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Strategies for Reducing Dropout Rates of First-Generation College Students

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Tanya Washington Bostic

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Strategies for Reducing Dropout Rates of First-Generation College Students

by

Tanya Washington Bostic

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BA, Florida Atlantic University, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

At a community college in the state of Florida, student retention has become a critical concern because more than half of the first-year first-generation students fail to graduate. That rate is four times higher than for other first-year students. Guided by Tinto's Student Integration Model as the conceptual framework, this intrinsic qualitative case study was conducted to investigate factors that students, faculty, and staff perceive to contribute to the high dropout rates among first-generation students at the local site. Additionally, this study was conducted to identify strategies to reduce first-year, first-generation college student dropout rates. Data was collected from participants through one-on-one interviews. Participants included eight first-year, first-generation college students and nine college employees. The college employees included four advisors, two faculty, and three staff members. The analysis of the interview data revealed that most learners faced financial challenges, felt alone and unprepared, and perceived that they lacked support. These findings led to the development of a 3-day professional development workshop for faculty and staff at the local site. The goal of the professional development program is to share strategies to improve graduation and retention rates for this study population, which could benefit students and the learning institution. Such a program could have implications for positive social change by providing better support for first-year, first-generation college students, guiding them to successful degree completion, which is beneficial to the college and the community.

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Dedication

Having become a young professional, I look back and say, “Wow, look how far I have come.” I am a Black woman who is educated and proud of who I am. When I think of all that I have achieved, I owe it to my parents. As a first-generation college student on my father’s side, I give thanks to the opportunity to higher education, which was encouraged by my parents. They believed in me, encouraged me, and taught me never to give up. Their kind words and eternal love motivated me to achieve my dreams. I realize that Mom and Dad have been my cheering team that nurtured and supported my dream to earn a Bachelor of Arts in humanities, a master’s in business administration, and soon to be a doctorate in higher education. As a child, my mother was my role model. I loved watching her as a businessperson talking on the phone and watching her professional body language. I admired her skills and demeanor and wanted to be just like her.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
The Local Problem.....	1
Rationale	1
Definition of Terms.....	3
Significance of the Study	4
Research Questions	5
Review of the Literature	5
Conceptual Framework	6
Review of the Broader Problem.....	7
Retaining First-Year First-generation College Students.....	7
Motivation as an Element in Sustaining Effort.....	8
Community Assimilation as a Factor in Retention	12
The Role of Academic Standing in Student Retention	13
Academic Support.....	14
Summary of the Literature Review	16
Implications.....	17
Summary	18
Section 2: The Methodology.....	20
Introduction.....	20
Research Design and Approach	20

Research Design.....	20
Pilot Study.....	22
Participants.....	23
Number of Participants	25
Gaining Access to Participants	26
Establishing Researcher–Participant Relationship	27
Data Collection	28
Access to Participants	29
Role of the Researcher	30
Data Analysis Results	30
Qualitative Data Analysis Software.....	30
Transcription	31
Data Coding	31
Thematic Development	32
Evidence of Quality and Procedures.....	32
Findings.....	36
Research Question 1.....	40
Research Question 2.....	46
Research Question 3.....	52
Discrepant Cases	57
Conceptual Framework	58
Limitations	59
Conclusion	59

Section 3: The Project	60
Introduction.....	60
Description and Goals.....	61
Workshop Day 1	62
Workshop Day 2	64
Workshop Day 3	65
Rationale	67
Review of the Literature	68
Professional Development	69
Retention Support	70
First-Year First-Generation College Students Experience Support	70
College Campus Support	71
Academic Standing and Financial Aid Support.....	72
Project Description.....	73
Creating an Excellent Education System.....	74
Staying In Touch with Students.....	75
Creating Guidance and Counseling Centers	76
Barriers for First-Year, First-Generation College Students.....	77
Implementation	77
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	78
Potential Barriers.....	78
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	78
Roles and Responsibilities	79

Project Evaluation Plan	79
Project Implications	80
Local Community	80
Far-Reaching	81
Conclusion	81
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions	83
Introduction.....	83
Interpretation of the Findings.....	83
Project Strengths and Limitations.....	84
Recommendations for Alternative Approaches	87
Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change	88
Reflection on Importance of the Work	89
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research	90
Directions for Future Studies.....	92
Conclusion	94
References.....	95
Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation from Florida Washington Community College	164
Appendix C: Initial Email Invitation Participant Letters (Students)	165
Appendix D: Initial Email Invitation Participant Letters (Faculty)	166
Appendix E: Initial Email Invitation Participant Letters (Staff).....	167
Appendix F: Initial Email Invitation Participant Letters (Academic Advisor).....	168
Appendix G: Student Interview Questions	169
Appendix H: Faculty Interview Questions	170

Appendix I: Staff Interview Questions171
Appendix J: Academic Advisors Interview Questions172

List of Tables

Table 1 *Project Study Participants* 23

Table 2 *Code Frequency* 38

Table 3 *Themes, Subthemes, Codes* 39

List of Figures

Figure 1. First-Generation Student Declines in Retention, 2018–2020..... 2

Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Persistence in higher education can be challenging for students who lack preparation. In 2010, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education found that 60% of incoming first-year students enrolled in a community college needed at least one remedial course before enrolling in collegiate classes (Hébert, 2018). According to Bailey et al. (2010), 70% of students taking remedial courses do not graduate from college. First-generation college students often lack the skills needed for postsecondary education in mathematics, reading, and writing. (Ives, & Castillo-Montoya, 2020). Compared to their non-first-generation peers, first-generation college students have higher dropout rates (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020).

The lack of reading and writing academic skills in collegiate work often increases college dropout rates. First-generation college students who lack academic college preparation often struggle in college courses and find their weaknesses in reading and writing impede their success, leading to a struggle throughout their undergraduate degree (Hébert, 2018). Garriott and Nisle (2018) reported that some professors believe first-generation college students who lack fundamental reading and writing skills also lack the confidence to ask questions or seek aid.

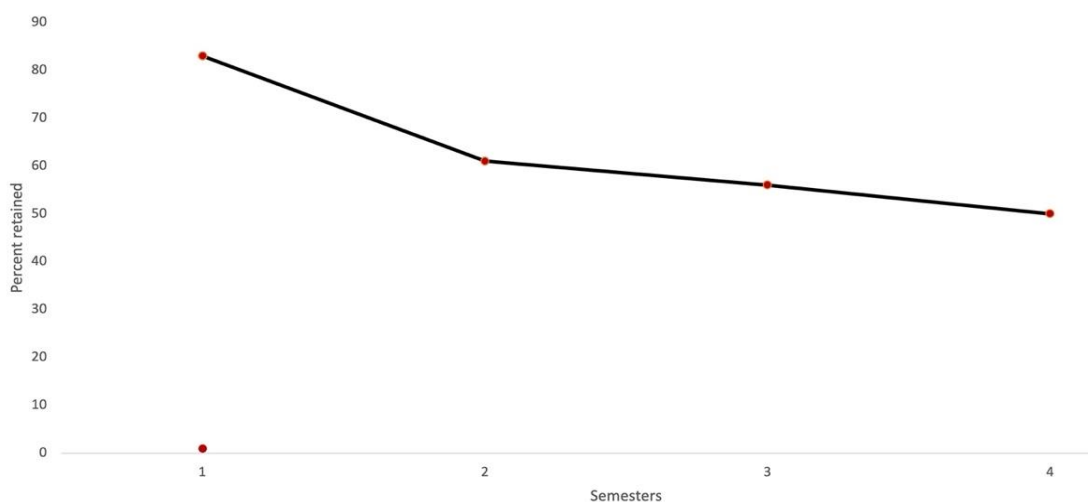
Rationale

Dropout rates among first-generation college students in their first year pose a significant challenge at a community college located in the state of Florida, hereafter referred to under the pseudonym Florida Washington Community College (FWCC). High

dropout rates present a serious challenge due to the decreased probability of these individuals being able to obtain lucrative career opportunities to repay their student debts. Additionally, the high percentage of students who leave school before graduation poses a challenge for local businesses in recruiting qualified personnel. Although FWCC has prioritized student retention, first-generation student retention has continued to decline (Figure 1). Across 2018–2020, retention rates have declined between semesters one and four for this population of students.

Figure 1

First-Generation Student Declines in Retention, 2018–2020



Source: FWCC, 2018

The fall-to-spring retention rate of first-time college degree- or certificate-seeking students in financial aid-approved programs was about 83% for the Fall 2018 cohort tracked to Spring 2019 (FWCC, 2019). The percentage has been consistent at 82% to 85% for the past six fall groups, according to (FWCC, 2019). The fall-to-fall retention rate of the Fall 2013 first time-in-college cohort dropped to 61%, a three-point decline

from the prior cohort. By the second spring term, retention had dropped to 56% for that cohort (FWCC, 2019). By 2023, one in three freshman students will not return for the sophomore year (U.S. News & World Report, 2023).

College students who are the first in their immediate family to attend college, commonly referred to as *first-generation students*, may experience difficulties as they navigate the unfamiliar terrain of higher education. These challenges may include juggling multiple responsibilities, encountering unrealistic expectations, feeling unprepared, and lacking support from family members. Unfortunately, these obstacles can impede their ability to succeed in college (Balzer, 2020).

Definition of Terms

Specific terms used in this study include:

Dropout rate: Rate of students who do not complete college coursework and do not obtain a college degree (Gottfried & Plasman, 2018).

First-generation students: Students who are the first to attend college from a home in which neither parent attended college (Toutkoushian et al., 2018)

First time in college: Students who have never attended any college or university (Shapiro et al., 2019).

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): Form used to request federal, state, and school aid in paying for college (Gurantz & Wielga, 2021).

Grade status: Students who excel academically and maintain a positive reputation with their college. (Townesley & Varga, 2018).

Retention: The extent to which learners stay within and complete a program of study in a predetermined time period (Seidman, 2019).

TRIO programs: Federal outreach and student services programs designed to find and provide services for disadvantaged individuals (Moody, 2022).

Significance of the Study

Students, FWCC, and the local community may receive help from this study to increase student retention by reducing the dropout rates of first-generation students. Improved retention could enable FWCC to help first-generation students overcome the academic, social, and personal issues that negatively affect their classroom performance. Graduates with associate degrees would be eligible to transfer to a university to complete a bachelor's degree. A better-educated workforce would help the local industry and the community.

Fewer dropouts and more graduates would also increase tuition revenue and job placement. Improved retention and graduation rates might also increase support from alumni, the public, and the local government. Community colleges increasingly rely on student retention as not only a financial resource, but also a tool to stimulate alumni contributions. Improved retention rates of first-generation students can increase tuition revenue for FWCC; 83% of first-generation college students' tuition was the main financial source for the college. Academic advising support can also improve retention and graduation rates because the student advisor relationship is critical to student development and success (Toutkoushian et al., 2018).). Furthermore, academic advising is a resource to support graduation rates and employment.

Research Questions

Despite the use of innovative retention initiatives, high dropout rates of first-generation students continue to be a growing concern at the college in this study. The following research questions were used to study the beliefs of first-generation college students, faculty, and administrators about the challenges and barriers first-generation college students face and ways to improve student retention.

RQ1: What are students', faculty members', and administrators' perceptions of the challenges and barriers first-generation college students face in the first year of college?

RQ2: What are students', faculty members', and administrators' beliefs of the reasons for the high dropout rate for first-generation college students?

RQ3: What strategies do students, faculty members, and administrators feel would effectively overcome barriers for first-generation college students?

Review of the Literature

A literature review was completed using Walden University's online library, Education Research Complete database, Sage database, ERIC database, ProQuest Central database, and Google Scholar search engine. Boolean phrases were used, and the following essential expressions were explored: *first-generation students*, *dropout rates*, *retention*, and *community college*. This review includes a detailed synthesis of the literature regarding the conceptual framework of students' perceptions related to factors influencing student development and levels of attitudes—organizational, background, and

environmental. Such beliefs can influence whether a first-generation student stays at an institution.

The researcher conducted a thorough investigation by performing a comprehensive search using specific keywords to identify the various factors that impact the achievement and ability of first-year college students who are the first in their family to pursue higher education. By specifically targeting keywords related to these factors, the author was better able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the current literature available on this subject. To ensure a thorough analysis, a thorough examination of peer-reviewed research articles was carried out, enabling the researcher to delve into the various aspects of this topic. The literature review was then methodically categorized into two primary areas of focus: first, exploring studies pertaining to the resilience and perseverance of first-year first-generation college students, particularly in relation to dropout rates. Second, investigating studies that shed light on the factors influencing the retention of first-year first-generation college students.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model was the conceptual framework for this study. The Student Integration Model suggests first-generation college students drop out before graduation due to their lack of social connections, difficulties with coursework, and unclear goals for success (Tinto, 1975). In recent decades, researchers have used Tinto's model to focus on college student retention because a student's academic and social environments jointly influence retention. Academic and social integration is developed through informal interactions with peer groups and faculty (Tinto, 1975).

Higher levels of collaboration with academic and social aspects influence a college student's decision to graduate from college. Such collaboration supports a well-rounded student and promotes achievement.

Instructors can make a difference using general techniques for all students and others oriented explicitly toward first-generation students (Manzoni & Streib, 2019). The increased study of college degree achievement concerns the nation's ability to remain ahead in an economy that is becoming more globally comprehensive and involved. Many individuals hold the belief that the reputation and competitiveness of the United States are at risk since several nations have now surpassed the United States in terms of degree attainment.

Review of the Broader Problem

Students dropping out is at a high rate between the first and second year of college and is a significant concern for most community colleges nationwide. First-generation students who drop out of college early are often disadvantaged due to barriers such as maturity level, college readiness, and personal thoughts and feelings regarding belonging in a college setting (Bishop, 2019). Some students may decide to drop out from a community college because they feel uncomfortable; others may drop out because they lack money to pay for their postsecondary education.

Retaining First-Year First-generation College Students

The exploration of the theme of persistence in achieving educational goals has been conducted by notable authors Hand, Griffin, Frischmann, and Moor. In their respective research, Hand et al. (2022) discovered a significant correlation between

student persistence and their self-perception, particularly in relation to their mental and physical well-being. Similarly, Griffin et al. (2022) uncovered a link between student engagement in learning and their ability to persevere. These esteemed authors also emphasized the vital role of institutional support, especially for first-year college students. Frischmann and Moor (2017) examined the impact of transitioning between semesters on student persistence, highlighting the numerous challenges faced by students. These challenges included adjusting to new schedules, classmates, instructors, expectations, and course materials. The researchers delved into strategies aimed at assisting students to successfully navigate their initial year of college.

Motivation as an Element in Sustaining Effort

Stephenson et al. (2020) conducted a survey at a local community college and found that students who took part in the survey were more likely to stick with their studies. This positive effect on retention was still noticeable even 18 months later, suggesting that the survey could help improve student retention. Stephenson and their team also discussed how commitment and engagement were crucial factors in keeping first-year students in school. Chang et al. (2020) found that students who were determined to graduate from their school showed strong commitment to attaining their goals. This commitment motivated them to keep working hard and stay in school.

Elliott (2020) emphasized that academic advisors, faculty, and staff have a significant impact on the enrollment and retention of students in higher education. The author asserted that motivating students to persist is a crucial aspect of the academic advisors' role. Elliott further highlighted the role of academic advisors, faculty, and staff

in providing guidance and support to students in navigating various complex tasks during their initial year at the community college. These tasks encompass diverse areas such as childcare, employment search, financial concerns, and interpersonal dynamics within the community college community.

The Influence of Extrinsic Motivation on Retention.

Roths et al. (2017) defined extrinsic motivation as the rewards and consequences associated with academic performance. They identified external factors, such as improved grades, financial incentives, and recognition, as examples of influences on the reinforcement of persistence. Through a qualitative investigation, the researchers found that extrinsic motivation yielded positive outcomes in learning, achievement, satisfaction, and overall well-being. Similarly, Lerdpornkuirat et al. (2018) discovered a close connection between students' motivation, engagement, and persistence. The quantitative study demonstrated that a supportive learning environment, encompassing interactions with peers, faculty academic advisors and staff, and the community college, played a pivotal role in bolstering students' persistence. This result was particularly relevant for first-year first-generation college students.

According to Roksa and Whitley (2017), how well first-year first-generation college students do in school is intricately connected to how motivated they are. The researchers noted that student motivation and faculty engagement can affect first-year first-generation college student success. They found that faculty who focus on the needs of their students can help them use their motivation to do well in college and persist. Many studies have looked at why students stay in school and keep going. Luke et al.

(2015) found that first-year first generation college students that finish their programs and graduate feel a sense of accomplishment, make more money, have job security, and are seen as more professional. Luke et al. (2015) concluded that when first-year first-generation college students keep going, they are more likely to reach their academic goals.

Ashraf et al. (2018) conducted a study to investigate if there was a connection between first-year first-generation college students' determination to find the right major and their likelihood of graduating. The researchers suggested that community colleges should help first-year first-generation college students explore different majors to improve their chances of sticking with their studies. They also found that first-year first-generation college students who consistently showed determination had higher levels of success and retention, while those who lacked determination tended to lose interest in their academic goals. Hendijani et al. (2016) investigated how rewards affected first-year first-generation college students' motivation and performance and discovered that a special payment system with external rewards had a positive impact on first-year first-generation college students' overall motivation.

Munoz et al. (2019) stressed the importance of faculty, academic advisors and staff regularly interacting with students to keep them engaged during their first year of college. They also noted that friendships with their peers on campus helped first-year first generation college students feel like they belong. Similarly, Sogunro (2015) emphasized how crucial it is to understand the factors that motivate and sustain first-year first generation college students learning in higher education. The author found that first-year

first-generation college students are more likely to succeed when they have the motivation to learn, and that motivation affects their persistence. Things like the quality of teaching, the curriculum, timely feedback, and effective academic advising all play a role in influencing students' motivation.

Community Colleges

A study conducted by Brooker and colleagues in 2017 found that first-year first-generation students at community college can be tough for first-year first-generation college students and may even affect their ability to stay in college. The study identified common difficulties for first-year first-generation college students that included managing their time, workload, and meeting the expectations of family and friends. The researchers suggested that when first-year first-generation college students face challenges, they require additional support to overcome them and reach their academic potential. Williams et al. (2018) emphasized the impact of college retention rates on an institution's reputation. The researchers suggested that understanding the factors that influence student retention can increase the retention rate of incoming freshmen.

