similarly, taxpayers and society as a whole benefit in both direct and indirect ways from people having access to postsecondary education (Freeman, 2018). For minorities, obtaining a college degree produces better employment opportunities and increases the chance that individuals and their families will have more stability in their lives (Beheshtifar & Norozy, 2013). Also, obtaining a college degree can sharpen a student's ability to think critically. According to Dr. Martin Luther King (as cited in Freeman, 2018), “the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education” (p. 102).

For these reasons, educators have increasingly focus on ensuring that high school students are prepared for college and a career (Beheshtifar & Norozy, 2013). Students who have a feeling of purpose and awareness of the college process are more inclined to continue their education; the knowledge and sense of purpose could be attributed to parents who had completed college (DesJardins & McCall, 2014). Not all students have this asset and may have worse academic outcomes as a result. First-generation, low-income students are usually academically underprepared compared to their peers, have minimal awareness of the college admissions and financial aid processes, and receive

little to no support from their families in these areas (Beheshtifar & Norozy, 2013). They also receive less advocacy or help from informed people when searching for and selecting colleges (DesJardins & McCall, 2014).

Other potential barriers first-generation, low-income students may experience are lower high school grade point averages and standardized test scores to enroll into postsecondary education (Zepeda et al., 2020). In addition, they may lack social and academic skills and financial and economic literacy, all of which are key to success in postsecondary education (Wolfenden, 2020). These barriers may impede their educational achievement and other outcomes.

Background

For this professional administrative study, I interviewed a group of first-generation, low-income students in the Southeastern region of the United States who graduated from high school in 2016 and aspired to complete degrees in higher education. The study sheds light on how the transition from high school to college could be a challenge for some low-income, first-generation high school students, as well as the multiple obstacles they face on their journey. Federal officials have created multiple programs to assist low-income students in transitioning to college.

Background of TRiO Federal Program

In 1964, as part of the War on Poverty, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act, which authorized the formation of local community action agencies (Kotamraju & Blackman, 2011). These community action agencies aimed to strengthen, supplement, and coordinate efforts of additional policies. The Economic

Opportunity Act initiated the idea of helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds complete high school and enroll in postsecondary institutions (Kotamraju & Blackman, 2011).

The acronym *TRiO* itself had no meaning, but it was derived in the late 1960s from the first three of the federal government's educational opportunity programs: Upward Bound (UB), Educational Talent, and Student Support Services (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The first program, UB, stemmed from passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 due to the administration's War on Poverty (Mangan, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The second outreach program, Talent Search, was created by the Higher Education Act in 1965, whereas the third outreach program was Student Support Services, which was launched in 1968 under the name *Special Services for Disadvantaged Students* (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Officials have continued to develop TRiO programs and expand their service range. By the late 1960s, the Higher Education Amendments Act started adding to the prior three TRiO federal programs, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2015). The fourth program, known as *The Educational Opportunity Center*, was added to the TRiO federal programs through the Higher Education Amendments of 1972. The fifth program, known as the *Training Program for Special Programs Staff and Leadership Personnel*, was created after the Higher Education Act was amended in 1976. The Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, the sixth program, was added by the Higher Education Amendment in 1986 and was designed to assist eligible participants for doctoral studies through research and other scholarly activities. The

seventh program, the UB math/science program, was created in 1990 and addressed the concern that students might need specific preparation for math and science (Booker, 2016; Mangan, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This program has the same administrative regulations as the regular UB program. Last, passage of the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2001 led to the creation of the eighth and final amended program known as Student Support Services. Students enrolled within this program are eligible to receive a Federal Pell Grant as financial assistance, catering to their education needs (Mangan, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Officials created the eight programs to provide resources to individuals from low-income families, to disabled students, and those classified as first-generation to attend college (Booker, 2016). I focused on one of these programs, UB, in this study. A UB program was the client organization.

Background of the Client Organization

The client organization was an UB program located at an HBCU in the Southeastern region area of the United States. Officials at the university established a partnership with the U.S. Department of Education's TRiO Program to meet the needs of first-generation, low-income high school students by socially and academically preparing them for college. Officials also wanted a means of increasing the students' financial and economic literacy skills.

The university has had several historical achievements throughout the years; officials saw an opportunity to continue to have a positive impact on the community by adding the UB program in 1966 (Karadag, 2017). The program serves area public school

system students by preparing them for college entrance, according to the university's website. The UB program is 100% federally funded through the U.S. Department of Education.

UB is one of the programs created from the federally funded TRiO program. Enhancing students' academic preparation is a key aim. UB offers mentorship and support for students as they prepare for college (Booker, 2016). These services include preparation for entrance exams, submission of college applications, completion of financial aid packets, and the researching and submission of scholarship applications (Tate et al., 2015). UB staff members promote student achievement and prepare them for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access to resources and facilities, according to the program's website. The overall UB program serves high school students who are first-generation, low-income are afforded the opportunity to participate in the UB program during Saturday sessions and summer breaks. These opportunities provide them the experience to study in a 4-year college environment while still attending high school (Booker, 2016).

The low-income, first-generation college students may not be knowledgeable or prepared for college. Their parents may need additional resources, tools, and support to guide them through the beginning of postsecondary education (Mangan, 2015). UB bridges the needs gap and prepares high school students for a postsecondary education curriculum (Tate et al., 2015). The program participants receive tutoring in mathematics, science, literature, and English composition (Booker, 2016). During the summer months, students receive a 6-week residential campus experience. Although the focus is on

academics as they are immersed in coursework, the opportunity also provides students with social interaction exposure mimicking the college experience (Booker, 2016).

The transition from high school to college could be a challenge for first-generation, low-income students. The U.S. Department of Education (2015) shared one of their federal funded TRiO program is Upward Bound. The goal of UB is to ensure that high school students are prepared for entry into postsecondary education. In addition, university officials aimed to increase the obtainment of college degrees by first-generation and low-income students. As noted on its website, leaders of the local UB program desired to glean from their efforts whether their programmatic studies were adequately preparing high school students for their 1st year of college. To ensure that the program continues its impact in the community, university officials hired a director to oversee the program, with responsibilities for policy, procedures, and initiatives for meeting academic needs, according to its website.

Background of the Problem

The number of high school students who attend postsecondary education and are first-generation make up a large percentage of college students in the United States (Tate et al., 2015; Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Also, the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education is an organization that studies students who are specifically both first-generation and low-income (Booker, 2016). Staff members gather and analyze data on students from first-generation and low-income families to determine whether they differ from traditional students who attend college (Tate et al., 2015). They

examine several types of data, including types of institutions they attend, demographic characteristics, financial needs, and the need for remedial education (Mangan, 2015).

Although, research shows that first-generation students face barriers every day in their college experience (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Equally, in the local area, first-generation, low-income students who desire to pursue their college degree can connect with a high school counselor to receive information about UB. The UB counselor and the program director would then interview and potentially accept the high school student into the program.

UB administrators and instructors collaborated with the state department of education to improve high school students' chance of academic and social success. UB programmers partnered with high schools and postsecondary institutions to train students and improve their workforce skills. The university officials, along with the director shared, they aimed to decrease high school dropout rates, increase graduation rates, improve technical and academic skills, and assist students to make a smooth transition from high school to the postsecondary educational field. However, many first-generation college students continue to enter college unprepared (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2017). During their 1st year, these students struggle to maintain their studies, pass their courses, and be motivated to register for a 2nd year, which leads to college dropout.

Barriers First-Generation Students Face. Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) stated that the barriers that first-generation, low-income students face when they enroll into postsecondary institutions mean that the students do not persist in college at the same rate as other cohorts.

Social and Academic Skills. The first barrier to success in postsecondary education is the lack of social and academic skills. A deficit in these skills affects students' lifelong of learning. Yucel (2018) stated that there is a link between a student's lack of social skills and their academic abilities in high school. Learning social skills enhances good behavior and decreases negative behavior in students (Lynch & Simpson, 2010). Social skills development increases students' academic progress, health, and overall well-being while effectively averting several problems such as alcohol and drug use, aggression, truancy, and bullying (Lynch & Simpson, 2010).

Financial Literacy. The second barrier to success in postsecondary education is financial literacy. People who are financially literate often have the experience and awareness to make good financial decisions (Mitchell & Lusardi, 2015). Financial literacy can enable people to manage their finances appropriately, borrow and save money, and plan and invest for the future. It is needed in high school because students learn about budgeting, saving, debt, investing, charitable giving, and other aspects of money management in financial literacy classes (Lee, 2019). This understanding creates the groundwork for students to develop strong money habits early on and avoid many of the pitfalls that contribute to long-term financial difficulties (Lee, 2019).

Economic Literacy. The third barrier to success in postsecondary education is economic literacy. Economic literacy encompasses knowledge acquisition, money management behaviors, and tangible monetary outcomes, though a comprehensive definition has not been established (Mitchell & Lusardi, 2015). Financial knowledge has an important impact on individuals' welfare and their life's outcome. Having an

understanding of the strategies for success during post-secondary schooling may be a sound financial rationale for someone to retain and preserve their lifestyle (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2017). Economic literacy can inform the decisions that individuals make regarding their way of living, planning, and/or saving their wealth (Mitchell & Lusardi, 2015).

Additional Factors for First-Generation Students. Próspero and Vohra-Gupta (2017) noted several factors that contribute to first-generation college students becoming frustrated and leaving college without completing their education. These factors include being a part of a family that was not knowledgeable about the college experience, lacking financial support, beginning coursework unprepared, and being unfamiliar with the college process. These factors influence students' academic achievement and performance, self-esteem, progress, and persistence (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2017). Because of these factors, officials at the U.S. Department of Education implemented the UB program to prepare first-generation, low-income students for the transition from high school to college (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2017; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013).

Most importantly, first-generation students generally are comprised of minorities, individuals from low-income families, and adult learners (Cole, 2008; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2017). Due to these demographic characteristics, such students often face obstacles hindering their pursuit of higher educational goals (Grimard & Maddaus, 2018). The aim of the UB program at the target university was to address and mitigate the barriers that affected first-generation, low-income high students.

Problem Statement

The problem was that first-generation, low-income students entered college with barriers to success related to social and academic skills, financial and economic literacy skills, which led to college dropout.

Purpose

I examined the lived experiences of first-generation college students who participated in the 2016 cohort of the UB program at a university in the Southeastern region of the United States. I wanted to understand students' experiences and also provide recommendations to increase the program's effectiveness. This study addressed the UB program's impact on social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy for first-generation, low-income students who enrolled in their first college term. I identified areas of improvement that the leadership of the UB program may be able to use to modify the program for future precollege and undergraduate cohorts.

