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What Drives Underprepared Students From the First Year On

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Abstract

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MA, Long Island University, 2006

BA, Delaware State University, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

College students often enter college academically unprepared, as evidenced by low high school cumulative GPAs or poor SAT scores. In response to this problem, administrators at a 4-year university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States implemented an intensive, semester-long program to introduce and acclimate conditionally admitted students to the rigors of collegiate life. The purpose of this study was to understand how to assist students in moving from Year 1 to full admission and beyond. In accordance with Bandura's reciprocal causation of social cognitive theory model, the research questions centered on conditionally admitted students' descriptions of their experiences with intensive, semester-long program participation. The qualitative case study used data collected from 10 semistructured interviews with conditional admission program student participants. Data analysis consisted of initial coding, axial coding, and iterative recategorization to identify the key findings. Among the findings were that the study site lacked strong faculty–student engagement and that students had mixed feelings regarding the seminar course being helpful. However, they found the university environment conducive to learning, leading them to stay. A white paper provided potential solutions to administrators, including increased faculty–student engagement and more meaningful required seminars for first-year conditionally admitted students. This study and the subsequent project may create positive social change by expanding degree achievement for underprepared, conditionally admitted college students, which thus increases opportunities for upward social mobility.

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Section 1: The Problem

Regardless of many states having expanded secondary school graduation prerequisites over the last decade, numerous high school graduates lack the skills necessary to undertake college-level courses (Ngo & Melguizo, 2016). This means high school graduates are entering their first year of college underprepared for the academic rigors associated with college. As a result of this lack of preparation, many students leave colleges and universities without earning a degree (Wyner, 2014).

According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS, 2014), only 53.8% of students earn a baccalaureate degree within 6 years of starting their college education. Dependability standards from the first semester to the second revealed that rates for conditionally admitted students were extraordinarily lower than those for nonconditionally admitted students for all 4-year institutions (Noel-Levitz, 2013). Because so many students are enrolling in college underprepared, many schools conditionally admit these students and provide remediation or interventions to retain this population.

Definition of the Problem

The local problem that inspired this study was that despite a 4-year university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States (MAU) developing a semester-long provisional program to retain students and assist in moving them into full-time admission, only 70% of students passed the conditional admission program (CAP). The CAP began in fall 2015 with 63 students, 42 of whom successfully completed the program. Of the 39 students enrolled in the fall 2016 program, 30 passed. Passing the

CAP required students to maintain a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 and comply with study hall and program attendance. Failure to meet these requirements led to dismissal by the program directors. If a student did not meet program requirements and wished to return to the university at any point, the student must have attended an accredited institution and completed a minimum of 15 to 18 credit hours before being allowed reentry (MAU, 2016).

Students conditionally admitted into college are at a higher risk for drop-out or academic dismissal before graduation (Adebayo, 2008; Mattson, 2007; Nora & Crisp, 2012; Stewart & Heaney, 2013). Nationally, third-semester retention is about 76% for conditionally admitted students at 4-year institutions compared to 83% for generally admitted students (Noel-Levitz, 2015). With only 70% percent of conditionally admitted students passing the CAP, it seemed prudent to explore the students' perceptions of the program to gain an understanding of how it is preparing them for academic rigor.

The gap in practice is that not all students admitted into the CAP passed the program. This may be a result of MAU's admittance of underprepared students into the CAP who have not met initial admission requirements. Not passing the CAP could, however, be strongly linked with the lack of knowledge or incomplete CAP information. Researchers have reported on the wide use of first-year programs over the years; however, there has not been much research from student perspectives on whether these programs meet the needs of underprepared students (Barnett et al., 2012; Price & Tovar, 2014). Addressing this gap by documenting student CAP perspectives and experiences is important in understanding the factors necessary for underprepared students to

successfully complete the program and ultimately obtain a college degree (Bower, 2013; Murphy, Gaughan, Hume, & Moore, 2010; Strayhorn, 2011, 2014).

In an effort to introduce and accustom conditionally admitted students to the rigors of collegiate work, MAU (2015) developed a CAP offering structured study halls with intentional tutor support, access to peer advisors, and a variety of services aimed at stimulating and enhancing students' academic prowess and self-empowerment. Even after 2 years of CAP operation, student success rates in passing the program remained in the 70% range (MAU, 2016). To date, researchers have studied the program only through quantitative methods and only minimally from the students' perspectives. According to MAU's (2016) annual performance report, the school focuses only on CAP pass-and-fail rates. As a result, campus leaders have little to no understanding of students' perceptions of the program or their descriptions of potential barriers to success. Campus leadership needs to have a deeper understanding of how students experience the program and how they describe their barriers related to being prepared for full-time admission.

The university admits into the CAP borderline students who fail to meet MAU's initial admission requirements, giving them the opportunity to attend an intensive, semester-long program. This gives students the chance to demonstrate adequate preparation for advancing to the second year of college and becoming full-time students. The CAP provides students the opportunity for extended engagement and academic support to position them to pass the program and become a general student (MAU, 2016). However, an average of 70% of CAP participants fail to complete the program (see Table 1).

Table 1

Conditional Admission Program Passing Rates

Semester	Passing rate (%)
Fall 2015	66
Fall 2016	76

Note: MAU internal statistics (2016).

Rationale

In a personal conversation, the CAP director expressed concern regarding participants' experiences and how they described being prepared for the second year of college (Director of Conditional Admission Program, personal communication, September 2017). Because MAU established the CAP to help students prepare for their second year of college, the director expressed the need to better understand the extent to which students describe the program as meeting their needs, as well as potential barriers to achieving passing rates higher than the low 70% range. Although over the years researchers have reported on the wide use of first-year programs, there has been little research on whether these programs meet the needs of underprepared students (Barnett et al., 2012).

The purpose of this study was to understand how to assist students in moving from Year 1 into full admission. Attaining this objective came through building knowledge of students' personal cognitive, behavioral, and environmental experiences through the CAP. Since the main goal is to introduce and acclimate conditionally admitted students to the rigors of collegiate work, campus and CAP leaders need to

identify opportunities to better position conditionally admitted students to successfully pass the program, thus advancing to the second year of college and full-time admission.

Definition of Terms

At-risk students: These students are considered at a higher risk for failing to achieve success or graduation in a higher education setting (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

Attrition: Attrition occurs when the student withdraws from a program or otherwise drops out of college (Jeffreys, 2012).

College-ready: Students who are academically prepared for college-level study are considered college-ready (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012).

Conditional-admission or *provisional acceptance:* Conditional admission allows students entry to a college or university yet with restrictions that may include academic performance requirements and participation in academic services (Nichols & Clinedinst, 2013).

Conditional admission program at MAU: The CAP in intensive, semester-long program designed to introduce and acclimate conditionally admitted students to the rigors of collegiate life at MAU. CAP students are required to attend a structured development designed to help them thrive both in and outside of the classroom. These activities include tutoring, seminars, workshops, and structured study (MAU, 2017).

Persistence. Persistence is characterized as nonstop enlistment to graduation (Hogan, Bryant, & Overmyer-Day, 2013; Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014; Wolfe, 2012).

Retention. Retention occurs with the continued enrollment of a first-time freshman student from the initial fall semester to the following fall semester (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013).

Underprepared student. A student who is typically considered remedial in one or more of the basic areas of reading, writing, and mathematics by evidence of low standardized test scores or low high school GPAs (Stewart & Heaney, 2013).

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because the results may aid students attending CAPs to successfully advance to the second year of college and beyond. Through developing and implementing appropriate and informed revisions, CAPs may better provide effective advisement and support to the growing number of conditionally admitted students, subsequently advancing them to full-time, college-level admission. Campus leaders may also find guidance when needing to revisit and revise the CAP design. Exploring this program from participants' perspectives may provide evidence regarding participants' descriptions of their experiences of increasing preparation for college. On a larger scale, the information collected may shed light on students' experiences in programs for conditionally admitted students as they advance in their academic career. This study could provide administrators and teachers with information to help develop CAP policy and direction when educating conditionally admitted students. Moreover, the advantages of this study's discoveries could likewise achieve social change through the sharing of published or presented material with the local site, and perhaps regional meetings to help leadership identify opportunities to better position conditionally admitted students to

successfully pass such programs, thus advancing them to the second year of college and full-time admission.

Research Questions

Integrated into MAU's Freshman Studies offerings, the CAP assists students in acclimating to the requirements of collegiate life. Campus and CAP leadership adopted the format in consideration of the positive impact of such programs as revealed in the research literature. However, even with such preparation, students' program passing rates remain in the low 70% range. The intent of the CAP is to help students who did not meet the initial university admission requirements by exposing them to intensive academic advisement and support so as to be adequately prepared for full-time admission; as such, the program must be responsive to students' needs for a viable intervention. Although CAP students do not participate in developmental, remedial courses during the intensive semester-long program, they are enrolled in fewer course credit hours compared to regularly admitted students. Based on the thought that all three factors of Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model—personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental—can impact the experiences of CAP participants while in the program, the following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?

RQ2: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?

RQ3: How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs as they move to full admission?

Review of the Literature

I conducted a comprehensive literature review to obtain a thorough familiarity with research and researchers regarding this topic. The following review of the literature includes the characteristics of underprepared students, various first-year program models, and the effectiveness of conditional admission programs.

Search Strategy

I conducted a systematic literature search of studies published between January 2016 to November 2017 using the following databases—ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Education Research, and ProQuest—to identify articles on acceleration and accelerated learning programs within higher education during that period. Search terms were *conditional admission programs, provisional acceptance, first year college students*, *underprepared students*, *persistence, at-risk, first year interventions,* and *retention*. I reviewed all findings regarding a single study as well as articles focused on conditionally accepted students and retention.

Conceptual Framework

The framework that guided this study was the triadic reciprocal causation of social cognitive theory model (Bandura, 1978, 1989; Wood & Bandura, 1989). I expected this model to shape the study through focus on the connections of three components: behavioral, personal–cognitive, and environmental factors. Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation of social cognitive theory model provided the ability to explore the

bidirectional intersection of the behavioral, personal–cognitive, and environmental factors involved in an activity such as the CAP.

According to Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model theory (1989), personal–cognitive characteristics, environment, and behavioral factors are correlated and can influence each other bidirectionally. With that, another issue confronting conditionally admitted first year students was a lack of or little information on factors relating to personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental effects involved in the CAP program. In the CAP, students' personal characteristics and behaviors may directly influence the environment, or the environment may influence students' personal characteristics, behavior, and overall experience. Bandura (1989) stated that personal experiences prompt reactions to one's environment, causing changes in behavior. Specifically, the behavioral factor has to do with students' ability to participate and adopt the needed skills and knowledge for the program. The personal–cognitive factor encompasses students' level of confidence within their new environment, helping them to demonstrate high levels of performance in the CAP program. The final element in Bandura's model has to do with environment, such as organization into cohorts, in efforts to assist and shape students' level of confidence in the CAP program.

Researchers who have studied underprepared students' experiences have focused on the connection between the environment and student behavior. The incorporation of the personal–cognitive factor within the framework allowed for a deeper understanding of how all three elements engage and impact students' experiences. The model provided me with a clear and rational understanding of the participants and their association with

the phenomena of underpreparedness, first year of college, and the CAP. Further, the framework helped explain how participants' personal characteristics, behavioral patterns, and both physical and social environment impacted their experiences within the CAP. Lastly, the model served to guide the exploration of how participants engaged with and learned the skills and information taught in the CAP, as well as their ability for self-directed success upon leaving the program (Bandura, 1989; Carducci, 2009).

The model has three major components guiding its practice: behavioral, personal–cognitive, and environmental (Bandura, 1978, 1989; Wood & Bandura, 1989). The behavioral component pertains to grounding one's performance in the ability to engage with and internalize material, skills, and knowledge from an educational opportunity. The dimensions within this component are incentives, expectancies, outcome, and performance accomplishments. Incentives help to describe the value of education to the learner (Bandura, 1989). Incentives link with outcome, which describes one's expected results of behavior. In relation to the conditionally admitted students in the CAP, the outcome's value is the students' ability to pass the program, advance to the second year of college, and ultimately graduate with a bachelor's degree. Also under the behavior component, expectancy helps to explain one's ability to perform (Bandura, 1989). Even though a conditionally admitted student knows the value of results and outcomes, examining expectancies reveals how the student demonstrates ability to perform in the program. Finally, under the behavior component, performance accomplishment describes how students demonstrate mastery of performance in the program in light of the incentive and outcome (Bandura, 1978, 1989; Carducci, 2009; Wood & Bandura, 1989).

The personal–cognitive component contributes to learners reinforcing their confidence and capability with the newly learned skill (Bandura, 1978; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Used in this component are four dimensions: cognitive, motivational, affective, and self-observation (Bandura, 1978, 1989; Wood & Bandura, 1989). The first dimension, cognitive, describes the students not only having sufficient knowledge as gleaned from the CAP to advance to the next level, but also possessing the skills for acting upon the knowledge as demonstrated through their performance in the CAP. The motivational dimension focused on examining students' ability to stay on task and the extent to which they had the drive to attend class as well as to put in sufficient study time for mastering necessary skills (Carducci, 2009). Closely linked with mastering their ability was the talent for self-observation in which students understood the expectations and were able to adjust their actions so as to fulfill them. This dimension is linked with the behavioral component with the objective of refocusing students' behavior through the CAP. The behavioral component helped the researcher determine how the CAP learners described their learning through assignments, homework, simulations, and other activities.

Environment, the third component, helped instructors and administrators better understand students learning a skill to shape their confidence and belief in their capabilities to learn and apply the skill (Bandura, 1978, 1989; Carducci, 2009; Wood & Bandura, 1989). The instruction dimension helped to position students to learn proper practices and strategies from a knowledgeable person, with each student having the opportunity to observe and practice skills necessary to advance to the next level. Through

the dimension of modeling, learners had the ability to practice the skill in a controlled simulation environment, guided by those with more knowledge and able to provide formative feedback so the learner could gain confidence with the skill. Self-confidence, in theory, allowed learners to apply the skill in actual situations. With the aforementioned components as the foundation, the model had three capacities, each with a few dimensions to help focus on participants' learning descriptions as they described their CAP experiences.

In this study, I examined the behavioral and personal–cognitive factors as well as environmental influences mutually affecting one another with regard to the three sets of factors, thus obtaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between these individual factors as they related to CAP participants' engagement. The intensive, semester-long program served as an introduction to the rigors of university life for conditionally admitted students. The intent with the CAP was to help students who did not meet the initial admission requirements by exposing them to intensive academic advisement and support with the goal of adequately preparing them for full-time admission. Through the CAP, students received a variety of services aimed at stimulating and enhancing their academic prowess and self-empowerment, such as tutoring, social interaction, peer advising, and structured study halls (MAU, 2015). CAP trainers outline the two concepts that pertain to students progressing into the second year (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). The first, positive self-concept, related to the strengths and weaknesses of students in the CAP program, in the end helping them adequately prepare for the second year and beyond. The second concept, realistic self-appraisal, facilitated identification of

students from their realist self-appraisal to modify their behavior as they move on in their second year.

The dimensions helped me to make meaning of how the students were learning the skills as well as their ability to retain and appropriately apply such learning in appropriate situations. Behavior is the learners' ability to articulate their incentives and expectations of the program as well as to perform and achieve the desired outcome. This relates to their personal–cognitive factors as well as implications from the environment. The personal–cognitive component helped to illuminate the extent to which CAP learners described which affect-related aspects guided their learning experiences as they engaged in purposive action and deliberate attention to the behavior required for program success.

Review of the Broader Problem

Underprepared Students

Tierney and Sablan (2014) found approximately 40% of students entering college in 2014 were underprepared for college-level coursework, a significant increase from 29% in 2005 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). The majority of these underprepared college students were minorities (Gilroy, 2013). Approximately 50% of Hispanic and African American students entered college not having met any of the ACT's (2012) four College Readiness Benchmarks. In 2016, upon sorting the data by racial structure and school preparation as a means of measuring student readiness in the four branches of knowledge, just 11% of African American, 17% of Native American, and 23% of Hispanic students met the standard. With a readiness rate of 49%, White

students were far more prepared than these three minority groups, and Asian Americans had the highest preparedness rate at 60% (ACT, 2016).