The researchers also found that interventions help first-year first-generation college students transition smoothly into community college, and identify struggling students, which may improve retention. A research conducted by Rivera et al. in 2020 established the fact that the initial year of community college poses significant difficulties for first-year first-generation college students due to their need to adapt to unfamiliar social dynamics and increased academic expectation.

Retention

Another significant issue in community colleges is first-generation college student retention. These students often fall behind in college studies, which may contribute to early dropout, even within the first semester of college (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018).

Approximately, 84% of first-generation college students lack financial resources, student aid, and resources related to student retention and support (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020).

Community Assimilation as a Factor in Retention

Means and Pyne (2017) conducted a study to understand how support structures, like first-year first-generation college student organizations and relationships with faculty, can help first-year first-generation college students feel like they belong and stay in college. They found that these support structures assist first-year first-generation college students to not drop out. Mirijanian (2018) also found that special seminars can make first-year first-generation college students feel more confident in their academic abilities. Rucks-Ahidian and Bork (2020) emphasized the role of friendships in helping first-year first-generation college students. These friendships help students feel like they fit in and give them guidance and support to achieve their goals. Being part of social activities, like study groups, also helps first-year first-generation college students feel connected and satisfied with their community college, which makes them more likely to stay.

Delmas (2020) highlighted how faculty can make a substantial difference in first-year first-generation college student retention. When faculty notice that a first-year first-

generation college student is struggling, they can tell the student's advisor, which increases the chances of the student staying in college. Christe (2015) found that first-year first-generation college students feel connected to their community college when they have clear goals and are committed to their degree. Social activities outside of class might not directly affect whether a first-year first-generation college student stays in college. Patterson et al. (2017) found that feeling like *you belong socially* is connected to staying in college.

The Role of Academic Standing in Student Retention

There are many reasons why first-year first-generation college students stay motivated to continue their education (Bozeman et al., 2020; Sogunro, 2015). One crucial factor is having effective academic advising, which helps first-year first-generation college students reach their academic goals, which increases their chances of graduating (Sogunro, 2015). Bozeman et al., (2020) also found that first-year first-generation college students' values and motivation to achieve academic goals are connected to their likelihood of persisting. Additionally, Bozeman et al., (2020) noted that the community college's goal of increasing enrollment and retention is closely tied to students' ability to achieve their goals.

Bowers and Foley (2018) conducted a study in a community college setting to examine the factors influencing persistence among first-year first-generation college students. The study found that students' retention rates were positively affected by their increased academic confidence and success in preparing for community college. Specifically, students who had dual enrollment credit or advanced placement in English

or mathematics had higher retention rates compared to those without such credits.

Similarly, Browning et al. (2018) reported the importance of academic integration in fostering institutional commitment, and emphasized that character strengths such as hope, and gratitude play a vital role in enhancing academic achievement and persistence among first-year first-generation college students.

Academic Support

Another significant challenge for first-generation college students is to recognize that they may need readily available remedial training (Havlik et al., 2020). While academic support is available to increase first-generation college students' academic success, many first-generation students do not take advantage of these resources (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020). A student's ability to meet college expectations is influenced by their personal characteristics, including their behavior and psychological factors.

Using beginning postsecondary students longitudinal study data, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported a lower college persistence rate among first-generation students (Araújo et al., 2019). After several years of attending community college, 58% of first-generation college students were progressing toward college degrees compared to 77% of students whose parents were both college educated (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020). This is a problem that extends historically as well. Based on the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, 43% of first-generation college students left college without receiving a degree compared to 20% of non-first-generation college students (Chen, 2005).

According to Gillen O'Neel (2019), the Department of Education used institutional performance, student access, affordability, and student outcomes to rate community colleges, and one area of performance was college success among first-generation college students. Therefore, community colleges need to retain and graduate more first-generation college students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, community colleges need to understand the needs of first-generation college students to create programs to aid them better (Gillen O'Neel, 2019).

Parental Education

Pendakur (2023) examined first-year retention and found that fathers' educational attainment positively affects students' academic and social integration and persistence to the second year of college. Due to the excessive cost of higher education, most college students depend on financial aid. Adequate student funding increases academic success, social integration, and enthusiasm (Cabrera et al., 1992). Understanding academics and social collaboration play a significant role in developing student commitment, positively impacting retention (Beil et al., 1999). Berger and Braxton (1998) focused on the effect of social integration on persistence at a highly selective private research institution. Results showed organizational attributes such as fairness in academic and social rules and regulations significantly influenced first-generation students' levels of social integration.

Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) reported that first-generation college students are less academically and socially cohesive than non-first-generation college students. National data show that students will be successful if they are integrated into the college atmosphere after transitioning straight from high school (Pendakur, 2023). While these

studies support the positive effects of academic and social integration, others have been limited to cross-sectional single-year retention data from a single institution (Gibbons et al., 2019). According to Gibbons et al. (2019), a third group of studies aggregated enrollment status without specified timing for withdrawal, such as the total number of students withdrawn by the end of the third year in college.

Summary of the Literature Review

The previous literature review investigated a range of factors that can impact the ability of first-year first-generation college students to continue and stay enrolled at community colleges. Rothes et al. (2017) reported that student motivation significantly influences their persistence. Extrinsic motivation, as explained by Rothes et al. (2017), refers to external rewards or consequences tied to academic performance, such as better grades, monetary incentives, and honors, which serve as reinforcements for persistent behavior. Meens et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study, which found that intrinsic motivation, driven by internal satisfaction derived from interest and enjoyment in learning, is a key driver of persistent behavior. Moreover, the study underscored the importance of self-determination and academic integration in relation to retention and persistence. Lambert (2017) suggested that self-determination plays a role in achieving goals related to persistence. Tafreschi, D., & Thiemann, P. (2016) focused on students who did not meet the predetermined academic performance standards that were set for their first year of undergraduate studies. These standards required students to achieve a certain level of academic success to continue onto their second year. However, if students fell short of these requirements, they were obligated to retake all their first-year courses

before they could progress to the next academic level. Overall, the literature suggests that there are multiple factors, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, perseverance, social integration, academic performance, self-confidence, self-determination, and financial support, which can inspire students to persist and maintain their engagement in their studies.

Implications

The dropout rate of first-generation college students is a major concern because this student group is less likely to graduate than college students whose parents graduated from college. Factors based on the findings of this study showed resources could be used in this area to support the first-generation decrease of dropout rates and retention. After viewing dropout rates, retention, and academic support, these issues for first-generation college students become a major highlight for FWCC to focus on the needs and concerns of these students (Covarrubias et al., 2019). The issues listed show that community college institutions measure first-generation college students as at-risk students. Applying theory and understanding the problem, community colleges can begin creating programs to aid these students in understanding the purpose and goal of graduation. Findings from this study suggest that increased funding at the state and local levels for both community colleges and communities may benefit first-generation at-risk students.

According to Levitz et al. (1999), colleges must have resources to retain first-generation students successfully. With better support, more first-generation students will earn degrees, preparing them better for the workforce economy (Covarrubias et al.,

2019). Increasing the graduation rate of first-generation students equips these students to succeed in the skilled workforce economy and benefits communities and businesses.

Summary

Many first-generation students have lower college retention rates compared to non-first-generation college students. This is a serious problem because non graduates have fewer job opportunities. The economy suffers because of the subsequent shortages of skilled workers. Furthermore, fewer graduates reduce income from tuition and create additional non-graduate debt. In this study, I investigated factors that affect first-generation college students' ability to graduate. In Section 1, I introduced the local problem, the problem at the national level, the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework of the study, and the research questions for the study. Additionally, I provided an in-depth overview of the existing peer-reviewed literature regarding topics closely related to academic entitlement and self-efficacy. In Section 2, I comprehensively delineate the methodology employed in this study.

In Section 3 of the study, an in-depth explanation is given regarding the reasons behind selecting this project, and the study findings. Additionally, a comprehensive literature review is conducted to explore the genre of the project. A three-day professional development training program for first-year first-generation is presented. The program is designed for first-year first-generation college student academic advisors, professors, and staff. Furthermore, a structured project evaluation plan is presented, outlining the objectives and goals of the project.

Section 4 includes a detailed analysis of my reflections and project conclusions. The analysis examines the strengths and limitations of the project, discussing its overall effectiveness and areas for follow-up study improvement. The implications of the project's findings for positive social change are explored, highlighting its significance and potential impact. Research recommendations for future studies are also provided. The aim is to inspire and guide future researchers. Additionally, this section shares insights and lessons learned from conducting the research and developing the project. Lastly, a concise conclusion is provided, summarizing the key findings and implications, and providing closure to the project.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

At FWCC, retention rates are a significant problem for first-generation college students during the first two semesters of college. I developed the guiding questions in this qualitative study to collect data regarding the perceptions of first-generation college students, faculty, and administrators about the challenges and barriers first-generation college students face and ways to improve student retention. In this section, I discuss the justification of the research design, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis, and methods to ensure the protection of the study participants. I also discuss the assumptions and limitations of the study. Qualitative research is used to describe vital elements such as emotions, social phenomena, and participants' perceptions (Peterson, 2019). This type of research aims to answer research questions related to these aspects through careful analysis and interpretation of gathered data.

Research Design and Approach

Research Design

The qualitative research design is used to examine participants' perceptions, and in this study, those perceptions were regarding retention among first-generation college students at a specific community college in the state of Florida. Quantitative research is known for generating objective and dependable outcome data that can often be applied to larger populations, whereas qualitative research is focused on gathering in-depth and authentic process data that stem from the perspectives and interpretations of participants rather than the researcher or systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings

(Teherani et al., 2015). Inductive and more adaptable than quantitative research methodologies, qualitative research allows a researcher to change strategy in response to findings.

There are multiple benefits to using qualitative research. As new concepts or patterns surface, the data collection and analysis method can be modified. A smaller sample size is needed for qualitative research, which speeds up data gathering and analysis. A more thorough review is possible of the subject materials. Research frameworks can adapt to new or existing data. Human experiences and observations serve as the foundation for qualitative research data.

I selected the qualitative research design based on the local problem and guiding research questions. Qualitative research is appropriate for studying mutual experiences in native surroundings. This research design can be used to investigate how people perceive aspects of their lives, how individuals and/or groups behave, how organizations function, and how interactions shape relationships (Covarrubias et al., 2019).

Qualitative research is based on a positivist assumption that a singular reality can be discovered using appropriate research methods (Bowman et al., 2019). Another aspect of the qualitative design is that researchers develop their work from beliefs, usually post-positivist, or constructivist, using different approaches to conduct research (Havlik et al., 2020). Another benefit of selecting a qualitative design for this study was the ability to investigate participants' experiences related to the challenges and barriers first-generation college students face and ways to improve student retention at FWCC. Grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology are pivotal frames within qualitative research that

shape the research question, methods of data collection, and analysis (Havlik et al., 2020).

Grounded theory is a technique that is general and can use any information, but its most well-known use is biased information. Although working with probabilities, most grounded theory schools of thought are considered subjective because measurable strategies are not used, and figures are not displayed (Byrne, 2019). After carefully examining this approach, I have realized that qualitative research sometimes conducts grounded theory studies without fully grasping its distinct principles and guidelines. A grounded theory approach was unsuitable for this study.

Ethnography was created during the 20th century and used by anthropologists to investigate unique societies. Ethnography is employed when a specialist needs to observe a gathering of individuals to develop a significant comprehension of their lives or specific parts of their lives (Farrier-Williams et al., 2018). Therefore, I concluded that this design was not appropriate.

Phenomenology is used to recognize marvels, spotlight abstract encounters, and understand the structure of those lived encounters. This design was established in the mid-20th century by Pratt et al. and Farrier-Williams et al. (2018). Phenomenology in research is used to depict the essential qualities of a phenomenon that has happened. After reviewing this approach, I deemed it was not suitable for this project study.

Pilot Study

I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and FWCC's IRB to conduct a pilot study before the project study. The pilot study aimed

to test the interview questions and make any needed changes before the actual study.

Çetin and Halisdemir (2019) recommend pilot studies as a best practice in the research process.

The 17 pilot study participants—a mix of first-generation first-semester students, advisors, faculty, and administrators—were excluded from the subsequent project study. In the pilot study, the participants answered the drafted interview questions. I then compared their answers with the research questions to reduce bias and ensure the questions were on target.

Participants

The research study participants were first-generation college students, faculty, and academic advisors at FWCC. Table 1 shows the categories of numbers of the participants. The study included eight first-generation students, four advisors, two faculty, and three staff. One-on-one interviews were used to maintain anonymity and to provide sufficient time for research participants to elaborate on the retention challenges and potential solutions at FWCC.

Table 1

Project Study Participants

Category of participants	Number of participants
First-generation first-year students	8
Advisors	8
Faculty	2
Staff	3

Students

First-year first-generation college students who were between ages 18 and 25 who had completed two semesters of college were eligible to participate in the study. Forty students were initially invited to participate in this study. Five students with cumulative grade-point averages (GPAs) between 1.0 and 1.99 and five students with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher were selected to participate. To enable comparative analysis, the student selection was based on GPAs to create two groups: high academic achievers and low academic achievers. Comparative analysis research seeks to control confounding variables theoretically through case selection and pairing (Khanal, 2018). An e-mail invitation to participate in the study was sent by the appropriate administrative office of FWCC. I sent out invitations until the required sample size was achieved.

Faculty

Faculty members with two years of experience teaching first-year first-generation college students were selected based on criterion sampling for the study. The invited faculty members came from the college readiness department at FWCC. The faculty could share their experience and concerns of first-year first-generation college students, discussing attendance and class participation. An e-mail inviting faculty to participate in the study was sent by the appropriate administrative office of FWCC.

Staff

Staff with two or more years of experience working with first-year first-generation college students were selected based on criterion sampling for the study. This included four academic advisors, two faculty, and two staff. I chose academic advisors,

staff, and two faculty because they were the first to encounter first-year first-generation college students before beginning classes. Academic staff members meet first-year first-generation students outside the classroom, assisting them with career options, job placement, preparing for job interviews, and resumé writing. Strategies may be more appropriate to the aims of implementation research and more consistent with recent developments in quantitative methods (Cho, 2019).

In the same way, admission, financial aid, and academic advisors work with students when issues and concerns arise due to lack of communication. The dean of student services was included as a participant because the dean plays an essential role in supporting first-year first-generation students to improve their performance and retention. Therefore, the dean provided a distinct perspective on the issue and ways to better serve this student population.

Number of Participants

In this study, I interviewed eight first-year first-generation college students enrolled in their first two semesters. This participation number was justified because the purpose of the qualitative study was to provide a depth of personal participant information about the nature of the problem and potential solutions. A smaller sample size was appropriate for this research because it provided deeper context and meaning through the interviewing process (Choi & Kang, 2019).

Interviews are a systematic way of talking and listening to people and are another way to collect data from individuals through conversations (Cottrell, 2019). Interviews were completed individually. The identities of all candidates were restricted to protect

their anonymity. Through interviews, I was able to identify critical points made by participants while profoundly connecting with them. A smaller number of participants was used to acknowledge a philosophical assessment of the problematic and prospective resolutions.

Two faculty who taught first-year first-generation college students within the college readiness department and who met the criterion of teaching 2 or more years were invited to participate in the study. Eight first-year first-generation students in the college readiness department were selected for interviews using a random online selection method. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on population characteristics that are of interest to best enable a researcher to answer study questions (Finney & Horst, 2019). One of the major benefits of purposive sampling is the wide range of sampling techniques that can be used across such qualitative research designs (Frogg  & Woods, 2018).

Gaining Access to Participants

Student data used in the sample selection came from FWCC's office of institutional research. These data included student names, email addresses, cumulative GPAs, and attendance records. Once this information was obtained, FWCC emailed students in the third semester. Each participant was emailed a personal invitation. The emails were sent to 40 students by the college readiness department. I selected the first eight students who agreed to participate in the study. I emailed the invitations to faculty and staff as well. No contact with potential participants or data collection began until I received approval from the Walden University and FWCC IRB.

Establishing Researcher–Participant Relationship

While I have had the opportunity to support and guide first-year first-generation college students in person as an academic advisor and instructor, it is important to note that my involvement in this study was impartial and fair. Respecting the discretion and confidentiality of the participants allowed me to establish connections with them (Fullwood et al., 2019). My tasks included collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data from participant interviews. Furthermore, ensuring the credibility and validity of my research was paramount, especially considering my role as an academic advisor and the wealth of instructional experiences I possess. Undertaking this study without any preconceived biases was of utmost importance, as it would contribute immensely to the overall reliability and trustworthiness of the findings.

After selecting participants, I provided them with an informed consent form that protected their rights in the study. I received approval from Walden and FWCC IRBs before contacting participants or collecting data. Once I received permission from the research site and Walden University, I began contacting prospective participants. I followed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) policies on protecting participants by any means mentally, physically, or legally. I provided each participant with all information about the purpose of the study and participation requirements. Participants were informed they could withdraw at any time with no adverse effects and that confidentiality would remain protected.

Candidates were informed that all study participation was anonymous during and after the study. Consent forms and an encrypted USB flash drive were stored in a locked

filed cabinet in my home. All data were password protected in accordance with the IRB and NIH policies to protect the rights and protection of all participants. After 5 years, all documents will be shredded, and the data will be deleted.

Data Collection

Data collection for my study involved interviews with students, faculty, and staff. The interview approach allowed me to respond to the research questions, the purpose, and the local problem in the study. Interviews with students, faculty members, and staff were conducted on Skype because of concerns about social distancing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected using audiotaped interviews, reflective note-taking, and written transcription. The interviews lasted 30 minutes. During the interviews, I controlled the flow of the process and had opportunities to ask clarifying questions when needed (Fukuda et.al., 2019).

Student Interviews

Students who accepted the invitation to participate in the study received the interview protocol (Appendix B), which illustrated the purpose of the study and identified me as a doctoral candidate. The student interview questions are listed in Appendix C. The opening questions were designed to familiarize students with the interview process and begin with discussing first-year, first-generation student challenges. Having the opportunity to interview the participants face-to-face helped me gain first-hand knowledge of their challenges, views, assessments, sensitivities, and recommendations for students who are struggling with thoughts of dropping out during their first year of

college. The students received the interview questions prior to the actual interviews, so all student interviewees were familiar with and answered the same questions.