Research Question

The research question for the qualitative case study was, What is the perspective of the 2016 cohort of the UB program at a southeastern university concerning the program's effect on their preparation for completion of postsecondary education?

Nature of the Administrative Study

For the professional administrative study, I used a qualitative case study design with a phenomenology approach. That qualitative research technique revealed first-generation, low-income students' perspectives of the UB program and how it benefited

their transition to college. Qualitative research incorporates a variety of philosophical perspectives and techniques (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

A case study, according to Yin (2017), is an empirical approach that "involves contemporary phenomena (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world environment, especially when the borders between phenomenon and context are not easily discernible" (p. 17). I chose to conduct a case study because I wanted to look for patterns and trends that might connect with the existing literature. With this as my aim, the qualitative assessments would be done with no preexisting views.

The type of qualitative research was phenomenology. Due to minimal information on the barriers to success for first-generation, low-income students, I opted to conduct phenomenological interviews. I conducted in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to examine the perspectives of former students about their lived experiences during and after participation in the UB program. This allowed me to gain insight into the former students' behaviors and motivations while in postsecondary education. The lived experience included the benefit of the UB program, the need for precollege programs, and what aspect of first-generation, low-income students' participation afforded them opportunities and skill sets to obtain a college degree.

Significance

The study's examination of the lived experiences of first-generation, low-income undergraduate students who participated in the UB program reasoned may be significant to the program's staff, participants, and the university at large.

Significance to Practice

The findings of study may affect several key stakeholders. The essential stakeholders of UB were high school students, the program director, the provost of academic affairs, and the senior vice president and chief financial officer of business affairs. The study may expand the body of research and offer insight on how to decrease the barriers to success and decrease the college dropout rate among first-generation, low-income students.

Significance to Social Change

This study may contribute to positive social change by informing stakeholders of the barriers to social and academic skills, financial and economic literacy that first-generation, low-income students face as they obtain their college degrees. The findings supported the need for precollege programs such as UB and informed other high school students with similar backgrounds. The study may be a positive resource to help first-generation, low-income students transition to college. It may also provide additional information to explore the barriers and difficulties of those who had previously transitioned from high school to college and graduated.

Summary

For many decades, the UB program has served first-generation, low-income high school students in the local area by preparing them for college life as they completed their core courses of study. Programmers implemented curricula and activities to ensure students' success before and after postsecondary education (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). In this study, I examined the lived experiences of a cohort of recent graduates. I

examined participants' level of social, academic, financial, and economic literacy skills after they participated the UB program.

Section 2: Conceptual Approach and Background

Introduction

The problem was that first-generation, low-income students often enter college with barriers to success related to social, academic, financial, and economic literacy skills, which led to college dropout. In this case study, I explored the lived experiences of first-generation college students who participated in the 2016 cohort of the UB program at a university in the Southeastern region of the United States. I also wanted to provide recommendations to increase the program's effectiveness. The study addressed the UB program's impact on social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy for first-generation, low-income students who enrolled in their first college term. The research question for the qualitative case study was, What is the perspective of the 2016 cohort of the UB program at a southeastern university concerning the program's effect on their preparation for completion of postsecondary education?

In this section, I review concepts, models, and theories that pertain to social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy among first-generation, low-income students enrolled in their first term of college. The section also includes information on the organizational background and context of the study and my role as a Doctor of Public Administration student. I also examine the study's relevance for public education organizations.

Concepts, Models, and Theories

Postsecondary education for first-generation, low-income individuals was of concern to the state department of education. Because of their ongoing concern,

administrators and educators nationally have sought to ensure that UB programs adequately prepare students to transition from high school to postsecondary education (Mattern et al., 2017). According to the target state's department of education, UB provides intensive basic skills that are required for success in completing high school education.

Deliverable to the Client

The deliverable approach selected was a recommendation memo that highlighted the participants' positive experience, the participants' feedback, and my recommendations. Memos are most effective when they connect the writer's purpose with the reader's interests and needs, regardless of the exact goal (Thomson, 2016). A recommendation memo from a researcher provides a different viewpoint on a problem that an individual or organization had to confront and overcome.

A recommendation memo is a formal document that primarily communicates information to outside stakeholders (Wolfenden, 2020). Organizations produce and transmit written communication in a variety of ways. Email messages, text messages, letters, memos, and reports are all common types of written communication in contemporary business (Thomson, 2016; Wolfenden, 2020). Organizations also post written information on their websites and social media pages on a regular basis.

Writing an excellent recommendation memo supports the writer's message and reduces misinterpretation and other issues that come with many other written documents (Wolfenden, 2020). Formality is an important consideration in deciding which type of written communication is ideal for a certain occasion. Written communications and

papers are typically categorized as official, informal, or heartfelt. Most documents and messages created and/or delivered electronically are considered informal (Thomson, 2016; Wolfenden, 2020).

The memo shared participants' positive experiences, participants' feedback, and my recommendations and options for how to help high school students develop their social and academic skill sets and financial and economic literacy as they prepare for a successful 1st year in postsecondary education. I designed the recommendation memo to provide the stakeholders, including the program director, program counselor, and college officials, with new information, such as policy changes. Another aim of the memo was to persuade them to take a specific action, such as attend a meeting in the community or utilize different education technique. I viewed the memo as an efficient way to communicate with administrators and the director and staff of the program.

Theoretical Underpinning

Being focused on the social, cultural, and academic need of high school students classified as first-generation, low-income, strategies were developed to encourage and enhance their learning surroundings and maximize a positive environment. These strategies are based on the theory of cultural capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu influenced by the theories of Karl Marx (Thompson, 2016; Thomson, 2016). Therefore, the explanation of the cultural capital theory.

Cultural Capital Theory

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, developed an idea of a way to explain how cultural capital's power in society transferred to social class. He believed that cultural

capital plays an important role in molding (Holm, 2018). The cultural capital theory focuses on the dominance of middle-class culture in society and social institutions, and how it provides children an advantage in education (Thompson, 2016). Bourdieu defines cultural capital as "familiarity with legitimate culture within a society" (Rawolle & Lingard, 2016, p. 167). He stated that families pass on cultural capital to their children by introducing them to education, music, dance, theatre and by having discussions over the dinner table (Puzic et al., 2015).

Thompson (2016) shared that Bourdieu felt cultural capital can be converted into economic capital through the education system, which validates the possession of cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications. The qualifications potentially translate into economic capital (Holm, 2018, Thompson, 2016). The educational system is an important factor in overcoming social inequalities, as students are helped financially, socially, and educationally by their families to achieve higher education and focus on professional career success (Puzic et al., 2015).

The Three States of Cultural Capital

Bourdieu and Passeron (2020) shared there are three states of cultural capital that exist: embodied (language, mannerisms, preferences, etc.), institutionalized (educational credentials), and objectified (books, works of art, cultural goods, etc.), and in each state there is reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2020). Bourdieu argued that cultural capital is valuable within the field of education because it validates the cultural capital and positive qualities to take into society (Brown, 1973/2018).

This enhanced the point that education was critical for persons to take their cultural capital and move into social and economic capital. According to Covarrubis and Fryberg (2015), the need for pre-college support services is a critical part of preparing first-generation, low-income students for post-secondary education, and to assist them in gaining access and opportunity to attend and succeed in high education.

Key Concepts in the Study

Postsecondary access programs, such as the UB program, provided significant contributions to the goal of improved students' higher education success. Higher education for first-generation, low-income students and the barriers they had encountered were key concepts within the framework of this study and the following provided clarity to those concepts.

Higher Education for First-Generation, Low-Income Students

First-generational, low-income students are considered at a disadvantage when compared to the students whose parents had experience in post-secondary education (Cole, 2008). Cole (2008) conducted a qualitative study that analyzed the educational histories and reconstructions of narrative stories that provided data demonstrating the educational dynamics within low-income, first-generation college students and their journeys. The study's findings investigated how low-income first-generation students described and understood their experiences and shared stories of their 1st year of college (Cole, 2008). His study indicated the difference between the students who left and those who persisted in completing their degrees.

Parents who have not attended college find it difficult to guide their children on how to enroll in and complete a postsecondary course of study (Cole, 2008). The correlation between low-income and first-generation students features how higher education affected their ability to succeed during their pursuit. As first-generation, low-income students earn their college degrees, they learn how higher education provides a way of becoming economically stable (Cole, 2008). First-generation, low-income students who are learning and living through barriers understand the value of hard work and the rewards that come from it (Alsalkhi, 2018).

According to Page and Scott-Clayton (2016), first-generation, low-income students have more difficulty finding their motivation to attend college, finish their academic courses, and apply to post-secondary institutions. Alsalkhi (2018) conducted a detailed study focused on students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The study related the increased efforts of first-generation students pursuing higher education in America and the numerous calls for research on low-income families who make up this demographic. Data gathered from the research showed how different variables of diversity impacted students' education, the impact of pursuing higher education, and the overall outcome of the potential barriers affecting a first-generation experience's success (Alsalkhi, 2018). The research found indicated how a close view of the data revealed gaps in the research, left additional room for future studies.

Barriers Encountered by First-Generation Students

Low-income first-generation college students encountered three primary barriers to success: social and academic skills, financial and economic literacy.

Social and Academic Skills. The concept of social skills for scholars were an important part of academic achievement and every stage of life. Social skills were important because it allowed an individual to interact in society. It enhanced the quality of life that made relationships close and strong, which led to solid physical and psychological health. It helped students to communicate proficiently and improved decision-making skills within their peer groups.

Social development depends on factors such as peer relations, good social adjustment with others, emotional intelligence, family structure, social skills, etc. (Beheshtifar & Norozy, 2013, p. 4-5). Those factors of social skills formed the pathway to an individual's success. Social skills helped through held conversations with others, started and maintained relationships and friendships. Basically, social skills are behaviors that promote positive interaction with others (Flowers, 2018, p. 16-18). Good social skills are very important for an individual for successful functioning in life, and by learning these skills a person comes to know how to make good decisions, good choices and how to behave in diverse situations (Konishi & Wong, 2018, p. 45). Social skills help to prepare young people to be mature and succeed in their adult roles with the family, workplace, and community (Beheshtifar & Norozy, 2013, p. 5). Social skills help people in their academic, personal, and future professional activities and to adjust in their social life (Konishi & Wong, 2018, p. 48).