Each year, U.S. colleges and universities admit students who are underprepared for classes at the college level (Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Hollis, 2009). In recent years, the federal government, state officials, school administrators, and leaders within college institutions have recognized college readiness, or the lack thereof, as an issue with genuine student outcomes (Tierney & Sablan, 2014). As a result, ensuring high school graduates are entering college academically prepared has become an educational priority in the United States (Chapa, Leon, Solis, & Mundy, 2014; Tierney & Sablan, 2014). Although this issue seems likely a focus of college and university representatives, some argue that public high school officials do not pay sufficient attention to the postsecondary success of students (Abbott, 2014). This disconnect and lack of communication between high school and higher education officials is contributing to the large number of underprepared college students (Wu, 2014). Adams (2014) highlighted the collaboration between secondary schools and colleges and the need to make early associations as keys to preparing students with the scholastic aptitudes needed to be fruitful in college.

ACT (2013) identified students entering college underprepared as a growing concern, because only 25% of students nationally met all four benchmarks of reading, writing, mathematics, and science required to be college ready. Meeting these benchmarks reveals a direct relationship between retention, progress toward degree, GPAs, and degree completion (ACT, 2013). While the lack of academic preparation in

high school contributes to students entering college underprepared, nonacademic factors also contribute to college underpreparedness.

Personal–Cognitive Factors

With personal–cognitive factors, individuals employ mental processes to gain knowledge and comprehension and apply cognitive methods in education (Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Such factors include thinking, knowing, remembering, judging, and problem-solving. These higher-level brain functions encompass language, imagination, perception, and planning. With the use of personal–cognitive ideas, successful learners employ strategic thinking in their approach to learning, reasoning, problem solving, and concept acquisition (Cen, Koedinger, & Junker, 2006). As students continue to expand their repertoire of strategies and reflect on the methods of learning, these personal–cognitive factors facilitate reflection on how students think and learn, set reasonable learning or performance goals for students, select potentially appropriate learning strategies or methods, and monitor students' progress toward their goals (Barchia & Bussey, 2011).

Behavioral Factors

Study behaviors represent what students actually do when equipped with the necessary skills. Proper study behaviors require the knowledge of study skills, with actualization of these skills when students carry out academic tasks. According to Bandura (2001) and Zimmerman (2008), behavioral factors contribute to students' academic success in college. Study behaviors demonstrate students' concepts of how to accomplish learning goals and the specific actions needed to reach such goals (Jones,

Slate, Perez, & Marini, 1996). Understanding students' study behavior and habits is more crucial in the college environment than in primary and secondary schools.

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors relating to students are the skills needed to shape students' confidence and belief in their capabilities to learn and then apply skills (Carducci, 2009). Each student must have the opportunity to observe and practice the appropriate skills within the college environment necessary to advance to the next level. Students' educational progress depends on the ability to practice skills in a controlled simulation environment, as learners gain the self-confidence to apply the skill in actual situations.

Family Support and the Underprepared Student

Despite the conceptual framework encompassing the personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors involved in an activity such as the CAP, family support is an important factor for the underprepared student. Family or parental support and educational engagement from an early age correlates with later college preparation (Robinson & Harris, 2014). According to Robinson and Harris, the home environment is one of the personal factors that, in combination with the parent-child relationship, is a significant predictor of college readiness. As DeLoatche, Bradley-Klug, Ogg, Kromrey, and Sundman-Wheat (2015) posited, parents should become involved with their children's learning as early as preschool, becoming familiar with the skills their children need to academically succeed.

Parental support plays a major part in a child's educational success. Pillinger and Wood (2014) stated that parents' involvement can significantly impact their children's

development even more than the parents' socioeconomic status or educational level. Children who come from homes with emotionally supportive, encouraging, and involved family members and parents tend to show greater academic success and classroom engagement. According to Leonard (2013), a common subject in college readiness literature is emotional guidance, with students' success or failure often dependent upon the environment created by their parents. Emotional support is necessary throughout a child's academic career; indeed, parental involvement eases the child's way to postsecondary education (Guerra & Nelson, 2013).

Persistence

Although any students may decide not to stay in their selected school until graduating, those who are underprepared are more likely to depart before graduation, causing the institution to lose both tuition and diversity (Burks & Barrett, 2009; Demaris & Kritsonis, 2011; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). This is a problem, as more than half of students enrolled in colleges and universities in 44 U.S. states are unprepared for college education (Butrymowicz, 2017).

Persistence in college is a particular issue for students of color. While college enrollment is increasing each year for minorities, persistence continues to be a problem for all students of color but especially Black students, who graduate at a substantially lower rate than White students (Roach, 2013). The low persistence and completion rates of Black students and the increasing racial gap in graduation rates suggest that far too many Black youth are entering college underprepared (Price & Tovar, 2014). Much like underpreparedness, persistence relates to more than academic challenges. Lunenburg

(2015) noted the academic achievement gap and ability to persist in college is directly related to the groups' socioeconomic status, parents' education level, financial resources, school readiness, and the quality of education received at the presecondary and secondary levels. In fact, students from more well-off backgrounds are likely to have access to better resources, parents with college degrees, and attendance at higher-quality schools prior to college (Lunenburg, 2015).

Underpreparedness, college readiness, and persistence are interrelated. According to Stewart, Doo Hun, and JoHyun (2015), students who were more prepared for the demands of college were more likely to persist past the first year than students who were not prepared to take college-level courses. Therefore, providing resources or interventions for underprepared students during their first year of college is essential. Resources such as academic advising, tutoring, and first-year programs may help underprepared students to succeed in college (Stewart et al., 2015).

First-Year College Persistence

Student persistence is most basic need in the first year of college, as the greatest proportion of students drop out of college during or following the first year (Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Schneider, 2010; Tinto, 1993, 2012). According to Morrow and Ackermann (2012), 56% of all student departures occur entering the second year of college. Following a national study, Noel-Levitz (2014) revealed that 93% of female and 88% percent of male first-year college students described themselves as "deeply committed" to their educational goals. However, fewer than 40% of first-year college students nationwide actually complete their degree within five years (ACT, 2013). Often,

students come to college with a perception that does not always align with their real experiences once on campus. First-year students with more prominent discrepancies between their desires or beginning impressions versus their genuine encounters are likely to leave the institution (Pleitz, MacDougall, Terry, Buckley, & Campbell, 2015).

Many factors impact first-year college persistence. Students who experience poor interactions within the campus environment whether socially or academically tend to drop out during their first year. Positive academic performance and interactions with faculty and staff support integration into the academic environment, whereas negative experiences trigger student isolation (Chen, 2012). Researchers have also shown that social interactions both internal (e.g., extracurricular or peer group activities) and external to the institution play a significant role in first-year persistence. Life, work, and family circumstances as well as outside encouragement and influences can constructively or positively support students' sense of connection with the college (Siekpe & Barksdale, 2013). In the end, there is a strong relationship between academic and social integration with regard to first-year college persistence.

First-Year Programs

Many institutions offer first-year support such as summer bridge programs, first-year seminars, and provisional admission to assist incoming students to successfully transition into college. Many young people find the move from high school to college to be a stressful time in their lives, taking a toll on their emotional, physical, and mental health (Harris Poll, 2015). These programs are important because they provide support similar to that which empowers students in their transition from middle school to high

school (Christie & Zinth, 2015). Well-designed first year programs that are academically centered and address social integration issues can narrow the college readiness gap and provide the tools and resources for underprepared students to be successful in college. Roybal, Thornton, and Usinger (2014) found first-year programs helped students gain a sense of belonging within the new college environment, in turn promoting academic and social success. According to Albanes, Gallagher, Hazel, and Pfaff (2014), first-year programs, specifically those offered in the summer, have proven to increase a student's motivation toward college. Although first-year programs vary by institution, most target specific populations, such as students deemed underprepared, to assist with college readiness (Otewalt, 2013).

Models of First-Year Programs

Summer Bridge

Summer bridge programs come in many models and can be residential or nonresidential. The programs, usually lasting 5 weeks, are highly structured with academic support and peer mentoring embedded into the curriculum. Summer bridge program curricula address the unique challenges faced by many first-year college students, exposing them to the college setting and the multitude of resources offered (Otewalt, 2013). These summertime offerings are enrichment programs designed to strengthen high school graduates' ability to persist by teaching critical thinking skills and ways to navigate through college. Summer bridge programs have proven successful in developing underprepared students both academically and socially.

This particular model incorporated personal–cognitive factors, specifically several different levels of triangulation within the college system. According to Otewalt (2013), the summer bridge program exposes students to the collegiate system through a higher-level functional scope. By incorporating personal–cognitive factors, the summer bridge program could assist learners in using their own ideas to engage strategic thinking in the approach to learning. Summer bridge programs have traditionally shown success, especially in onboarding at-risk populations inclined to academic underachievement (Douglass & Attewell, 2014).

First-Year Seminars

First-year seminars emerged when Reed School offered a primary credit-bearing course in 1911 (Gordon & Grites, 1984). First-year seminars have served as academic interventions in higher education (Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005); as schools developed seminar designs to meet diverse college student interests and needs, the seminars were more frequently available and with varied themes (Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Young & Hopp, 2014). In the 1970s, the University of South Carolina (n.d.) developed a reputation for modernizing the seminar, calling it University 101. With a focus on underprepared students, the course was in place for this populace to develop self-confidence and open doors for social connections with other students, faculty, and staff. By 1999, almost 90% of universities and colleges had implemented some type of first-year seminar (Padgett & Keup, 2013), a rate that has continued to grow. Today, junior colleges, public and private universities, and Ivy League schools offer some type of first-year seminar to new students. Much like summer bridge programs, however,

course presentations and proposed results vary by institution. Summer bridge programs and first-year seminars reveal what students are capable of when they are equipped with necessary skills. The success of the first-year seminar as an academic intervention in higher education (Upcraft et al., 2005) is reflected in students' knowledge of study skills, focusing on the actualization of skills when they carry out academic tasks.

Conditional or Provisional Admission Programs

According to a Pell Institute Survey, provisional admission programs nationwide specifically target students deemed underprepared for college-level courses and typically from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Nichols & Clinedinst, 2013). Provisional acceptance awards students entry into a college under specific conditions that may include academic performance requirements, participation in tutoring services, and taking advantage of advisement or mentoring (Nichols & Clinedinst, 2013). Underpreparedness has a link with environmental factors relating to students whose skills need improvement to shape their self-confidence and belief (Carducci, 2009). As with other first-year programs, conditional admission programs vary and are customized to the particular needs of the institution and the students (Nichols & Clinedinst, 2013). Although a student may not meet an institution's general admission requirements, provisional admission programs offer them a chance to begin their postsecondary journey at a 4-year institution.

Nichols and Clinedinst (2013) estimated that 57% of 4-year colleges and universities in the United States have established provisional admission programs to promote access and retention, enabling underprepared students to enroll under specific conditions. Researchers have found that provisional acceptance positively affects student

persistence (Nichols & Clinedinst, 2013). Despite being considered underprepared academically when first enrolled, 70% of provisionally accepted students persist and remain enrolled as sophomores (Nichols & Clinedinst, 2013), with third semester retention identified as around 76% at 4-year universities (Noel-Levitz, 2015).

Problems with First-Year Programs

Although researchers have reported on the wide use of first-year programs over the years, there has not been much research on whether these programs are meeting the needs of underprepared students (Barnett et al., 2012). While many recognize the value of first-year programs, others have provided strong critiques. Many critics have argued first-year programs' excessive concentration on professional aptitudes leaves them insufficient regarding the true purpose of higher education (Hickinbottom-Braun & Burns, 2015).

There have been mixed results about the effectiveness of summer bridge programs since their inception. Because these programs drastically differ in their components and implementation, it is difficult to determine if, overall, they are educationally solid and enable students to cross barriers between secondary school and college (Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013). When interviewing instructors about their summer bridge teaching experiences, Jenkins, Speroni, Belfield, Jaggars, and Edgecombe (2015) found that many instructors felt 5 weeks was not enough time to deliver content in a meaningful way. These instructors also stressed that students did not have time to fully engage with them or the content.

Although a majority of campuses provide this type of admission program, few researchers have attempted to understand the programming structure or criteria used to

select students for provisional enrollment, and fewer have explored students' perceptions of conditional admission programs. In recent years, improving academic success and retaining students in their first year of college have become a significant focus for higher education administrators and education policy makers. First-year intervention programs have been the catalyst for attempting to provide incoming students a chance to succeed. Despite a developing collection of literature on first-year programs, researchers to date have not addressed how underprepared students succeed in their first year of college (Wolfe, 2012). Successful first-year completion is an ongoing issue in higher education, as almost 50% of incoming students drop out before their second year and many who remain find difficulty completing remedial courses ("Survey of Entering Student Engagement," 2015). Determining what helps underprepared students succeed beyond their first year of college is essential for increasing degree attainment. Therefore, the goal with this study was to explore the experiences of unprepared first-year students to gain a better understanding of their unique needs.

Implications

The findings from this study provided the local site with a more profound understanding on how conditionally admitted students learn, which instructional and assessment strategies work best, how experts execute proficient learning in the classroom, and how conditional admission programs impact students in their first year of college. One possible project arising from these results could be a white paper to help campus leaders make strategic planning decisions for program improvement. As universities strive to improve CAP effectiveness and success, campus leaders can proceed

from an informed position, allowing for more focused decisions regarding policy and direction.

Notwithstanding local implications, another potential result from this study may be to effect social change through sharing findings with neighboring universities or colleges having similar programs. Access to the aggregate information accumulated from the study may provide current administrators greater insight into instructional methodologies for connecting with conditionally admitted students and enable future experts to design a superior conditional admission program. Conveying new instructive systems to these administrators may enhance instructional practice and stimulate new research. Lastly, on a societal level, social change may come about if more underprepared students have a chance to start where they are and progress to achieving an advanced education degree as do most regularly admitted students. This could greatly improve the quality of our nation's education system now and for years to come, as the children of today's successful conditionally admitted students will be more inclined to plan their own excursion through higher education.

Summary

Students entering college underprepared has turned into an issue in the United States as the number of students leaving colleges and universities after their first year without earning a degree keeps on increasing. The study site, a 4-year university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, is reflective of this problem as it battles to expand the retention rate among the conditionally admitted students. There are various potential issues that could impact first-year retention, for example, financial, physical,

mental health, social, and academic reasons, as well as student attributes. In any case, researchers have reported on the wide use of first-year programs focused on increasing retention over the years; however, there has not been much research from student perspectives on whether these programs meet the needs of underprepared students. At the study site, additional time should be spent on how students experience the CAP and how they describe their barriers related to being prepared for full-time admission.

Section 1 included a review of the problem of the study, which was the study site's battle to increase its CAP retention rate. In this section, the rationale and significance were clarified, which was comprised of evidence from the study site explaining why the issue needs to be addressed and why increasing retention rates is significant. Presentation of the literature review was in accordance with three general classifications, which incorporated an examination of distributed data applicable to underprepared students, persistence, and first-year programs. The research existing suggest approaches to improve retention among underprepared college students. Three research questions were developed to discern 10 CAP student participants' perceptions regarding how the CAP prepared them for their second year of college. A qualitative research design guided this study and was used to gain a deeper understanding of how students experience the program and how they describe their barriers related to being prepared for full-time admission.

In Section 2, I present the research design and methodology used to collect and analyze the collected data. Section 3 includes the rationale for the project as well as a

literature review in support of the provided recommendations. Section 4 is a reflection on the study's strengths and limitations with regard to the problem.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The CAP at MAU is an intensive, semester-long program for students who failed to meet the institution's initial admission requirements. In this study, I collected data through interviews with student participants to gain an understanding on how to assist students in moving on from Year 1 to full admission. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?

RQ2: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?

RQ3: How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs as they move to full admission?

Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model provided a focal point for both the structure of the interviews as well as the coding and analysis of data gathered. This gave a clear understanding of participants and their association with the phenomena of underpreparedness and being first-year college students in a conditional admission program. The qualitative methodology girded the approach for data collection and analysis from interviews of 10 CAP participants who successfully passed the CAP and are currently in their second year of college. My role as the research investigator was to obtain information directly from the students. Qualitative research was the most appropriate for this study for a few reasons. Through the qualitative methodology, I was

able to identify concepts not yet known to the local site by studying people and events in their natural setting (Creswell, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 1988). In this study, I wanted to learn about the students' experiences with transitioning from high school to college, and their personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental relations experiences in the CAP program related to their academic and social needs (Bandura, 1989). Also important was that qualitative researchers use inductive reasoning to break the data into specific, concrete pieces, and then the pieces into broader categories representative of participants' voices within the study boundaries (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Case Study

This research incorporated a case study design, enabling exploration of meaning and processes as well a deeper understanding of a person, group, or situation (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). In this project, an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) met my goal of obtaining a deeper understanding of a group as its members engaged in an educational experience on a college campus. The intrinsic case study itself facilitates exploration of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995); specifically, I explored the descriptions of experiences of conditionally admitted students who completed the CAP and successfully transitioned into a full-time university program. Lodico et al. (2010) explained that researchers typically use case studies to focus on exploring people or groups who attempt to examine their experiences while firmly entrenched in their environment. Stake (1995) and Yin (2014) argued that case studies are different from other qualitative studies that are rooted in the idea of a bounded system; in

this study, the boundedness was the CAP, classrooms, and underprepared students. Moreover, a case study provides the methods to explore a specific case (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014), which, in this study, was conditionally admitted students who have passed the semester-long CAP and gained full admission status in advancing to their second year on MAU's campus and taking a full credit load.

Justification for Design Selection

I considered other qualitative research designs for this study, one an ethnographic design in consideration of culture-related explorations (Wolcott, 2008). Ethnographic researchers explore culture, tradition, value systems, and belief structures as practiced in a specific local setting. However, because I was not seeking to examine the role of culture, ethnography was not an appropriate research design choice. Another possible design was phenomenological inquiry, which allows researchers to examine the essences of lived experiences through an interactive interview process involving four or more participants (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). The focus of this study was not investigating how the conditionally admitted students described the essence of their lived experiences in the CAP, making phenomenological inquiry also an inappropriate research design. Narrative inquiry was a valid choice to explore people's stories and life experiences (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); however, I did not intend to explore the conditionally admitted students' life stories or a life-changing event regarding their CAP experiences, making narrative inquiry also inappropriate for this study.

I rejected quantitative methodology because experience is a concept that is challenging to capture through statistical measures (Creswell, 2013). Previous researchers

have conducted several quantitative research studies regarding conditional admission programs (Adebayo, 2008; Copeland, 1991; Heaney & Fisher, 2011; House, 1995; Houston, 1980; Laden, Matranga, & Peltier, 1999; Ting, 1997; White & Sedlacek, 1986). However, conditions for generally admitted students differ from those for conditionally admitted students. Thus, to uncover the unique aspects of the conditional admission experience, qualitative research was the most useful.

Participants

Selection of Participants

The criteria used for selecting participants were that each student be enrolled in the second year of college at the institution and have successfully completed the semester-long CAP. The resultant sample in this project study was 10 students who had completed the CAP at the 4-year university located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Although I would have liked to contact students who did not pass the CAP because they could provide information on barriers faced and reasons that led to unsuccessful completion, there was no feasible way to contact this particular population. MAU pogram directors dismissed the students who failed to meet CAP requirements. If these students wished to return to the university at any point, they must have first attended an accredited institution and completed a minimum of 15 to 18 credit hours before being permitted reentry (MAU, 2016). Considering the university's requirements, there was no clear way to locate students who failed the program.

Convenience sampling allowed me to identify and select participants who fit study criteria (Emerson, 2015). Because a set number of students met the criteria for

selection, convenience sampling was the appropriate method. The CAP program began in fall 2015 with a total of 63 students, 42 of whom successfully passed the program. In fall 2016, the CAP began with 39 students, with 30 passing the program. In all, a population of 72 students successfully passed the CAP between the program inception in fall 2015 and fall 2016. Because the CAP director maintained a list of all students in each cohort, I contacted the director to obtain contact information for students who had successfully completed the program. I subsequently invited these 72 students to participate, accepting the first 10 students who responded. At the time of the study, all 10 students had successfully passed the CAP and were enrolled in their second year of college at MAU, making them eligible to participate in personal, one-on-one interviews.

Sample size in qualitative research is a debatable issue, with a wide range of opinions across a number of qualitative research experts (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) felt the first six to eight interviews revealed key themes, with all key themes present by the tenth interview. I obtained participants through an email invitation using contact information from the CAP director's student participant list. The email included my contact information, outlined the nature of the study, the details of the interview, and explained why the student was in an ideal position to give me valuable firsthand information from their own perspective (see Appendix B).

Gaining Access to Participants

To gain access to the participants and begin the process of conducting the qualitative interviews, I first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board

(IRB) at Walden University (Approval Number 09-12-18-0300133) and then the IRB at the study site. After receiving permission from the IRBs, I contacted the director of the CAP to collect contact information for the qualitative interviews, requesting a list of CAP participants' first and last names and email addresses. Subsequently, I emailed all listed participants and selected for the study the first 10 students who responded to my email.

Researcher–Participant Working Relationship

Establishing a researcher–participant relationship is one of the most important parts of conducting qualitative interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Knox & Burkard, 2009). To this end, I was respectful of participants and allowed them time to express any questions or concerns they had about the study. In the invitation, I included background information about myself, explaining that I was a current employee of MAU working in a department completely unrelated to CAP program, that I was a Walden University doctoral student conducting a research study, and that the study was confidential to help them feel safe and secure in speaking to me. To develop trust and confidence with participants, I stressed that there was no obligation to complete the interview and that, if uncomfortable, they could remove themselves from the interview pool or process at any time. Moreover, I explained that participation had no impact on their academic standing at the institution. Lastly, to establish participant comfort, I conducted each interview in a reserved room at the university's library, a familiar setting to both me and the students.

Measures for Ethical Protection

The ethical protection of participants was a priority in this study. To protect participants' confidentiality, I replaced all names with labels (e.g., S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6,

S7, S8, S9, S10). Additionally, I instructed participants to contact me directly so others in the study setting would not know who participated. Prior to taking part in the study, all students received and signed an informed consent form describing the background of the study, its voluntary nature, any risks or benefits, payment, privacy, and researcher contact information (see Appendix C). I stored all signed consent forms in a fireproof lock box in my home office and immediately assigned an individual code to each participant to keep their identity protected. For this study, no harm occurred beyond the typical everyday stresses someone would encounter attending a college course at the study site. Participants were free to end participation at any time with no retribution.

Data Collection

Personal Interviews

The qualitative data collection technique used was semistructured interviews. Interviews are a data collection tool by which a researcher explores a phenomenon through the stories of another (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010). As my goal was to discover themes that emerged from the interviews, using semistructured interviews helped me gather reliable qualitative data. Personal interviews provide the forum for an interchange between an interviewer and a participant in accordance with a specific study's protocol (see Appendix D; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Although this forum may seem innocuous, the researcher must remain vigilant, as each prompt is a negotiation between what the interviewee *thinks* the interviewer wants to know and what the interviewee *wants* the interviewer to know (Errante, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Considering all three factors of Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model—personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental—I created interview questions focused on gathering insight into students' perceptions in regard to the interactions of these elements. I followed a self-produced interview protocol that included explaining the purpose of the interview, clarifying the informed consent form, and making clear that I would record the interview with each participant's permission (see Appendix C). Since I needed to collect specific data to answer my research questions, the interviews were semistructured (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). This type of interview allowed for the opportunity to collect multiple perspectives and detailed information through probing questioning.

Further, I was also interested in the CAP participants' deep and rich descriptions of their experiences, thus the questions were open-ended to allow each student to offer additional information (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Patton, 2002). This led to securing a rich and robust set of data such that answering the research questions came from identifying the major themes and possible subthemes based on variations around the dominant theme (Patton, 2002). I noted follow-up probes in the interview notes when it seemed the participant had more to offer and wished to expand the discussion on a specific prompt.

All interviews took place during a 3-week period within the academic year, not including the summer semester. The first 2 weeks were for the first round of interviews, with the last week reserved for any necessary follow-up interviews. In preparation for the interview, I provided participants with a list of available time slots, engaging with them

upon receipt of their selection to provide the expectations of the interview and meeting location. Each interview took place in a reserved room at the university's library, a place where my identity was unknown (Lodico et al., 2010). Further, I explained their identity would remain confidential, as well.

Each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length, recorded on a digital voice recorder with permission from each participant. Within 48 hours of interview completion, a hired professional transcribed each recording, signing a confidentiality agreement prior to accessing the recorded interviews (see Appendix E). A pseudonym identified the respondent in each transcript with a logbook maintained to ensure transcript–interviewee alignment.

Keeping Track of Data

My organizational method for keeping track of data included using both hard copies and flash drive storage, which I stored in a locked cabinet in my home office. Per Walden University requirements, this information will remain secured in the cabinet for 5 years, after which time I will destroy it. According to Patton (1990), researchers should keep an unused master copy of interviews in a safe place. Thus, I am keeping master electronic copies of interviews on a password-protected computer as well as on a flash drive in a fireproof lock box locked in a cabinet in my home office.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was as an interviewer and data analyst. At the time of recruitment, all participants learned of the researcher's role as a current employee of the study site working in a department unrelated to the program under studied. Specifically, I

work as a director of a STEM undergraduate program funded by the National Science Foundation. My role in this position includes ensuring the smooth daily operations of the various program initiatives and conducting outreach to local industry contacts to build and maintain a viable student internship placement program. Also disclosed was that I was a doctoral student at Walden University, with this information disclosed to fully describe the researcher's role and minimize perceived coercion to participate. As the researcher, I had no direct supervision over or interaction with any potential participants.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the interviews, I used Bandura's model as a guide for organizing the open themes in relation to personal–cognitive, behavior, and environmental factors. Creswell (2012) stated that data collection and analysis is a simultaneous and inductive process. To prepare and organize, a hired transcriptionist typed each recorded interview into a Word document. Once this was completed, I e-mailed participants their specific transcript and asked the person to thoroughly read the transcript and make any notations in areas that were deemed questionable. Later, in a separate email, I shared the preliminary themes that stemmed from the study with participants to confirm I had accurately captured their thoughts. Two of the participants questioned the transcripts, both expressing that they did not remember saying some of the statements transcribed. I met with both participants on different occasions to play the audio of the interviews for them. After hearing the audio recordings, neither participant requested any changes to their transcripts. On the other hand, these two participants did not question the

preliminary themes that were sent to them in a later email. The other eight participants responded to both emails stating that they had no recommendations for changes.

Data analysis began with me analyzing each interview transcript and following with cross-case pattern analysis of the interview protocol questions (Patton, 1990). I read each transcript several times to increase familiarity and to understand what the participant expressed; after this, I made comments to begin organizing data into topics and then codes. According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), "coding is the heart and soul of whole-text analysis" (p. 780). I labeled codes, attaching them to chunks of words, phrases, or paragraphs (Basit, 2003). Ryan and Bernard (2000) suggested several coding strategies that work well for novice researchers, including identifying repetition of words and phrases, cutting and sorting quotes or expressions, and looking for similarities and differences throughout the documents.

Using an initial coding procedure, I began to code data by marking the text, followed by cutting and sorting quotes and expressions (Saldana, 2012). Through this iterative process, the common codes eventually became themes. Such inductive analysis can include either concepts that emerge from participants or sensitizing concepts assigned by the researcher when participants do not identify a term for the phenomenon (Patton, 1990). I completed a review of the data to look for rival explanations and negative cases. Following completion of the first cycle coding, I used axial coding for the second cycle phase, an activity that involves collapsing the codes to a smaller number by combining similar initial codes, thus diminishing the number of codes while expanding each one (Saldana, 2012).

I used word processing and spreadsheets to aid in this process, as well as a hard copy version of the data for the initial reading and notes. As codes began to emerge, I employed the comment-tracking feature of Microsoft Word as well as colored text and different highlight colors. I kept a legend of what each color meant using a spreadsheet to avoid confusion. Microsoft Word also enabled the cutting and pasting of concepts electronically. I used a spreadsheet to keep track of emerging themes.

Accuracy and Credibility

To ensure credibility, I used member checks and peer debriefing as well as maintaining a reflective journal to avoid personal biases influencing study. Utilizing these various techniques helped form a solid research study that was credible, trustworthy, and as accurate as possible. I utilized member checking to ensure my interpretations of the interviews were correct, a two-step process by which I first shared the analyzed transcripts, and secondly the preliminary themes that stemmed from the study with participants to confirm I had accurately captured their thoughts (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 210; Merriam, 2009). Member checking gives participants the opportunity to review the researcher's interpretations and provide clarity or additional information (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Using peer debriefing, I enlisted a colleague who was also a professor with established competence in qualitative data analysis to review my data and the process by which I developed my findings (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The peer debriefer read and signed a confidentiality agreement prior to viewing any data. I demonstrated the

accuracy and credibility of the data analysis through several ways. Recording interviews helped with the accuracy of the transcription.

Reflexivity is another method for showing credibility. Reflexivity is reflecting critically about oneself as a researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). By keeping a journal, I actively practiced reflexivity. Additionally, to show trustworthiness, it is important to write with clarity and transparency, representing a sound methodological approach to the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Discrepant Cases

Identifying discrepant cases included looking for outlier categories that may have led me to other conclusions (Patton, 1990). Negative cases are those that do not fit the other patterns (Patton, 1990); thus, it is important to look and account for these to ensure accuracy and credibility of the findings. Using rival explanations and negative cases also brings credibility to the study (Patton, 1990). I analyzed the discrepant data to determine if they challenged the emerged themes and findings. Subsequent to the analysis, I further explored the discrepant data in accordance with the guiding research questions and literature review.

Data Analysis Results

The local problem that provoked this study was that despite a 4-year university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States developing a semester-long provisional program to retain students and assist in moving them into full-time admission, only 70% of students passed the conditional admission program. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of how to assist students in moving on from Year 1 to beyond in

full admission. To determine conditionally admitted students' perceptions regarding how the CAP prepared them for their second year of college, I interviewed 10 participants and analyzed the data for this study. Of the 10 participants, 30% were male and 70% were female. All participants were Black/African American and in their second year of college. For the purposes of study coding, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, and S10 represented the students who were interviewed.

In light of the theoretical framework of Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) and guided by his triadic reciprocal causation model (1986), the accompanying research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?

RQ2: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?

RQ3: How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs as they move to full admission?

Transcription and Coding

I conducted the interviews in English and recorded them on a digital voice recorder. I listened to each of the recordings a minimum of seven times and I read and reread the interview transcripts for nearly 3 weeks. After this step, I imported the interview materials into NVivo version 12. I then opened the files and explored all 10 participants using Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model theory (1989), grouping them into categories including personal-cognitive, behavioral, and environmental charts.

Clark and Zimmerman (2014) characterized reciprocal causation as the mixing together of thoughts, attitudes, and actions. The manner in which an individual thinks depends on the collection of knowledge (thoughts), which impacts point of view (attitude) and causes an explicit social reaction (action). Primarily, I identified reactions to each interview question and then connected them to the research questions. I then coded each transcript using an inductive coding approach form to elicit essential themes from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). Table 2 shows how I connected manual coding to create themes and categories of information from the audio-recorded interviews. More importantly, Table 2 represents how the interview questions connect to Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model theory (1989), thus uncovering emerging themes and categories of how the 10 participants experienced the CAP.

Table 2

Bandura's Triadic Reciprocal Causation Model Theory

Cognitive code	Interview questions that relate to theory/code
Cognitive/personal factors	
Attitude	1, 2, 3
Expectations	5, 9, 24
Knowledge	4, 6, 7
Behavioral factors	
Skills	4, 8, 9
Practice	10, 11, 12, 13, 14
Self-efficacy	15, 23
Environmental factors	
Social	19, 18, 23
Access to institution	17, 22, 24
Influence with/from others	18, 20, 21

Evidence of Quality

When the transcripts were analyzed, the transcripts and preliminary themes that rose from the study were presented via e-mail to the participants for review. Two of the participants questioned the transcripts, both expressing that they did not recall saying some of the statements transcribed. I met with both participants on two different occasions to play the audio of the interviews for them. After hearing the audio recordings, neither participant requested any changes to their transcripts. These two students did not question the preliminary themes that were later sent to them via email. The other eight participants confirmed that they received both emails but did not request edits and had no further feedback to provide. Member checking ensures credibility and enables participants to guarantee that the information is displayed accurately and that no disparities are apparent.