Faculty Interviews

Faculty who accepted the invitation to participate in the study received the interview protocol (Appendix B), which illustrated the purpose of the study and identified me as a doctoral candidate. The faculty interview protocol is listed in Appendix B; the faculty interview questions are listed in Appendix C. The questions were designed to recognize faculty members' experiences with challenges and solutions of first-year, first-generation college students. Having the opportunity to interview the faculty participants face-to-face via Skype enabled me to gain knowledge of their challenges, views, assessments, sensitivities, and recommendations. Faculty provided the latest information about why they thought first-generation students dropped out within their first year of college. The interview questions were finalized, so all faculty participants answered the same questions.

Access to Participants

Prior to collecting data, I obtained IRB approval from FWCC. Such approval was required to protect the participants and ensure the study had no ethical issues. The FWCC Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness sent email invitations to students inviting them to participate in the study. Once students agreed to participate in the study, I selected the first eight students who met the inclusion criteria. Random sampling was not possible because of the difficulty in getting large participation numbers during the coronavirus outbreak.

Role of the Researcher

I'm an academic advisor at FWCC. However, none of the students in this study were part of my caseload. Consequently, there was no risk of bias due to previous interactions with student participants. I looked forward to this qualitative research because I believed the methodology would provide the best opportunity to understand the innermost lived experiences of research participants (Gist Mackey et al., 2018). A neutral methodology redirected the study to a proficient moral approach.

Data Analysis Results

The process of conducting interviews spanned over a period of around three weeks. Once the interviews with both faculty members and students were concluded, the next step involved transcribing each participant's interview within a time of 24 hours. To ensure accuracy, I carefully reviewed and assessed each transcription multiple times.

The interviews were recorded on a digital phone; I then sent the files to a transcription service. I read each reply, allocating a code by applying the software through transcription review. I conducted a second categorization to improve the quality of the analysis, adding codes to participants' answers. I then reviewed each code to confirm its accuracy. Next, I used ATLAS.ti, which is described in more detail in the following section, to continue the coding process.

Qualitative Data Analysis Software

The coding and analysis were conducted using ATLAS.ti, an appropriate program for analyzing qualitative data (Duncheon, 2018). Additionally, this program allows you to code data using text, audio, and video examples to aid in the analysis. The participants'

audio replies to the interview questions were downloaded into ATLAS.ti for analysis after being submitted to a transcription provider. I used Atlas.ti to color-code phrases, words, and sentences pertaining to the study topics and student and teacher perspectives of first-year, first-generation college students. In the analytical research, codes were categorized, and data were consolidated using Atlas.ti.

Transcription

Transcribing describes the transformation of oral speech into a written and meaningful text that includes relevant information that can be analyzed (Cooper et al., 2018). Within 24 hours, the audio recordings of the interviews with students and staff were sent to an online company for transcription. When the transcriptions were returned, I reviewed the transcriptions and audio files to correct any errors. Next, participants were asked to assess the transcript for accuracy.

Data Coding

Some research methodologists claim that coding is merely technical, preparatory work for higher-level thinking about the study. However, Flenbaugh et al., (2018) maintained that coding is an analysis because codes are also used to retrieve and categorize data, enabling researchers to quickly find and cluster related segments. In this study, data coding was used to examine variances and resemblances among interview answers. A crucial part of the coding was to confirm there was no missing or incorrect information. I examined my footnotes for codes and themes. I assessed the data in reference to the research questions and sub-questions.

Thematic Development

Once the data was transcribed and coded, I used the codes to create themes. The themes contain codes that are used to unify ideas regarding the subject of inquiry (Harackiewicz & Priniski, 2018). Heinrich (2000) investigated self-authorship theory through the perceptions and experiences of first-year, first-generation undergraduate students. The authors contextualized periods of cognitive dissonance, examined contextual and environmental factors related to development, and framed these experiences as catalysts that promoted self-authoring behaviors. In this study, I created tables and figures to visualize and unify the themes. The themes helped me consolidate interview outcomes regarding how students, staff, and faculty perceived why first-year, first-generation college students struggle and have barriers.

Evidence of Quality and Procedures

Educational qualitative research must be demonstrably high quality because it is less robust than quantitative methodologies (Motulsky et al., 2021). Recognizing the subjectiveness of qualitative methodologies, I used several techniques to strengthen the research quality. These methods included member checking, triangulation, transferability, peer debriefer, reflective note taking, confirmability, and data storage.

Member Checking

Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Holschuh, 2019). In this study, participants were asked to assess their own interview transcripts for accurateness. I then corrected any errors based on the transcript review.

Member checking was used to increase the credibility or trustworthiness of the research results. Horowitz (2019) noted that member checking reduced risks to research participants. when data was shared. House et al. (2020) agreed that sharing interview data was ethical.

I also had study participants review their interviews to correct any transcription errors or omissions. Participants also had the opportunity to clarify their comments and to provide additional information and insights regarding their interview responses (Kumar & Mattanah, 2018). The transcript review method was used to strengthen the accuracy of the interview transcripts before they were coded and analyzed (Kumar & Mattanah, 2018). Through member checking, I was better able to confirm the accuracy of participants' transcripts.

Triangulation

Triangulation strengthens validity by using multiple data sources, which reduces the impact of data-related biases (Carter et al., 2014; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). In the current study, data were collected by probing the transcripts and interviews from first-year students, first-generation college students, and faculty who engaged with these students. Confirming participant answers to interview questions by restating them from various points of view, increased confidence in the validity of the data. Triangulation added an additional confidence in the study data. Analysis of inconsistent cases was also used to strengthen the quality of the data. Any inconsistencies were questioned to ensure participants' responses were accurately stated, recorded, and transcribed.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizability of research findings to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Love & Crowell, 2018; Younas et al., 2023).

Transferability in qualitative research is limited by small sample sizes and qualitative data collected from interviews and focus groups. Quantitative research is best suited for answering questions about what and when because of the numerical data that is suitable for statistical analysis (Hogan, 2019). synonymous with generalizability; transferability refers to validity in quantitative research. However, in this qualitative study, the lack of transferability was a qualitative research limitation.

Peer Debrief

I selected a member of the student services administration department to be the peer debriefer in the study. That individual was chosen because of their doctoral degree and impartial view of the study needed to minimize bias (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). The two interviews were analyzed in the recorded transcripts, which were supplemented by my interviewer notes. Participant comments were selected and included to enrich the analysis (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Reflective Note Taking

I incorporated a reflective notetaking journal in my qualitative methodology to increase dependability by linking similarities of insights among study participants. Notetaking was used to minimize personal preconceptions about the study participants that could bias my interpretations. The purpose of the note taking, which was conducted throughout the interviews, was to: (a) take adequate time to establish rapport and to build

trust with the interviewees so that they would feel comfortable sharing personal information, (b) structure the questions to make the interview seem like a conversation, (c) stay on track, not straying into topics not linked to the research objective or research questions, and (d) reduce participant anxiety by establishing a comfortable interview environment (Pessoa et al. 2019).

Confirmability

Confirmability was used to verify that findings were shaped more by participants and less by the researcher (Luna, 2018). Confirmability refers to the degree to which others can confirm or corroborate the results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability allows researchers to validate how they reached their decision from the data. In my research study, I integrated participant interview quotes and my personal observations recorded in my notes in interviews recorded in a philosophical log.

Data Storage

Data for this study were collected via semi-structured interviews with eight students and nine college employees, consisting of four advisors, two faculty, and three staff members. After the completion of all interviews, the audio recordings were professionally transcribed. Each participant was then sent a copy of their transcript for review. After the accuracy of the transcripts was confirmed, the 17 transcripts were reviewed three times to enable me to become immersed in the data, and to begin identifying repeated ideas and words that were potential codes.

During the study, transcribed data were stored on an external hard drive attached to my personal computer in my home office. Information was also stored on an encrypted

flash drive. When the study was completed, the paper and electronic data were then stored in a fireproof locked file drawer in my home office. The data will be stored for 5 years, and then destroyed.

Findings

Throughout the data collection, I developed the coding process for the transcripts. Coding involved reading each transcript, line by line, to identify repetition in the form of phrases, utterances, sentiments, thoughts, and words. Once a code was identified, I would name it and then insert it into the data in parentheses. After all the interviews were coded once, I developed an overview consisting of 81 codes. Saturation was indicated when no new codes emerged during the analysis of the last four transcripts. At that point, I reviewed each transcript a final time to ensure all codes were identified and included for data analysis.

Upon completing the coding process, I developed a frequency table (Table 2). The table shows the frequency of each code that emerged. The most frequent code was *students needing guidance* ($n = 68$), followed by *financial barriers* ($n = 50$), and *connecting with resources* ($n = 43$). The least frequent codes were *bilingual*, *the same problems for native students*, *empathy*, *credits won't transfer*, and *remedial education*.

Table 3 displays the themes, subthemes, and corresponding codes. After completing the coding, I arranged the codes into groups based on similarities. This process of arranging helped me to visualize emergent themes and subthemes. I developed three themes and nine subthemes that aligned with the research questions. The themes were: challenges, reasons for dropout, and strategies to reduce barriers. The nine

subthemes included: students face personal challenges related to family, culture, and the home; students face several school-related and administrative challenges; students feel lost and alone; students are unprepared for the academic challenges and expectations of higher education; students lack support and often remain silent, financial barriers prevent students from performing well and remaining in school, provide students with multiple sources of caring support, provide students with resources and connect them to the school, and foster personal characteristics that increase academic success.

Table 2*Code Frequency*

Code	N	Code	n
Students need guidance	68	Relationships with students	14
Financial barriers	50	One-on-one	13
Connect with resources	43	Administrative challenges	13
Home/work responsibilities	41	Ask for help	12
Student lack of understanding	41	Appreciative	12
Time management	32	Do my best	11
Understand students' circumstances	30	School integration	10
Lack of direction	29	Lack of information	10
Overwhelm/pressure	28	Lack of responsibility	10
Give up	28	Distance learning barriers	10
Personal experience as a student	26	Flexibility	10
Financial aid confusion	25	Family expectations	10
Lack of support	25	Family	10
Mentorship	25	Lack of discipline	9
Technical barriers	25	Lack of connection	9
Helpful staff	25	Rewarding	9
Different from high school	23	Independent	9
Language barrier	23	Isolated/alone	9
Low academic performance	21	High school doesn't prepare	8
Parent education	20	Compassion	8
Unaware of support/resources	20	Won't speak up	8
Encourage	20	Motivation	8
Communicate with students	20	Spend money	7
Peer support	19	Hold students accountable	7
Be approachable	19	Cultural differences	7
Lack confidence	19	Disinterest	7
Determination	19	Writing difficulties	6
Mental health	19	Need paperwork from other countries	6
Patience	18	Age group differences	6
Ask questions	18	Nobody cares	6
Clubs/groups	18	Show care/concern	6
Better life	18	Could be working/making money	6
Family lack of understanding	17	Poor study habits	5
Won't seek help	17	U.S. education is different	4
Listen	17	Bilingual	3
Not prepared	17	Same problems for native students	3
Family support	16	Empathy	3
Tutoring	16	Credits won't transfer	3
Balance	15	Remedial education	3

Table 3*Themes, Subthemes, Codes*

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Codes
Challenges (RQ1)	Students face personal challenges related to family, culture, and the home	Home/work responsibilities Parent education Lack of family support Family expectations	Language barrier Bilingual Balance U.S. education is different
	Students face several school-related and administrative challenges	Financial aid confusion Spend money. Citizenship paperwork Age group differences	Admin challenges Learning barriers Technical barriers No transfer credit
	Students feel lost/alone	Students lack understanding. Lack direction/ Mental health	Frustration Disinterest Nobody cares
Reasons for Dropout (RQ2)	Students are unprepared for the academic challenges and expectations of higher education	Different from HSI High school doesn't prepare. Time management Remedial education Poor study habits	Lack of discipline Lack of autonomy Low academic performance Writing difficulties
	Students lack support Students often remain silent	Won't speak up; give up. Lack of confidence Lack of information	Overwhelm/pressure. Lack of support Won't seek help
	Financial barriers result in dropping out	Need to work to make money	Finances
Strategies to Reduce Barriers (RQ3)	Provide students with multiple sources of caring support	Student guidance Understand student's needs. Mentorship, helpful staff Compassion Listening & empathy	Communication Be approachable. Show care/concern. Family & peer support Reward
	Provide students with resources and connect them to the school	Connect with resources. Hold students accountable. One-on-one Ask questions	School integration Clubs/groups Tutoring Flexibility
	Foster personal traits that increase academic success	Determination Better life Independent	Motivation Do my best. Appreciative

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, “What are students,’ faculty members,’ and staff’s perceptions of the challenges and barriers first-generation college students face during the first year of college?” The first theme to emerge was directly aligned with this question: *challenges*. The theme focused on the challenges faced by first-generation college students, and three associated subthemes highlighted personal, school-related, and affective challenges. These subthemes included *students facing personal challenges related to family, culture, and the home*, *students facing several school-related and administrative challenges*, and *students feeling lost and alone*. Each subtheme is discussed in the following section.

Students Face Personal Challenges Related to Family, Culture, and the Home

All the first-year, first generation participants stated that they experienced persistence challenges in meeting their personal and professional responsibilities. Work schedules, parenting, caring for family members, helping to pay bills, and other home commitments often made it difficult for these students to balance educational and family/work needs. One of the most prevalent codes to emerge from the data was *home/work responsibilities* ($n = 41$). Advisor 2 explained, “In my experience with first-generation students, they still have homes to take care of,” while Faculty 1 shared, “They have to help sustain their households.” Faculty 3 mentioned “family issues,” while Staff 3 mentioned more pressing crises such as food and home insecurity. Student 3 was a working mother with three kids, and Student 2 shared that “Managing work and school is very hard.” As Student 7 explained, “If you have to work while you attend school, that

can be challenging.” Six participants specifically mentioned students’ struggles to balance school, home, and work.

Family, culture, and language were also challenges for students. As many first-generation students are bilingual and have learned English as a second language, attending college in an English-speaking country can present challenges. Seven participants mentioned the language barriers faced by this population. Faculty 1 explained,

There are a lot of students at the college from other countries, and they’re first-generation in the country, and they’re not English speakers as their first language. Those can be very frustrating challenges for a student who does not speak the language as proficiently as native-born students.

Advisor 2 illustrated that language barriers can make it difficult for these students to learn and understand their professors, saying, “Another thing too is they might not understand the professor to the extent that they need to understand that professor, who can create a challenge for them.” Student 2 was the only student participant who specifically mentioned language barriers, but faculty felt language was a significant challenge for first-generation students.

In addition to language challenges, first-generation students must also adapt to an educational system that may be vastly different from the system in their home country. As Advisor 1 stated, “The college system in America is very different, and with individuals who are coming from other countries to the college system in the States, it’s very different.” This sentiment was echoed by Staff 1 and Faculty 2. Similarly, cultural

differences sometimes create barriers for these students. Advisor 2 shared, “Within the classroom, a challenge that I can say they face is culture shock.” When asked about the resources that first-generation students need to be successful, Student 4 explained, “A lot of us, we come from different backgrounds, and we are coming with different types of experiences, struggles, and we’re all cultured differently.”

Participants reported that their family’s lack of understanding of the educational challenges their students faced was a challenge to student success. Twelve first-generation student participants discussed their parents’ educational backgrounds, explaining that their parents did not go to college themselves, which sometimes created unrealistic expectations, stress, and a lack of support for these students. As Advisor 2 explained, for example, the parents might say, “I’m going to support you, I got you, but they don’t really know how to support the student.” Faculty 1 shared,

Sometimes those students don’t have the reinforcement from the same academic rigor when they go home because, again if their parents didn’t earn a college degree, they too might not have the ability to help that student with homework or math or whatever the case may be.

Several students remarked that non-first-generation students benefitted from parents who had experienced college. Because their parents had not had opportunities to go to college, Students 1, 5, and 7 related that they felt heavy pressure to succeed in college, even if it was not necessarily what they wanted for themselves. Student 1 explained, “So I kind of felt pressured to go to college, to get an education, it just didn’t work at the time for me, and I didn’t have any guidance.” Student 5 added:

I was expected to do dual enrollment because [my mother] didn't have dual enrollment, and nobody told her about it. So, she was like, "okay, you're going to do dual enrollment as well as doing these college classes at high school," and then doing online classes.

Student 5 added, "I had all this expectations of me to the point where I brought them to college. I was unprepared."

Students Face School-Related and Administrative Challenges

In addition to personal challenges, first-generation students may also encounter school-related challenges related to technology platforms, paperwork, and financial aid. Two students talked at length about the administrative hassles they experienced getting paperwork from their home countries, and the lack of assistance needed when they followed up with their U.S. schools. Student 3 shared, "The main hurdle that I had [with my college] was that even though the academic records they wanted from me were coming from a different country, and I had no control over it." These students felt dismissed by staff but admitted that a helpful and patient few provided the assistance they needed. This lack of help caused both students to unnecessarily spend hundreds of dollars, compounding their financial stress. Student 4 explained, "After I paid all that money, they told me I didn't need to do that."

In addition to these administrative issues, participating students and faculty also discussed the financial aid confusion often experienced by first-generation students. As Advisor 1 shared, "The financial aid process is so long, so tedious, that many times it does not process on time." Advisor 2 explained, "Another one is that parents don't have the knowledge to know that if they give you tax information to take care of financial aid,

it won't be a specific amount coming from their pay stub." When asked about their experiences as first-generation students, Student 1 replied, "I wish they would have focused a little bit more on, like, let's say, the financial aid part." This sentiment was echoed by Student 2, who shared, "I still don't understand 100% how financial aid works and how to apply." Student 5 added, "You're unprepared in the financial department, so it's a lot of unnecessary stuff, such as taking out loans, not knowing how to file for financial aid."

Technical and distance learning barriers were also mentioned by participants as school-related challenges. Students, advisors, and faculty all discussed either students' unwillingness to use technology or lack of familiarity with the platforms and tools needed to participate and communicate. Faculty 2 lamented how their first-generation students often wanted to talk face-to-face rather than communicate more efficiently through email. Faculty added, "I really had to fight tooth and nail, prior to the pandemic, to get students to send me a simple email, you know, if they have a question." When discussing technology barriers, Faculty 4 mentioned generational differences and how older students tended to struggle more: "I've had 40-year-olds, even the 50s, and they are clueless and normally ask questions that hold back the students who already know." Three of the students discussed challenges in navigating technology platforms. Student 3 described the process as looking for "a needle in a haystack," while Student 4 said, "You can get to where you need to go because the website is there, but not all of us are very [savvy] when it comes to the technology world."