Academic skills were important because it encouraged students to become productive learners. It gave students the confidence to participate in courses. For students that are planning to attend post-secondary education, it is recommended students

incorporate classroom skill sets: academic discourse, an academic text strategy, an academic strategy, learn to compose and learn to comprehend (Tan et al., 2021, p. 160-162).

In the transition from high school to post-secondary education, students face various sources of academic stress, which include the demonstration of an ability to engage in challenging materials under time limitations (Al-Qahtani, 2015, p. 60-61; Tan et al., 2021, p. 158). Time management, procrastination, attention, memory, study aids, note-taking, exam techniques, overcoming test anxiety, being an organizer, how to process information, remaining motivated, maintaining a happy attitude, and focusing on reading materials are just a few of the difficulties (Al-Qahtani, 2015, p. 56-57).

Using effective learning strategies during the study is crucial for positive long-term learning outcomes and academic achievement (Al-Qahtani, 2015, p. 58; Ariel & Karpicke, 2018, p. 44-46). First-year students struggle with developing effective learning strategies (Ariel & Karpicke, 2018, p. 49). The lack of social and academic skills is difficult for both the student and the teacher because the student may be unable to process information in certain situations, and the teacher may be uninformed of the student's non-educational issue (Tan et al., 2021, p. 170-171).

Financial Literacy. According to the National Center of Education, studies showed many first-generation, low-income students drop out before completing their 1st year of post-secondary education (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). They felt that understanding financial responsibilities helped students in post-secondary education face any barriers by ensuring they were provided an academic environment and educational

experience that encouraged, stimulated, cultivated, and supported the entry of not just first-generation but all students. With that belief, they feel it led to completing and attaining of a degree (Olani, 2017).

College students are faced with increased financial pressures of college tuition continues to increase during this last decade resulting in students working multiple jobs and acquiring student debt (Olani, 2017). Financial literacy was not taught as a core course in kindergarten through Grade 12 education in the southeastern state. The range of financial topics is broad. Financial literacy in society and general was focused on as a type of literacy for an adult who needed to manage family finances, like investments or retirement goals. However, the focus is college students need some financial literacy to manage their finances while attending college (Fernandes, 2018; Olani, 2017).

Próspero and Vohra-Gupta (2017) conducted a study on first-generation college students' motivation, integration, and academic achievement. The researchers revealed the ranges of biases faced in a post-secondary environment. Through several documented advantages of interacting with the students from diverse backgrounds, they focused their target around the 1st year of post-secondary education - the data displayed how students overcame barriers while pursuing a degree (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2017).

Economic Literacy. Raftu (2017) shared students not only drop out due to absenteeism from higher education, but another factor is also the cost of living during school. The induction of the Pay-As-You-Earn loan repayment option to keep student loans affordable, capping student loan repayment to 10% of their income helped with living (Smith et al., 2013, p. 251-252). According to Smith et al. (2013) shared, the

benefits of post-secondary education are implications for economic growth, social mobility, and equality (p. 260).

The credential to greater lifetime earnings, low poverty rate, and low unemployment rate (Smith et al., 2013, p. 260). Ensuring students gather understanding that college graduates are more likely to find a job and the unemployment rate for bachelor's degree individuals is half of the unemployment rate of high school graduates (Martin, 2021, p. 167). Obtaining a post-secondary degree often leads to better decision-making about health, marriage, and parenting; it makes people more goal-oriented; and it improves patience (Martin, 2021, p. 180). Individuals with a higher education degree were likely to have retirement benefits and health insurance through their employer.

College Preparation Programs

Officials at the state department of education understood that there was a need to focus on areas of future education, such as enrollment in post-secondary education and measurable progress in post-secondary education. Understanding academic success in post-secondary education for first-generation, low-income could be through one of the leading to programs such as UB that aided in the direction towards that achievement (Education Advisory Board, 2016).

A study conducted by Odeleye and Santiago (2019) outlined shared variables of first-generation and poverty-stricken students studied in a similar sample population. They showed how students in this study who were low-income first-generation college students enrolled in post-secondary education in the 1st year or beyond. Their goal offered underprepared students the opportunity to enhance their chances of post-secondary

education success. Moreover, they focused on pursuing an innovative alternative for the development of education, which observed the academic importance of attending a bridge program (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019).

The high school students had experienced an increase in academic task completion, was a byproduct of being a UB program participant. The UB program contributed to building social skills and strong academic skill sets that will help students stay in college (Gist-Mackey et al., 2017). Their findings showed conflicted evidence of effectiveness in the summer program with student retention, self-efficacy, persistence, and academic improvement. Understanding the reason for TRiO UB program was to develop and implement skills into high school students for college preparation and their motivation for post-secondary education (Gist-Mackey et al., 2017).

Ongoing Student Support

Assouline et al. (2015) explored the barriers and solutions for serving students with an accelerated strategy plan. They shared an outline of benefits to having a supportive emotional educator to sustain family pride in remaining focused on reaching academic and personal goals (Assouline et al., 2015). They identified the students that dealt with poverty and studied their strengths. They strongly encouraged school counselors and teachers to develop programs to help meet the needs of their students. Having a supportive team is essential to first-generation, low-income students' success in post-secondary education (Assouline et al., 2015). Tinto (2010) suggested that having a support team allows students to be more involved socially and academically, increasing their persistence and reducing stress. Not having family support is a one of the significant

barriers first-generation, low-income students face (Tinto, 2010). Wang (2014) suggested that parents and family support improves the transition from high school to post-secondary education for students and increases the probability of college success.

In Assouline et al. (2015) qualitative study, they focused on the students who faced prejudices, personal opinions, and biases with collecting data to analyze and interpret the students who had support versus those who did not have support. The data was equivalent to the classes and categories that enabled the authors to organize, reconstruct, and manage the significant components (Assouline et al., 2015). Therefore, they understood how to interpret the data gathered from the participants through interviews and surveys showed how first-generation, low-income students were more likely to be successful if they had a support system.

Definitions

The section below presented the definition of key terms used in the study.

Academic skills: The ability to pick up new techniques and habits to excel in school. The student's capacity to build in literacy and technical disciplines such as math and science is influenced by their academic skill (Al-Qahtani, 2015).

Cohort: A group of people sharing the same characteristics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

College readiness: The set of skills, behaviors, and knowledge a high school student should have before enrollment in their 1st year of post-secondary education (Flowers, 2018).

Cultural capital: Having the skills, knowledge, values, and norms which can be used to get ahead in education and life more generally (Thompson, 2016).

Economic literacy: The ability to understand, discuss, and respond to any event to shape your economic environment essential for life (Yucel, 2018).

Financial literacy: The ability to understand and use financial skills taught (Yucel, 2018).

First-generation college student: An undergraduate with neither parent having completed a baccalaureate degree; in the case of any individual who resides with and received support from only one parent, that parent has not completed a baccalaureate degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Low-income person: An individual from a family whose taxable income is below 150% of the poverty level as established by the Bureau of the Census (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Social Skills: The ability to communicate and engage with others daily, both verbally and nonverbally, through body language, gestures, voice, and facial expression (Lynch & Simpson, 2010).

Upward Bound (UB): Federally funded early intervention program designed to help low-income and first-generation students prepare for higher education.

Relevance to Public Organizations

Finding an opportunity to bridge a gap between high school and post-secondary education continues to be an ongoing focus in high education (Mangan, 2015). Barriers include social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy. These are

only a few of the barriers that high school students face when deciding to continue their education (Thompson, 2016). The barriers contributed to students' lower educational success and completion.

The connection the UB program had with the university showed the compacity to strengthen and prepare students for success. One way to access higher education after high school is to look for academic intensity and quality of the student's choice of area to study (Mangan, 2015). Once high school students were exposed to college courses on a college campus through the UB program, it gave them hope that they could be successful on the post-secondary education level. Attending pre-college programs improves student college readiness by strengthening their social and academic skills (Thompson, 2016).

Organization Background and Context

The university's UB program was founded in 1966. The program was fully funded through the U.S. Department of Education, according to its website. The funded service eighty-five students in the surrounding school system that provided fundamental support to participants in their preparation for post-secondary entrance. As noted on its website, the program serves high school students from families whose parent does not hold a bachelor's degree and students from low-income families. The goals of the program were to prepare high school students, who were underrepresented, to succeed on their application for post-secondary education and to increase the number of first-generation, low-income students to earn their degrees.

The mechanics exist to ensure the program meets its annual objectives and benchmarks set forth by the state department of education. The success of the UB

program was a large scale of longitudinal studies in research that focused on the success of their participants. The UB program has two phases: the Summer Residential Institute and the Academic Year Saturday, according to its website. The Summer Residential was where students spent 5 or 6 weeks as a college student on the campus and the Academic Saturday was where students spent 2 Saturdays a month on campus between September and May. This helps students with an ease in their transition from high school to post-secondary education, as noted on the program's website.

Understanding the impact the UB program has on the lives of their administrators, staff, and students has geared the motive in its effectiveness yearly (Jones et al., 2020). The leaders deemed strengthen in their services by considering the experiences shared over the years to ensure each participant of the program (Mangan, 2015). The UB program focuses on emphasizing academics and the success of preparing its participants for college entrance examinations to ensure more significant opportunities for first-generation, low-income students (Youngs, 2021). Despite the circumstances of participants, the UB program developed a strong focus on preparing for college assessment tests, increasing self-confidence, improving study skills, and decreasing any academic weakness (Youngs, 2021).

Role of the Doctor of Public Administration Student/Researcher

As a public administration scholar, I had been curious about practical and social problems that affected the development of first-generation, low-income young adults in high school as they prepared for post-secondary education. Although I had experience to observe the UB program, I felt obligated to research the problem and provide evidence to

those stakeholders that made decisions about this field, which contributed to positive social change. The financial literacy and economic literacy of undergraduate students were directly tied to positive social change in the community.

In the project, my role was to think critically and globally about that addressed the matter, develop, use measurable instruments, conduct research and evaluate, understood the economic perspectives in administrative and policy analysis, apply theory to real-world situations, and make sound ethical decisions. I remained objective during the research as data was gathered from the research participants.

Summary

In sum, first-generation, low-income students continued to seek knowledge on financial obligations for college higher education. As the cost of college increased, students needed to understand social and academic skills, financial and economic literacy. While in high school, there were college preparation programs designed to help cultivate readiness for post-secondary education. Ongoing student support contributed to self-efficacy for one's ability to progress through and after college.