After completing the member checking process, peer debriefing was likewise used to guarantee facts relating to the results of the study were clear. Peer debriefing is a method through which the researcher presents information to an individual outside of the study to check whether the outcomes are conceivable (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). This process is like an external audit, wherein an outside individual who is new to both the researcher and the study is acquired to review the work (Creswell, 2012). I utilized peer debriefing with a colleague who knows about the intent of my study to guarantee that the facts are displayed clearly.

Themes

Utilizing an initial coding method, I started to code data by denoting the text, followed by cutting and sorting quotes and expressions (Saldana, 2012). Through this iterative process, the common codes eventually became themes. Three themes emerged from the feedback of all 10 student participants, each aligned with Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model theory. These themes were: (a) characteristics such as coursework and instructors' help with coursework that influenced students' academic experience, behaviors, and success; (b) CAP preparation of students in terms of tutoring, peer advising and seminars; (c) and environmental support and transition.

Findings

The findings are exhibited by the research questions, which were

RQ1: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?

RQ2: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?

RQ3: How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs as they move to full admission?

The findings of the study were derived from the various questions that were posed to every participant. Complete analysis of the findings was included in each theme and supported by the participants' responses. The contextual analysis as described by Creswell (2007) may consist of somewhere in the range of three to five lenses to examine a case. Once the interviews were conducted and transcription of the tapes was completed,

I analyzed the data utilizing NVivo 12 software to help recognize subjects and themes. Finally, the themes were shared with the ten participants and a peer debriefer for review as a means to provide validation and consistency with my study. In the following, I present the three themes that emerged from the data to respond to the three research questions, an outline of how the findings were consistent with current literature, and the relationship of the findings to Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model theory.

Research Question 1: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?

Data collection from the 10 student participant interviews was sufficient to answer Research Question 1. I asked 10 interview questions related to this research question (see Appendix D), with emerged themes relating to the characteristics such as coursework and instructors' help with coursework that influenced students' academic experience, behaviors, and success while in the CAP.

Theme A: Characteristics such as coursework and instructors' help with coursework that influenced students' academic experience, behaviors, and success.

The themes of coursework and instructors' help with coursework resonated among all participants in the study.

Coursework. For the participants in this study, coursework was an important and positive part of the CAP. A series of interview questions helped develop this theme. The first question addressed participants' feeling or attitudes about the coursework assigned during the CAP. While students unanimously had a positive experience with the coursework assigned while in the CAP, they communicated mixed reviews regarding the

difficulty of the coursework assigned. Six out of 10 participants indicated mathematics-related assignments as their most difficult; two participants expressed their most difficult assignments were in English; and two students indicated none of the assignments were difficult. In terms of the easiest assignments, six participants specified English as their easiest assignments. S4 who indicated "none" for the most difficult assignment listed English assignments as the easiest. S2 expressed the English course being very difficult because of the essays assigned. She said, "I had trouble writing the essays for the English class, but I feel the class really prepared us for our second semester English course." S6 expressed that the math course was challenging:

> The math class was challenging and sometimes made me feel like I was not ready for college. I had to get a lot of help with the coursework because most of the time I was confused and very frustrated with the class. I passed the class but got low scores on most of the exams. I almost felt like I was going to fail the class because it was so hard.

The literature suggests that dissatisfactory academic performance is one of the main reasons students drop out of college during or after their first year (Westrick, Le, Robbins, Radunzel & Schmidt, 2015). Cognition is the learning, thinking, and understanding procedure people experience from birth on. All learning happens utilizing the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Table 3 presents participants' responses regarding the cognitive process during their CAP experience (Bandura, 2012; Cho & Kang, 2017).

Table 3

Feelings About Coursework

Feelings about coursework	Q1: How do you feel about the coursework that was assigned during the CAP?
Beneficial	S3 response
Better	S10 response
Challenging	S8 response
Engaging	S9 response
Fairly easy	S5 response
Helpful	S4 response
It did prepare us	S7 response
It's a lot lighter	S1 response

***Instructors' help on coursework*.** The participants reported that instructors help on coursework had a significant effect on their experiences while in the CAP. A series of questions addressed the CAP instructors help within the program, as summarized in Table 4. Three out of the 10 students did not feel they received adequate assistance from the instructors on their coursework. S3 expressed that the instructors did not go over or explain the coursework thoroughly. S1 explained feeling as if she did not have much access to the instructor. Therefore, she did not get the assistance needed to do her best on the coursework. When I asked, "how did instructors help you with the assigned coursework? S4 answered, "All of the instructors helped except for one . . . During class time she told us not to ask questions. She said questions were for SIs (Supplemental Instructor)." S4 went on to say it seemed like the instructor "just did not care" and did not bother to ask them questions to see if they understood what was being taught. While this student passed the course, he explained that he felt he could have received a better grade

had the instructor offered more assistance inside and outside of the class. This aligns with Hoffman's (2014) statement that negative exchanges with instructors often result in diminished confidence and the potential inability to complete the course or college as a whole for students.

The connection between an instructor and a student is critical, particularly for retention (Kahu, 2013; Kelly et al., 2012; Micari & Pazos, 2012), in any case, as data show, a third of the CAP students were not forming solid relationships with their instructors, which is in accordance with the reported research (Jackson, Yoo, Guevarra, & Harrington, 2012; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013; Witkow et al., 2015). Jackson et al. (2013) indicated that a conceivable reason for this was that unengaged instructors were unlikely to help engaged students. This connects back to Bandura's (1989) research because the lack of knowledge and comprehension gained caused by the aforementioned experiences additionally kept students from fully integrating into the college experience, which put them at risk of not remaining at the institution. Not having any desire to give up and simply leave the institution, these students took it upon themselves to amend the situation and tried to initiate personal connection with other instructors at the institution.

Table 4

Instructors Help With Coursework

Help with coursework	Q2: How did the instructors help you with their assigned coursework?
No hands-on to support/Not accessible	S1 response
Assist	S2 response
Did not thoroughly go over assignments	S3 response
Helpful	S5 response
Instructors provided information	S9 response
Provide help most of the time	S10 response

Research Question 2: How do students' personal-cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?

Three interview questions influenced the generation of the following theme, including those about tutoring help, peer advising, and support in terms of the seminar course.

Theme B: CAP preparation of students in terms of tutoring, seminars, and peer advising. Overall, when I received information about the students' experiences with tutoring and peer advising, the consensus was that both prepared them for the second year of college.

Tutoring. When I asked students about their experiences specifically with tutoring, the accord was that tutoring assisted in a significant way. Specific responses appear in Table 5. All ten participants reported that the tutoring sessions helped them get through the CAP. S2 explained:

> When I started the CAP I felt unsure in many ways. I just did not think I had what it took to get through the classes. I really did not feel like I had the skills to pass the math class. When I started the tutoring sessions, I understood the assignments more and was reinsured that I could really do it.

Ding and Harskamp (2012) specified that tutoring had a positive impact on students' academic achievement and learning attitudes. This links to Bandura's research stating that there are empowering effects of appropriate learning strategies or methods (Bandura, 2015).

Table 5

How Tutoring Helped in Projects

Tutoring help	Q11: How did tutoring help you out on projects?
A lot/extremely helpful	S4 response
Encouragement	S5 response
Helped as a peer	S7 response
Helped me understand and reinsure	S2 response
Helped me, sometimes come around and see the progress	S3 response

Peer advising. All of the CAP participants conveyed having a positive experience with their peer advisors. S9 described her experience with her peer advisor as amazing. When sharing further details about her experiences, she said:

> I really believe my peer advisor was god sent. If it were not for her, I would have been totally lost when it came to just about everything. She helped me find things on campus. She told me how much time I should spend on studying. She taught

me how to communicate with instructors through email. She was amazing and gave me insight on what to expect moving forward.

According to Sidelinger, Frisby, & Heisler (2016) a positive rapport with peer advisors can help to create supportive connections, which cultivates social integration, prompting more prominent levels of comfort and engagement for students on campus. Positive mentoring or advising experiences depend on modeling and observation. The following responses demonstrated how the CAP students learned how to behave or learn information by having direct experience with situations and through modeling via peer advising (Bandura, 1986):

- Were able to express my struggles. (S10)
- They helped a lot. Still help me 'til this day. (S4)
- The peer advisors were amazing. They gave insight what to expect. (S9)
- Held accountable. (S7)
- It helped a lot. (S3)
- They were really helpful. (S5)
- Amazing. Really helped with making [MAU] feel like home. (S8)

Seminar course. While the CAP students had positive experiences with tutoring and peer advising, five out of 10 of the students had negative experiences with the seminar course. In relation to seminars, I asked students "How did seminars help while in CAP?" All of the student responses are in Table 6. S9 expressed that the seminar course was a waste of class and deemed the course unnecessary. S4 explained that he simply did not remember much about the course because he was not required to attend all classes. S8

said that the seminars were somewhat helpful but could have been more organized. Lastly, when I asked "how did seminars help while in the CAP," S4 described his experience as "feeling like the seminar course did not help at all…there was no real structure and I only remember going a couple of times."

The literature findings are suggestive of the university seminar course impact on student persistence when the course is required as a semester-long experience and is a for-credit course (Hyers, & Joslin., 1998; Miller & Lesik, 2014; Nicholson, Putwain, Connors, & HornbyAtchison, 2013; Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, & Oestreicher, 2017; Reid, Reynolds, & Perkins-Auman, 2014). The university seminar course is an important one because it provides support to students through observation and modeling, which empowers students in their transition from high school to college (Christie & Zinth, 2015). This relates to Bandura's (1986) theory that students learn how to behave or learn information by having direct experience with situations and through effective modeling. Since a significant amount of students discussed not having a great experience with the seminar course as a learning method, they endeavored to make a concerted effort to learn from their peer advisors and tutoring sessions. A majority of the students reported that they stayed connected with their peer advisors outside of scheduled times and even remained in communication in their second year of college. These students also stated that while in the CAP they never missed any tutoring sessions.

Table 6

How Seminars Helped

How seminars helped	Q11: How did the seminars help you out in the CAP?
Enriching	S7 response
Gave information/wasn't bad or good	S2 response
Waste of class/unnecessary	S9 response
Helpful/could have been more structured and organized	S8 response
Very open, really uplifting	S1 response
I do not remember them too much	S4 response
Reinforced how to be a good student	S6 response
I do not think the seminars helped	S5 response
Did not learn much about what I needed to succeed on campus	S10 response
Helped gain skills about resume writing and interview skills	S3 response

Research Question 3: How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs as they move to full admission?

There were nine interview questions related to this research question. Theme 3 emerged from these questions, with student responses and feedback sufficient to address the research question. Students gave their opinions as to whether the campus environment was conducive to learning and how the CAP helped them transition from high school to college. Table 7 presents participants' responses regarding the opportunity to observe and practice the appropriate skills within the university environment necessary to advance to the next level.

Theme C: Environmental support and transition.

Environmental support. The CAP students overwhelmingly agreed that the campus environment was conducive to learning. When S4 described being at the study site, he said,

> It was definitely conducive to learning. I always felt safe while on campus. When I was in the CAP, we were always with peer advisors. The advisors would walk us to all the different buildings on campus. Most times, they would sit with us in the café. Before coming here, I was somewhat scared of the big campus and getting lost, but those feelings went away and I always felt safe.

This aligns with the literature that when students feel safe on campus they are more likely to engage and persist (Jennings, Gover & Pudryznska, 2007; Patton & Gregory, 2014; Wilcox, Jordan, & Pritchard, 2007). The positive environmental support is related to Bandura's (1986) idea that students are driven by environmental influences and this factor can be a determinant in student success and achievement.

Table 7

Conducive Environment to Learning

Conducive environment to learning	Q 18: Was the university's environment conducive to your learning and development?
It was because of all of the structure	S9 response
It was; I felt safe	S4 response
It prepared me for college	S1 response
Yes	S2 response
Yes	S5 response
Yes	S3 response
Yes it was	S7, S8 response

Transition. When asked how the CAP helped with transition from high school to college, all of the students reported that the program helped considerably. S7 explained that the CAP provided support and encouragement to succeed throughout the first year of college. Another student emphasized that the CAP helped ease him into the college environment and helped him to focus. A third student said, "the CAP got me acclimated to my surroundings, helped me understand where to go for class and took away my fear of being away from home." Hunter and Linder (2005) characterized a first-year seminar as a course that help students in their scholarly and social advancement all while making them feel whole on the college campus. This relates to Bandura's (1997) theory that a program such as the CAP can influence students' belief in their ability to succeed at something. Table 8 shows how a model of triadic reciprocity in which cognitive, behavioral, and other environmental factors worked as determinants in how successful the CAP was in easing students' transition from high school to college.

Table 8

CAP and Transition

CAP and transition	Q19: How did the CAP help you transition from high school to college?
Feeling of anxiety, but helped me stayed on the campus	S1 response
Gave me structure, support and encouragement	S7 feedback
Got me acclimated to my surroundings and knowing where to go for class	S1 feedback
Helped to ease in to the college environment and helped me to focus	S9 feedback
Highly confident in my ability to comment on coursework	S8 response
Made me more independent	S2 response
Offered us everything	S3 response
Took away fear	S4 response

Discrepant Data

Yin (2014) depicted discrepant cases as approaches to clarify conflicting information, recognizing these cases add credibility to research studies. Amid the coding process, which brought about the three themes of this research study, one outlier emerged from the interview transcriptions. The one discrepant case originated from S1 when she answered the last interview question, "What did you wish for that you didn't have as a CAP student?" S1 replied, "Hmmm. I wish the program . . . it was really structured. Like we couldn't go or do certain things without someone being there. I feel like if we had a little bit more freedom and leeway or if we could explore the campus more. . ." S1 was the only participant who used the terms "freedom" and "leeway" when describing the CAP. As she was the first interview, I expected comparative descriptions in forthcoming

interviews; however, none of the following participants used such terms. Despite S1's use of the terms "freedom" and "leeway," she continued on as a CAP student and is at present finishing her second year of college.

Further evaluation of the discrepant data helped to decide whether it was conceivable to amend, expand, or affirm codes that had emerged from data analysis (Kiryak & Calik, 2017). After thoroughly investigating the discrepant data, I failed to discover solid proof in support of the contrary data. According to Kiryak and Calik (2017), an absence of supporting evidence of opposite data expands the validity of the original findings.

Summary

In this qualitative case study, the CAP students' experiences at the study site were examined to understand why the CAP retention has been low. The study was comprised of interviews with 10 participants. When the interviews were conducted, all 10 participants were enrolled in the second year of college at the institution and had successfully completed the semester-long CAP. Each of the participants volunteered to be involved in the study and signed consent forms. Data were gathered through one-on-one semistructured interviews with the participants, which were all audio recorded. Following the interviews, the data were transcribed and member checking as well as peer debriefing was conducted to guarantee credibility.

The transcripts of the interviews were coded and analyzed for themes and after that those themes informed the findings of the study. The accompanying three findings emerged from the data in the wake of coding and analysis:

- Finding 1: Overall, students at the study site were satisfied with the CAP. However, a third of the students expressed having poor relationships with their instructors as it related to help on their coursework.
- Finding 2: Largely, 5 out of 10 of the students had negative experiences with the seminar course.
- Finding 3: The CAP students overwhelmingly agreed that the campus environment was conducive to learning and helped them transition from high school to college.

Outcome of the Findings

As the findings show, there are concerns across two areas of the CAP in regard to first-year retention. These concerns were found in faculty-student engagement, and the university seminar course. In this manner, a project that speaks to the issue of the CAP's poor retention rate by addressing the areas of concerns is justified. A white paper would allow for these areas of concern to be discussed along with recommendations for addressing the concerns. The white paper is intended to expand the study site's CAP completion rates through increased instructional support and more required meaningful seminars for first-year students. This white paper will incorporate the background of MAU's existing CAP policies, relevant literature, white paper description, goals, and implications.