Students Feel Lost and Alone

An overwhelming sentiment among participants, especially students, was the sense of being alone, confused, and uncared for. The fourth most prevalent code was *student lack of understanding*. Student confusion and lack of direction were mentioned by all participants in a variety of contexts. Student 1 described a lack of “general direction,” while Student 3 mentioned “the lack of understanding, lack of direction” that first-generation students face. When discussing academic barriers, Advisor 1 explained, “Some of them just don’t understand.” Student 2 described college as “confusing,” sharing, “I’ve been clueless about a lot of things that have to do with more than just college.” Staff 1 felt first-generation students were often “not familiar with the college experience,” and Student 8 admitted, “I had to withdraw because I didn’t understand the process.”

This lack of direction and sense of being lost was described by four of the students. Student 1 was “pretty much just lost,” while Student 3 admitted to feeling “all over the place” due to a lack of direction. These feelings of confusion led to significant frustration, which sometimes caused students to become isolated, stressed, and disinterested. Nine participants discussed frustrations experienced by first-generation students. Four students and three faculty/staff discussed students’ feelings of isolation. Student 2 admitted to being very isolated. “You’re basically alone here.” Student 7 said first-generation students often feel like “you’re literally by yourself,” while Student 5 explained, “I didn’t know anybody, and I didn’t have any friends on campus.” Advisor 1 commented that the frustration and isolation may be compounded by the COVID-19

pandemic. Three students and three faculty discussed possible mental health challenges related to the stress and isolation experienced by first-generation students. As Student 7 shared, “I guess the whole, just going it by yourself and having to figure it out, like that, can really take a toll on your mental health if you don’t know how to deal with it.”

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, “What are students,’ faculty members,’ and staff’s perceptions of reasons for the high dropout rate for first-generation college students?” The second theme to emerge directly aligned with this question: *Reasons for Dropout*. Three subthemes highlighted factors that participants perceived to be related to dropout; unlike the issues that emerged as *challenges* for the first theme, subthemes for the second theme were viewed as more impermeable barriers that could cause students to quit school. The three subthemes were: (a) students are unprepared for the academic challenges and expectations of higher education, (b) students lack support and often remain silent, and (c) financial barriers prevent students from performing well and remaining in school. Each subtheme is discussed in the following sections.

Students are Unprepared for Academic Challenges/Expectations of Higher Education

The first subtheme for Theme 2 related to first-generation students’ lack of preparation. Among all participants, there was a strong sentiment that first-generation students often come to college unprepared. Participants explained that college was different from high school and did not equip students with the rigor, skills, and knowledge needed to excel in college. According to a group of 23 students, the code of conduct in college is different from what they experienced in high school. One student,

Student 7, mentioned that college is vastly different from the Florida public school system, and public schools in general. Another student, Student 1, described college as a completely distinct entity. Students 5 expressed that because they were unprepared, they believed college would be like high school. A faculty member, Faculty 1, observed that the level of difficulty is higher in college, requiring students to study and read more and become self-reliant. Staff member, Staff 3, added that college provides a lot of freedom that students are not accustomed to.

Struggles with newfound freedom and independence were reflected in the codes of *lack of discipline, lack of autonomy, time management, poor study habits, and lack of responsibility*. All participating students and faculty described first-generation students' lack of the skills to be autonomous as they transitioned from high school. Advisor 1 spoke of students' tendencies to "not take ownership of their mistakes," while Students 1 and 7 struggled because of their lack of discipline. Student 6 explained that many first-generation students are unprepared to set up their own schedules because they "aren't that organized." Advisor 1 explained, "They haven't lived life like an adult," while Student 5 shared, "It's like when you enter college, you are expected to be an adult at that point and make your own decisions and choices and have everything together." As Faculty 1 stated, "There's an expectation that you're going to be intrinsically motivated to get the things done in college that are required." Thirteen participants specifically described difficulties with time management and meeting assignment deadlines.

Many students felt they were not taught the personal autonomy skills needed to succeed in college. As a result, students often fail classes, lose financial aid, or drop out.

The code *low academic performance* emerged 21 times in the data and was discussed by nine participants. Student 7 described dropping out because of low grades. Staff 3 elaborated on the problem of students dropping out due to poor grades. Student 1 confirmed withdrawing from a class because of a failing grade. Student 5 admitted to failing two classes, while Student 8 shared, “I kind of failed all of my classes.”

The discussion of poor academic performance suggested that students not only lack study skills and discipline needed to succeed in college, but also lack academic and subject knowledge preparation. Advisor 1 shared that “They are just not ready for certain levels [of schooling].”

Students Lacking Support Often Remain Silent

Compounding the lack of preparation that emerged for the previous subtheme, students often felt unsupported but lacked the confidence to speak up and ask for help when they were lost. This idea was reflected in the following three codes: *won't speak up* ($n = 8$), *won't seek help* ($n = 17$), and *lack confidence* ($n = 19$). A lack of confidence related to feeling ill-prepared, language barriers, and a lack of support made first-generation students less likely to speak up or ask for help; this reticence then kept them in a spiral of low academic performance, low self-esteem, and a lack of self-efficacy. Staff 3 explained, “They’re not used to speaking up in the classroom. So, when the professor gives the lecture, they don’t ask questions.” Faculty 1 stated, “They don’t ask questions because they don’t want to look like they don’t know something compared to their peers in the classroom.” Advisor 2 shared that first-generation students sometimes hesitate to ask questions because they feel it is a sign of weakness. Student 5 admitted they were

“the type of person that does not ask for help unless it’s too late,” and Student 7 said, “Even when I need it, I shall struggle before I ask anybody for anything.”

Nine participants discussed the lack of confidence among first-generation students, which often fostered a reluctance to not ask for help and to remain silent when they were struggling. Faculty 4 explained that “They are embarrassed to tell me, but as professors, we just talk and say terms they don’t know the meaning of.” Staff 3 said first-generation students were often “very shy;” Student 4 admitted they were “not a very outspoken person.” Speaking of their college experiences, Student 3 “felt a lot of self-doubts,” and Student 2 said, “I put myself down way too much.”

Participants described a lack of support given to first-generation students, with the code *lack of support* emerging 25 times in the interviews. Staff 1 described these learners’ lack of a support system, while Advisor 2 explained: “they need support.” Faculty 1 said many learners “don’t feel like they have the support,” and Student 2 admitted, “You don’t even really have family or anything to help you.” Even when support and resources were available, students were often unaware of them. Speaking of available resources at the college, Student 5 explained, “not a lot of people know about these opportunities.” Similarly, Student 3 shared that “So, the things that you need, they’re there, but you just don’t know that.”

A lack of information, support, and resources – or the lack of awareness of available resources – contributed to feelings of stress and overwhelmed that made students want to give up and drop out. Student 5 described the feeling as “just jumping into a pool and they can’t swim.” Student 3 felt “way in over my head,” and Advisor 2

explained students took on too much “when they already have so much gone on.”

Speaking of the stress they felt, Student 4 said, “It’s like everything is on fire, and I need to throw water on all these things that are on fire. Where do I throw the water first?”

Faculty 2 said, “They’re going to end up overwhelmed, and if they’re overwhelmed, they’re going to assume they can’t do it. And if they realize they can’t do it, they won’t do it.” When discussing their stress and frustration, Student 4 admitted, “I actually just wanted to back out.” Student 1 shared, “As someone who did drop out in the beginning, I totally get it because you don’t have anyone to look up to, anyone to guide you, tell you how to do well in college, or anything like that.”

Financial Barriers Prevent Students from Performing Well and Remaining in School

The third subtheme for theme two focused on the financial challenges students faced. As indicated in participant interviews, many first-generation students work to support themselves and their families while they are in school. The second most common code to emerge was *financial barriers* ($n = 50$), which reflected the significance and prevalence of financial hurdles these learners face. Faculty 1 discussed how economic burdens impacted first-generation students:

The social and economic parts still impact your learning because, you know, if you can’t get enough to eat, or you can’t have some of the resources that require additional funding your financial aid doesn’t pay for, that you can’t get support from home, that’s going to tend to impact your success in the classroom as well.

This sentiment was echoed by Staff 3, who mentioned financial challenges, homelessness, and food insecurity as barriers.

When asked about the most common reasons for dropout among first-generation learners, Faculty 2 replied, “It is definitely financial support.” Similarly, Student 5 cited money, and Student 7 described financing college as “a huge challenge.” Staff 1 mentioned “challenges of being able to finance their academics.” Student 7 later added, “Finances are a huge part of the challenges and barriers to being a first-year, first-generation college student.” Because first-generation students are often ill-prepared for college on many levels, low academic performance is common; consequently, they often lose their qualifications for financial aid and must figure out how to pay for college themselves. As Student 1 shared, “I’ve just been paying out-of-pocket, and right now, I have absolutely no money to pay for my classes next semester.” Student 8 shared a similar predicament: “I have lost my financial aid... I’m paying out-of-pocket now to go to school.” Student 2 stated, “Work has been the most challenging because if I don’t work, I don’t have money to pay for school.”

The financial stress caused by the school can make first-generation students consider dropping out and working instead. Four participating students brought up the idea that students could be working or making money now instead of attending school. Student 6 shared, “I believe a lot of these students, they have that job, and they see they’re making money, and they can get things now,” and Student 2 explained, “It can look like it’s easier to ignore money, to just work instead of not work that many hours and go to school.” Student 7 expanded upon this sentiment:

I think that’s the main reason for the dropout rates because you can go make money. If it’s about making money, you can make money by doing so many

things. If you make money doing so many things, it's like, "What do I need a college degree for, and what exactly am I doing this for?" I think that is the primary reason why first-year students drop out because it's like, "If I can do this and make more money, why am I spending all of these years, all this money, and all this time, when [it] isn't going to reap me any rewards?"

Research Question 3

The third research question asked, "What strategies do students, faculty members, and staff feel would be effective in overcoming barriers for first-generation college students?" The third theme directly aligned with the question: *Strategies to reduce barriers*. Three subthemes centered on how support, resources, and personal traits could be leveraged to improve retention of first-generation students. These subthemes included *Providing students with multiple sources of caring support, providing students with resources, and connect them to the school, and fostering personal characteristics that increase academic success*. Each subtheme is discussed as follows.

Provide Students with Multiple Sources of Caring Support

The first two themes highlighted a sense of unpreparedness, isolation, and lack of support for first-generation students. The first subtheme to emerge as a strategy to help these learners persist was focused on providing students with many sources of caring support. For faculty, staff, and advisors, the codes of *encouragement, compassion, listening, empathy, care/concern, helpful staff, patience, and being approachable* emphasized the caring characteristics that first-generation students need from college

professionals. The most common code across all interviews was *students need guidance* ($n = 68$).

All participants emphasized students' need for guidance and direction and the importance that such guidance comes from a place of care concern. Staff 2 explained, "I think the students that are coming in, it doesn't matter what age they are, I think they need that nurturing, just that handholding." Speaking of first-generation students, Faculty 1 said, "I understand students who come from those backgrounds, so I take the extra steps to encourage them." Faculty 3 described "Listening, understanding where they are coming from, and just being there." Advisor 1 emphasized their ability to be empathetic with first-generation students, and when asked about the most important characteristics needed to assist these learners, Staff 1 mentioned compassion. Staff 3 believed they could help first-generation students because they were "genuinely interested in students' welfare." Student 3 appreciated professors who showed caring concern for students and treated their job as more than just a paycheck.

Understanding each student's unique circumstances was also emphasized, to need support and to demonstrate care and empathy. Staff 1 shared, "So, for me, trying to meet the student where they are, listening to them and understand their aspirations, and making sure that the information on how to get them along that path is there for them." A similar sentiment was shared by Advisor 1:

And I think the fact is that you know, many of my co-workers and I have learned to make ourselves and our environment friendly, a comfortable environment for

them to like to come in and share with you the things that happened to them personally.

Advisor 2 tried to “take into consideration other things they have going on.” Staff 2 and Faculty 2 shared anecdotes about students sharing serious personal challenges they were able to assist with.

All the participating faculty, staff, and advisors were first-generation students. These firsthand experiences allowed them to empathize and understand the challenges experienced by first-generation students, and they often leveraged personal experience to help and encourage these learners. All but one staff member described how they used their firsthand experiences to assist first-generation students. Advisor 1 shared:

I think my personal experience is like; I went through this with no parents around to help me, not even like (none of my) parents (even knew). Like, I did not have any parents that could help me in this situation step-by-step, knowing that many of our students are in the same situation. The fact that part of my education was completed in another country, so the American college system was very new; I wasn't aware of it. So that helps me a lot.

Similarly, Advisor 2 shared:

“I use that experience to let them know that I have been there, I've done it. It might seem scary to you, but I am not asking you to do something I have not done.” I always give them other examples of other college staff that are also first-generation, that it is something to be proud of and something to carry with you.

Faculty 1 understood the challenges faced by these students because they had been in those same shoes. Faculty 4 said, “I always share my story with them, what I did to become successful.” Staff 2 described their ability to empathize with students: “And I think about my own experience in college when I first got into college, and I was by myself and came to a whole new state.”

Provide Students with Resources, and Connect Them to the School

The second subtheme for theme two focused on providing students with the needed resources and helping connect them to schools. Participants emphasized school integration, fostering a sense of belonging, and encouraging students to join clubs and groups. Advisor 2 described connecting first-generation students and encouraging them to join school clubs. Faculty 1 agreed that she would “Encourage students to get involved with clubs and organizations.” Faculty 2 discussed helping integrate students into the college beyond the classroom and academics. Faculty 4 said first-generation students must get involved: “Don’t just go to class to get an A but get involved.” Staff 1 emphasized connecting students with the college and other groups of students.

As previously mentioned, first-generation students are often unaware of the resources and support available to them through the college. Thus, an important strategy for reducing dropout among these learners is to connect them with these resources. The importance of this strategy was reflected in the prevalence of the code *connected with resources*, which was the third most common code in the data ($n = 43$). Faculty 1 explained, “It’s up to professors to connect students to academic support services to help them succeed,” and Staff 1 described connecting students to resources “to make sure they

know that there are opportunities here to help them.” Staff 2 mentioned the need to intervene and connect students to resources available throughout the college.

For faculty and staff to connect first-generation students to the resources they need, they must understand the needs and struggles of these students. Because first-generation students often hesitate to seek help, a big part of connecting these learners to resources is encouraging them to ask questions and seek help. As Advisor 2 shared, “Sometimes, students need to know that the support is there, and they just need to ask for help to know where to get the support they need.” In offering advice to other first-generation students, Student 8 said, “Don’t be ashamed or afraid to, you know, ask your questions.” Similarly, Student 3 said that first-generation students must be willing to ask for clarification when they do not understand something. Student 1 explained that first-generation students need people with whom they feel comfortable asking questions about college. Similarly, Advisor 1 described the importance of making these students feel comfortable so they would come to them and ask questions when they needed help.

Other resources mentioned as helpful for reducing dropout among first-generation students included tutoring, mentoring, and flexible class schedules. Student 2 said, “The free tutoring helps a lot.” Five other students also mentioned the benefits of tutoring. Students 3, 4, and 5 all discussed the value of being able to create their own class schedules, which allowed them more flexibility to tend to other personal and work responsibilities. The value of one-on-one interactions was also emphasized. Faculty 3 described how one-on-one time was helpful to struggling students, while Students 2, 4, and 8 all expressed a preference for one-on-one assistance.

Foster Personal Characteristics That Increase Academic Success

The final subtheme for the third theme emphasized personal student characteristics that foster academic success. Participants in this study described several personal traits among first-generation students, including determination, motivation, independence, and drive. Student 8 described themselves as determined, while Student 2 shared, “When I want something, I stay with it.” Student 5 was “determined to just do whatever my mind has set me to do,” and Student 7 explained that first-generation students “really have to be determined.” Student 3 said they were a “go-getter,” and Student 4 said first-generation students need to feel motivated.

A drive to do their best and work toward better lives was also common among participating students. Student 2 shared, “I always want to do better,” while Student 8 was “just trying to be a better person.” Student 5 described a desire to want more for their life. Advisor 2 explained that many first-generation students wanted to create better lives for themselves and their families. A keen sense of independence emerged from interviews with Students 1, 7, and 8. Five participants described the appreciation for opportunities to attend a college that was common among first-generation students.

Discrepant Cases

Analysis of the interview responses and transcripts did not reveal any discrepant cases. Member checking enabled participants to verify response accuracy and correct any errors. Using a peer debriefer increased analytical reliability. Faculty, advisors, staff, and students reported similar strategies to promote student success at the community college. There were no discrepant cases in the research findings.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975) is the conceptual framework that endorsed the outcomes of this study. Tinto (2006-2007) determined that, even though we have enhanced our understanding of what impacts student persistence, this knowledge improvement has not significantly boosted an overall student retention rate. According to Tinto's research, students from diverse backgrounds have unique experiences that affect their ability to persist in community college settings, which has been recognized by the higher education population.

Tinto understood that higher education professionals have come to understand that the "process of student retention differs in different institutional settings" (p. 4) and that student connections within their environments make a difference. Tinto's (2006-2007) question was:

We must stop searching for the silver bullet-the panacea-to solve our institutions' retention problems. More precisely, we ought to consider the study and preparation of student diligence as a multidimensional problem, heeding the warning of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) by addressing the multiple forces operating in multiple settings that influence persistence. Pressures on students' perseverance choices and performances are not unidimensional; our resolutions cannot be one or the other. The demand for additional intricate belief about endurance stands for both the study and preparation.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that it took place at a single community college. A second limitation was the small sample size and qualitative methodology that made the study results not generalizable to other community colleges. A third limitation was the inability to quantify the impact of variables that affected first-year, first-generation students' retention.

Conclusion

After completing the pilot to study to test the strength of the interview questions, I interviewed students, staff, faculty, and advisors about strategies to reduce first-year, first-generation college students' dropout rates and to improve student retention. The use of open-ended questions encouraged interviewees to speak openly and to elaborate on the interview topics. I also probed for additional insights based upon the nature of the participants' responses. The themes were color coded and organized by topic using thematic analysis to identify and connect emerging patterns. I used member checking, descriptive narrative and quotes, and data triangulation to establish reliability and appropriateness.