The UB program made connections with its students. This section provided the readers with an overlook of barriers that first-generation, low-income students faced to achieve post-secondary success. Section 3 outlined a detailed explanation of a strategic plan for the data collection process and analysis tools used in the study.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

Introduction

The university's UB program partnered with first-generation, low-income high school students to support their social and academic skills and financial and economic literacy as they prepared to enter postsecondary education. Programmers sought to help high school students develop college readiness skills through academic experiences. The UB program offered additional services and resources for the students enrolled in the program such as academic instruction and advisement, SAT/ACT preparation, college tours, tutoring, summer academic program, grade monitoring, educational and cultural activities, and weekend academic classes.

Practice-Focused Research Question

The case study's central question was, What is the perspective of the 2016 cohort of the UB program at a southeastern university concerning the program's effect on their preparation for completion of postsecondary education? Students who participated in the university's UB college preparatory program lacked financial and economic literacy. According to students that had previously participated in the UB program years before had not been able to articulate whether the program adequately prepared them socially and academically to enter and complete their postsecondary education. The gap most first-generation, low-income students faced was a lack of knowledge of financial and economic literacy, as they completed their postsecondary education. The lack of research on the outcome of UB programs was the rationale for this capstone, which encompassed study of those barriers, review of the program's design, and recommendations for

improvement. The interview instrument I used contained a total of four sections, with two questions each. In developing each question, I purposely sought to examine participants' proficiency level related to financial and economic literacy skills and its applicability to the participants' lives. I explored the correlation, if any, between the utilization of the skill sets taught and the effects during and after postsecondary education.

Sources of Evidence

I gathered the questionnaire data by posing open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) to first-generation, low-income students who had previously participated in the UB program at a southeastern university. In this subsection, I present the evidence generated from the qualitative professional administrative study and provide information on the target population and procedures used in the study. Also, I discuss the research instrument, safeguards for protecting the participants, strategy for recruitment, consent, and means of analyzing and synthesizing information. The goal was to capture and synthesize participants' experiences in relation to their academic success, social skills, and personal college experiences.

Evidence Generated for the Administrative Study

I explored the barriers of success for first-generation, low-income students through interviews. For the informal interviews, I used open-ended questions, which allowed the participant to articulate their lived experience based on the UB program's expectations.

Participants

I used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves “the inquirer selecting individuals and settings for investigation because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and core phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 181–182). The use of purposive sampling enables the researcher to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon to be analyzed (Creswell, 2013).

According to Creswell (2013), a smaller sample size of participants is common for a qualitative study because the results are not intended to be generalizable; rather, the goal is to gather extensive information about the individual’s study. I interviewed 19 participants. Participants were between the ages of 23 and 25. These participants had been in the UB program's 2016 cohort during high school, attended Saturday sessions, gone on college campus tours, attended college prep seminars, and completed the coursework. These participants were familiar with all aspects of the UB program from their 4 years in it. In addition, they had either finished a 2- or 4-year postsecondary education or selected a full-time employment. Therefore, to be eligible for the study, the student (a) had to be a member of the 2016 UB cohort, (b) participated in the UB program for at least 2 years, and (c) experienced financial and/or economic hardship throughout 1st year of college. The rationale for specifying these criteria was to ensure that participants received the majority of the program's services for college retention and postsecondary careers.

Procedures

The phenomenology approach created the opportunity to examine the deeper and more personal phenomena of first-generation, low-income students and their collegiate lived experiences. After I received permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval no. 01-18-23-0745093), I contacted the UB program director via email to obtain a start date to conduct the study. Once the start date was confirmed, I emailed the program director that requested a list of the students who were registered and participated in the 2016 cohort of the program. Once the list was received from the program director, I sent an email to all persons on the list. The email introduced who I was, explained the study, the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the interview process. The email was used as the consent form and invitation to the study. The email described the criteria and requested their agreement to participate in the study. This process is standard for a qualitative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). All participants were requested to respond to the email within 1 week after they received it.

Upon receipt of the email/invitation consent response, I confirmed the participant's information met the criteria. The participants that met all of the criteria received an email of the consent form and privacy policy within 5 days, they received an email confirmation, that included an assigned identification number that recognized them for the study, the date, time, and videoconference link to sign-in for the initial open-ended questionnaire as the first step of the interview. The electronic form utilized to store data information was locked in a secured file cabinet. The participants who do not meet the criteria of this study were not interviewed. Interviews were held on Tuesday,

Wednesday, and Thursday between 5:00 and 8:00 p.m. for 45 min to an hour. The interview began with an introduction as it continued to an overview of the research study's purpose, recording, and confidentiality procedures. I conducted interviews from a secure location to ensure privacy. I reiterated to each participant that their participation was voluntary, and they could decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time. At the end of each interview, I thanked the participant for their participation in my study. After the interviews were conducted, I proceeded to transcribe the interview responses. After each interview session, all notes written down in a notebook was locked in a file cabinet. I typed out in descriptive field notes and saved them on a password-protected PC. In addition, I filed and organized all interview notes in an accordion-style file that labeled each interview with the date of the interview session. All interview notes and research study materials was safely locked up in a filing cabinet in my home office that ensured the participant's safety and privacy.

Instrumentation. The data collection for the study was in-depth interviews. Two sources were utilized to develop my interview questions (Guest et al., 2016, Youngs, 2021). The interviews were scripted with open-ended semi-structured questions. The script included an outline of the statements and questions for each participant interview. There was a researcher introduction, the purpose of the study, confirmation of the participant's informed consent, and an explanation of the interview's parameters.

Recording of Interviews. Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research interviews are when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their responses. Audio recordings were used to ensure consistent

transcription. Previous research examined participants' financial and economic literacy using operational criteria offered by various scholars and academicians (Alsalkhi, 2018; Karadag, 2017) To test their theories, previous researchers used the survey technique, interviews, and a questionnaire instrument, as well as statistical models to measure results (Alsalkhi, 2018; Cole, 2008; Karadag, 2017).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. To maintain the security of the study findings and recorded interview notes, a password-protected computer was used. Upon the initial beginning of the research project, all participants were requested to submit digital consent. All interviewees were notified that their interviews were recorded as part of the research. The recordings of the interviews were stored on an electronic tablet. I asked open-ended questions to obtain the participant's responses. Every day after interviews have been conducted, I will listen to and transcribe the recording (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Ethical Protections

When collecting data for the study, I took steps to ensure that the participants would not be harmed. By harm, it was meant that the study was not used for a medical experiment, no emotional discomfort, invasion of privacy, dehumanizing procedures, or demeaning during this research. The primary goal was to protect each participant's welfare, rights, and human dignity throughout my research.

Strategies for Recruitment. To maintain ethical protection during the recruitment of participants for my study, I intend to follow the Code of Federal Regulations part 46 subpart section A – Basic HHS Policy for Protection of Human

Research Subjects § 46.101 (Protection of Human Subjects, 2022). This policy applied to all research involved as human subjects conducted that took appropriate administrative action to make the policy applicable to the research. The policy covers research undertaken by Federal civilian employees or military personnel, with the exception that each department or agency head may make administratively appropriate procedural changes (Protection of Human Subjects, 2022).

Consent and Privacy. Each participant who accepted the invitation and gave consent to participate for the study understood that the information gathered was not to be discussed or shared with anyone outside of the study. The contact information of those who denied the invitation to the study was withdrawn and destroyed from the information of those who accepted. Upon receipt the participants who agreed to the study were all anonymous and coded by number as their electronic agreement was received. No one's identity was shared throughout the study. All electronic data relevant to all participants was placed in a filing cabinet with a locked key in my home office. No information was shared.

All data obtained throughout the research was kept for 3 years before being destroyed. Participants were notified about important privacy policies and the protection of personal data, what their information was being used for, and how long it would be kept. They were informed of their audio-recorded interview sessions and gave consent.

Approvals. I had contacted the southeastern university and gained approval from the UB director, which gave permission for the study of the program's design and impact to be conducted. The UB director sent a written letter, which was submitted to my

chairperson. The program's director sent a password-protected electronic file that contained the participants' phone numbers and email addresses of the students that participated in the 2016 cohort. Contact information for the client organization was provided in the letter for any questions or concerns (see Appendix B). I also obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board before beginning data collection on January 18, 2023, the IRB approval # is 01-18-23-0745093. After obtaining its approval, I sent an email to prospective participants to invite them to engage in the study. I scheduled an interview with interested individuals after they provided their consent.

Analysis and Synthesis

The study examined the lived experiences of first-generation college students and provided recommendations to increase the program's effectiveness. I analyzed each participant's responses by identified categories and patterns of connections to cite major themes.

Analysis Systems

The qualitative methodology used to collect data and to analyze the results. Merriam (2009) describes qualitative research as the researcher's desire to comprehend meaning constructed by individuals. In other words, Merriam characterizes the qualitative genre as an attempt to comprehend "how people make sense of their reality and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 2009). The analysis system used for the study was NVivo. NVivo was a software program, used for qualitative and mixed-methods research.

The system is used currently to analyze the unstructured text, audio, video, and image data, such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles (NVivo, n.d.). For example, Means and Pyne (2017) used NVivo software to categorize, code, and organize their data. They created codes within the software and coded their transcripts line by line. Within their data analysis, they examined themes and trends that developed and showed connections within the study (Means & Pyne, 2017, p.916-918).

Creswell and Baez (2020) shared how an individual could use code text with multiple codes to convey their main idea. Whereas Richards (2015) argued that almost all data would need coding at least three times: 1) to describe doing that provides information about a certain source, 2) with topic codes that describes the labeling of the text according to its subject, and 3) with analytical coding with high order codes to do the thinking (p. 89). Based on these authors who all used coded text to analyze their study, I used codes to analyze the research. The codes placed into categories that helped to identify the variables/themes and synthesize how the barriers contributed to the participant's readiness for post-secondary opportunities.

Data Integrity

I aimed to protect the data integrity of the evidence that was collected by the adhered Code of Federal Regulations policy § 46.101. As part of the research procedure, I complied with the code research standards that emphasized the obligation of researchers to do no damage, obtain informed consent from participants, and portrayed respondents' opinions were accurately as necessary. I evaluated the evidence to ensure they were trustworthy sources that captured the significance of my research (Nair, 2018). It

managed the outliers by setting up a filter in the testing tool, which removed the outliers during post-test of the analysis.