In Section 3 of this paper, presented are the findings and development of the project connected with the research study. The findings, displayed in data tables and in a narrative form, respond to the three research questions. This section additionally

incorporates clarification of how and why the related project is important for the future of the CAP at the study site. Lastly, in Section 4 provided are conclusions and reflections for this project study.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The design of this qualitative study enabled me to gain an understanding of how students conditionally admitted to MAU may receive assistance in moving on to full admission. According to the results of the study, stakeholders at the study site can enhance their insight and abilities in developing an effective CAP from a white paper. Kolowich (2014) recognized that white papers, as methods for correspondence, have a particularly legitimate and a comprehensive, detailing style.

In response to the research findings, I developed some recommendations to help stakeholders expand MAU CAP completion rates through increased instructional support and more meaningful required seminars for first-year conditionally admitted students. Both study findings and the literature review served as the foundation for developing recommendations to address best practices related to increased faculty–student engagement and seminar presentation for first-year students. These recommendations included required enrollment in the university seminar course for all students, not just for those who have met the institution's admission requirements. The second recommendation was increased faculty–student engagement, with a third recommendation to enrich students' skills in the seminar class to cover areas such as time

management, campus facilities orientation, drug/alcohol awareness, responsible sexual behavior, and the importance of diversity.

Description and Goals

I chose a white paper for this study because, as indicated by Gotschall (2016), position papers allow a researcher to potentially prescribe answers for an issue. Researchers have contended that retention rates are among the most vital when estimating the nature or quality of an educational institution (Lee, Sanford, & Jungmi, 2014). This study's problem of low retention rates was not a new issue to any higher education institution that admits underprepared students, since there is a general recommendation for academic preparation being a solid part in foreseeing student retention and achievement (Visser & van Zyl, 2013). In this manner, a safe assumption is that all higher education institutions that admit underprepared students like the ones in the CAP do so with concerns about these students' capability to persist and ultimately graduate. However, most higher education institutions do not require first-year seminar courses for conditionally admitted students.

My essential goal for the white paper (see Appendix A) was to help increase MAU's overall retention rates through the CAP. My second goal was for all CAP students to receive the required university seminar course. The findings indicated that 5 out of 10 of the students had negative experiences with the seminar course and some students did not remember much from the course because attendance was not required. Therefore, requiring all first-year students to take the university seminar course, not

simply those who met the admission requirements, could build student preparation to bolster benefits, resulting in an increase in college retention rates.

Rationale

Saarinen (2015) defined white papers as a composition of recommendations or advice arranged for a group with the ability or authority to make decisions. I selected a white paper as the project (see Appendix A) because the data analysis described in Section 2 presented two areas in particular at the study site that needed to be addressed as it relates to the CAP retention rates. The two areas included the lack of faculty-student engagement and 50% of the participants reported having poor experiences in the seminar course.

The medium of a white paper enabled me to discuss the concerns that originated from the data analysis as far as what was occurring in the CAP at the study site. It additionally allowed me to outline what was happening in the CAP within the overall context of research in the field of retention. In addition, in light of the data analysis and based on the literature, I proposed recommendations for these concerns so that administrators at the study site can choose a suitable approach to improving the retention rates in the CAP. As retention is as of now an issue of concern at the study site, it is my expectation that a white paper will help get the required data into the administrators' hands with the goal that the CAP retention issue is addressed in a convenient way.

Review of the Literature

With respect to data collected on CAP within the educational system, information from this review of literature supported the usefulness of a white paper both interactively

and collaboratively, leading to a program change plan. In addition, it enabled me to probe into the change management principles related to organizational change for the U.S. educational system. The findings of the study led to suggested recommendations for the MAU CAP.

I centered my literature search on the following databases: Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, PsychARTICLES, PsycINFO, MEDLINE, PubMed, ERIC, CINAHL, ProQuest, and EBSCOhost. To identify relevant sources, I used Boolean operators to search for terms and combinations of terms, including *white paper, position paper, recommendation paper, first-year students, conditionally admitted student, conditionally admission program, instructional support, seminar courses,* and *higher education.*

White Papers

In the white paper created for this doctoral study, I make recommendations on the best ways to improve MAU CAP completion rates. Historically, white papers were utilized as official government reports as they were progressively legitimate in nature, yet today, white papers are utilized in business, explicitly for companies (Graham, 2013). After the U.S. government directed a concentration toward educational reform in the mid-1980s, white papers or policy recommendation and change have been an advancing theme in the domain of education (Coburn, Hill, & Spillane, 2016). Current policy endeavors have an emphasis on adjusting policy standards to match those of professional development training, with educational programs' content further influencing higher education (Coburn, Hill, & Spillane, 2016; Shukla, Sudhaker, Baredar, & Mamat, 2018).

Before beginning the procedure of program implementation, the substance of the program must be in a shape policymakers can grasp (Adam, Moat, Ghaffar, & Lavis, 2014; Adams & Sandbrook, 2013; Tomaschek, 2015). Balian et al. (2016) proposed that the best means for bundling a program recommendation is a program brief. Such a brief is an individual archive identifying concerns arranged in a reasonable and compact way for the overall public to grasp (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). For fruitful usage of a policy brief, researchers should ensure they address all identifiable concerns (Asarnow et al., 2015; Beynon, Chapoy, Gaarder, & Masset, 2012). As Balian et al. expanded, researchers must be clear in their presentation, succinctly presenting program recommendations in bulleted form in the introduction. In addition, program briefs should not exceed 12 pages (Beynon et al., 2012). The key message should be the focal point of the program presented in terminology customized to the target population (Balian et al., 2016). Upon identifying the target population, the researcher must identify the approach in which to compose the brief. According to Herman (2013), a white paper is the best format for presenting program recommendations.

A white paper is a style of report aligned in philosophy, viewership, and affiliation (Sakamuso, Stolley, & Hyde, 2015). According to Carvalho, Rocha, van de Wetering, and Abreu (2019) and Herman (2013), an effective white paper introduction includes eight stages: decide the issue, break down the information, condense the consequences of the information, assess the information, create proposals for change, deliver reservations, recommend usage ventures, and refine the end to address the general objectives. In the end, the information provided in a white paper needs to concisely

condense the goals of the proposed research while giving adequate detail of the general study strategy and approach (Lyons & Luginsland, 2014). The resultant white paper will be a thoroughly considered, effortlessly comprehended program recommendation with solutions to the institution's issue of low CAP passing rates.

Purpose of a White Paper

A white paper is intended for two things explicitly: to influence and to instruct (Mattern, 2013).The purpose of this white paper was to present an extensive and substantial case supporting the recommendations proposed in the project. In short, this project was a means to make program recommendations (Bardach, 2016; McLaughlin, West, & Anderson, 2016; Smith, 2013; Smith & Katikireddi, 2013). In the process of developing the project, I defined key elements and made recommendations, providing analysis of potential conclusions and recommendations. Also springing from this study was strong support for using and selecting a white paper as the best course of action for providing information and findings to a select audience (Sakamuso et al., 2015).

Policies on Higher Education Retention

As policy composition varies, it is critical to survey approaches in higher education, as those approaches are the most relevant to this study. Unfortunately, policies in respect to persistence—specifically first-year student retention—are not common. St. John, Daun-Barnett, and Moronski-Chapman (2012) found that state and government approaches on higher education persistence and retention are generally new, underfunded, and infrequently contemplated due to there being a greater emphasis on degree completion. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine the effects of a government

policy on retention because each institution is unique with its own inside approaches and projects, thus making results inconsistent due to too many factors (St. John et al., 2012). Rigby, Woulfin, and Marz (2016) identified that educational policies are seldom executed as proposed, which likewise makes their effects difficult to determine. Another issue with retention is in the event states compensate schools with higher degrees of consistency, wealthier elite schools benefit most, thus harming schools with lower socioeconomic standards (Blömeke & Olsen, 2019).

President Clinton attempted to have states make frameworks to report retention results so people in general could receive an education; his efforts, however, faced obstruction and ultimately dissolved (Box, 2019). While Clinton may have been unsuccessful, comparative frameworks have emerged as late. One area that has appeared to improve college retention is financial aid policy, the progression and enhancement of which have positively influenced retention rates (St. John et al., 2012).

Another policy affecting retention was the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2008, the result of a Congressional order to plug “the holes in access to and finishing of higher education” (Ross et al., 2012, p. v). With a more grounded spotlight on retention (St. John et al., 2012), this act allowed states to, with the use of grant money, focus explicitly on retention, specifically regarding low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). These grants served as monetary guides to subsidize programs that concentrated on effort, outreach, mentoring, and tutoring (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). In addition, a new pilot program enabled institutions of higher education to apply for funding to help student achievement, specifically in the area

of retention (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). These different grants proved to have a positive association with retention (Chen & St. John, 2011). Student Support Services, one component of the government's TRIO programs, has also proven a degree of accomplishment in the area of retention (Quinn, Cornelius-White, MacGregor, & Uribe-Zarain, 2019). Unfortunately, a significant number of these grants and programs have of late faced elimination or substantial cuts in funding (Douglas-Gabriel, 2017); thus, educational institution leaders need to consider better approaches for improving retention.

First-Year Seminar Course and Its Relationship to Student Retention

Colleges and universities have an assortment of mediations to increase student retention, with the first-year seminar course the most common academic intervention meant to furnish students with the essential aptitudes to succeed (Cuseo, 2009; Misra, Eyombo, & Phillips, 2019; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Seidman, 2019; Tobolowshy, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). After reviewing in excess of 2,500 studies on university programs and encounters and their influence on students, Pascarella and Terenzini found that a first-semester seminar course strongly connects with both first-year retention and degree culmination.

Hunter and Linder (2005) characterized a first-year seminar as a course intended to help students in their scholarly and social advancement. Technically, a seminar is a unique, dialogue-centered course in which students and their teachers trade thoughts and information. As a rule, there is solid support on networking in the classroom. The National Survey of Student Engagement (2005) revealed that students interested in first-year seminars took more frequent tests, had more of a positive time scholastically, were

bound to participate in dynamic and synergistic learning exercises, cooperated as often as possible with personnel, and were increasingly happy with the college experience.

Studies on Effects of First-Year Seminar Courses

A limited number of researchers have addressed the effect of first-year seminar courses on retention and graduation rates. In a seminal study, Smith (1963) looked at rates of retention among students who took a seminar course versus those who did not, becoming the first to develop a research hypothesis to test the connection between the completion of a seminar course and retention. Smith uncovered an association among the completion of the seminar course and retention. In 2005, Pascarella and Terenzini reviewed in excess of 40 studies and reported:

> Studies reliably find that [first-year seminar] participation encourages persistence into the second year and over longer timeframes. Later studies utilized different multivariate measurable methodology to control for scholarly capacity and accomplishment and other precollege attributes. Whatever the methodology, the research focuses to the equivalent end, demonstrating positive and factually noteworthy net impacts of [first-year seminar] participation (versus nonparticipation) on retention and persistence into the second year or attainment of a 4-year bachelor's degree. (p. 402)

Jenkins-Guarnieri, Horne, Wallis, Rings, and Vaughan (2015) directed a quantitative study of a first-year seminar program at an open 4-year college to identify what impact the course had on student persistence and scholarly achievement. Participants were 2,188 first-year students, 342 of whom finished the first-year seminar

program. The intent with the program was to create subjective factors related to student results, such as inspiration and responsibility to the institution, as well as useful abilities like process of organizing time, critical analysis, and study skills (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015). The researchers affirmed that students who completed the seminar course were more likely to remain enrolled at the institution. They likewise discovered students who effectively finished the first-year seminar program had greater chances of being in good academic standing than those who did not complete the program (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015).

Faculty–Student Engagement

Faculty–student interactions involving educational results for students are an essential issue in academia (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Gamson, 1991, 1999; Dika, 2012; Harris & Lee, 2019; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2010; Tinto, 2006, 2012a; Waldeck, 2019). Over the years, researchers have shown collaboration with an instructor can improve students' academic achievements, self-improvement, progress, acumen, and university persistence (Hoffman, 2014; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Sakiz, 2012; Xiao, 2012). Kezar and Maxey (2014) indicated that interactions between instructors and students appear to enhance the nature of students' learning and college experiences, with effective faculty–student interactions leading to increased retention and completion rates, better grades, and self-confidence. Kezar and Maxey also noted studies showing faculty–student associations alone have an autonomous effect.

Faculty–student interactions can likewise increase students' feelings of fulfillment with their college program and the institution (Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa, 2006;

Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Associates, 1981; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Gizir, 2019; Outcalt & SkewesCox, 2002; Pascarella, 1980; Peña & Rhoads, 2019). Having an effective faculty–student relationship can intensely alter students' feelings of satisfaction as well as educational outcomes (Adnot, Dee, Katz, & Wycoff, 2017). Also, faculty–student interactions served as the foundation for a more individual and welcoming school setting for student achievement (Taylor, 1971; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Micari and Pazos (2012) sought to determine whether there was a connection between faculty–student interactions and student achievement, ultimately finding increased collaborations among faculty and students associated with increased student retention and persistence as well as educational goal fulfillment. Moreover, the researchers discovered private and personal correspondence between the instructors and students fortified and bolstered students' scholarly development and connections with the institution. According to Burkhauser (2017), faculty members might be in the best position to influence a student's decision to stay enrolled at a university.

The relationship created among students and instructors inside the college strongly predicts that students do not leave their course before completion (O'Keeffe, 2013). Researchers have reported on the inspiration resulting from a positive association between students and instructors (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Tinto, 2014). When students realize a teacher is helping them, they feel progressively happier with their school life, which builds their dedication to go further both academically and professionally (Braxton et al., 2000; Brookfield, 1986, 1995; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978; Tinto, 2012, 2014). Hoffman (2014) found that positive faculty–student

interactions have long related to positive student results, including expanded exertion, more noteworthy student commitment, and a greater probability of persistence and subsequent college completion. Similarly, teachers' inability to establish concern, empathy, and respectful practices resonates with students as they feel instructors have abandoned them and their learning (Hoffman, 2014; Tinto, 2012, 2012, 2014). Therefore, this negative exchange often results in diminished confidence and the potential inability to complete the course or college as a whole (Hoffman, 2014).

Project Description

Based on the data analysis, study findings, and the review of literature, I developed a white paper identified with the study site's CAP retention concerns. These concerns include the lack of faculty-student engagement and half of the participants reporting having a poor experience in the seminar course. In the white paper, I conveyed the results of this study and drew attention to the significance of personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors as they related to first-year students' experiences in a CAP. The paper included recommendations regarding means of improving the CAP to guarantee a total understanding of the personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors and their impacts on CAP students' retention. These recommendations stem from the findings that majority of the participants reported that instructors help on coursework had a significant effect on their experiences while in the CAP. With 30% of students stating that, they did not feel they received adequate assistance from the instructors on their coursework. As well as other participants explained feeling as if they did not have much access to the instructor. Additionally, 50% of the students described their

experiences with the seminar course as negative. Consequently, the key recommendations are to make the university seminar class mandatory for all students, increase faculty-student engagement, and expand the university seminar class to cover important areas such as time optimization, introduction to campus facilities and key areas of support, drug/alcohol mindfulness, responsible sexual conduct, and the significance of diversity. Results of this white paper may be MAU's increased CAP completion rates through greater faculty–student engagement and seminars that are meaningful and required for first-year conditionally admitted students.

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

The only assets or resources needed for project presentation and discussion among the study site's four stakeholders are the cost of photocopying and binding the white paper. Of course, necessary resources to actualize the required seminar course enrollment are greater. Time is one of the greatest resources required, as making the seminar course a requirement for all CAP students would take time to plan and execute. The second largest resource required is money, which is additionally a potential barrier, as the institution may not have the funding for such a recommendation. Funding is necessary to hire faculty to teach the additional required seminar courses. It is my presumption the recommendations requiring money will face the greatest challenge from the stakeholders.

At the study site, I had existing support from the CAP director, who had previously expressed interest in my work and was eagerly awaiting my outcomes to share with others in the department. Aside from scheduling time to share my findings, I did not

expect difficulty bringing the key stakeholders together to talk about my white paper. However, I did foresee pushback from some stakeholders when I discussed the need for funding and additional faculty for the proposed required university seminar course.