Section 3 includes a detailed description of the project, a literature review of first-year, first-generation college student challenges, and strategies for social change. The project describes the goals, rationale, and reasons for the case study, which was to identify causes and solutions for high student dropout rate of first-year, first-generation college students. The project outlines strategies for academic advisors, staff, and faculty to reduce dropout rates of first-year, first-generation college students.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 includes a description of my project, project goals, and rationale. One purpose of this project was to conduct a case study of the reasons for the high student dropout rate of first-year, first-generation college students. The second purpose of the project was to investigate and propose strategies for academic advisors, staff, and faculty to reduce dropout rates of first-year, first-generation college students. Based on the literature review and study findings, I developed a 3-day professional development activity that included (a) a current literature review of first-year, first-generation college students' dropout rates that relate to the local problem; (b) challenges students encounter as first-year, first-generation college students; (c) barriers to first-year, first-generation college students; and (d) strategies for improving first-year, first-generation college student success (Bennett et al., 2021).

The project identified activities that can reduce dropout rates among first-year first-generation college students at FWCC (Ricks & Warren, 2021). In the project, I interviewed students, faculty, and staff to identify the causes of the high dropout rate of first-year, first-generation college students and to determine strategies to reduce the dropout rate. The project also included best practices to reduce challenges encountered by first-year, first-generation college students (Grace-Odeleye et al., 2022). The goals for this study were to: (a) develop activities to promote student growth, development, and educational achievement; (b) interview academic advisors, staff, and faculty to understand their barriers and struggles with supporting first-year, first-generation college

students; and (c) strengthen the professional skills, knowledge, and behaviors of academic advisors, staff, and faculty needed to assist students (Canning et al., 2020).

Effective training for academic advisors, staff, and faculty includes a variety of continuous formal and informal professional development and learning opportunities (Azmitia et al., 2018). The training and development will assist academic advisors, staff, and faculty in expanding their core knowledge and skills. The training will include innovative approaches to improve collaboration and refine staff values and philosophy (Miller et al., 2021). The professional development program aims to ensure that academic advisors, staff, and faculty have the information and support they need to effectively meet the needs of first-year, first-generation college student populations (Lopez, 2018).

Description and Goals

Results from my case study model were used to design a professional development workshop for academic advisors, staff, and faculty (Brown et al., 2021). The workshop was developed to enable participants to share and engage in strategies that support student success for first-year, first-generation college students and to reflect on practices, perceptions, and challenges encountered when attempting to decrease first-year, first-generation dropout rates (Berzenski, 2021). I selected professional development because the findings of my case study suggested that academic advisors, staff, and faculty face challenges and barriers when assisting first-year, first-generation college students (Rovitto, 2022). Each professional development session was designed to encourage academic advisors, staff, and faculty to reflect upon the knowledge learned and to share ways to build practices for student success and retention (Tobolowsky et al.,

2020). Another benefit of the skills is their ability to improve communication with academic advisors, staff, and faculty. The project was designed for both face-to-face and remote delivery to reach a larger audience.

The participants will be academic advisors, staff, and faculty. As participants connect in various activities, group membership will be varied to add differing viewpoints on providing resources for first-year, first-generation college students. Tables for participants will have markers, stickers, pens, highlighters, large and small post-it notes, and copies of each day's PowerPoint slides for note taking. The daily workshop agendas are listed in Appendix A. The workshop will include icebreakers to facilitate teamwork and connectedness, small and large group activities, videos, role-play activities, and presentations from academic advisors, staff, and faculty. Another goal of the workshop is to develop a broader understanding of student retention by including the perspectives of different participant groups. At the conclusion of each day, participants will assess their presentation and include any questions, concerns, or suggestions for the following day.

Workshop Day 1

The first day's goal is to develop glueyness and the knowledge of participating academic advisors, staff, and faculty who assist first-year, first-generation college students. The first-day workshop topics include the local problem, research questions, and conceptual framework. This information will be provided to the participants to develop strategies to reduce first-year, first-generation college students' dropout rates and improve student retention. The contrasting perspectives from new and seasoned academic

advisors, staff, and faculty will promote discussion and the open exchange of ideas. The facilitator will facilitate two initial icebreaker exercises designed to introduce the challenges and barriers of first-year, first-generation students, academic advisors, staff, and faculty. The first exercise—Fire or Ice—will encourage academic advisors, staff, and faculty to share how much time they have worked with first-year, first-generation college students. The participants will also compare their experiences using the analogy of either an iceberg or a volcano to justify how these qualities assist or inhibit this population.

In the second exercise, a ranking of challenges and barriers for students, academic advisors, staff, and faculty will be listed with a collective compact list of the top three to five challenges and barriers of first-year, first-generation college students discussed in a role-playing format. Following the role-play, academic advisors, staff, and faculty will return to their tables to create a list of the barriers encountered by first-year, first-generation college students at the college. Academic advisors, staff, and faculty will explore all assessments to identify similarities and the potential for success. Next, the participants will explore the information, making additions and modifications to further assist first-year, first-generation college students. To conclude the lesson, participants will review and discuss common programming patterns with conditionals.

The training will also include a review of the college learning plan by the college's administrator of academic innovation and strategy. The activity will include participant discussions on the first-year first-generation college students' retention plan and literature review exercises. For each local problem and the research question identified, participants will be asked to introduce viable solutions and to discuss why they

could work. At the end of the first day, participants will complete a survey linked to the day's topic. Participants will be asked to read a short scholarly article concerning dropout challenges and barriers for first-year, first-generation college students. That topic will be used to begin discussions on Day 2.

Workshop Day 2

The second training day will focus on course design and analysis of the causes of first-year, first-generation college student dropouts. The activities will also include the development of solution proposals for local problems. Day 2 will begin with a reflection exercise and video with an open discussion forum on key points related to the local problem. Participants will then be placed in groups to discuss parts of the literature that correlate with challenges and barriers to first-year, first-generation college students, particularly those in 2-year community college settings. Participants will conclude their discussion of challenges and barriers by comparing the list from the previous day and adding any new strategies for student success and retention. Participants will be placed in groups and tasked to build a foundation with several levels that signifies understanding (20-minute time limit). The group with the most robust and extraordinary foundation will win the contest. The prize will be a \$20 gift card to a restaurant of their choice.

Following the challenge exercise, each group will be asked to explain how, why, and on what root they built their foundation. Participants will then access the academic innovation and strategy system, starting with an overview of the academic plan presented by the college's administration. Following this presentation, activities for the rest of the day will emphasize realistic learning strategies that incorporate ideas as a teaching tool to

assist first-year, first-generation college students and improve retention and dropout rates for this population. Critical thinking exercises will further reinforce Tinto's Student Integration Model and link its connection with first-year, first-generation student retention and dropout rates (López, 2018; Schaeper et al., 2020).

During the afternoon session, participants will be given access to scholarly articles discussing first-year, first-generation college students' situations. The participants will analyze, discuss, and list any problems they find in the scholarly article. Following this exercise, participants will be placed in small teams to discuss resolutions and suggestions on how the college may retain first-year, first-generation college students more successfully to improve the 2-year college degree completion rate. Team leaders from each group will present their suggestions. The suggestions will be given to the vice president of academic innovation and strategy. The training will conclude with a question-and-answer session, a finishing point, and a Day 2 survey of the training.

Workshop Day 3

The last training day will begin by addressing any participant questions or concerns. Next, participant teams will create a visual representation on a large Post-It Pad of schemes to improve the retention and reduce dropout rates of first-year, first-generation college students. After the activity, each team will share their illustration on how to improve retention and decrease dropout rates. The vice president of academic innovation and strategy will provide data on the characteristics of first-year, first-generation college students. Afterward, academic advisors, staff, and faculty who have finished the course can share their experiences and answer questions.

Following the presentation and question-and-answer activity, participants will be placed in small teams to discuss how first-year, first-generation college students' retention and dropout rates can affect the community college. Each team will share approaches they have employed. Next, the vice president of academic affairs, provost, and director of outreach and recruitment will present the importance of providing resources for first-year, first-generation college students. The presenter will also discuss the benefits of retaining and providing resources and the future to implement additional resources for community college students. The dean of academic advising will present information and practices for advising first-year, first-generation college students. Participants will have an opportunity to ask questions. Following this portion, the department chair, who provides direct supervision to the faculty, will engage participants in role play related to student evaluation, partnership, and presence. Participants will review each scenario and how it relates to first-year, first-generation college students.

Next, a community college innovation office representative will discuss best practices for improving first-year student retention and will show a 10-minute video about retention strategies. Participants will deliberate and reflect on the information. Following the conversation, participants will be placed in small teams to list best practices for first-year, first-generation college student retention. The participants will then create a concept plan to strengthen relationships and support this population. Academic advisors, staff, and faculty will combine strategies to improve the success and retention of first-year, first-generation college students. The vice president of academic innovation and strategy will review the checklist with academic advisors, staff, and

faculty. Participants then can ask questions and offer solutions to improve retention and reduce dropout rates for first-year, first-generation college students. The training will end with a concluding survey and any remaining questions.

Rationale

Low academic attainment consequences are significant for first-year, first-generation college students and society (Kitchen et al., 2021). Many first-year first-generation college students are low-income and have less family support while in college (Kniess et al., 2020). For that reason, such students often feel a greater sense of responsibility to be the one who succeeds in their family. Such responsibilities can increase pressure on students and impact their social transition. As a result, some first-generation students may require additional support.

Many educational institutions have begun implementing special programs to better assist first-generation learners in overcoming obstacles in higher education (Cataldi et al., 2018). First-year, first-generation college student retention is a significant issue for some community college programs. Examples of programs that have shown positive results include the freshman empowerment program at the University of Central Michigan and student support services (Folger et al., 2004; Holt & Winter, 2018). An analysis of the freshman empowerment program shows the program contributed to a 40% higher retention rate (Redford & Hoyer, 2017), and the student support services also improved retention and completion. The success of such programs shows that supporting first-year, first-generation learners can have positive benefits.

However, research literature notes various challenges affecting support programs implemented by educational institutions. Holt and Winter (2018) noted that community colleges might fail to understand the causes behind first-year, first-generation dropout rates before implementing such programs. Some first-year, first-generation students drop out due to finances, social adjustment challenges, the need to work, fear of academic failure, and the need for remedial education (Collom et al., 2021). The reasons students drop out of programs depend on demographics and not understanding these reasons can affect a program's ability to increase retention. This could result in community colleges reducing or eliminating funding for these programs.

First-year, first-generation college students require a robust support system to succeed in college. Data analysis revealed that most learners also face financial challenges, feel alone and unprepared, and lack support (Radunzel, 2021). Furthermore, students have expressed the need for a caring support system and resources that enhance school bonding (Li & Carroll, 2020). This professional development project aims to assist FWCC faculty and administrators in understanding the reasons behind high dropout rates among first-year, first-generation students and to investigate strategies to enhance retention.

Review of the Literature

This literature review presents scholarly research and findings regarding problems and solutions related to improving first-year, first-generation college students' retention (Brookover et al., 2021). I used peer-reviewed sources from academic journals and databases such as Ebscohost, Educational Research, Sage, ERIC, ProQuest Central

database, Google Scholar, and Walden University Library. I also used Boolean phrases and explored the following essential expressions: first-generation students, dropout rates, retention, support structures, early college experience, tutoring, and mentoring (Brookover et al., 2021).

In the review of the literature, the following factors were identified: first-year, first-generation college students' dropout rates, reasons for dropout, need for support structures, the importance of tutoring and mentoring, and the impact of the early college experience (LeBouef, & Dworkin, 2021). The following modules were identified in the literature review: professional development for first-year, first-generation college students, challenges to success improving dropout rates, and strategies for success for completing a two-year college degree (Hopkins et al., 2021). The peer-reviewed scholarly research was retrieved from the years 2017-2022.

Professional Development

A program has been developed based on the research findings to train academic advisors, staff, and faculty members to improve the success rates of the target students in this study. Experts have emphasized the importance of professional development programs to equip faculty and support staff with the necessary skills to effectively assist students. These programs can also enhance relationships between advisors, staff, faculty, and students, promote coaching and employability skills, and improve teaching practices. Professional development opportunities can strengthen skills such as goal setting, time management, teamwork, collaboration, leadership, and career planning. By providing advanced knowledge and promoting acceptance of organizational changes, professional

development training can lead to positive outcomes. It ensures that faculty members are prepared to identify and support students who may be at risk, while also creating a positive learning environment on campus. Additionally, professional development is crucial in preparing individuals to adapt to changing trends.

Retention Support

It is important to incorporate a variety of resources that promote first-year student retention. These resources include the first-year experience, campus support, academic achievement, and financial assistance. According to Webster et al. (2018), successful transition and reduced student stress are correlated to student success and persistence. In a similar vein, Lynch and Lungrin (2018) emphasized the critical need for academic advisors, staff and faculty members to evaluate the success of their interactions with students in promoting positive student attitudes and retention. According to Lynch & Lungrin (2018), it is the duty of academic advisors to offer guidance to students as they explore and contemplate different career paths and academic majors before making a final decision. (

First-Year First-Generation College Students Experience Support

Webster and colleagues (2018) emphasized the importance of effective communication between students and faculty for helping students adjust to college and succeed in their studies. Wood et al. (2016) conducted a study highlighting the significance of academic preparedness in supporting the transition and persistence of first-year undergraduates. Larkin and Dwyer (2016) found that peer-to-peer mentoring programs increased student engagement and retention rates. McCluskey et al. (2019)

reported that universities have implemented the First Year Experience (FYE) initiative to facilitate a smooth transition and support for students. Participating in FYE improved academic performance and retention rates for at-risk students (Connolly et al., 2016).

According to a study by Wismath and Newberry (2019), students benefited from a first-year program that included a course on mapping academic resources in their community. The program helped them connect with academic and social campus resources, and to develop their own identity and career goals. Isacco and Morse (2015) found that academic motivation and a strong connection to the university were important for student retention. Roksa and Whitley (2017) emphasized the importance of involving students' families in the first year experience to expand social networks and better support student success. Bowman et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of belonging and emotional well-being for students' adjustment and success in college. Data collected during the first semester showed that students' social connections, satisfaction with friends, and feelings of achievement in class were linked to increased engagement and positive changes in their sense of belonging and emotional well-being.

College Campus Support

In a groundbreaking investigation, Schreiner and Tobolowsky (2018) uncovered the pivotal role that faculty members play in ensuring the triumph of first-year students as they transition into their second year devoid of attrition. The researchers recommended faculty development to provide professors with the requisite knowledge and skills to establish positive bonds with campus students. The researchers also underscored the significance of engaging faculty in a comprehensive evaluation of the second-year

curriculum to include cultivating enriching educational experiences across the entire campus. In addition to this, Schreiner and Tobolowsky stressed the importance of organizing academic advising in a way that not only encourages students to find meaning and direction in their education but also allows for sufficient opportunities, resources, and motivations for mentorship. The researchers concluded that facilitating augmented communication and nurturing connections between faculty and students exerts a profoundly positive impact on academic achievement, student retention, and overall contentment.

Academic Standing and Financial Aid Support

According to DeAngelo and Franke (2016), being prepared for college, managing time effectively, using good study methods, and asking for help when needed are all important for succeeding in college. The two researchers discovered that students who were not well prepared often struggled to get financial help, which made it harder for them to stay in college. They also found that students who had a strong connection to their university tended to get better grades and were more likely to stay in school.

Another study by Zepp and colleagues (2018) examined how financial stress affects students' academic performance. The study authors suggested that reducing financial stress could be done by encouraging problem-solving and budget planning. They also found that students who had good emotional well-being and effective coping skills performed better in school and were more likely to stay in school.

The purpose of this study was to find out what factors encourage first-year students to continue studying at FWCC for a second year and to gather their suggestions

on how the institution can improve their motivation. After analyzing the data, four main themes were identified: the use of college readiness skills, support from family and friends, better communication between faculty and students, and the impact of university personnel, faculty, and advisors on student motivation. A training program was created to address these themes and combat the issue of low retention rates. Previous research has shown that first-year seminars and service-learning experiences have a positive effect on academic success and the likelihood of students staying enrolled. It was also suggested that institutions can improve student motivation by examining predictors of academic performance and success, as poor academic performance may indicate potential retention challenges.

The professional development training for academic advisors, staff and faculty took into consideration the campus atmosphere discussed in scholarly works. It emphasized the importance of effective communication and building connections within the university. The literature shows that student interactions and university affiliations have a significant impact on academic achievement, leading to increased determination and retention. The research supports the notion that factors like GPA and financial assistance contribute to persistence and retention. The advisor training program incorporates these findings and focuses on enhancing student persistence and retention through various support factors.

Project Description

This primary project concern was to identify the best strategies to reduce first-year, first-generation college student dropout rates. This project will assess the students'

challenges in schools and investigate techniques to reduce first-year, first-generation college student dropout rates. This project is also concerned with various school dropout measures and dropout-prevention strategies. Various evaluation methods must be used when dealing with barriers and challenges, like the qualitative and quantitative evaluation models (Gilmore& Glennon, 2020). The John Hopkins Talent Development Middle School (TDMS) was used in the identification process of the strategies which can help reduce the dropout rate (Leary & Bryner, 2021).

This project will also utilize resources to conduct research, analyze, and make recommendations. This project is fully supported by the academic advisors, staff, and faculty because it is considered crucial in helping the students stay in school. When conducting this project, there are several challenges. For example, some of the students may be reluctant to tell their side of the story based on the challenges and the lack of cooperation from their parents (LeVine, 2018). Questionnaires will be used to lessen first-year, first-generation college students' fear (Li & Carroll, 2020).

First-year, first-generation college students are likely to fully cooperate because they are the most affected group. The participating students will have the opportunity to give their views on their challenges (Osgood, 2021). Acevedo and Lazar (2022) anticipated that such a project can succeed in implementing effective approaches to increase the rate of first-year, first-generation college student retention.

Creating an Excellent Education System

Another strategy is to provide an excellent educational system that reduces first-year, first generation college student dropout rates. A good education system makes it

easier for students to navigate the education system (Yao et al., 2020). A good education system also helps nurture first-year, first-generation college students in selecting their community college courses. A positive environment also assists this college group to pursue what they think is best for them, and not to feel that they are being forced (Acevedo & Lazar, 2022). The excellent education system also gives students opportunities to study what they desire and are passionate about, which assists students to fulfill their dreams and ambitions, while reducing dropout rates (Love et al., 2021).