The approach to managing the outliers within my study after they have been identified, set up a filter within NVivo to remove or change outliers during my post analysis. To ensure that the data was integral and not offset, I was specific in the variables of the study; that way, only evaluated the main variables and not strayed to data outside of the study. NVivo provided a query tool that could assist me to uncover patterns in the data that may had been missed during the process tracking stage. The results of a word frequency query scanned by this tool to assist uncover additional themes or groups. The missed information that was unrelated to the study mentioned in a later chapter for further research.

Credibility

To guarantee credibility, the plan to speak with participants who had met the criteria of the study, therefore, the results were an accurate interpretation of the participants meaning. Reflexivity is a strategy I will utilize to enhance the credibility of my research findings (Creswell, 2013). Delve and Limpaechar (2021) highlighted that it is useful to work with coded data to ensure the validity of my type of research, which means that the information should be categorized and labeled to identify various connections and themes. Reflexivity entails questioning one's personal judgments, behaviors, and belief systems while gathering data (Delve & Limpaechar, 2021). The key points intended to practice while accountability, trustworthiness, and clarity was conducted.

Transferability

According to Nowell et al. (2017) transferability is connected with the aspect of applicability in which the research findings can be transferred to a particular perspective with different participants. Researchers improve transferability to different contexts by using detailed explanations that allow others to judge the found validity in another situations (Kim et al., 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). The interviews were recorded, the participants' first-person experiences described via direct quotes. For background information on participants, my research approach to the study setting and data collection technique will be to present a demonstration within the findings' relevance in other research (Elo et al., 2014). The data collected in the study found could be transferred to other HBCUs and/or UB programs.

Dependability

According to Nowell et al. (2017), dependability involves the transparency and description of the study's steps throughout the entire research process. Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the data over time (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). My study's methodology could be replicated by other researchers with similar contexts, it considered conditions that could change depending on the nature of their study. The description of participants' perceptions of their experiences will enhance the dependability of my research; this can serve as a benchmark by which I will be able to examine their experiences (Kim et al., 2017). Similarly, an audit trail can assure dependability and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017). As documentation of my research methodology is integral to ensuring the reliability of my study (Bloomberg & Volpe,

2019), audio and video conference recordings of the interviews will be saved and referred to as needed in order to ensure the accuracy of the data. There was a memo created complied of a summation of each participant's interview. Similarly, the software NVivo used to maintain a log of participants, interview dates and times, age, sex, current educational status, consent, contact information, and confirmation of each participant's process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the research study's results can be substantiated by the researchers (Nowell et al., 2017) through the validation and demonstration of a direct trail leading back to the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This will help me to ensure that data interpretation is not the result of my beliefs, attitude, or preferences, but rather, a clear extraction from the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Within qualitative research, confirmability can help mitigate bias through data triangulation, reflexivity, and an audit trail (Chowdhury, 2015). As confirmability mandates the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the research, it is a widely accepted approach to ensure the quality of qualitative research (Chowdhury, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017). The use of open and axial coded allowed analyzation of the data whether it was justified in the research framework and data acquired. Similarly, created a digital file of the research steps that showed transparency of the collection and analysis of data as well as the commitment that ensured that I followed research protocols and procedures. Additionally, since data was digitally recorded and participants' responses were directly quoted, any bias was mitigated. The criteria for confirmability necessitate the data will reflect

participants' first-hand experiences rather than be influenced by my prejudices (Connelly, 2016). Therefore, the use of participants' direct quotes in the research does not reflect my bias.

Analysis Procedures

I purchased the necessary qualitative software needed for coding and transcription. I entered the transcribed data information into NVivo software for the process known as the coding phase. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) suggest placing category codes because the preface of the questions for this qualitative research will help with the coding process.

Merriam (2009) advises to go over each transcript and identify the most common variable. This allowed me to look at questions or keywords I wanted to answer or topics I wanted to explore that are relevant to my study. The software produced keywords or phrases which helped me to organize the categories, and they were color-coded to make them easier to distinguish. This is meant to help me organize and analyze data by offering a visual tool that sorts and arranges my data in such a way that any patterns can be detected, and connections made with the information that was obtained (Merriam, 2009).

I organized the designated category that best fits the specific code. Each category developed to ensure credibility and control for biases to clarify the needs that needed to be addressed concerning the program. Prior to transcription, I reviewed the keywords for accuracy. I kept track of my notes in a research diary and highlighted the major themes that were revealed in the interviews. Then, used the themes to discover the correlation/connection to the research question and identify a coding technique.

Merriam (2009) advised that researchers, once they have completed the steps of the coding phase, should interpret the information and state their findings and share if there is a valid link or significance for the information. I analyzed the open-ended responses from the qualitative interviews allowed me to combine the different participants' ideas, experiences, and perspectives of the UB program into cohesive findings, interpretations, and recommendations. Through the ensured validity of the data gathered, the reflexivity of these data aided to assure the trustworthiness of the study. This synthesis aid is the final analysis and interpretation of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Summary

The study's problem was that first-generation, low-income students entered college with barriers to success, related to social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy, which led to college dropout. This qualitative phenomenological research study gathered data that identified the barriers and offered recommendations to the client organization that enhanced the UB program design. Additionally, the interview responses indicated the positive impact on the participants' social and academic skills and as well as, their financial and economic literacy skills, after participating in the UB program. This study revealed which improvements could be implemented into their program for increased enrollment, retention and degree completion.

Section 4: Evaluation and Recommendations

Introduction

The problem addressed in the study was that first-generation, low-income students entered college with barriers to success related to their social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy, which led to college dropout. This was an opportunity to bridge the misconception of high school students who continued to pursue higher education with barriers. . The area of focus was on certain barriers like social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy. The lack of research on the impact and outcome of UB programs was the rationale for studying these barriers and reviewing the program's design.

The purpose of this research project was to explore, examine, and understand the lived experiences of first-generation college students who participated in the UB program and provide recommendations to increase the program's effectiveness. I gathered data from the 2016 cohort of the UB program at a southern university concerning the program's effect on their preparation for completion of postsecondary education. As a result, from my research, each student who participated in the university's UB college preparatory program lacked financial and economic literacy. This study provided them an opportunity to reflect on whether the program adequately prepared them socially and academically to enter and complete their postsecondary education.

Demographics

This study was of a program located at an HBCU in the Southeastern region of the United States. In 2016, the UB program had a total of 21 students who participated

and completed the program. Of the 21 participants, 19 consented to be interviewed and were between 23 to 25 years of age at the time of their participation in this study. The remaining two students opted out. The gender was comprised of three identified as nonbinary, four identified as male, and 12 identified as female. The ethnicity of all participants was African American. These participants were a part of the UB program's 2016 cohort during high school when they attended Saturday sessions, went on college tours, attended college prep seminars, and completed the coursework. They were familiar with the program's framework and its benefits.

The cohort members met the criteria to participate in the study: (a) were a member of the 2016 UB cohort, (b) participated in the UB program for at least 2 years, and (c) experienced financial and/or economic hardship throughout 1st year of college. Additionally, each participant received majority of the program's services for college, completed their postsecondary education, and were presently working in their careers. For this reason, individuals believed they could share their own experiences for my research.

Sources of Evidence

The primary source of evidence was responses to the open-ended interview questions. This is standard procedure for a study that is inquiry-based qualitative research and data collection (Creswell, 2013). The open-ended questions served as the interview protocol and were structured with a verbal prompt read to participants during the interviews. Following the process described by Chowdhury (2015), I began each interview with an introduction that included information on my role as the researcher, a

restatement of the study's purpose, a reading of the informed consent, and an explanation of the interviews' parameters. This structure helped to ensure that participants understood how the interview was to be conducted and that they were willing to recall and provide descriptions of their experiences in the UB program, an important point presented by Freeman (2018).

The interview protocols were in alignment with the study's purpose and research question, and I focused my questions on how students perceived the effectiveness of developing college readiness skills through academic and social experiences. The interview questions (see Appendix A) included the participants' demographic information; ethnicity, personal perceptions of the program's role in their life, content of skill sets (social and academic), and comprehension of financial and economic literacy during and after postsecondary education. I elicited open-ended responses from participants to obtain greater perspective on their lived experiences, as suggested by Richards (2015).

Upon receipt of their signed consent, I sent participants an email with a link to a scheduling tool that offered 45-min interview options between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. over the course of 3 days. Some participants requested a Saturday interview time to accommodate their schedule. All interviews were conducted in a secure location to ensure privacy.

Before each interview, I reiterated to the participants that their participation was voluntary, and they could decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time. I explained the questions' outline and gave the participants the assurance that they

remained anonymous and that no personal information identifying them was included in the research paper. Additionally, I assured each participant that their data was locked in a secure location for 3 years before being destroyed and was accessible only by me.

After each interview session, the transcription was processed and locked away with password protection. Any anecdotal notes that were written down in a notebook were saved and locked away with a key in a file cabinet. Files assigned to each interviewee were labeled with the date of the interview session and stored accordingly. All notes and research study materials were safely locked in my home office to ensure participants' safety and privacy.

When my proposal was submitted, I stated that I used NVivo software program to create codes and help with the transcripts line by line. However, I decided to use an alternate program called Dedoose which is a qualitative data analysis application designed for mixed methods and qualitative research (Dedoose, n.d.). This web-based application is designed to organize, code, and categorize data. I used it to examine themes and trends that developed and to show connections within my study. Creswell and Baez (2020) and Richards (2015) all used coded text to analyze their studies. In my study, the codes were organized into categories that made it easier for me to find the themes and to summarize the obstacles and successes that affected the participants' readiness for post-secondary completion and career opportunities.

Findings and Implications

I used Dedoose to organize the data, which gave me clarity and insight into the participants nonverbal cues, noteworthy spoken words, vocal details, and other tangible

information that was relevant to the research. After allowing the original analyses to process for 3 days, I was able to create the topics, categories, and themes. The following details that analysis.

Analysis of Findings

Qualitative research is fundamentally designed to understand a phenomenon based on the voices of participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Due to the need for accuracy, research rigor, and details, verbatim transcriptions of the virtual interviews should be recorded (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). I recorded each interview and used Dedoose to code the participants' responses and arrange the data after transcribing all the recordings, as suggested by Gentles and Vilches (2017). The data collected were examined utilizing a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is beneficial for examining participants' views by locating, arranging, and describing data to highlight themes and patterns (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3353).