Potential Barriers and Solutions to Barriers

While money is a required resource, it is also a potential barrier because the institution may not have the funds to hire additional faculty for the added seminar courses. Means of addressing this barrier could be increasing the seminar class size, progressively offering more courses as funding permits.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

After I gain approval of my research study from Walden University, I will schedule a meeting with the CAP director, instructors, and other stakeholders. I will distribute my white paper to meeting invitees, including the CAP director and instructors, and then commence to discuss my study. I hope that MAU representatives will discuss many of the issues and recommendations over the summer 2019 term so as to perhaps implement some of the recommendations for the following term as the start of the academic year.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

It is my responsibility to write the white paper and then have it printed. It is also my responsibility to contact the director of the CAP to set up a meeting and explain its importance. In addition, I am responsible for providing copies of the white paper before the meeting so that stakeholders have sufficient time for review. I also need to anticipate the questions and concerns the stakeholders may have and be prepared to answer them.

Finally, I need to clear my schedule for any additional meetings that may be requested by stakeholders. In turn, stakeholders including CAP administrators and educators are responsible for thoroughly reading the white paper, attending the meeting(s), actively taking part, and hopefully supporting implementation of the proposed recommendations.

Project Evaluation Plan

In social sciences research, evaluation is an examination of something of significant worth. To demonstrate the value of my research study, I will make a formative evaluation plan to evaluate the value of my white paper. Formative evaluation pushes a project designer to increase the probability that the final project will accomplish the expressed objectives (Flagg, 2013). In this way, a formative evaluation will help to guarantee the white paper will be in the most professional and reliable state. This will decrease bias while stakeholders survey the white paper.

Four members of MAU's Freshman Studies department will act as formative evaluators of the recommendation paper, including two higher education administrators and two educators who have worked with the CAP population. Each formative evaluation participant will receive a copy of the white paper as an attachment via email, as well as a survey. This evaluation technique permits me to address appropriate issues in a timely way (Nolette et al., 2017). Evaluators will be able to make any suggestions for improvements with respect to all parts of the white paper.

The evaluation tool (see Appendix F) will include both open- and closed-ended survey questions regarding the participant's impression of the white paper. Evaluators will provide both quantitative and qualitative information, which will allow me to gain

proficiency with project shortcomings to enhance the project before full stakeholder distribution. The self-developed survey will also include Likert scale questions (Lodico et al., 2010). I will use an inductive coding approach form to analyze and code open-ended questions to elicit essential themes from the raw data (Thomas, 2006).

After I analyze all information, I will be ready to enhance the white paper and make stakeholders' suggested revisions. Upon making these changes, I will distribute the white recommendation paper to administrators and educators within the CAP department at MAU. The objective of the white paper will be to motivate stakeholders to actualize some of the recommendations. The overall goal of the evaluation will be to give an extensive picture of the project effectiveness.

Project Implications

The project that I have developed is a white paper (see Appendix A). The motivation behind this white paper including recommendations was to give information and conceivable solutions for MAU stakeholders to improve CAP retention. The white paper will likewise open a new conversation on the issue of CAP participant retention, this one with a point of view from inside the study site and with new data. This is especially crucial since the standards for dependability have stayed dormant; thus, a change is required. At the study site faculty-to-student interactions proved to be vital for the first-year students. Therefore, the provided strategies in the white paper for instructors on how to be more approachable and how to develop positive interactions with students would help to increase faculty-student engagement, which has been found to improve retention and is valuable to both the students and institution (Micari & Pazos, 2012).

Retaining students benefits the students and the institution, as it gives the students a better chance of graduating and getting their degree within 4 years from the same institution (Fauria & Fuller, 2015).

In addition to the student benefits, the study site would profit monetarily (O'Keefe, 2013), as every student retained equates to additional tuition and room and board revenue. The gradually expanding extra income could help in various ways, including employing more full-time staff or expanding student conference funding, both of which would enhance the experience students have at the institution. Moreover, an increase in CAP retention could result in improved institutional ranking and notoriety (Aljohani, 2016).

Lastly, on a societal level, implementing the recommendations from this white paper may produce social change by more underprepared students having a chance to start where they are and progress to accomplish an advanced education degree, just as most regularly admitted students do. A great improvement would be enjoyed by our nation for now and years to come, as evidenced by later generations.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this research, I conducted interviews with 10 student participants with the aim of identifying conditionally admitted students' perceptions on how the CAP prepared them for their second year of college. This section provides the final segment of the research study, including a discussion of project strengths and limitations, as well as recommendations to mitigate the limitations. Over the course of the study, I maintained thorough consideration of the project development and leadership qualities. This section further outlines the implications of this study, its applications, and directions for future research. Section 4 concludes with a summary, bringing organization to this section and the entire project.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The idea behind this white paper was to help higher educational directors, educators, and stakeholders increase their insight and aptitude in curriculum and instructional methods with regard to closing the achievement gap between conditionally admitted and traditional students. The white paper, including recommendations, is itself a strength, as it gives an unparalleled chance to convey the findings of the study to CAP stakeholders in a succinct and straightforward way (Creswell, 2012). Another benefit of exhibiting findings in such a format is the capacity to communicate and highlight the main points of the research study findings. The strength of the white paper lies in bringing attention to how ineffective student–faculty interactions and unproductive

seminar courses negatively impact student success in the current CAP, as well as how to better utilize the CAP to yield improved retention. The recommendations in the project may increase student–faculty engagement, which researchers have indicated has various benefits for the students, such as feelings of belonging and acceptance on a college campus (Aljohani, 2016; O'Keefe, 2013). Another objective was to build student–faculty connections in the classroom and through different opportunities outside of the classroom, which would be gainful to both the students and the institution (Micari & Pazos, 2012; Nalbone et al., 2015). Lastly, with this project, I intended not only to build faculty–student interactions, but to also enhance the university seminar course and, along these lines, increase retention for the first-year CAP students through gradual improvements to the MAU CAP structure. This is a project strength because the recommendations would not require an extraordinary change to the present state of the CAP, thus making stakeholders more likely to consider and execute them.

Limitations

The principal limitations for this project include resources and approval. After I send results in a white paper format to stakeholders and administrators, I expect stakeholders to thoroughly read the recommendations as well as implement some or all of them. The recommendations are not grassroots activities; rather, they require approval from essential authorities to execute. Furthermore, one of the recommendations—making the seminar course mandatory for all—will require the allotment of financial resources. Therefore, those who can make such financial decisions must give their approval.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The issue I addressed with this study was poor CAP retention rates at the study site. I addressed that issue through the viewpoint of personal connections: explicitly personal perspectives shared by student participants. I conducted a qualitative study utilizing one-on-one interviews, and I utilized the outcomes to compose a white paper. Another way to deal with the issue could have been to think about other potential factors in first-year retention, for example, those regarding students' financial or family matters or issues of the institution. On the other hand, I could have explored an alternate part of the social realm, such as academic integration and future goals in respect to first-year conditionally admitted student retention.

Different options would have been to examine other projects, data collection techniques, and study designs. I could have conducted a quantitative study focusing on the previously referenced factors, subsequently analyzing the collected data. Instead of personal interviews, I could have formed focus groups to decide whether diverse groups of students had shared experiences. Moreover, I could have explored different projects, such as another instructional class for first-year seminar instructors or professional development opportunities offering strategies and tools to educators on how to teach and work with first-year conditionally admitted students.

An alternate way to deal with the study site's retention issues would have been to focus on second- or third-year retention, which would include more factors and where there is less research. That approach could have included a longitudinal report following certain students for 1 year or more to realize what influenced the likelihood that they

would leave the institution. Information could have been gathered from students who had left the college to identify the reasons for their departure after spending a substantial amount of time and money at MAU.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

The term *scholarship* refers to the activities and elements that methodically advance the process of teaching, research, and practice within the field of education through arduous investigation (Trigwell & Shale, 2004). Over the course of this project, I have gone from student to researcher by exemplifying practices such as reading purposefully, studying critically, and listening carefully. Through the process, I have improved my critical writing, an additional key component of scholarship. Upon reflection, I recognized three areas in myself noteworthy of personal development through this process: building research skills, gaining successful time management skills, and increasing my level of confidence with the research process.

Gaining Research Skills

I have gained comprehensive research skills during the course of this project, ranging from the premise of the study to establishing a problem statement through the prospectus, and from the proposal through data analysis. My engagement in data collection, data handling, and analysis has been the greatest contribution to my scholarly development as a researcher. As my studies neared the end, I saw that the quest of my scholarly activities began when I enrolled in the EdD program, as I have personally developed research skills that will stay with me beyond graduation. One of the key

individuals who offered valuable contributions and useful guidance to me throughout the process is my committee chair, and she remains an integral part in this development.

Successful Time Management

In terms of personal time management, as a scholarly researcher, I have benefited greatly from the research to which I have been exposed since the commencement of this program. In the course of developing the research study, I underestimated the time I would need, which resulted in several challenges throughout the process, such as recruitment of participants, ensuring the progress of the study, and completion dates. However, these experiences and processes have taught me many lessons, especially with regard to successful time management.

Increasing Level of Confidence

I have gained significant confidence throughout the process, which has resulted in improved scholarly writing of this project. This self-confidence has come up through the constant interaction with my committee chair and second committee member. Through their support, I have been inspired to work independently and to analyze and criticize my work to transform it into a scholarly document. This confidence will indeed assist me as a researcher, an educator, and an individual. The nature of my professional work requires a high level of self-confidence, leadership, and excellent communication skills to meet stakeholders' needs. Engaging in this project has added to the honing of my leadership skills. In summary, the three areas highlighted have developed, transformed, and assisted me in developing from a student into a researcher.

Project Development

When I established the project for this study, I wanted to create something valuable and useful for higher education administrators and educators. In view of the potential impacts of the doctoral study, I realized I needed to accomplish something that would build educators' learning as well as aptitudes. In this manner, I needed to choose a project that would be current, powerful, and aligned with the study institution's central goal and vision. Since I needed a compelling communication tool that was accessible to readers and that allowed me to comprehensively share my strategies and recommendations, I selected the white paper for this project. In choosing this information-delivery format, I experienced an additional part of scholarship: critiquing the project type and afterward justifying the project choice. As I did not locate many prior scholars or researchers who utilized white papers, it appears more professionals need to use this format to disseminate research study results (Neuwirth, 2014; York, 2012).

The white paper could be a means of communicating research findings and suggestions in higher education settings. York (2012) recognized the white paper as a particular kind of report composed for a target group; the evaluation of such a report rests in picking up input and inquiries from the intended target group. I will utilize the input gathered from the stakeholders to decide whether they understood the recommendations outlined in the paper; subsequently, I will incorporate this feedback into the formative evaluation of the white paper. Through the process of developing the project, I have learned that developing a white paper requires time and labor. Deciphering the results of

the research into practice, however, provided me a well-treasured professional skill, especially in the final write-up.

Leadership and Change

During my time at Walden University, I have built numerous leadership skills as a scholar-practitioner through coordinated effort with colleagues and respected peers. In my job as the Director of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities-Undergraduate Program—Transforming Education through Active Learning Project (HBCU-UP TEAL Project), I have figured out how to research issues for solutions, look for learning and comprehension of ways to address issues, and share research with colleagues for discourse and reflection before taking a stance on an issue or settling on a decision regarding an issue or problem. Through the development of my project, I have become inspired to be more engaged as a leader in my field.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

My development and advancement as a researcher are linked with my Walden University endeavors. The joint effort and talks with Walden peers tested me to see perspectives and data with objectivity and integrity. I found two of the basic components of a doctoral journey were persistence and time, particularly amid the research process. Walden's solid and thorough scholarly projects coupled with the high standards of my committee have convinced me to remain a lifelong learner. While managing this project study, I have learned the significance of peer engagement, identifying the needs of students and cooperating with institution administrators as and when necessary. In

finishing this project study, I satisfied my interest for collecting data and learning with the desire for adding to the field of higher education.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As the director of the HBCU-UP TEAL Project, I am certainly aware of how important evidence-based decisions are and how they can affect students, student educational outcomes, and faculty members. Upon completion of this project, I have learned many things, one being how to make decisions based on the analysis of data. With data collection and analysis, one can provide a more definite and accurate action plan. One of the challenging areas I found in this project was making decisions. Without knowing variables and corresponding data, the project could be very challenging. Through the whole process, I have enhanced my leadership strength and engaged in the implementation of the best practices for students transitioning into full admission.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

This entire experience as a scholar-practitioner has permitted me to enhance my project development skills. The process of composing the recommendation paper helped me to consider my study in a practical way. With this project, I concentrated on strategies administrators and educators could use to increase retention in the CAP. I learned that developing a solid white paper requires investment, exertion, and scholarly inquiry.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The work in this doctoral study is the impression of my vast educational journey. This was an opportunity for me to focus my energy on the issue of student retention and gain a firm understanding of how the CAP currently offered affects first-year student

retention. The suggestions I gave in the white paper can possibly increase retention rates and positively impact student achievement for conditionally admitted students. The positive impact may result in more students feeling integrated with the college environment, faculty, and staff at the college and becoming more committed to obtaining a college degree. Many higher education institutions in the United States are encountering low retention rates, too, and can utilize the suggestions in the white recommendation paper in areas of weakness they may have. Executing a few suggestions—for example, a more enriched seminar course that covers areas such as time time optimization, introduction to campus facilities and key areas of support, drug/alcohol mindfulness, responsible sexual conduct, and the significance of diversity—can ultimately influence the entire educational community.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Positive social change refers to the application of strategies, actions, and ideas that could improve the development of any society (Walden, 2014). The outcomes of this study resulted in positive social changes that have implications for improved student academic engagements, outcomes, and overall satisfaction with the CAP. These implications stimulate the progress of students and their interest for career progression. The positive results of personal–cognitive characteristics also suggest that educational trainers and mentors should not focus unwaveringly on the instruction provided but also consider the progressive process of students' education and their preparedness to move beyond the first year of college. This positive social change will help in instructors'

knowledge and open other avenues for alternative teaching modalities in line with the triadic reciprocal causation of social cognitive theory model (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

My goal is to publish the results of the study and make them available to the study site population, other educational institutions, officials, providers, trainers, community leaders, advocacy groups, and the general public concerning the need for awareness of the perspectives of students as they transition from the first year on. I will be available as and when necessary to discuss or interpret this study's results in academic and research forums such as symposiums, workshops, and conferences at local, national, and international levels.

It is my hope that administrators will use the findings of this study to design, develop, and implement tailored conditional admission programs as well as evidence-based program interventions that will address the challenges of conditionally admitted students. Consequently, these intervention programs will result in better student outcomes and quality of education in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. If I were to expand this study, I would talk with students who had left the college to uncover why they left and learn more about when they realized they needed to leave. I would likewise want to know their perceptions and experiences of the institution to which they transferred, if applicable, including if it was a better fit for them and why.

Conclusion

In this section, I acknowledged and documented the reflections of my doctoral journey along with study project strengths, analysis of self as a practitioner and project developer, reflections, limitations, applications, and recommendations. The general

objective of this doctoral study was to gain an understanding of how to assist conditionally admitted students in moving from year one to beyond into full admission at a 4-year university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. My enthusiasm for first-year and conditionally admitted student achievement inspired me to identify a conceivable answer for the issue at the study site. I was able to develop a white paper for administrators and educators at MAU that provides recommendations to expand the study site's CAP completion rates: increased faculty–student engagement, required University seminar course and seminars that are more meaningful and required for all students, including first-year conditionally admitted students. In all, this doctoral study has been fulfilling and gainful to my personal and professional development.

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Appendix A: The Project

Recommendations to Retain Conditionally Admitted Students

Walden University

The White Paper

By Shanetta S. Lillard

Executive Summary

This white paper is a review of why only about 70% of the students at a four-year university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States (hereafter referred to as Mid-Atlantic University [MAU]) passed the conditional admission program (hereafter referred to as CAP), and includes three strong recommendations on how to improve MAU CAP completion rates. These recommendations emerged from the data provided by students who successfully completed the CAP.