An excellent education system develops first-year, first-generation college students' confidence, increasing their expression level and boosting their understanding (Grace-Odeleye, & Santiago, 2019). The system in this study also promoted increased creativity, innovation, and thinking skills among first-year, first-generation community college students. This system has also helped the students to face the daily challenges they experience in their lives in a positive way, enabling them to solve the challenges they experience (Adrogué & Garcí de Fanelli, 2018). This strategy has also reduced the school dropout rate by 10% in most institutions (Osgood, 2021).

Staying In Touch with Students

Parents are frequently advised to communicate with their children while at college to encourage them to stay positive and continue with their studies (Todorova, 2019). Parental guidance is usually crucial to the first-year, first-generation college students as it assists them to be open-minded and focus on their studies.

Parental guidance of first-year, first-generation college students can also reinforce their love and ensure that students do not feel neglected, which can reduce student

depression and stigmatization (Vinas-Forcade et al. 2019). Ongoing communication between parents and their students creates bonds assisting first-year, first generation college students to share with their parents' challenges that could affect their academic progress (Canning et al., 2020).

Parental guidance can also help first-year, first-generation college students to avoid harmful activities such as drug abuse (Taru & Suyanto, 2020). Keeping in touch with first-year, first-generation college students also assist parents in learning about the progress of their children at school and offer guidance. Such parental support can promote academic excellence and student motivation; and, hopefully, lessen first-year, first-generation student dropout rates.

Creating Guidance and Counseling Centers

Stress and depression contribute to the school dropout rates of first-year students (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Access to guidance and counseling centers can provide counsel for students who feel depressed and stigmatized. Guidance and counseling can also assist students in sharing their problems (Yao et al., 2020).

Being able to express themselves in a friendly and free manner assists first-year, first-generation students in overcoming challenges that can interfere with their academic progress (Ricks & Warren, 2021). Similarly, Identifying and recognizing student talents, abilities, and field of interest can assist first-year, first-generation college students to be more successful (Canning et al., 2020).

This strategy has also helped many first-year, first-generation college students to avoid peer pressure to use drugs and activities that might interfere with their commitment

to their studies (Fauzi, 2020). By minimizing negative behavior, first-generation college students are better able to achieve their dreams and avoid distractions that can interfere with their academic progress. This strategy helps maintain academic progress and reduce dropout rates of first-year, first-generation college students (Pratt et al., 2019).

Barriers for First-Year, First-Generation College Students

It is suggested that academic advisors, staff, and faculty help students to overcome first-year retention barriers. Parents can also assist their first-year students with living and academic expenses to reduce student stress and to promote the students' educational progress (Azmitia et al., 2018). Government assistance with educational expenses should also be considered to ensure that first-year, first-generation college students have adequate funds and safety (Eveland, 2020). Reducing financial struggles assists students in concentrating on their studies. Parental involvement can further assist students to progress in their studies. A favorable learning environment reduces the probability of dropping out of school (LeVine, 2018).

Implementation

The 3-day professional development workshop participants will include academic advisors, staff, faculty, and staff that assist first-year, first-generation college students. The workshop is scheduled to take place in the summer, right before the start of the fall semester. Attendance is mandatory for all participants, and it will serve as a valuable professional development opportunity for the upcoming academic year. Upon successful completion of the workshop, participants will receive a certificate in recognition of their accomplishment. The college will generously provide all necessary materials for the

workshop, ensuring that participants have everything they need to fully engage in the learning experience.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Potential resources and existing support include access to the Financial Aid Office, Academic Advising Office, Counseling Center, Family and Student Resources, and Career and Professional Development. As a workshop facilitator, I shall coordinate the welcoming of participants and introduce the trainers, college staff, and the provost. Tools such as flip charts, pads, pens, markers, and PowerPoints will be free to participants as these are readily available at the community college.

Potential Barriers

One potential barrier may be the workshop date. Since the workshop will be held during peak registration time, advisors, staff, and faculty will be busy. Providing a stipend to attend the workshop could be an incentive to attend the 3-day workshop. Informing academic advisors, staff, and faculty about the importance of the workshop will also promote attendance. Providing advance notice of the training dates and offering professional development credits may encourage more attendance. The support of the provost, teachers, and departments on college campuses will also promote attendance.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The workshop would occur at the end of the summer before the fall semester. Planning of the workshop would occur after the spring graduation to allow time for academic advisors, staff, and faculty and staff to incorporate the training dates on their calendars. I would reserve the conference room with the college special projects

coordinator and submit information to the Vice President of Academic Affairs, who in turn would email faculty the workshop information. The workshop will begin each day at 8:30 am and end at 4:00 pm, provided with morning snacks, an hour lunch break, and one morning, afternoon, and evening session break.

Roles and Responsibilities

As a facilitator and professional development coordinator, I shall collaborate closely with academic advisors, staff, and faculty by providing the workshop and required follow-up sessions. The Vice President of Academic Innovation and Strategy would offer support in integrating training modules into the Microsoft Teams and workday management system for participants so that they may review the workshop resources and communicate with their co-workers through the messaging system. Currently, FWCC does not have a Director of Enrollment Management but anticipates this position will be filled at a future date. The role of the Director of Enrollment Management could also include offering professional development workshop support.

Project Evaluation Plan

The professional development workshop will include an evaluation of each workshop activity at the end of each training day, and a final survey within 24 hours following the 3-day workshop. The evaluation will be used to improve future professional development in assisting first-year, first-generation college students. This type of evaluation will help determine activities and methods that may reduce the dropout rate of first-year, first-generation students at the college. The evaluation will be used to improve retention strategies. The construction of a counterfactual program will assist in

implementing programs effectively reduce first-year, first-generation college student dropout rates (Amiri, 2020).

The challenges that typically impact students who are in their first year of college and are also the first in their family to attend college will be analyzed and contrasted. (Brookover et al., 2021). The project evaluation will include surveys, impact rating tools, monitoring, evaluation, data collection, and activity timelines. The overall goal of the project based on the evaluation model is to ensure that it provides the information that can be produced by positive, negative, unintended, or direct interventions.

This type of evaluation assists the college to develop strategies to reduce the school dropout rate for first-year, first-generation college students (Blanco, 2018). The stakeholders who will be involved in the evaluation include academic advisors, staff, faculty, and relevant authorities within the college. This collaborative evaluation with the stakeholders will serve as a tool to better assist first-year, first-generation college students to graduate.

Project Implications

Local Community

Increasing community college graduation rates should increase the number of skilled members in the workforce. As a result, the local economy would benefit. Furthermore, the incidences of crime might reduce with employment growth, but only if dropout prevention plans are developed with added support (Yang, 2022). While the advantages of obtaining a college degree are frequently highlighted by society for individual graduates, it is essential to recognize that the positive impact extends beyond

personal benefits. In addition to benefiting themselves, public university graduates contribute significantly to society through their active involvement in volunteer work, displaying exemplary leadership qualities, and making valuable philanthropic contributions. As a result, these graduates play a vital role in enhancing the overall civic and economic well-being of their respective communities.

This project is important to FWCC because of the high dropout rate of first-year, first-generation college students in the first year of college. The goal is to implement solutions that reduce the first-year dropout rate of community college students. If operational dropout prevention strategies reduce the dropout rate, increased graduation rates would be expected for first-year, first-generation college students. Hopefully, solutions found in this study will also apply to community colleges throughout Florida.

Far-Reaching

Reducing dropout rates will furnish more students with work skills and will qualify them for better paying jobs and more career opportunities. More skilled workers also will benefit communities and business. This project study benefits may extend to community colleges, universities, and communities across the United States.

Conclusion

This study aims to better understand the causes of the increasing dropout rate of first-year, first-generation college students, and identify solutions to reduce the dropout rate. One solution may be strengthening connections between staff, faculty, and first-year, first-generation college students. Similarly, close parental involvement should improve student academic success (Capik & Shupp, 2021). Government initiatives can

make academic loans, bursaries, and scholarships more available to assist students in paying for their schooling.

Evaluation of first-year, first-generation college students' comprehension of academic standards and expectations may also aid in better preparing them for success (Keefe et al., 2022). By enhancing students' knowledge that continuing in college is a route to greater earnings and more job prospects, more academic assistance and encouragement may help boost retention. A motivation to lower the risk of dropping out might be academic accomplishment (Wilbur, 2021). First-year, first-generation college students are more likely to drop out of school when academic counselors, instructors, staff, parents, and governmental organizations are involved.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This section provides a summary and analysis of the study's results, strengths, and weaknesses. The suggestions for future research explore the implications and potential applications in benefiting colleges, communities, and industry. Additionally, I reflect on how the project contributed to my academic, scholarly, and work development. Finally, I discuss the project's potential impact and offer a concluding statement with a key message.

Interpretation of the Findings

The aim of this project was to determine why first-year, first-generation college students have a high rate of dropping out and to suggest ways to improve student retention at FWCC. The project involved researching current literature to understand the challenges that make it more likely for first-generation students to drop out. Additionally, interviews were conducted with eight students and nine college employees to identify the obstacles that students face. Finally, potential strategies were discussed to enhance student success.

The data analysis and study findings indicated that first-year, first-generation students at FWCC face a myriad of challenges that contribute to the high dropout rate. The most cited challenges included lack of guidance and preparedness to adapt to college life, lack of support from faculty and fellow students as students felt alone, and financial barriers. These challenges reflect the need for educational institutions to implement strategies that support such student groups, connect them with schoolwide resources, and

foster personal characteristics that enhance motivation and success. Notably, students are also unaware of resources available or offered by the school and often remain silent when faced with challenges.

Considering such evidence, I propose a 3-day workshop for professional development tailored to academic advisors, staff, and faculty at FWCC. The workshop aims to help college staff identify and implement the best strategies for improving student success for first-year, first-generation college students. The goal of this professional development project is to assist faculty and administrators at FWCC in understanding the reasons behind high dropout rates among first-year, first-generation students and to investigate strategies that can enhance retention. The goal of the project was to address the study's findings and to propose designs for academic advisors, staff, and faculty to reduce dropout rates of first-year, first-generation college students. Professional development activities can promote student development and educational achievement. The activities can also assist academic advisors, staff, and faculty in strengthening their professional skills, knowledge, and behaviors to assist students.

Project Strengths and Limitations

This study emphasized the need for educational institutions to devise strategies tailored to improving first-generation student retention based on an analysis of this student population's critical issues and barriers. Using a qualitative approach, the study was conducted to develop insights specific to FWCC students, but applicable to similar institutions elsewhere. The challenges unveiled by this research represent a starting point

for educational stakeholders to implement retention strategies that counter similar challenges.

One strength of this project is the review of the literature, which includes research into strategies designed to reduce student dropout rates. These studies consider the leading causes of retention challenges. Another contribution of this study was interviewing actual students and faculty members about their perceptions of the causes of student attrition and viable solutions. The qualitative approach enabled me to include personal feedback, not just numerical data from reports. The findings of this study help to reduce the retention literature gap and to build on various student retention strategies.

This project aims to support first-generation students by implementing early intervention and fostering collaboration between schools and communities. Faculty members can receive professional training to better understand and address the challenges faced by students. The project also emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in guiding and supporting students.

Another strength of the initiative is its low cost. The proposed 3-day workshop is low cost by minimizing lost work productivity. Typically, cost-effective projects are more likely to be adopted. The study takes advantage of the existing school resources, such as faculty members who can be tapped to enhance student retention. The professional training project also enables school leaders to recognize underutilized resources they could effectively implement in fostering retention and strengthening school connections. Because of the nature of qualitative research, replicating this study in other communities around the nation would be inexpensive and quick due to small

sample size and the need to address validity. Researchers would need to carefully analyze the underlying issues specific to their learner population and local community.

The current study has four limitations. The first is the qualitative design that provides deeper insights into student experiences, barriers, and strategies to reduce dropout rates. Qualitative studies have limitations due to the small sample size that does not represent the study population at FWCC. Despite research illustrating that racial minority students, Hispanics, and African Americans are at higher risks of dropping out, the selected student sample does not adequately represent the population.

The second study limitation is the focus on FWCC, which limits the generalizability of study findings to other institutions. Studies beyond FWCC may have different outcomes. Lastly, interaction with students increased my potential to influence how participants respond to questions due to interviewer and social desirability bias, which could affect the interview results. In this study, triangulation and data validation were used to remove discrepant cases to minimize such biases.

Third, the 3-day workshop timeline increases risk because of the time involved. The timeline could limit opportunities for faculty to attend. The short timeline also limits the ability to deliver the necessary training, and the problem would be compounded if participants were unable to attend all three sessions. One way to improve attendance would be to communicate to advisors, staff, and faculty regarding the significance of the training. Advanced notice of the training dates, advertising of the training benefits, and providing incentives such as professional development credits could increase attendance.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The current study incorporated a qualitative design with in-depth interviews of eight students and nine faculty and staff members from FWCC. The insights gained from the study can be helpful for educational leaders wishing to further tailor programs to the student population. However, qualitative research and a small sample size limit the generalizability and transferability of the study findings.

An alternative mixed-method qualitative and quantitative design could be beneficial. Combining the two research techniques reduces weaknesses associated with a single research design but is more expensive. That approach would be a logical follow-up to gain more information and further improve programs.

The current study incorporated a 3-day professional training workshop for FWCC faculty and staff. The workshop consists of face-to-face training to enable faculty members to identify the best strategies for enhancing retention for first-year, first-generation students at FWCC. An alternative approach would add online training opportunities that would provide additional flexibility and the opportunity for continuous learning and evaluation. Online training modules would also reduce training costs and employee productivity loss. However, any online methodology should include synchronous group sessions to develop social skills and include opportunities to brainstorm collectively. Online modules would also require more resources in preparation and delivery. A cost/benefit analysis would assist planners in designing the best training mix.

Alternative learning modules could also be tailored for students. Such modules include pre-onset outreach programs that include welcoming and supportive messages to learners, support video initiatives in which first-year students connect with their fellow students. Participants could share their challenges and how they overcame them and provide motivation to each other through videos, online classes, and social media like Meta. Such a college-wide support system could promote college visibility of the learner system to students.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

The doctoral process is challenging yet rewarding in equal measure. While the program has equipped me with unequivocal knowledge and a chance to make a real difference in education and other societal aspects, the process has been equally challenging. When applying for the doctoral program, I had to confront my apprehensions about how the program would change my usual tasks and add to my workload. Working and studying is burdensome as individuals must strive to balance the two. I have learned how to make and stick to plans while allowing time to relax and enjoy life. I learned how to make the program conducive to my lifestyle without burning out. Therefore, the doctoral program has equipped me with time management and other vital life skills that will forever be helpful in my professional and academic life.

The research process was challenging, and I cannot express my gratitude for being so close to the finish line. Every research begins with an idea or question to be answered. These ideas stem from life experiences or observed challenges in the community of interest to a researcher. Reviewing statistics on the dropout rates of first-

generation students is worrying, especially for first-generation students. As a first-generation student on my father's side who graduated with a college degree, I often wonder how I made it. Therefore, I dedicate my research to helping those facing similar challenges find the courage to complete their studies.

The research and development of the project have also imparted to me the desire for lifelong learning. I learned the importance of critically analyzing societal issues and devising research-based strategies to tackle them. The data collection process also exposed me to the extent of ethics in research when dealing with human subjects and the necessity to avoid researcher bias. As a first-generation student, my family experience helps me better relate to the life experiences of the students in this study. On the other hand, I was aware to be careful not to let my first-generation background bias my representation of the issue. I was careful to remember throughout the study of the need not letting my opinions slip into my analysis. Researchers must accurately report study findings, even when researching topics of personal significance that could conflict with their individual opinions. Lessons learned during this project would also apply to my professional life as an educator and thus influence my philosophy when dealing with students facing similar challenges.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The research topic is of personal and professional significance in my job because dropout rates among first-generation learners are a challenge for my community college, as well as for other similar educational institutions. Failure to complete studies affects community development and minimizes the positive impact of community colleges on

the communities they serve. The dropout rate makes it difficult for the local industry to find skilled workers.

Although educational institutions recognize the need to provide support services for first-generation learners, such programs face a myriad of challenges, such as the inability to identify specific causes of the problem. These programs may reach their potential if students are unaware of their existence or fail to use them.

By providing faculty and staff with the skills to improve student retention, more students would qualify for good paying jobs. As community colleges struggle to do more with less financial support, better graduation rates would encourage more support from alumni, the public, businesses, and local government. Colleges that assist students to graduate from community and business connectedness, which garners more college support and opportunities for first-generation learners. Other challenges include minimal parental and faculty involvement. Many parents have busy schedules, and heavy workloads that limit their involvement with their children's college education. Increasing graduation rates benefit students, families, and the community.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This qualitative research delves into the various obstacles that first-year, first-generation students encounter, which can potentially lead to them dropping out of college. By conducting in-depth interviews with eight students and nine faculty members, the study reveals that these learners not only face financial, social, and academic hurdles but also personal challenges that further hinder their ability to succeed. These personal challenges include managing work schedules, parenting responsibilities, taking care of

family members, contributing to bill payments, and fulfilling other household obligations. As a result of their parents' lack of education and involvement, these students often feel isolated, confused, and ill-equipped to handle the academic demands and expectations of higher education. Recognizing these challenges serves as a crucial starting point for administrators and educational institutions to design programs that cater specifically to this student population and evaluate their existing initiatives to ensure they adequately support these students.

The study aims to have a positive impact on students, schools, and the community by lowering the number of students who drop out of school. Today, obtaining a college degree opens opportunities for higher-paying jobs for students. This, in turn, sets a positive example for parents who can secure good jobs, instilling in their children the importance of higher education and motivating them to complete their own degrees. The implementation of effective strategies to prevent dropouts and increase graduation rates, particularly for first-year, first-generation college students, would not only benefit the community by stimulating economic growth and creating a more skilled workforce, but it would also contribute to a decrease in crime rates as the productive population increases. Additionally, higher graduation rates would have a positive impact on property values, as the quality of education in a neighborhood has an influence on its desirability. The resulting increase in economic activity would enhance the overall well-being of the community and improve access to various resources. Lastly, a decrease in dropout rates would lead to a rise in revenue for FWCC, as the college heavily relies on student tuition fees. This would make FWCC more appealing and attractive to potential learners, leading

to an increase in enrollment rates. The success of this endeavor would have a ripple effect on students, as schools would have more resources at their disposal and the community would benefit from these positive outcomes.