Following a preliminary review of the data, I wrote memos based on participants' responses to each of the study's leading questions. This helped me to identify a code system. Furthermore, I was able to record, review, and enhance my observations from the interviews while also developing my analytical skills through the gathering of data. Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) suggest using memos while analyzing data to improve the reliability, dependability, and credibility of the research. Then I developed a word cloud of typical phrases that each participant used throughout the interviews, and these are shown in Figure 1. The word cloud is intended to offer a reader-friendly method for qualitative data analysis (Matthews et al., 2015, p. 40). It is necessary to thematically

Topics

I used the words and phrases in the word cloud to develop topics. From the breakdown of the codes in the Dedoose database, there were 43 topics shared by the participants throughout the interviews, and these are noted in Table 1.

Table 1*Number of Participants for Each Topic*

Topic	Participant gender (no.)		
	Nonbinary	Female	Male
Better prepared for postsecondary education	2	10	2
Exposure to college life while in high school	3	12	3
Skills that transferred with them to college	3	9	3
Accountability	2	11	4
Sustainability	3	11	4
Negotiation	1	10	3
Relationships	3	12	4
Prioritizing	2	9	2
Advising support	3	11	2
Ongoing guidance	2	11	2
Library resources	2	12	2
Planning	3	12	3
Formatting	3	8	3
Budgeting	3	11	3
Time management	3	12	3
Learning independence	3	10	4
Understanding the instructors' expectations	2	9	2
Listening to details	3	11	2
Taking detailed notes	2	9	2
Motivation	3	10	2
Self-starter	2	11	2
Commitment	3	12	4
Self-discipline	3	10	3
Writing	3	10	3
Budget	2	10	3
Saving	2	10	3
Proper planning	3	11	2
Understanding of financial aid	3	8	2
Checking	3	10	3
Loan money out	3	9	2
Financial relief	3	11	3
Set-up for your future	3	10	2
Wisdom in spending	2	9	2
Understanding medical plans	2	7	1
How to sustain with what you have	3	8	3
Purchasing home/vehicle	2	8	2
Proper investment	2	8	1
Borrow money	2	9	4
How to complete job application	3	12	4
Effective communication	3	11	4
Ability to think-critically	3	10	2
Different way to problem-solving	3	9	2

The second set of results indicated that the topics were still too broad, and I needed to complete an additional round of analysis. Therefore, I completed a third round of analysis through Dedoose to develop the categories. I utilized codes to construct categories. Placing the codes in categories is a logical construct base on similar responses (Chowdhury, 2015). There were specific words, phrases, and/or descriptors stated by participants to code. After coding was applied, the topics were categorized using axial coding, which disclosed relationships between the current categories and suggested potential new categories. This analysis allowed me to develop the categories.

Categories

Table 2 shows the categories as well as the number of responses in each. The first category identified was the advantages an individual could learn by participating in the UB program. A total 14 participants shared they felt better prepared for post-secondary education, 18 participants expressed that exposure to college life while in high school was beneficial, and 15 participants shared that the skills they learned transferred from the UB program to college, but into adulthood.

The second category was how participants expressed the effects the UB program had on their personal development. A total of 17 participants shared accountability, 18 participants stated sustainability, 14 participants said negotiation, 14 participants provided relationships, and 13 participants gave prioritizing their activities.

The third category displayed the resources and services that were made available to the individuals. A total of 16 participants stated that the advising support is needed

during post-secondary education, 15 participants said they needed to have ongoing guidance, and 16 participants expressed the need to use the library resources.

The fourth category that was formed showed the barriers of the UB program, and 18 participants felt planning, 13 participants expressed formatting, 17 participants stated budgeting, 18 participants said time management, 17 participants shared they had to learn their independency, and 13 participants expressed how they had to learn and understand their instructors' expectations of them.

The fifth category listed the behaviors that were needed for post-secondary education. There were 16 participants that felt they need to listen to details, 13 participants stated they had to take detailed notes, 15 participants said they needed motivation, 15 participants said they needed to learn to become a self-starter, 19 participants felt they had to have commitment, ten participants felt they needed self-discipline, and 16 participants needed to learn writing skills.

The sixth category that was formed was the benefits of learning financial literacy. There were 15 participants who felt they had to learn to budget, 15 participants who needed to learn how to save money, 16 participants shared they learned about proper planning, 13 participants expressed how they were introduced to financial aid, 16 participants said they learned they needed a checking account and understood its purpose, 14 participants felt they did not have any extra money to loan out, 17 participants showed they needed some financial relief during and after post-secondary education, and 15 participants wanted to make sure they were set-up for their future.

The seventh category recognized the benefits of economic literacy that was shared by the participants. Thirteen participants shared they learned wisdom on spending, ten participants expressed the need to understand medical plans, 14 participants felt they had to become more disciplined with finances, 12 participants learned how to purchase their own home and vehicle, 11 participants learned the guidelines of proper investment, and 15 participants learned about borrowing money.

The final category that was developed was the knowledge and development of career skills. 19 participants felt they learned how to complete a job application, 18 participants shared they learned how to effectively communicate, 15 participants stated they acquired a new ability to think critically, and 14 participants felt they learned multiple ways to problem-solve.

Table 2*Number of Participant Responses for Each Category/Subpoint*

Category/Subpoint	No. of responses
1. The advantages an individual could learn by participating in the UB program	
Felt better prepared for post-secondary education	14
Exposure to college life while in high school was beneficial	18
Participants shared that the skills they learned would transfer from the UB program to college, but into adulthood	15
2. How participants expressed the effects the UB program had on their personal development	
Accountability	17
Sustainability	13
Negotiation	14
Relationships	14
Prioritizing their activities	13
3. The resources and services that were made available to the individuals	
The advising support is needed during postsecondary education	16
They needed to have ongoing guidance	15
The need to use the library resources	16
4. The barriers of the UB program	
Planning	18
Formatting	13
Budgeting	17
Time management	18
Learn their independency	17
Learn and understand their instructors' expectations of them	13
5. The behaviors that were needed for postsecondary education	
Need to listen to details	16
Had to take detailed notes	13
Motivation	15
Learn to become a self-starter	15
Had to have commitment	19
Self-discipline	10
Learn writing skills	16
6. The benefits of learning financial literacy	
Learn to budget	15
Learn how to save money	15
Proper planning	16
Introduced to financial aid	13
Needed a checking account and understood its purpose	16
Did not have any extra money to loan out	14
Financial relief during and after post-secondary education	17
Wanted to make sure they were set-up for their future	15
7. The benefits of economic literacy that was shared by the participants	
Learned wisdom on spending	13
Need to understand medical plans	10
Become more disciplined with finances	14
How to purchase their own home and vehicle	12
The guidelines of proper investment	11
Borrowing money	15
8. The knowledge and development of career skills	
Learned how to complete a job application	19
Learned how to effectively communicate	18
A new ability to think critically	15
Learned multiple ways to problem-solve	14

Note. UB = Upward Bound.

Development of Categories Into Themes

To find a common pattern and develop themes, I triangulated the data from the interviews by comparing the participants' answers to questions using codes with their participation in the UB program to their lived experiences during and after post-secondary education. Researcher reflexivity helps to maintain awareness of the significant nature of participants' voices and perspectives (Delve & Limpaecher, 2021). The result of this analysis is displayed in Table 3, which shows the progression of topics to categories to themes.

Table 3*Topics, Categories, and Themes*

Topic	Category	Theme
Better prepared for postsecondary education.		
Exposure to college life while in high school	Advantages of participating in the UB. program	1. Participation in a UB program prepares students for postsecondary education.
Skills that transferred with them to college		
Accountability, sustainability, negotiation, relationships, prioritizing	Effects of UB program	
Advising support	Use of resources and services that were available	
Ongoing guidance for assistance		
Library resources		
Planning, formatting, budgeting, time management, learning independence, understanding instructors' expectations	Barriers of UB program	
Listening to details, managing time, taking detailed notes, motivation, self-starter, commitment, self-discipline, writing	Behaviors that are needed for postsecondary education	2. Participation in a UB program fosters the development of social and academic skill sets that are needed to succeed in the college environment.
Budgeting, saving, proper planning, understanding of Financial Aid and checking, accountability, loan money out, financial relief, set-up for one's future	Benefits of financial literacy	
Wisdom on spending, understanding medical plans, how to sustain oneself with existing resources, purchasing home/vehicle, proper investment, borrow money	Benefits of economic literacy	
How to complete a job application, effective communication, ability to think critically, different way to problem-solve	Knowledge and career skills developed	3. Participation in a UB program prepares students to enter the workforce and/or complete their degree programs.

Note. UB = Upward Bound.

Interpretation of Findings

The study addressed the UB program's impact on social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy for first-generation, low-income students. The findings from my study showed that the UB has been a positive impact in the lives of the cohort participants. Overall, this program is needed in the community located in the Southeastern region. The following are the themes of the findings that came out of the categories.

Theme 1: Participation in the Upward Bound Program Prepared Students for Postsecondary Education

Being adequately prepared for post-secondary education was a central point the participants expressed in their responses throughout the interviews. The completion of high school is a significant milestone in the lives of each participant, and it was a time for celebration and reflection on their academic achievements and future. Descriptors that were used by the participants as they described the advantages of participating in the UB program were (a) exposure to college life while they were in high school, (b) feeling better prepared for post-secondary education, and (c) feeling that skills they learned was transferable to post-secondary education. Each participant shared the viewpoint that a person must have the motivation to complete the program successfully.

Descriptors the participants used were accountability, sustainability, negotiation, relationships, and prioritization. These codes aligned with UB program helping them to understand the workload they faced, and the importance of training in transitioning from

high school to post-secondary education. The categories help develop the themes in the study.

The category of resources and services that were available for the participants as they prepared to transition from high school to post-secondary education is a critical part of this theme. The participants' shared they had advising support, ongoing guidance for preparing for post-secondary education, and there were resources they located in the library. Each participant expressed their understanding of the need to have the knowledge to successfully transition from high school to post-secondary education. Awareness and ultimately, joining the program prepared them for post-secondary education while attending high school.

Theme 2: Participation in the Upward Bound Program Increased the Development of Social and Academic Skills That Are Needed to Succeed in the Postsecondary Environment

Participants in the interviews described how the UB program helped them improve academic and social skills that were thought to be barriers and might have been a problem throughout their high school years and their post-secondary education. Discovering the importance of transitioning from high school to post-secondary education was perceived to be significant in one's preparation. The preparation for some looked differently but there was a pattern that was found within each response. Proper planning, strategies to help with budgeting, time management, independent living skills, and syllabi expectations were undeveloped areas during the UB program.