The CAP began in fall 2015 with a total of 63 students, 42 of whom successfully passed the program. In fall 2016, the CAP started with 39 students, with 30 successfully completing the program. To pass the CAP, students had to maintain a minimum GPA of 2.5 and comply with study hall and program attendance. Failure to meet CAP requirements led to dismissal from MAU by the program directors. If a student did not meet the program requirements and wished to return to the university at any point, the student must first have attended an accredited institution and completed a minimum of 15 to 18 credits (MAU, 2016). Students conditionally admitted into college are at a higher risk for dropping out or receiving academic dismissal (Adebayo, 2008; Mattson, 2007; Nora & Crisp, 2012; Stewart & Heaney, 2013). Nationally, third semester retention is about 76% for conditionally admitted students at four-year institutions compared to 83% for generally admitted students (Noel-Levitz, 2015). With only 70% percent of conditionally admitted students passing the CAP, it seemed prudent to explore the students' perceptions of the program to gain an understanding of how the CAP was preparing students for academic rigor.

Many students who leave colleges and universities without earning a degree do so because they entered underprepared for college work and academic rigor (Wyner, 2014). In response to this problem, MAU directors implemented an intensive semester-long CAP to first introduce and then acclimate conditionally admitted students to the rigors of college. In this research study, I sought to gain an understanding on how to assist students in moving from year one to beyond in full admission.

Through the qualitative research methodology, I conducted interviews to explore Bandura's reciprocal causation of social cognitive theory model. The research questions guiding the study to explore participants' experiences were:

RQ1: How do students' personal-cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?

RQ2: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?

RQ3: How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs as they move to full admission?

The results supported the recommendations of increased faculty–student engagement and more meaningful seminars required for first-year conditionally admitted students.

Background

Regardless of many states having expanded secondary school graduation prerequisites over the last decade, a number of high school graduates lack the skills necessary to succeed in college-level courses (Ngo & Melguizo, 2016). This means high

school graduates may be entering their first year of college underprepared for the academic rigors related with higher education. Many students who leave colleges and universities without earning a degree do so because they have entered underprepared (Wyner, 2014).

According to the NCHEMS (2015), only 53.8% of students obtain a bachelor's degree within 6 years of beginning their college education. Graduation rates for conditionally admitted students were significantly lower than those of nonconditionally admitted students for a wide range of four-year institutions (Noel-Levitz, 2013). Although students enroll into colleges underprepared, many colleges and universities conditionally admit these students and provide remediation or interventions to retain this population.

To consider students prepared for college, they must have mastered mathematics and English skills and knowledge necessary for higher educational success (National High School Center, 2012). Students without such skills often do not receive admittance to college, and if they do, they may be placed in programs to prepare them for full acceptance. College readiness—or the lack thereof—is a concern with potentially severe outcomes (Tierney & Sablan, 2014). Thus, federal, state, and local governments as well as school administrators have begun to view this concern as a priority (Chapa, Leon, Solis, & Mundy, 2014; Tierney & Sablan, 2014). Although this issue seems to be a focus of college and university representatives, some argue that public high school officials do not pay sufficient attention to the postsecondary success of students (Abbott, 2014).

These disconnects and communication breakdowns between secondary school and university officials contribute to the large number of underprepared college students (Wu, 2014). Adams (2014) highlighted collaboration between secondary schools and colleges and the need to make early associations as keys to planning for students with the scholastic aptitude needed for college success. While the lack of academic preparation in high school leads to students entering college underprepared, nonacademic factors such as motivation, anxiety, personal support, and self-perception also contribute to college underpreparedness (Fong et al., 2017).

The Theoretical Framework

Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation of social cognitive theory model (Bandura, 1978, 1989; Wood & Bandura, 1989) provided the foundational relevance and historical understanding for the study. The model guided and shaped the study through the connections of three components: behavioral, personal–cognitive factors, and environmental influences. Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation of social cognitive theory model facilitated exploration of the bidirectional intersection of the behavioral, personal–cognitive, and environmental factors involved in a program such as the CAP.

According to Bandura (1989) and the triadic reciprocal causation model theory, personal–cognitive characteristics, environment, and behavioral factors are correlated and can influence each other bidirectionally. With that, another issue confronting conditionally admitted first year students is little to no information on factors relating to personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental effects involved in the CAP. In the case of the CAP, the students' personal characteristics and behaviors may directly

influence their environment, or the environment may influence the students' characteristics, behaviors, and overall experience in the CAP. Bandura (1989) stated that personal experiences prompt reactions from one's environment, causing changes in behavior. Specifically, the behavioral factor relates to the student's ability to participate and adopt the needed skills and knowledge for the program. The final element in Bandura's model, environment, translates into such things as organization into cohorts that assist and shape students' confidence levels in the CAP.

Researchers of underprepared students' experiences have focused on the connection between the environment and the students' behavior. The incorporation of the personal–cognitive factor within the framework allowed for a deeper understanding of how all three elements engage and impact students' experiences. The model provided a clear and rational understanding of the participants and their association with the phenomena of underpreparedness, first year of college, and the CAP. Further, the framework assisted in explaining how the participants' personal characteristics, behavioral patterns, and environment, including physical and social, impacted their experiences within the CAP. Lastly, the model guided the exploration of how participants engage with and learn the skills and information taught in the CAP, as well as their capacity for self-directed success once they leave the program (Bandura, 1989; Carducci, 2009).

Summary of Analysis/Findings

A qualitative interview enabled me to learn how students' personal-cognitive characteristics influence their academic engagements and overall satisfaction within the

CAP. Ten students volunteered to participate in the study, all of whom were enrolled in their second year of college at the study site. In addition, each participant had successfully completed the semester-long CAP. The interviews consisted of guiding questions for the students, open-ended so as to allow students to provide narrative stories of the experiences they had at MAU. These experiences gave insight as to which factors added to their overall satisfaction within the CAP. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do students' personal-cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?

RQ2: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?

RQ3: How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs as they move to full admission?

After capture by a digital voice recorder, the interviews underwent transcription and import into NVivo version 12. Exploration of data and grouping them into categories including personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental occurred. Application of an inductive coding approach applied to the transcribed data helped to elicit essential themes from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). In accordance with the research questions, three themes emerged from the student participants' feedback, each theme aligned with Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model theory (1989). The themes were: (a) characteristics such as coursework and instructors' help with coursework that influenced students' academic experience, behaviors, and success; (b) CAP preparation

of students in terms of tutoring, seminars and peer advising; (c) Environmental support and transition.

Research Question 1: How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?

Data collection from the 10 student participant interviews was sufficient to the research question above. I asked 10 interview questions related to this research question (see Appendix D), with emerged themes relating to the characteristics such as coursework and instructors' help with coursework that influenced students' academic experience, behaviors, and success while in the CAP.

Theme A: Characteristics such as coursework and instructors' help with coursework that influenced students' academic experience, behaviors, and success. The themes of coursework and instructors' help with coursework resonated among all participants in the study.

Coursework. For the participants in this study, coursework was an important and positive part of the CAP. A series of interview questions helped develop this theme. The first question addressed participants' feeling or attitudes about the coursework assigned during the CAP. While students as a unanimous had a positive experience with the coursework assigned while in the CAP, they communicated mixed reviews regarding the difficulty of the coursework assigned. Six out of 10 participants indicated mathematics-related assignments as their most difficult; two participants expressed their most difficult assignments were in English; and two students indicated none of the assignments were difficult. In terms of the easiest assignments, six participants specified English as their

easiest assignments. S4 who indicated “none” for the most difficult assignment listed English assignments as the easiest. S2 expressed the English course being very difficult because of the essays assigned. She said, “I had trouble writing the essays for the English class, but I feel the class really prepared us for our second semester English course.” S6 expressed that the math course was challenging. She explained,

> The math class was challenging and sometimes made me feel like I was not ready for college. I had to get a lot of help with the coursework because most of the time I was confused and very frustrated with the class. I passed the class but got low scores on most of the exams. I almost felt like I was going to fail the class because it was so hard.

The literature suggests that dissatisfactory academic performance is one of the main reasons students drop out of college during or after their first year (Westrick, Le, Robbins, Radunzel & Schmidt, 2015). Cognition is the learning, thinking, and understanding procedure people experience from birth on. All learning happens utilizing the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Table 1 presents participants’ responses regarding the cognitive process during their CAP experience (Bandura, 2012; Cho & Kang, 2017).

Table 1

Feelings About Coursework

Feelings about coursework	Q1: How do you feel about the coursework that was assigned during the CAP?
Beneficial	S3 response
Better	S10 response
Challenging	S8 response
Engaging	S9 response
Fairly easy	S5 response
Helpful	S4 response
It did prepare us	S7 response
It is a lot lighter	S1 response

Instructors' help on coursework. The participants reported that instructors help on coursework had a significant effect on their experiences while in the CAP. A series of questions addressed the CAP instructors help within the program, as summarized in Table 2. Three out of the 10 students did not feel they received adequate assistance from the instructors on their coursework. S3 expressed that the instructors did not go over or explain the coursework thoroughly. S1 explained feeling as if she did not have much access to the instructor. Therefore, she did not get the assistance needed to do her best on the coursework. When I asked, "how did instructors help you with the assigned coursework? S4 answered, "All of the instructors helped except for one . . . During class time she told us not to ask questions. She said questions were for SIs (Supplemental Instructor)." S4 went on to say it seemed like the instructor "just did not care" and did not bother to ask them questions to see if they understood what was being taught. While this student passed this course, she explained that she felt should could have received a better

grade had the instructor offered more assistance inside and outside of the class. This aligns with Hoffman's (2014) statement that negative exchanges with instructors often results in diminished confidence and the potential inability to complete the course or college as a whole for students.

The connection between an instructor and a student is critical, particularly for retention (Kahu, 2013; Kelly et al., 2012; Micari & Pazos, 2012), in any case, as data shows, a third of the CAP students were not forming solid relationships with their instructors, which is in accordance with the reported research (Jackson, Yoo, Guevarra, & Harrington, 2012; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013; Witkow et al., 2015). Jackson et al. (2013) indicated that a conceivable reason for this was that unengaged instructors were unlikely to help engaged students. This connects back to Bandura's (1989) research because the lack of knowledge and comprehension gained caused by the aforementioned experiences additionally kept students from fully integrating into the college experience, which put them at risk of not remaining at the institution. Not having any desire to give up and simply leave the institution, these students took it upon themselves to amend the situation and tried to initiate personal connection with other instructors at the institution.

Table 2

Instructors Help With Coursework

Help with coursework	Q2: How did the instructors help you with their assigned coursework?
No hands-on to support/Not accessible	S1 response
Assist	S2 response
Did not thoroughly go over assignments	S3 response
Helpful	S5 response
Instructors provided information	S9 response
Provide help most of the time	S10 response

RQ2: How do students' personal-cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?

Three interview questions influenced the generation of the following theme, including those about tutoring help, peer advising, and support in terms of the seminar course.

Theme B: CAP preparation of students in terms of tutoring, seminars and peer advising. Overall, when I received information about the students' experiences with tutoring and peer advising, the consensus was that both prepared them for the second year of college.

Tutoring. When I asked students about their experiences specifically with tutoring, the accord was that tutoring assisted in a significant way. Specific responses appear in Table 3. All ten participants reported that the tutoring sessions helped them get through the CAP. S2 explained,

> When I started the CAP I felt unsure in many ways. I just did not think I had what it took to get through the classes. I really did not feel like I had the skills to pass the math class. When I started the tutoring sessions, I understood the assignments more and was reinsured that I could really do it.

Ding and Harskamp (2012) specified that tutoring had a positive impact on students' academic achievement and learning attitudes. This links to Bandura's research stating that there are empowering effects of appropriate learning strategies or methods (Bandura, 2015).

Table 3

How Tutoring Helped in Projects

Tutoring help	Q11: How did tutoring help you out on projects?
A lot/extremely helpful	S4 response
Encouragement	S5 response
Helped as a peer	S7 response
Helped me understand and reinsure	S2 response
Helped me, sometimes come around and see the progress	S3 response

Peer advising. All of the CAP participants conveyed having a positive experience with their peer advisors. S9 described her experience with her peer advisor as amazing. When sharing further details about her experiences, she said:

> I really believe my peer advisor was god sent. If it were not for her, I would have been totally lost when it came to just about everything. She helped me find things

> on campus. She told me how much time I should spend on studying. She taught me how to communicate with instructors through email. She was amazing and gave me insight on what to expect moving forward.

According to Sidelinger, Frisby, & Heisler (2016) a positive rapport with peer advisors can help to create supportive connections which cultivates social integration, prompting more prominent levels of comfort and engagement for students on campus. Positive mentoring or advising experiences depend on modeling and observation. The following responses demonstrated how the CAP students learn how to behave or learn information by having direct experience with situations and through modeling via peer advising (Bandura, 1986):

- Were able to express my struggles. (S10)
- They helped a lot. Still help me 'til this day. (S4)
- The peer advisors were amazing. They gave insight what to expect. (S9)
- Held accountable. (S7)
- It helped a lot. (S3)
- They were really helpful. (S5)
- Amazing. Really helped with making [MAU] feel like home. (S8)

Seminar course. While the CAP students had positive experiences with tutoring and peer advising, five out of 10 of the students had negative experiences with the seminar course. In relation to seminars, I asked students "How did seminars help while in CAP?" All of the student responses are in Table 4. S4 expressed that the seminar course was a waste of class and deemed the course unnecessary. S8 explained that she simply

did not remember much about the course because she was not required to attend all classes. S4 said that the seminars were somewhat helpful but could have been more organized. Lastly, when I asked "how did seminars help while in the CAP," S7 described her experience as "feeling like the seminar course did not help at all…there was no real structure and I only remember going a couple of times."

The literature findings are suggestive of the university seminar course impact on student persistence when the course is required as a semester-long experience and is a for-credit course (Hyers, & Joslin., 1998; Miller & Lesik, 2014; Nicholson, Putwain, Connors, & HornbyAtchison, 2013; Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, & Oestreicher, 2017; Reid, Reynolds, & Perkins-Auman, 2014). The university seminar course is an important one because it provides support to students through observation and modeling, which empowers students in their transition from high school to college (Christie & Zinth, 2015). This relates to Bandura's (1986) theory that students learn how to behave or learn information by having direct experience with situations and through effect modeling. Since a significant amount of students discussed not having a great experience with the seminar course as a learning method, they endeavored to make a concerted effort to learn from their peer advisors and tutoring sessions. Majority of the students reported that they stayed connected with their peer advisors outside of scheduled times and even remained in communication in their second year of college. These students also stated that while in the CAP they never missed any tutoring sessions.

Table 4

How Seminars Helped

How seminars helped	Q11: How did the seminars help you out in the CAP?
Enriching	S7 response
Gave information/was not bad or good	S2 response
Waste of class/unnecessary	S9 response
Helpful/could have been more structured and organized	S8 response
Very open, really uplifting	S1 response
I do not remember them too much	S4 response
Reinforced how to be a good student	S6 response
I do not think the seminars helped/did not learn much about what I needed to succeed on campus	S5 response S10 response
Helped gain skills about resume writing and interview skills	S3 response

RQ3: How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs as they move to full admission?

There were nine interview questions related to this research question. Theme 3 emerged from these questions, with student responses and feedback sufficient to address the research question. Students gave their opinions as to whether the campus environment was conducive to learning and how the CAP helped them transition from high school to college. Table 5 presents participants' responses regarding the opportunity to observe and practice the appropriate skills within the university environment necessary to advance to the next level.

Theme C: Environmental support and transition.

Environmental support. The CAP students overwhelmingly agreed that the campus environment was conducive to learning. When S4 described being at the study site, he said:

> It was definitely conducive to learning. I always felt safe while on campus. When I was in the CAP, we were always with peer advisors. The advisors would walk us to all the different buildings on campus. Most times, they would sit with us in the café. Before coming here, I was somewhat scared of the big campus and getting lost, but those feelings went away and I always felt safe.

This aligns with the literature that when students feel safe on campus they are more likely to engage and persist (Jennings, Gover & Pudryznska, 2007; Patton & Gregory, 2014; Wilcox, Jordan, & Pritchard, 2007). The positive environmental support is related to Bandura's (1986) idea that students are driven by environmental influences and this factor can be a determinant in student success and achievement.