The recommendations made by this study could have a positive impact on student retention rates. It is important for educational institutions to actively seek feedback from students to identify specific challenges that may contribute to dropouts. With access to student contact information, schools have a valuable opportunity to reach out to those who have left and inquire about their reasons for doing so. This information can then be used to develop effective strategies and provide staff members with the necessary training to implement them. Collaborative brainstorming sessions can be particularly helpful in gaining staff buy-in and improving the effectiveness of these strategies. To address student retention issues, it is recommended that educational institutions provide regular workshops for staff members that are tailored to the challenges faced by students, including dropout, at the beginning of each academic semester.

Directions for Future Studies

The context and scope of the current study confine the researcher to a single educational institution and offer additional avenues for future inquiry. Literature addresses various challenges that contribute to student dropout rates, including financial challenges, social adjustment challenges, excessive focus on work, fear of academic failure, and inadequate preparation for college life. However, such causes are not agreed upon and might vary depending on student demographics. The myriad challenges also suggest that there is no one solution to solve the challenges. Therefore, the following

studies might yield more insights into first-generation dropout rates and mitigation strategies.

1. Further study is recommended on the effectiveness of high school initiatives such as college preparedness programs.
2. Future study is recommended on fostering parental involvement in education. These studies must address parental involvement barriers such as illiteracy, language, and multiple shift work schedules.
3. Future studies must also address other mitigation strategies, such as campaigns that increase support for first-generation learners. Such a program is the “I Am First Gen” Campaign at Arizona Western University. Research must thus illustrate that such programs effectively lower dropout rates.
4. It is recommended that future studies include a large and racially diverse sample that is representative of all student populations. Issues facing first-generation students often differ by race, gender, ethnicity, and even religion, thus requiring a representative sample.
5. Future studies exploring challenges faced by first-generation that lead to a higher dropout risk must also focus on students who have previously dropped out. These students would offer more substantial insights on the specific reasons for their dropout as opposed to currently enrolled students.

Conclusion

The higher college dropout rates among first-generation students are a serious social issue that perpetuates social inequality. Education is crucial for economic freedom, better health outcomes, and community development, and therefore, educational institutions must work towards enhancing equity and inclusion by creating tailored programs for at-risk student populations. The research findings suggest that early implementation of retention strategies can strengthen connections between students, schools, and communities. Practical student retention strategies include reducing dropout rates, promoting student personal and academic well-being, working with companies to provide more job opportunities, increasing parental involvement, and offering financial assistance. Community colleges are in a better position to address issues like mental health, poverty, housing, and other factors that affect student achievement. Therefore, colleges must recognize the importance of helping first-generation students succeed in academics as part of addressing the challenges facing the American educational system.

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Appendix A: The Project

Title: Strategies for Reducing Drop-Out Rates of First-Generation Students

Purpose: The purpose of the project is to provide all staff, faculty, advisers, and administrators with professional development to decrease retention and drop-out rates of first-year first-generation college students.

Goals: The goals are to (a) engage in strategies that support student success for first-year, first generation college students; (b) reflect upon practices, perceptions, and challenges encountered when attempting to decrease first-year, first generation dropout rates; (c) discuss academic advisors, staff, and faculty and challenges and barriers for when assisting first-year, first generation college students; and, (d) create solutions to support first-year first-generation college students.

Desired Outcomes: To provide staff, faculty, advisers, and administrators with additional services to further support first-year first-generation college students with strategies to decrease the dropout rates plus increase retention and graduation rate.

Target Audience: The target audience is staff, faculty, advisers, and administrators who assist with first-year first-generation college students.

Timeline: A 3-day professional development workshop will be conducted.

Training Activities and Presentations: Activities will include practical applications, critical thinking exercises, group discussion, written analysis, and review. Best practices for reducing first-generation student dropout rates will be included. The daily agenda and accompanying presentations are included.

Professional Development Agenda

Day 1

Time	Activity	Presenter
9 - 9:05 am.	Welcome	College President
9: 05 – 9: 20 am.	Ice Breaker 1/Group Discussion/Reflections	Participants
9:20 – 9:30 am	So close, but so far: Why we Are here? (Local problem) Conceptual Framework	Tanya Bostic
9:30 - 10 am	Exercise: Icebreaker 2: Student Challenges	Tanya Bostic
10 -10:15 am	Small group resolutions: Hold the thought	Group Leaders
10.45 - 11 am	Break	
11 a.m. - 11:30 am	Learning Plan: Key Components	Career and Advising Operations Director
11:30 – 12:15 pm	Extra! Extra! Literature Review: First-Year First-Generation Education	Participants
12:15 - 1:15 pm	Lunch	
1:15 – 2:30 pm	Group Discussion: Reflections on the Literature/How to assist First-Year First-Generation College Students	Group Leaders
2:30 – 2:45 p.m.	Break	
2:45 – 3:10 p.m.	Hold the thought: Resolutions revealed	Group Leaders
3:10 – 3:30 p.m.	Questions and Answers Evaluation/Closing	

Materials needed: 1 projector, 1 laptop, 1 projector screen, markers, large Post-It Pads

Day 2 Agenda

Time	Activity	Facilitator
9 - 9:10 a.m.	Day 1 Reflections	Tanya Bostic
9:10 – 9:45 a.m.	Overview	Tanya Bostic
9:45 -10:15 a.m.	Resources for You Define: Small Group Activity	Group Leaders
10.15 – 10:30 a.m.	Break	
10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	7 Key Components to the Success for First-Year First- Generation	Tanya Bostic
11:30 – 12:30 p.m.	Lunch	
12:30 – 2:00 p.m.	First-year First-generation Analysis: Beginning to End	Group Leaders
2:00 – 2:15 p.m.	Break	
2:15 – 2:45 p.m.	Participants Connect: Breakout sessions	Group Leaders
2:45 – 3:10 p.m.	Action strategies/recommendations	Group Leaders
3:10 – 3:20 p.m.	Question and answer session	Tanya Bostic
3:20 – 3:30 p.m.	Evaluation	Tanya Bostic
	Closing	

Materials needed: 1 projector, 18 laptops, 1 projector screen, markers, 1 large Post It Pads, 17 medium length legal pads, pens.

Day 3 Agenda

Time	Activity	Facilitator
9 - 9:10 a.m.	Day 2 Reflections	Tanya Bostic
9:10 – 9:45 a.m.	Snapshot: First-year First-generation College Students	VP Academic Affairs
9:45 -10:15 a.m.	Student Presence: Small Group Activity	Tanya Bostic
10.15 – 10:30 a.m.	Break	
10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Advising/support tools	Dean of Student Development
	Academic report on first-year first-generation college students learning.	Vice President of Academic Affairs
11:30 – 12:30 p.m.	Lunch	
12:30 – 2:00 p.m.	Role Play: Student assessment, collaboration, and presence	VP of Academic Innovation and Strategy
2:00 – 2:15 p.m.	Break	
2:15 – 2:45 p.m.	Best Practices: First-year First-generation Video	Participants
	Best Practices Small Group Activity	Group Leaders
2:45 – 3:10 p.m.	Checklist Review	VP of Academic Innovation and Strategy
3:10 – 3:20 p.m.	Question and answer session	Tanya Bostic
3:20 – 3:30 p.m.	Evaluation	Tanya Bostic
	Closing	

Materials needed: 1 projector, 18 laptops, 1 projector screen, markers, 1 large Post It chart pad, pens, index cards.

Training Activities and Presentations

Day 1

Ice Breaker: The training will begin with a greeting and thanks for attending to all participants by the college president. The purpose and objectives of the professional development workshop will be reviewed. I shall explain to participants that they will be involved in all aspects of the training and presenting information from group activities. Participants will be in groups at various tables and will have 15 minutes to complete the first icebreaker activity. Participants will introduce themselves to a person at another table, sharing the amount of time they have taught online, and compare their online teaching experiences with either an iceberg or volcano, stating how these characteristics align with online teaching. After completing this activity, participants will introduce the person they spoke with and share the answer to the icebreaker question. I shall write key words from the answers on the large Post It chart. Participants would reflect upon the key words from the icebreaker discussion, and how they align with online teaching.

So close, but so far: After sharing the purpose of the workshop and goals for the day, I shall share information related to the local problem and the study by engaging participants in questions or statements that led to the local problem. The conceptual framework will also be presented and discussed with the participants.

Icebreaker 2: Student challenges: Academic Advisors, faculty, staff, and administrators will be asked to list three to five challenges that students encounter when assisting first-year first-generation college students. Academic Advisors, faculty, staff, and administrators will then rank the list from the least to the most important challenges they

perceive that students face. These challenges will be further discussed in a role play format. Following the role play, participants will return to their table to list what perceptions they now have concerning student challenges.

Hold the thought: Academic Advisors, faculty, staff, and administrators will be divided into small groups to share and compare the rankings of challenges students face and create a resolution to each challenge. Groups will be asked to map the challenges and the solutions on flip chart paper that I shall collect. Group leaders will present these challenges and solutions later during the day of the training.

First-Year First-Generation Plan: key components: The Advising and Career Operation administrator will give an overview of the college's learning plan, and the key components. A copy of the plan will be provided to each participant. Participants will be asked to recreate, or modify the plan based on their experiences. A large group discussion will be held, comparing the two plans, and how they could be merged with suggestions from advising managers.

Literature Review: First-Year First-Generation education: Prior to the lunch break, participants will be given literature to review pertaining to different facets of first-year first-generation college students education including student perceptions of classroom learning, student retention, student engagement, and success within the college.

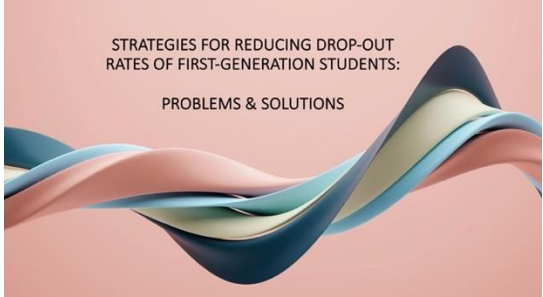



Group Discussion: Reflections on literature: Following lunch, the small groups will reconvene to reflect upon the literature they reviewed. Each category of literature will be discussed with its relation to first-year first-generation college students at the college, and

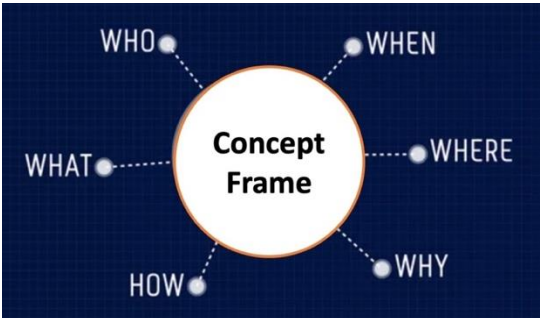


participants will reflect on the introduction statement of why helping this population is of immense importance. Group leaders will share their findings with the entire group.

Resolutions revealed: Participants will return into the smaller groups from earlier in the training day and reveal resolutions to student challenges. Questions and answers pertaining to training for the day and the day one evaluation will be completed.

Participants will be given a journal article related to online students to read in preparation for day two training.

PowerPoint Slides Day 1

<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 1</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING DROP-OUT RATES OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS: PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS</p>	<p>Each table will have color markers, and a Paper flip pad. These items will be used for activities throughout the day.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 2</p> <p>DAY 1 OBJECTIVES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Local problem ❖ 1st-generation student research findings ❖ Conceptual framework ❖ Challenges and barriers ❖ Participant discussion: Possible solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local problem, research findings of 1st-gen students • Icebreaker to introduce challenges and barriers of 1st-year, 1st-gen students, and staff. • Discuss 3-5 challenges and barriers of 1st gen students. • Round table discussion of viable solutions and discuss why they could work
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 3</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">TEACHING FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS</p>	<p>Presenter will discuss 1st gen student characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student from a family in which neither parent attended college. • 1 out of 6 college students in the United States
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 4</p> <p>CHALLENGES & BARRIERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of challenges and barriers • Academic challenges • High drop-out rate • Participant experiences with 1st-year 1st gen college students • Possible staff strategies to overcome barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe challenges 1st-year, 1st-gen college students face. • Discuss staff perceptions of reasons for high student drop-out rates. • Review staff experience working with these students. • Collaborate on strategies staff feel could help overcome barriers

<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 5</p> 	<p>The presenter introduces the conceptual framework in the study of 1st-year, 1st-gen college students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dropout statistics • Tinto's Student Integrational Model
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 6 Student Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think? • Group Discussion 	<p>The presenter introduces the conceptual framework in the study of 1st-year, 1st-gen college students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dropout statistics
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 9 Reflection on the Literature</p> 	<p>The presenter introduces the conceptual framework in the study of 1st-year, 1st-gen college students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dropout statistics
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 10</p>	<p>The presenter introduces the conceptual framework in the study of 1st-year, 1st-gen college students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dropout statistics

Day 1 Resolutions

Slide 11

QUESTIONS

- ❖ Evaluations
- ❖ Thoughts
- ❖ Prep for tomorrow



The presenter introduces the conceptual framework in the study of 1st-year, 1st-gen college students:

- Dropout statistics

Day 2

Importance of Relationship Building: The presenter will ask academic advisors, staff, faculty, and administrators to set teams in a group of five by table to begin an assigned chart paper and go to each number of questions to discuss and write answers about their campus on each chart paper to answer the following questions:

- 1) What do you believe is the current attrition rate for graduate students and why?
- 2) What do you believe is beginning students' greatest challenge at being effective at graduate school?
- 3) What kinds of support do you provide at your campus to support students? To what extent are these supports effective?
- 4) How often do you conduct formal meetings with students?
- 5) What are you doing personally to help your students to be successful academically?

The presenter will ask a representative from each group to read the answers charted about each question.

Why Can't We Get Along: The researcher will engage the academic advisors, staff, faculty, and administrators in a discussion as to why relationships are not improving between academic advisors, staff, faculty, administrators, and students overall. Based on the findings, students stated the advisors did not know who they were and that the advisors did not take the initiative to learn who they were when arranging meetings with the students. Students would also like to build more effective relationships with academic advisors, staff, faculty, and administrators, meaning they would like to have a more personal relationship where they can talk about their concerns, issues, and interests.

Starting the Conversation: The presenter explains that participants will get with a partner and practice how to start a conversation with first-year first-generation college students.

The participants will practice starting the conversation to facilitate students' transition.

These are a few conversation starters:

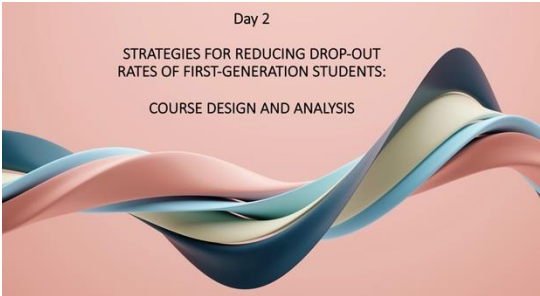
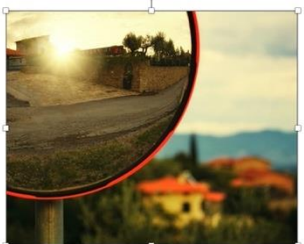


1. I noticed that...
2. I wonder if we could take about...
3. Would it be okay if we talked about...?
4. What concerns do you have about...?
5. I hope you don't mind my asking, but is there something you would like to talk about? I have noticed some changes in your performance/behavior/appearance lately.
6. "I have noticed that you have missed the last _____ classes, which is unusual for you. If there is something going on that you would like to talk about, I am here."





The purpose of this activity is to allow participants to learn how to have-courageous conversations with their students so students will understand that the academic advisor, staff, faculty, and administrators has their interest in mind. This activity shows how academic advisors, staff, faculty, and administrators can be supportive and trusted.

Establishing Rapport: The participants will practice establishing rapport with their students. This process will help set the foundation for the new culture of academic, staff, faculty, and advising and subsequent learning experiences to take place. Each participant will get with a partner and engage in the discussion by role playing and ask questions about the student's background, sharing about their academic career, or facilitating an

activity such as an academic journey timeline. The realization that a friendly smile and meeting in a less formal setting will help. Taking some time to get to know your students before diving directly into academic matters shows that you care. When students sense that you care, they care more about the advising experience. This process will lead us into the second half of our day where we will talk about what relationship building activities and supports academic advisors, staff, faculty, and administrators can provide to help all first-year first-generation college students on their campus.

PowerPoint Slides Day 2

<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Day 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING DROP-OUT RATES OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS: COURSE DESIGN AND ANALYSIS</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic advisors will be asked to discuss what they think relationship building consists of and why it is important.
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REFLECTIONS FROM DAY 1</p> <p>❖ LITERATURE REVIEW</p> 	<p>Participants will watch a 3-minute video clip on how positive relationship building with students improves student satisfaction and assists students with completing school promptly. Participants will then take 5 minutes to reflect on what they notice with their group.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 3</p> <p>OVERVIEW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum Instructional Design Staff and Advisors Strategies Questions & Evaluations 	<p>Presenter will discuss student/teacher relationship building activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newsletters are a tool, but not a substitute for knowing students. A friendly word can make a student's day. Common interests help develop close connections with other people. Ask students about themselves and take the time to listen attentively.
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN ACTIVITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose Teams Activity Product Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presenter will discuss the following way to build relationships with students: You do not have to agree with them all the time to form a relationship with them. No one likes judgment. Students want to become part of something bigger than themselves.

<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 5</p> <p style="text-align: center;">INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN ASSESSMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose • Teams • Activity • Product • Discussion 	<p>The presenter will ask the academic advisors these questions and give them five minutes to share with the group.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CONNECTION BREAKOUT SESSIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection • Compassion • Empathy • Assessment • Closing 	<p>The presenter will open the floor for questions and concerns.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 7</p> 	<p>Discuss strategies</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 8</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Questioning</p> 	<p>Facilitate discussion session</p>

Day 3

Reflection: After the morning greeting, ice breaker, and welcoming the participants, we shall then discuss the Day Two Activities.