The program not only helped with developing academic and social skills, but the participants also expressed the benefits of learning about financial literacy during their post-secondary education. The participants shared how they learned to budget, save, properly plan, understanding of financial aid, ways to research for financial assistance, how to write a check, having accountability, loans, financial relief, and how to set-up for their future. A recurring theme in the interviews was the need to increase awareness of the value of financial literacy. Some participants may have found some benefits challenging, but they expressed that the difficulties were worthwhile since they saw the value of the lessons learned once they had completed their post-secondary education.

The participants all felt that after they gained their understanding of financial literacy, they felt established and confident to navigate in the economic system of the world. There was a collective realization on the purpose of medical plans, how to sustain with what they have, wisdom in spending, a greater understanding of purchasing homes and/or vehicles, borrowing money, and how to invest. These areas have impacted the participants' lives during college and after graduation.

Theme 3: The Upward Bound Program Prepared Students to Enter the Workforce and/or Complete Their Degree Programs

There were correlations between the interviews and how the participants described how the UB program gave them the skills they needed to successfully select a field of study that matched their interests and needs. From the questions that were developed examined the participants lived experiences. Even though they were all unique, they all had connections that demonstrated how their knowledge and professional

development had progressed after leaving the UB program and post-secondary education. The responses' correlation was discovered were how to complete a job application, skill set of effective communication, ability to think critically, and ways to problem solve.

The Overall Meaning of the Themes

According to participant interviews, they felt a connection to high school peers and believed they achieved more academically from being a part of the UB program. This was made clear in the participants' descriptions of their social contacts while enrolled in the UB program and how much their peers' friendship, support, accountability, and encouragement helped them learn. Based on research by DesJardins and McCall (2014) a cohort approach to education, as cited in the research, can encourage intellectual engagement and a more fulfilling learning experience. As mentioned by Corvarrubias and Fryberg (2015) higher levels of critical thinking, teamwork, and determination in their studies may be experienced by fellow peers.

According to a study conducted by Hickson (2018), cohort models improve the efficiency and efficacy of the post-secondary education and creates a better learning environment for students. Social connection and learning engagement are correlated (Raftu, 2017). Offering pre-college programs to children of various backgrounds within high schools has advantages. First-generation, low-income students in high school may have been singled out for special attention because of potential barriers to learning. However, it has been found that having programs created to interact with them socially and academically has a significant impact on their life both during and after high school, a point presented by Prospero & Vohra-Gupta (2017).

Unanticipated Limitations or Outcomes

An unanticipated limitation to me was the NVivo program that did not work and there was no one to speak with to assist me with the software. After paying for the software and discovering there was no contact number to speak with a live person about my issue, I could not complete the data analysis phase. I researched for other analysis systems for qualitative study. I looked for a different program that produced codes, themes, and categories. Being unable to generate codes, themes, or categories through a database due to an unexpected limitation may have affected the results. I then completed the analysis manually. Having to generate the results manually had taken longer and had been tedious.

Another unanticipated limitation was the COVID-19 restrictions, for safety for participants and me, the interviews were conducted via video conference. The use of video conference to conduct the interviews resulted in success. All participants who accepted invitations to participate were willing to abide by the limitations that had been put in place, which were all conducted in a private and secured location.

Potential Implications Resulting From Findings

Implications for the Client Organization

The findings from my qualitative study, as it pertained to the UB program effects on the preparation for completion of one's post-secondary education, were invaluable. Each research question aimed to explain how the program participants' lived experiences contributed to their post-secondary degree completion. The findings from the study aligned with the research question and supported literature as it related to preparation for

the completion of post-secondary education. All participants within this study confirmed their participation in the UB program contributed to their success upon completion of their degree and in their career.

Responses from the study participants stated the UB program needs to expand their connections with other ethnicities of population students within the school district. Only being able to interview one ethnicity, seemed as if they were the only individuals that qualify and met the requirements of the program. Building an inclusive and diverse network increased the communication and connections to potential participants.

The recommendation for the client organization was intended to help to the family's household to gather in support groups that were relatable and obtain resource information they needed for matters. According to Fernandes (2018) shared that being a part of a support group bring together those individuals who are going through or have gone through similar situations. This way provided an opportunity for individuals to share their experiences, any coping strategies they may have used, or share any resource information. Networking and connecting people from the client organization to the families in the community provided partnership. Partnerships built a system that was an ongoing currency to build a bridge to connect any gaps between the families, communities, and schools.

Therefore, the implication findings for the system-built partnerships with stakeholders in the surrounding areas. The interaction with the people in the community developed the attitudes, skills, and knowledge the needed to become effective in their

region. The partnerships prospective allowed all individuals the community to be heard and actions of unity to be implemented.

Implications for Positive Social Change

From each interviewee they expressed positive factors for their lived experiences during and after attending the UB program. Having peer support, accountability, interactions with others, study groups, personnel that cared about their success, and mentors were all advantages for them being first-generation, low-income participants. Because of their interactions, they felt better as it related to their interpersonal abilities, as well as young adults. When describing their lived experiences throughout the program, there was a collective emphasis that heightened their academic and social skills. Each of them experienced significant effects that were important to the success of their academic careers.

Positive social change impacted the individuals that participated in the UB program by setting and focusing on a target goal from high school through their post-secondary education. The participants developed skills throughout the program that were a benefit to their lived experiences, as well. The participant's likelihood of making bad choices were lessened.

Positive social change impacted the client organization by way of increasing the program awareness. The awareness of the program allows opportunities for community exposure. Exposure to the UB program could increase the potential interest in being a possible student participation. This way-built partnerships in the community.

The community partnerships that would be built are intended to bring a positive social change by way of creating unity. When there is unity among individuals, there is a network of information that is shared. The provided information assisted in connecting families with resources that benefited to their situation. The resource information disseminated by way of newsletters, through workshops, or advertisements in the local grocery stores or gas stations.

The communication with community partnerships connected the program stakeholders by showing a positive improvement in the local systems through the transmission of knowledge. Modeling partnership amongst all sent a positive message of unity. Having the unity amongst all stakeholders, families, individuals, and the client organization was a positive way to bring everyone on one accord.

Recommendations

The recommendations to the program and client organization were focused on how to build community partnerships within the community and ways to continue the promotion of the program. The recommendations outlined the areas that were focused on throughout my study. Participants Positive Experience, Participant Feedback for Improving UB Program, Participants' Perspective, and Possible Recommendations were the titles of each section. The program director was provided a memorandum of recommendations which can be found at Appendix C.

Recommendation 1: Develop a Guidance Document for Advisors

The first recommendation to address was to develop a shared document that high school counselor, college advisor, and UB program advisor could use as a tool to provide

information and updates on the students during their time of participant throughout their duration of the program. This document outlined classes that students were in currently and their grades. The outline showed if the student was failing any course or had a grade that was below a C.

The high school counselor shared the information with the college advisor and worked closely together to develop a plan to assist the student. The plan was shared with the UB program advisor that outlined the need for assistance and the course(s) the student needed help in the most. The shared guidance document was aligned with the guidelines that were mandated by the Department of Education and shared with student and parent/guardian.

Recommendation 2: Create Student Workshops on Relationships

The second recommendation was to create workshops that allowed students to interact with other students who they are able to connect with yet enhance their social skills to build relationships. Workshops that were created for students to connect were a) spent 1-on1 time, b) morning chat-up for 5 min, and c) “peer praise” time. Within each workshop it allowed each student to build their own relationships with the other students. The 1-on-1 time workshop activity was created to happen twice a week for 15 min. Within the allotted time the students were to journal for 5 min about anything they wanted to share and 10 min the students were to talk about what they journaled. The morning chat-up happened every day, it allowed the student to communicate effectively about their evening or share anything they were thinking. And the ‘peer praise’ time

happened every Friday afternoon. Students gave appreciation and recognition for each other. Each workshop was built students autonomy and voice.

Recommendation 3: Build a Student Resource Program

The third recommendation was to build a resource program that leans assistance to a student who may have a need. That gave opportunity to others to donate for a great cause. The resource program assisted the student that was in the program that had a need. There were times students did not have food or water and were too embarrassed to ask. The student resource program provided a financial assistant for the student and the parent, which was kept confidential. The program gave assistance to help those who had no other help to turn. This program welcomed donations from can goods, dry foods, to clean shoes and clothes.

Recommendation 4: Create Student and Parent Workshops on Financial Literacy

The fourth recommendation listed was to create workshop sessions that allowed the student along with their parent to learn financial literacy and other resource needs that are provided to the community. This recommendation to the UB program created an opportunity to share a comprehensive course that would help a student to plan for a long-term financial outlook. The financial literacy workshop shared information on how to apply for college scholarship, ways to budget monthly resources, how to obtain and build good credit, how to save resources, and provided information of other resource that was available in the area, community, and state.

Recommendation 5: Build Community Partnerships

The fifth recommendation shared was to build community partnerships. Once community partnerships were formed brought awareness about the program to all ethnicities, those outside and within the community, and it was a way to share information to future participant that was interested. This strengthened the bond in other relationships with other community stakeholders. The program designated a committee of people to facilitate the relationship building as it was an important factor to the success of the students, but it helped parents' success also. Throughout the interviews with the participants, some but not all of them, expressed their feelings about their parents not having adequate knowledge of economic and financial literacy. A few activities that were recommended are pizza lunches on the lawn, movie night with popcorn, flag football (parent vs. child or family vs. stakeholder), or game night, these activities appeared to be social building, that would address the need for relationship-building in the community. Each activity would build mutual trust, respect, team-work, and effective communication amongst the stakeholders and families. These recommendations helped to promote the UB program in the local community and in the nearby high schools, all of which were positive changes for society.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The participants who took part in the interviews contributed information from their lived experiences and allowed me to examine and explore in detail and depth the correlation amongst them all. The data of my study presents a gap of possibility for further study that could continue if an individual was interested in this topic. There are

many more cohorts since 2016. Although, I conducted my study on the lived experiences of first-generation college students who participated in the 2016 cohort of the UB program, and we are in 2023, which indicate there was change within 7 years. And that individual would be able to identify any changes, challenges, or improvement of the UB program.