Table 5

Conducive Environment to Learning

Conducive environment to learning	Q 18: Was the university's environment conducive to your learning and development?
It was because of all of the structure	S9 response
It was; I felt safe	S4 response
It prepared me for college	S1 response
Yes	S2 response
Yes	S5 response
Yes	S3 response
Yes it was	S7, S8 response

Transition. When asked how the CAP helped with transition from high school to college, all of the students reported that the program helped considerably. S7 explained that the CAP provided support and encouragement to succeed throughout the first year of college. S9 emphasized that the CAP helped ease him into the college environment and helped him to focus. S1 said, "the CAP got me acclimated to my surroundings, helped me understand where to go for class and took away my fear of being away from home." Hunter and Linder (2005) characterized a first-year seminar as a course that help students in their scholarly and social advancement all while making them feel whole on the college campus. This relates to Bandura's (1997) theory that a program such as the CAP can influence students' belief in their ability to succeed at something. Table 6 shows how a model of triadic reciprocity in which cognitive, behavioral, and other environmental factors worked as determinants in how successful the CAP was in easing students' transition from high school to college.

Table 6

CAP and Transition

CAP and transition	Q19: How did the CAP help you transition from high school to college?
Feeling of anxiety, but helped me stayed on the campus	S1 response
Gave me structure, support and encouragement	S7 feedback
Got me acclimated to my surroundings and knowing where to go for class	S1 feedback
Helped to ease in to the college environment and helped me to focus	S9 feedback
Highly confident in my ability to comment on coursework	S8 response
Made me more independent	S2 response
Offered us everything	S3 response
Took away fear	S4 response

Major Evidence from Literature

Tierney and Sablan (2014) found that approximately 40% of students entering college in 2014 were underprepared for college-level coursework, representing a significant increase from 29% in 2005 (National Center for Education [NCES], 2015). The majority of these underprepared college students were minorities (Gilroy, 2013); in particular, approximately 50% of Hispanic and African American students entered college not having met any of the four College Readiness Benchmarks (ACT, 2012).

A student defined as being unprepared for college is one who does not possess the math and English skills necessary to succeed in college-level courses (National High School Center, 2012). Without appropriate college readiness, students face the prospect

of failing in their efforts to obtain a bachelor's degree (Tierney & Sablan, 2014). However, many colleges continue to accept students who fall into this category (Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Hollis, 2009), thus virtually ensuring a lack of student success. This ongoing problem has as of late gotten consideration in the United States, as administrators and government oversight bodies prioritize the problem (Chapa et al., 2014; Tierney & Sablan, 2014).

Factors such as personal–cognitive, behavioral, environment, and family **s**upport play a crucial role in identifying ways to assist students to move from year one to beyond in full admission. Personal–cognitive factors, those related to gaining knowledge and comprehension (Barchia & Bussey, 2011), are the tools students employ to individual mental processes as they gather and apply cognitive methods in education. Examples of personal–cognitive factors include reasoning, recalling, judging, critical thinking and problem-solving, all operations of the brain that encompass linguistic, creative energy, discernment, and arranging. With the use of personal–cognitive ideas, effective learners employ vital reasoning in their approach to learning, critical thinking, analyzing, and concept learning (Cen, Koedinger, & Junker, 2006).

In their study behaviors, students demonstrate concepts of how to accomplish learning goals and the specific actions needed to reach such goals (Jones, Slate, Perez, & Marini, 1996). Understanding students' study behaviors and habits is most crucial in the college environment compared to primary and secondary schools. Often characterized by flexibility and variety, college requires students to draw upon environmental factors, the skills needed to shape the confidence and belief in their capabilities to learn and apply

skills (Carducci, 2009). Within the CAP environment, each student had the opportunity to observe and practice the appropriate skills necessary to advance to the next level.

Beyond the conceptual framework focus on the personal–cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors involved in an activity such as the CAP, family support is an important factor that impacts the underprepared student. According to Robinson and Harris (2014), the home environment is a significant predictor of college readiness, where family support, or the lack thereof, plays a major part in a child's educational success. Pillinger and Wood (2014) stated that parents' involvement can significantly impact their children's development, perhaps greater than the parents' socioeconomic status or educational level. According to Leonard (2013), emotional guidance is a common subject in college readiness literature, with students' success or failure seen as dependent upon the environment created by their parents and incorporating emotional support needed through a child's academic career. Guerra and Nelson (2013) found parent involvement necessary in facilitating a child's pathway to postsecondary education.

Recommendations

Based on the information gathered from the interviews and recently published research, I suggest the accompanying recommendations be considered with respect to some of the previously mentioned findings.

Recommendation 1: Required First-Year University Seminar Course

At present, the study site requires CAP students to attend sporadically scheduled seminars; however, all other first-year students must enroll in a university seminar course to learn the key roles they must play in having a successful collegiate experience.

When asked about the seminar course, five out of 10 of the students responded as having negative encounters with the course. One student communicated that the course was a waste of class and deemed the course superfluous. Another student clarified that she basically did not recall much about the course since she was not required to go to all classes. A third student said that the courses were somewhat useful yet could have been increasingly organized and structured.

The literature findings are suggestive of the university seminar course effect on student persistence when the seminar is mandatory as a semester-long experience and is a for-credit course (Hyers, & Joslin., 1998; Miller & Lesik, 2014; Nicholson, Putwain, Connors, & HornbyAtchison, 2013; Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, & Oestreicher, 2017; Reid, Reynolds, & Perkins-Auman, 2014). Further, a current study by Permzadian and Credé (2016) is suggestive that semester-long seminar courses, when delivered during the first semester of college, are best in positively impacting student retention. The University of California-San Diego runs a first-year program that includes a mandatory seminar course for at-risk first-year students. The program serves between 120 and 150 students each year by placing them in two elective courses and a seminar course intended to improve their academic, social, and leadership skills. The program participants reliably have higher retention rates after the first year and higher graduation rates following five years than non-participants in the program (Tinto, 2012).

Based on the participants' insights and research relating to the subject, I recommend required enrollment in the university seminar course for all CAP students, not just those who have met the institution's admission requirements, which may result in

more students understanding collegiate expectations and progressing from the first year to graduation.

Recommendation 2: Increased Student-Faculty Engagement

At the study site faculty-to-student interactions proved crucial for the first-year students. The students reported that instructors help on coursework significantly affected their experiences while in the CAP. Three out of the 10 students did not feel they got sufficient help from the instructors on their coursework. One of the students communicated that the instructors did not go over or clarify the coursework altogether. Another student expressed feeling as though she did not have much access to the instructor. Hence, she did not get the help expected to do her best on the coursework.

Due to instructors' support, approval, and encouragement (Hostetter & Busch, 2013; Wood, Hilton, & Hicks, 2014), students tended to account greater belonging, expanded academic engagement, and greater academic confidence, which at that point lead to reports of higher engagement in the classroom. Researchers Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014), utilizing 22 Latina/o and African American students attending a private university, conducted a qualitative research study including focus group interviews. The findings uncovered faculty-student interactions are critical in the achievement of students' outcome at universities. Student time and involvement on campus outside of class was a significant component of the CAP and the successful transition from the first year to the second year. Because majority of the students expressed having poor interactions with instructors and research supports the fact that strong faculty-student interactions has the

potential to increase retention, the second recommendation is increased student–faculty engagement. Means of achieving this recommendation may include the following:

1. Student–faculty engagement should start in the classroom, with courses and assignments organized to encourage interaction with faculty. Louwrens and Harnett (2015) note student-faculty engagement as a critical component of instructing because of its direct connection with student achievement. Accomplishing this would be through faculty making classes more student-friendly. In addition, faculty should ask students for feedback throughout the course and allow for student-led discourse. Faculty ought to embrace a more interactive teaching style incorporating engaging lectures using active learning strategies.
2. Faculty must be more approachable. Faculty approachability has been researched and various approaches have been found to be effective (Stewart-Banks, Kuofie, Hakim, & Branch, 2015). Faculty can be more approachable by being communicative and showing active interest in student contact during which they reveal something personal about themselves and demonstrate a sense of humor.
3. It is essential to take note of that by and large, the type of positive and important interactions with faculty, as depicted by students, occurred outside the classroom (Lundber, 2014). Therefore, having activities outside of the classroom is critical. To accomplish this, faculty members can facilitate lunches as a way to bring the curriculum to life outside the classroom, making

> the coursework seem relevant while providing some relatability. In the end, steady learning environments that are the by-product of constructive faculty-student interactions play a critical role in encouraging the emotional and psychological skills that improve student engagement (Zumbrunn et al., 2014).

Recommendation 3: Expansion of the University Seminar Course

The foundation of most university or college education programs is the first-year seminar course educating students on what they need for a successful college experience and teaching them how to improve their skills so as to reach graduation. When I asked students how the seminar course helped them while in the CAP, half of them expressed that the course did not help much or at all. One student articulated that the seminar course was a waste of class and deemed the course pointless. Because she was not required to attend all classes, another student explained that she simply did not remember much about the course material. A third student said that the seminars were slightly helpful but lacked structure and organization. Lastly, one student described her experience as "feeling like the seminar course did not help at all…the class did not give me the skills I needed to be successful in college. I learned more from my peer advisor than attending the seminar course"

The first-year seminar course is typically considered an effective first-year retention initiative (Arensdorf & Naylor-Tincknell, 2016). At the University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) students reported feeling more prepared for their second semester of college after being oriented with the campus, gaining academic skills, and being informed

about drug and alcohol prevention in their university seminar class (Bir & Myrick, 2015). Awareness in these areas equip students with the information and tools essential to successfully complete tasks, goals, and fulfil the academic demands and rigors of collegiate life (Robbins et al., 2004; Thomas, 2016). Using students' responses to the interview questions coupled with the suggestive research, I recommend expanding the seminar class to cover areas such as time optimization, introduction to campus facilities and key areas of support, drug/alcohol mindfulness, responsible sexual conduct, and the significance of diversity.

I expect these proposed recommendations to work because they are descriptive and easy to implement (Burns & Harris, 2012; Vardiman et al., 2015). Implementing student engagement strategies may include team-based approaches such as collaborating in small groups on various assignments and projects. According to Johnson, Johnson and Smith (2014), working in small groups is an instructional strategy that maximizes students own and each other's learning. In an experimental study to research the impact of cooperative or team-based learning on student achievement, Tran (2014) discovered that there was a noteworthy increase in students' achievement and retention because of studying for eight weeks using team-based learning strategies. Such improvements merit careful drafting and management so that students can receive the full support needed for the first-year preparatory stage. The strategies must also impart that students are accountable for their own success, which merits the design of protocols to promote learning and development as well as comprehensive feedback to all students in a frequent and timely manner.

Conclusion

There are various causes for low retention rates among first-year college students, among them financial, social, scholarly, emotional, and institutional issues. Practically all of these issues include students' connections with faculty and the institution as a whole. At the study site, students identified individual connection to faculty members and feeling welcomed at the institution as essential factors in whether they remained at the institution. To help increase student satisfaction at the study site and conceivably improve first-year retention rates, there must be changes to the university seminar course and the learning communities where faculty and students interact. Most of these changes require little to no funding to implement before the following academic year. The beginning of a new academic year is an opportune time to try new ways for improving the stagnant retention rate among first-year conditionally admitted students.

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Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Invitation to participate in the research project titled:
"What Drives Underprepared Students From the First Year On"

Dear Conditional Admission Program Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study that focuses on What Drives Underprepared Students From the First Year On. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Shanetta S. Lillard who is a Doctoral student at Walden University. You might have seen the researcher around with students but this study is separate from that role. I am conducting interviews as part of this research study to gain an understanding of how the conditionally admitted program participants describe their experiences in the program as they relate to their academic and social needs at MAU. As a student who has completed the Conditional Admission Program you are in an ideal position to give me valuable firsthand information from your own perspective.

The interview takes around 30-45 minutes. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on being a student in the Conditional Admission Program. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings could lead to greater public understanding of conditional admission programs and the students who participate in such programs.

The researcher will make sure that no personal gain will be obtained by your participation. You are assured that this study will be confidential and your names will not

be disclosed to any person should you agree or decline to participate in the study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your choice to participate or not will certainly not affect your current or future relations with your institution or the researcher. If you decide to participate now and change your mind at any time later, you are still free to do so without affecting those relationships. You may quit at any time. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at shanetta.lillard@waldenu.edu or 585-317-5315.

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at Walden University at 612-312-xxxx or email: irb@mail.waldenu.edu

Thanks

Shanetta S. Lillard

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Welcome the participant.

Thank them for participating and explain what will happen throughout the interview.

Explain the Informed Consent Form to them and have them sign two copies. Give them one for their records.

Ask the participant if they have any questions and answer.

Explain to the participant that the interview will be recorded.

Begin the interview.

Interview Questions

Research Question 1: *How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics influence their academic experiences within the CAP?*

1. How do you feel about the coursework assigned by the instructors?
2. How did the instructors help you with the assigned coursework?
3. How important do you think coursework is for learning?
4. How well did you do with the coursework?
5. What would have helped you do better on coursework assignments?
6. What was the easiest assignment(s)?
7. What was the most difficult assignment(s)?
8. What things or people made it hard for you to complete your coursework?
9. What things or people made it easy for you to complete your coursework?
10. What do you do when something bothers you while you are completing assignments?

Research Question 2: *How do students' personal–cognitive characteristics and the students' academic behaviors interact to influence their experiences within the CAP?*

1. How did the tutoring help you while in the CAP?
2. How did the seminars help you while in the CAP?
3. How did the peer advisement help you while in the CAP?
4. How did the structured study halls help you while in the CAP?
5. What does academic success mean to you? How do you feel about your academic success?

Research Question 3: *How does MAU's environment support the students' academic and social needs?*

1. Was the university's environment conducive to your learning and development while in the CAP? Would you recommend the university to a friend?
2. How did the CAP help you transition from high school to college?
3. Describe your first year in the CAP at MAU.
4. What experiences contributed most to your success in the CAP? Academically? Socially?
5. How frequently did you socialize with other students in the CAP on campus?
6. What would you do differently if you could be a first year student in the CAP again?
7. How has the CAP prepared you for the second year of college at MAU?

8. Was there ever a time you considered dropping out of the CAP and leaving MAU? If yes, why? If no, why? Academic, social life, family issues?
9. What did you wish for, that you didn't have, as a CAP student?

Tell the participant that this ends the interview and turn off recording device.

Ask them if they have any questions.

Ask the participant if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview if necessary.

Thank them again.

Good bye.

Appendix D: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Transcription Services

What Drives Underprepared Students From the First Year On

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Shanetta S. Lillard related to her doctoral study on What Drives Underprepared Students From the First Year On. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;

2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Shanetta S. Lillard;

3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;

4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Shanetta S. Lillard in a complete and timely manner.

5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix E: Project Evaluation Survey

What Drives Underprepared Students From the First Year On

Study Evaluation

Please read the attached white paper entitled *Recommendations to Retain Conditionally Admitted Students*, which is the result of a study I conducted at MAU. The white paper will be introduced to the Director of the CAP and instructors who teach in the CAP with an end goal to improve the retention rate of the CAP by implementing one or all of the recommendations. Your feedback will help guarantee that the white paper is thorough and clear so that the presentation, distribution, and conceivable implementation goes smoothly. Please complete this evaluation after you have finished reading the white paper.

1. Did you feel that the executive summary page contained the most crucial information contained within the white paper? Please check one: ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If you felt more information was needed, which pieces of information do you believe should be added? If you felt information was included that was not crucial in the executive summary, please also indicate that below.

   Did you need more information about the study that was conducted in order to understand what was discussed in the paper? Please check one: ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If you felt more information was needed, on what areas would you have liked to have had more information?

2. Please rate each of the recommendations listed below on the qualities of clarity and comprehensiveness with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. You may add comments to clarify your responses.

Recommendation 1: Required enrollment in the University Seminar course for all students

Clarity: 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□

Comprehensiveness: 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□

Comments:

Recommendation 2: Increase faculty-student engagement

Clarity: 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□

Comprehensiveness: 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□

Comments:

Recommendation 3: Improve University seminar course

Clarity: 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□

Comprehensiveness: 1□ 2□ 3□ 4□ 5□

Comments:

Thank you for your feedback!