The How's and Why's of Alignment: *Participants will watch a video clip on* teaching styles aligned with learning styles. Academic advisors, staff, and faculty will focus on how to align students' learning style with teaching styles and how this could tie into student satisfaction. Participants will discuss what they noticed about the various learning and teaching styles and how this alignment supports student satisfaction.

Academic report: The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Student Development will facilitate this section of the workshop. The Vice President will present the importance of helping first-year first-generation college students, and future for how can better assist this population at the community college.

First-year First-Generation College Students Advising/Support/Tools: The Dean of Student Development will open by having participants to do a 20-minute quick write by creating five sentences on how they will advise and assist first-year first-generation college students concerning being successful inside and outside the classroom.

Participants will then turn to the person next to them to discuss the quick write and the relevance of what they feel first-year first-generation college students should know about the college and resources prior to registering for their semester course. Based on those findings, in six large groups, participants can create a six-item advising checklist that would include information for first-year first-generation college students should know at the start of the beginning of community college. Following these activities, the Dean will

engage participants in a fun video related to assisting first-year first-generation college students and college support offered at the community college. Each group will discuss and share two important points from the video and share amongst the other groups. This will help familiarize participants with understanding and support offered to our first-year first generation college students. The Dean would end the segment reviewing advising and support tools the college offers for first-year first-generation college students.

Role play: The Vice President of Academic Innovation and Strategy that supervises academic deans and faculty who oversees our academics and strategies will facilitate this segment of the workshop. Participants will volunteer for role play scenarios when dealing with first-year first-generation college students based on the findings of this study that would include delay, user-friendliness, and newness within inside and outside the classroom environment. We will discuss each situation and talk about best practices on how to resolve each scenario. As the dialogue extends related to best practice, we would discuss the college review plan that is currently being used when assisting first-year first-generation college students. Participants will be asked to review the strategies based on their professional development experience and recommend two to three modifications. We will discuss the modifications to the planning as it relates to evaluation.




Best Practices: Next, a 15-minute video on best practices when assisting first-year first-generation college students from the state community college system office will view by all participants, which would lead to an open conversation on best practices for first-year first-generation college students. We would also reflect on how first-year first-generation college students express their concerns when starting community college that we noted

earlier in the training. To introduce this exercise, participants will share their first experience when working with first-year first-generation college students whether in the classroom or outside the classroom in comparison with current practice, noting the similarities and differences to share amongst the group. Using an activity, participants will name the pieces of the puzzle. I would have various phases of headlines connected to first-year first-generation college students for each table in small groups to describe how their piece of the puzzle applies to best practices.

Vice President Checklist: The Vice President of Academic Innovation and Strategy would provide participants with a copy of the college's overview of resources and strategies for first-year first-generation college students checklist and allow 10 minutes for participants to quickly review the document. Following the assessment, each table will review a category of the checklist for small group discussion. We will continue as a large group to review each group's findings. Following this exercise, participants will complete the question-and-answer session and day three evaluation.

Should Learning Styles be taken into Consideration? *According to 90% of the students and 80% of the professors, the advisors did not take the time to match the students' learning style to courses, course sections, or professors. Professors and academic advisors will actively engage in the debate on the possible benefits and nuisances of assigning students to professors based on learning styles.*

Teaching Styles and Course Outcomes Presentation

<p>Slide 1 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS & IMPROVING RETENTION RATES</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic advisors will be asked to discuss what they think relationship building consists of and why it is important
<p>Slide 2 OUR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS ARE.....</p> 	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By so doing, they encourage and inspire students to always do their best throughout the semester.
<p>Slide 3 IMPROVING RETENTION</p> 	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes learning through listening and following directions. Teachers impart information via lectures, readings, presentations, demonstrations, role playing, etc.... Students learn by listening, taking notes, role playing, and practice. Ask students about themselves and take the time to listen attentively. Students won't trust you unless you are willing to trust them. Tell them what you genuinely care about and what you think.
<p>Slide 4</p>	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes learning through interaction. The teacher encourages critical thinking and lively discussion by asking students to respond to challenging questions. The teacher is a facilitator guiding the discussion to a logical conclusion.

ACADEMIC INNOVATION STRATEGIES



- Students learn to have opinions and back them up with facts.

Slide 5

IT BEGINS WITH US



The presenter will discuss the following:

- Promotes learning through empowerment.
- With this style, the teacher assigns tasks that students work on independently, either individually or in groups.

Slide 6





ADVISING/RESOURCES/TOOLS

- ❖ ADVISING
- ❖ COLLEGE RESOURCES
- ❖ SUPPORT SERVICES
- ❖ LIBRARY
- ❖ TUTORING
- ❖ COLLEGE COMMUNITY



The presenter will discuss the following:

- When students' learning preferences match their instructor's teaching styles, student motivation and achievement usually improve.
- Each of us has a specific learning style (sometimes called a "preference"), and we learn best when information is presented to us in this style.

<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ROLE PLAY: DISCUSSION</p> 	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher candidates will understand and apply mathematical problem-solving processes and construct rigorous mathematical arguments. • They will understand how mathematics is best learned and taught, supporting positive attitudes towards the subject.
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 8</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Education</p> 	<p>The academic advisors and professors will discuss how they can work together to maximize the outcomes and improve student satisfaction.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">EDUCATOR'S KEY GOALS</p> 	<p>The presenter will open the floor for questions and concerns.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">QUESTIONS?</p> 	

Possible Potential for Alignment: Academic advisors and professors discuss advisor and professor meetings, course offerings, and aligning students with professors' teaching style, meaning students being matched to certain professors. Participants will also discuss the consideration that aligning learning and teaching styles could help improve student satisfaction.

What Would You Do? Participants will work in pairs with advising scenarios dealing with aligning student learning styles with the various professor teaching styles. One participant will act as the student, and the other will act as the academic advisor. Based on the scenario, the advisor must determine the student's learning style and which professors would best fit the student's learning style.

Evaluation Form (Day 1 & 2)						
Training Workshop: Strategies for Reducing Drop-Out Rates of First-Generation Students						
SECTION I: COURSE EVALUATION						
	NA	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Cannot Decide	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Course content supports learning objectives.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
2. Course length was sufficient for syllabus.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
3. Course design promoted participation.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
4. Course provided practice and reinforcement.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
5. I understand learning objectives.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION II: TRAINING TOOLS						
6. Learning aids assisted my learning.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
7. Equipment worked.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION III: INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION						
8. Instructor was prepared	NA	1	2	3	4	5
9. Instructor knew content.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
10. Instructor was responsive	NA	1	2	3	4	5
11. Instructor was interesting.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
12. The instructor communicated well.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
13. Instructor encouraged participatory and interactive learning.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION IV: TRAINING BENEFIT						
14. I needed this training	NA	1	2	3	4	5
15. Training improved my job knowledge/skills.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
16. Exercises were good simulations of job tasks	NA	1	2	3	4	5
17. Multiple learning styles were used	NA	1	2	3	4	5

Evaluation Form (Day 3)						
Training Workshop: Strategies for Reducing Drop-Out Rates of First-Generation Students						
SECTION I: COURSE EVALUATION						
	Not Applicable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Can Not Decide	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Course content supported learning objectives.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
2. Course length was sufficient.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
3. Course design-materials and learning activities-encouraged my participation.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
4. Course provided opportunities to practice and reinforce what was taught.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
5. Course information was at an appropriate level to understand the learning objectives.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION II: TRAINING TOOLS						
6. Learning aids-workbooks, hand-outs, role-playing-assisted my learning.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
7. Technology equipment worked properly.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION III: INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION						
8. Instructor was prepared for class.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
9. Instructor was knowledgeable about course content.	NA	1	2	3	4	5

10. Instructor responded to questions.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
11. Instructor presentation was interesting.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
12. The instructor communicated well.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
13. The instructor encouraged a participatory and interactive learning environment.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION IV: TRAINING BENEFIT						
14. I needed training on this topic.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
15. The training was relevant to improving the knowledge/skills I need to accomplish my job.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
16. I believe the practical exercises were good simulations of tasks that I perform on my job.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
17. Training style supported my learning style (i.e., lecture, visual aids, and/or interaction).	NA	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION V: TRAINING OVERALL						
18. Overall, I am satisfied with training course.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
19. Overall, I am satisfied with instructor(s).	NA	1	2	3	4	5
20. Overall, I am satisfied with training.	NA	1	2	3	4	5
21. Additional Comments:						

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation from Florida Washington Community College

Community Research Partner Name _____
 Contact Information _____
 Date _____
 Researcher Name _____

Dear _____,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that your research proposal, “Strategies for Reducing Drop Out Rates of First-Generation Students” has been determined as exempt by the Florida Washington Community College IRB. This decision is based on the IRB’s assessment that the project has academic value and adheres to accepted research methods and human subject protections as set forth by the National Institute of Health (NIH).

Your responsibilities give the exempt status include the following: 1. Follow the protocol as proposed. If you need to make changes, please submit a new application noting any changes before you make them. 2. Use the consent form approved with your application. Please make sure that all participants receive a copy of the consent form. Regardless of consent form use, be sure that participants understand their participation in the research is voluntary. 3. If there are any injuries, problems, or complaints from participants, you must notify the IRB at irb@floridawashingtoncollege.state.edu within 24 hours. 4. Close your file with IRB when your research has concluded. Please reach out to us if you need additional assistance. Best wishes as you conduct your research.

Sincerely,

Executive Director, Planning, Research, and Effectiveness

IRB Co-Chair

Appendix C: Initial Email Invitation Participant Letters (Students)

Greetings,

I am contacting you as a Florida Washington Community College (FWCC) student who is the first in your family to attend college. This email is an invitation for you to participate in a research study to discuss your college experience(s).

The title of this research study is “Strategies for Reducing Drop-Out Rates of First-Generation Students.” I am requesting approximately 30 minutes of your time to conduct a one-on-one interview using Zoom or Skype.

There is no cost to participate in this research study. Additionally, there is a small monetary gift for your participation. If you are interested, please contact me via the information below. This will be a first come first serve opportunity research study. I look forward to your participation!

Sincerely,

Tanya Bostic

Principal Investigator

Tel. (561) 252-5602

Email: tanya.bostic@waldenu.edu

Appendix D: Initial Email Invitation Participant Letters (Faculty)

Greetings,

I am contacting you as a Florida Washington Community College (FWCC) faculty with 2 years of experience working with first-year first-generation college students within your classroom. This email is an invitation for you to participate in a research study to discuss your experience (s) with these students.

The title of this research study is “Strategies for Reducing Drop-Out Rates of First-Generation Students.” I am requesting approximately 30 minutes of your time to conduct a one-on-one interview using Zoom or Skype.

If you accept this invitation, your participation will help to improve the journey of other first-year first-generation college students as they navigate the college experience. There is no cost to participate in this research study. Additionally, there is a small monetary gift for your participation. If you are interested, please contact me via the information below.

This will be a first come first serve opportunity research study. I look forward to your participation!

Sincerely,

Tanya Bostic

Principal Investigator

Tel. (561) 252-5602 Email: tanya.bostic@waldenu.edu

Appendix E: Initial Email Invitation Participant Letters (Staff)

Greetings,

I am contacting you as a Florida Washington Community College (FWCC) staff with 2 years of experience working with first-year first-generation college students. This email is an invitation for you to participate in a research study to discuss your experience (s) with these students.

The title of this research study is “Strategies for Reducing Drop-Out Rates of First-Generation Students.” I am requesting approximately 30 minutes of your time to conduct a one-on-one interview using Zoom or Skype.

If you accept this invitation, your participation will help to improve the journey of other first-year first-generation college students as they navigate the college experience. There is no cost to participate in this research study. Additionally, there is a small monetary gift for your participation. If you are interested, please contact me via the information below. This will be a first come first serve opportunity research study. I look forward to your participation!

Sincerely,

Tanya Bostic

Principal Investigator

Tel. (561) 252-5602

Email: tanya.bostic@waldenu.edu

Appendix F: Initial Email Invitation Participant Letters (Academic Advisor)

Greetings,

I am contacting you as a Florida Washington Community College (FWCC) academic advisor with 2 years of experience working with first-year first-generation college students. This email is an invitation for you to participate in a research study to discuss your experience (s) with these students.

The title of this research study is “Strategies for Reducing Drop-Out Rates of First-Generation Students.” I am requesting approximately 30 minutes of your time to conduct a one-on-one interview using Zoom or Skype.

If you accept this invitation, your participation will help to improve the journey of other first- year first-generation college students as they navigate the college experience. There is no cost to participate in this research study. Additionally, there is a small monetary gift for your participation. If you are interested, please contact me via the information below. This will be a first come first serve opportunity research study. I look forward to your participation!

Sincerely,

Tanya Bostic

Principal Investigator

Tel. (561) 252-5602

Email: tanya.bostic@waldenu.edu

Appendix G: Student Interview Questions

Academic Experiences

- How would you describe your academic experience(s) as a first-year first generation student at Florida Washington Community College?
- What are some of the challenges and barriers as a first-generation college student face during the first year of college?
- Describe the academic challenges you have faced as a first-year first-generation college student during your college experience.
- What are students' perceptions of reasons for the high drop-out rate for first-year first-generation college students?
- What strategies do students feel would be effective in overcoming barriers for first-year first-generation college students?

Non-academic Experiences

- How would you describe your non-academic experience(s) as a first-year first generation college student at Florida Washington Community College?
- What and/or who has helped you to be successful in your campus experience(s) outside of the classroom?
- Describe the non-academic challenges you have faced as first-year first-generation college students during your college experience.
- How have you engaged in non-academic opportunities outside the classroom?
- What non-academic experience(s) would you identify as having the greatest influence on your non-academic success as a first-year first generation college student?

Challenges and Individual Factors

- Describe the challenge(s) you believe you experienced as a first-year first-generation college student that a non-first-generation college student may not have?
- What individual characteristics do you possess that you believe positively impacts you as a first-year first-generation college student success?
- What individual characteristics do you possess that you believe negatively impacts you as a first-year first-generation college student success?
- What do you enjoy about being a first-year first-generation college student?
- What resources do you feel will help the success of first year first-generation college student?

Appendix H: Faculty Interview Questions

Academic Experiences

- How would you describe your teaching experience(s) working with first-year first generation college students at Florida Washington Community College?
- What are some of the challenges and barriers working with first-year first-generation college students during their first year of college?
- Describe the academic challenges that first-year first-generation college students face within the classroom?
- What are faculty's perceptions of reasons for the high drop-out rate for first-year first-generation college students?
- What strategies do faculty feel would be effective in overcoming barriers for first-generation college students?

Non-academic Experiences

- How would you describe your non-academic experience(s) as a faculty member working with first-year first generation college students at Florida Washington Community College?
- What and/or who has helped you to be successful with working with first-year first-generation college students on your campus or outside of the campus?
- Describe the non-academic challenges you have faced working with first-year first-generation college students during your teaching experience?
- How have you engaged in non-academic opportunities working with first-year first-generation college students outside your classroom?
- What non-academic experience(s) have the greatest influence on your non-academic success working with first-year first generation students?

Challenges and Individual Factors

- Describe the challenge(s) you believe you experienced as a faculty member working with first-year first-generation college students versus a non-first-year first-generation college student may not have?
- What individual characteristics do you possess that you believe positively impacts you in your work with first-year first-generation college students for success?
- What individual characteristics do you possess that you believe negatively impacts you as a faculty member working with first-year first-generation college students for success?
- What do you enjoy about working with first-year first-generation students?
- What resources do you feel will help first year first-generation students succeed?

Appendix I: Staff Interview Questions

Academic Experiences

- How would you describe your assisting experience(s) working with first-year first generation college students at Florida Washington Community College?
- What are some of the challenges and barriers working with first-year first-generation college students during their first year of college?
- Describe the academic challenges that first-year first-generation college students face within the classroom and outside the classroom?
- What are staff perceptions of reasons for the high drop-out rate for first-year first-generation college students?
- What strategies do staff feel would be effective in overcoming barriers for first-generation college students?

Non-academic Experiences

- How would you describe your non-academic experience(s) as a staff member working with first-year first generation students at Florida Washington Community College?
- What and/or who has helped you to be successful with working with first-year first-generation college students on your campus or outside of the campus?
- Describe the non-academic challenges you have faced working with first-year first-generation college students when assisting with the students?
- How have you engaged in non-academic opportunities working with first-year first-generation college students outside your department?
- What non-academic experience(s) would you identify as having the greatest influence on your non-academic success as a staff member working with first-year first generation students?

Challenges and Individual Factors

- Describe the challenge(s) you believe you experienced as a staff member working with first-year first-generation college students versus a non-first-year first-generation college student may not have?
- What individual characteristics do you possess that you believe positively impacts you as a staff member working with first-year first-generation college students for success?
- What individual characteristics do you possess that you believe negatively impacts you as a staff member working with first-year first-generation college students for success?
- What do you enjoy about working with a first-year first-generation college student?
- What resources do you feel help a first-year first-generation student succeed?

Appendix J: Academic Advisors Interview Questions

Academic Experiences

- How would you describe your assisting experience(s) working with first-year first generation college students at Florida Washington Community College?
- What are some of the challenges and barriers working with first-year first-generation college students during their first year of college?
- Describe the academic challenges that first-year first-generation college students face within the classroom and outside the classroom?
- What are staff perceptions of reasons for the high drop-out rate for first-year first-generation college students?
- What strategies do staff feel would be effective in overcoming barriers for first-generation college students?

Non-academic Experiences

- How would you describe your non-academic experience(s) as a staff member working with first-year first generation students at Florida Washington Community College?
- What and/or who has helped you to be successful with working with first-year first-generation college students on your campus or outside of the campus?
- Describe the non-academic challenges you have faced working with first-year first-generation college students when assisting with the students?
- How have you engaged in non-academic opportunities working with first-year first-generation college students outside your department?
- What non-academic experience(s) would you identify as having the greatest influence on your non-academic success as a staff member working with first-year first generation students?

Challenges and Individual Factors

- Describe the challenge(s) you believe you experienced as a staff member working with first-year first-generation college students versus a non-first-year first-generation college student may not have?
- What individual characteristics do you possess that positively impact you as a staff member working with first-year first-generation students for success?
- What characteristics do you possess that you believe negatively impact you working with first-year first-generation college students for success?
- What do you enjoy about working with a first-year first-generation student?
- What resources do you feel will help the success of first year first-generation college student?