Finding an appropriate proportion of individuals who had completed the UB program and their post-secondary education was one of the limitations to my study. The sample size of participants in my study did not skew my personal biases as a researcher from impacting the outcome. For me to determine where to place the responses of the participants in its correct categories, themes, and codes for the study was not difficult. As a researcher I focused closely on the present findings and saw where there is possibility for future study of my research.

Summary

The interviews consisted of prepared, open-ended, semi-structured questions. This afforded me the opportunity to closely examine the participants perceptions related to their participation in the program and their descriptions of how the program impacted their lives during and after post-secondary education. My conclusion is that the client organization benefited from the study results and how it could impact the program's effectiveness.

Section 5: Dissemination Plan

Introduction

The dissemination plan for conveying the information to the client organization consisted of a memorandum with recommendations. I included material in the memo to promote the program, involve the community partnership, inform the client organization, and build awareness. I also included a summary of my study findings. The memorandum with recommendations was delivered electronically via email to the program director (see Appendix C for the memorandum).

Description of the Deliverable

The actual deliverable to the client organization was a memorandum. The memorandum's structure included categories that provided recommendations for each of the three areas based on the perspectives of the participants as gathered during the interviews. In the memorandum, which I sent to the program director via email, I explained how to build community partnerships and ways to continue the promotion of the program. The information that was shared was intended to influence the program director's future vision, with a goal of improving the UB program in this southeastern university of the United States. Therefore, I included detailed information about my study, key findings, and recommendations in the memorandum.

I believe that the deliverable was appropriate not only for the client organization but also for the university at large and families in the community who may be interested in sending their child to the program. Perhaps the on-campus partnerships could partner with other offices in the surrounding area to ensure dependability to the

recommendations. The inclusion of the interview findings gives the client organization a different perspective on partnering with the community for success.

Sharing this information to the client organization and other campus offices may give guidance to families that allows them to set realistic expectations. Programmers may benefit from suggestions on connections with other community partners to bring awareness of the program. Building trust and cooperation among the community partners may promote unity and result in positive social change in the area. Having a strategic plan based on the recommendations would close any misconceptions or bias opinions of first generation, low-income students, if consistently executed.

Summary

Although many people assume that high school graduates enter college with the academic abilities and conduct necessary to flourish in a demanding postsecondary setting, not all students are ready for work at the college level (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; DesJardis & McCall, 2014; Grimard & Maddaus, 2018). According to Rainie (2022), an increased number of jobs now demand that applicants hold a postsecondary degree of some type. Therefore, for any student seeking to find employment in the economic world today, it is essential to develop academic and social skills and understand financial and economic literacy. Educational leaders have developed different types of preparatory college programs to help high school students develop the skills needed to succeed in college, career choice, and lives after postsecondary education (Grimard & Maddaus, 2018).

Consistent with Alsalkhi (2018), analysis of the data from this study demonstrated how many diversity-related factors affected participants' educational outcomes and pursuit of higher education. The findings highlighted the overall result of the potential hurdles on the success of a first-generation experience. The UB program became a part of their lives during high school and throughout and after their postsecondary education. As defined by Connelly (2016), the participants' readiness for postsecondary education included cognitive ability the ability to self-monitor, and the capability to apply what they learned in all subject matter. In addition, students praised the cohort approach for its importance in enhancing their overall academic and social experiences for life.

I chose to conduct my professional administrative study of this client organization because as a child I struggled academically and socially. During that time, there were no programs available to assist me. Because my mother did not obtain a high school diploma, she was unable to attend college. The counselors at my high school declined to offer me help when I reached out to them, citing their opinion that I lacked the ability to thrive in college. As a result, I was motivated over the years to search for a way to contribute and support high school students who were facing similar circumstances as I did.

In consideration, I believe that educators recognized the importance of recognizing the effectiveness of pre-college programs by comparing the results of my research study to other models of early pre-college education. This is a way to help students gain college readiness skills that are needed in their education and career pursuit.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

I created the interview questions with the help of two resources: the book *Focus Group Research*, published in 2018 by Carey and Asbury, and the dissertation *Early College Readiness: A Qualitative Study Examining the Perceptions of Dual-Enrolled High School Graduates*, published in 2021 by Young. The questions provided a platform for the collection of data for my research. I examined the responses to the questions to answer the research question for this qualitative study. The questions were as follows:

Please indicate your gender:

- Male
- Female
- Binary/Non-Binary
- The participant prefers not to answer
- _____ (other reason)

Please indicate your ethnicity:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- The participant prefers not to answer

Interview Questions:

I. Introductory/Engagement Questions

- A. Today we'll be chatting about (your personal experiences throughout the Upward Bound program). What is your life like since you have graduated from post-secondary education?
- B. How did the Upward Bound Program prepare you for the college application process?

II. Exploration Questions**A. Social and Academic Skills:**

- 1. Was there ever a time while in high school that your social and academic skill set was a barrier for you?
- 2. How did UB provide growth in your social and academic skills?
- 3. How did your social and academic skills you have learned shape your college aspirations and career?
- 4. What specifically did you learn in this area through the UB program?

B. Financial Literacy Questions:

- 1. When and how did you learn about financial literacy?
- 2. Did UB play a role in you understanding this area?
- 3. Can you give an example of when and how you used financial literacy during your post-secondary education experience?
- 4. What are three areas of your life and career that were impacted by your learning of financial literacy?

C. Economic Literacy Questions:

1. Can you give an example of when and how you used economic literacy during your post-secondary education experience?
2. What are three things that were impacted by your learning of economic literacy?

III. Follow-Up Questions

A. Financial Literacy Questions:

1. Did you apply for any scholarships and/or grants for college while in the UB program?
2. Did you call your parent(s)/guardian for any financial assistance during college? If so, explain.

B. Economic Literacy Questions:

1. What did you do when you did not have enough resources for tuition and/or financial aid?
2. Did you have a job during college? If so, explain.

IV. Exit Questions

1. How is your career path going since graduation from post-secondary education? How did UB prepare you for your career?
2. Do you think there are related topics you feel that are important should have covered, but didn't?

Appendix B: Organizational Approval



UPWARD BOUND PROGRAM

Scholarship and Excellence in all things!

October 12, 2022

Ms. Collins,

Congratulations on reaching this point in your research. Please use this letter as our formal agreement to be the client for your Doctor of Public Administration research.

Our Upward Bound program is tied to [REDACTED] and we are open to sharing any records you might need as you select participants from one of our cohorts. In alignment with our research permissions, the program will provide the names of the graduates from the selected cohort with the understanding that you will contact them on your own to determine if they desire to participate in your research study. It should be reiterated that the proposed population that will be available for your study are program graduates who are no longer affiliated with the program [REDACTED] the University in any capacity.

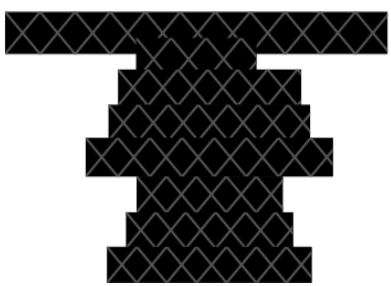
As we discussed as part of this agreement it is our preference not to have named in your research but rather to use generalized geographical data while using the program name - Upward Bound. Doing so provides protection for the participants and will expedite your research process. The use of the specific institutional name will create delays that I would like to alleviate in your progress toward completion.

Should have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Upward Bound office at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Program Director/PI



MEMORANDUM

To: Upward Bound Program Director

From: Kimberly Collins, Doctoral Candidate & Researcher

Date: August, 2023

Re: Public Administration Study Deliverable for U.B. Program

Executive Summary

This is a summation of the findings from the professional administrative study that I conducted on the Upward Bound program. The research problem was focused on first-generation, low-income students entering college with barriers to success, related to social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy, which can possibly lead to college drop-out. The population of the study was the 2016 cohort of the Upward Bound program, at a southeastern university. This research explored, examined, and understood lived experiences of low-income, first-generation college students, their preparation for completion of post-secondary education, and its impact on their social and academic skills, financial literacy, and economic literacy.

The demographics for this study where a total of 21 participants were enrolled in the 2016 cohort, three identified as non-binary, four identified as male, and 12 identified as females. The identified ethnicity of all participants was African American. The participants that were a part of my study met the criteria: (a) the student had to be a member of the 2016 U.B. cohort, (b) participated in the U.B. program for at least two years, and (c) have experienced financial and/or economic hardship throughout first year of college. I was able to interview a total of 19 participants whose ages are between 23 to 25.

Participant Positive Experience

- 12 out of the 19 participants that were interviewed expressed how the U.B. program made them feel as if their life was important along with their education.
- 14 out of the 19 participants that were interviewed shared how grateful they were that they participated in a program that prepared them for post-secondary education.

- 19 out of the 19 participants felt the U.B. program was critically to their success during post-secondary education.
- 19 out of the 19 participants expressed they would recommend the program to all low-income, first-generation scholars.

Participant Feedback

Participant Feedback for Improving U.B. Program

- The program had an inconsistent communication and lack of a hand-off process between high school counselor, university advisor and U.B. Program Counselor.
- The program did not provide instruction to boost/bolster self-determination and self-advocacy skills within students to utilize course catalog, class roster and syllabi to complete assignments and successfully complete their degree.
- The program did not have access to resources, both monetary and in-kind to support emergency life situations.
- The program did not provide instruction with real life examples to increase students' knowledge and awareness of spending and saving money.

Participants' Perspective

- Academic Skills
 - Lacked pre-planning in high school for undergraduate degree
 - Coordinated advising with the college advisor
- Social Skills
 - “College Culture” being self-sufficient,
 - learning how to read syllabi,
 - submit assignments, papers etc.
- Economic Literacy
 - Paying cell bills, groceries
 - Transportation/cab
- Financial Literacy
 - Budgeting, Financial Aid
 - Saving and Work Study for Assistance, Off-Campus Employment

Recommendations

Possible Solutions/Recommendations

- develop a shared document that high school counselor, college advisor, and U.B. program advisor could use as a tool to provide information and updates on the student.
- create workshops that allows interactions with others. It appears that the current opportunity that is provided where students can attend sessions to introduce and acclimate themselves to college life.

- build a resource program that leans assistance to a student may have need. Which allows others to give a charity donation towards a great cause.
- create a workshop session for the student and parent to attend, that would supply with the financial information and other resources they may need. It appears that the U.B. program has created a comprehensive course that helps the students to plan for a long-term financial outlook. build community partnerships to bring awareness about the program to all ethnicities.

/kc