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Parent Support and Retention of Rural First- Generation College Students

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Edna E. McCulloh

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Parental Support and Retention of Rural First-Generation College Students

by

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MA, Western Michigan University, 1994

BS, Aquinas College, 1986

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2016

Abstract

A small, private university was the focus of this study, where rural first-generation college (FGC) students withdraw at higher rates than their continuing-generation counterparts. An objective of the university leadership is to increase student retention to foster a greater likelihood of degree completion. The research problem was the inability to retain rural FGC students. The purpose of the study was to explore parental support that promoted rural FGC student retention. The research questions addressed the students' perceptions about parental support and their decisions to remain enrolled. The research methodology was a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through semi structured interviews with a purposeful sample of 12 full-time FGC students from rural residential zip codes or counties. Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed following a combination of approaches described by Creswell and Stake. The analysis revealed 6 themes: (a) parental support, (b) extended family relationships, (c) campus connection, (d) financial support, (e) community networks, and (f) institutional support. The results suggested that parental support shaped the students' decisions to remain enrolled. Based on the findings, a parent development project was designed to help university leadership and parents of rural FGC students engage collaboratively to improve retention. This study may contribute to positive social change, in that the resulting project may improve the students' ability to persist to degree completion and potentially give back to their rural communities.

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Dedication

This scholarly work is dedicated to my husband, Larry, and daughter, Imani, for their unselfish love and support during my journey to achieve this honor. I thank God each day for you both, and I love you so very much.

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First, I thank God for providing an opportunity for me to pursue and complete this degree. I truly live by the biblical scripture that I can do all things through Christ Jesus who gives me strength.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The achievement of a baccalaureate degree from an institution of higher education is an accomplishment desired by first-generation and continuing-generation students (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011). Although first-generation students from urban, suburban, and rural communities aspire to attend college and graduate, their postsecondary enrollment presents an array of obstacles, including the need to work while pursuing the degree (Stebleton & Soria, 2012), depression (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Duron, 2013); inadequate financial support (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke (2011), language and math competency (Stebleton & Soria, 2012), and a lack of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Fewins-Bliss, & Gray, 2013). Any barrier associated with college access, enrollment, and/or retention impacts a student's collegiate experience and achievement. This section contains a discussion of the parental support that shaped first-generation college (FGC) students' decisions to remain enrolled in college. The implications for the future development of a project based on the anticipated research results are discussed.

Definition of the Problem

The local problem that prompted this study concerned the inability to retain traditional-aged, first-time, full-time rural FGC students at a small private Midwestern faith-based university. Despite the university's recruitment efforts, there was a problem retaining rural FGC students beyond the first academic year. Freshmen withdrawal rates indicated that these students were retained at lower percentages compared to the

traditional freshmen cohorts. The problem negatively impacted rural FGC students, as they often withdrew from the university with acquired debt from unpaid tuition and fees and/or student loans, which inhibited their ability to transfer to another institution (E. Retree, personal communication, August 20, 2015). Without a college degree, it is difficult for FGC students to achieve employment, improve their socioeconomic status, and attain financial stability (Forbus et al., 2011; Thering, 2012). A possible cause of a FGC student's decision to leave a university may be inadequate or unsuitable parental support (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012; Strom & Savage, 2014). A qualitative research study was warranted to explore how rural FGC students perceived the parental support that shaped their decisions to remain enrolled in the university. The university's leadership and educators need to gain awareness and comprehension of rural FGC students' perceptions about parental support and how parents' level of support can impact student retention. Moreover, this qualitative study helped to close current gaps in knowledge about parental support and rural FGC student retention.

The rural FGC student population was the focus of this study, as rural students face unique experiences compared to nonrural FGC students, such as complex socioeconomic conditions, inability to adjust to new ways of studying, and community living (Yiquan & Yijie, 2015). Byun, Irvin, and Meece (2012) reported that rural students' ability to enroll in college and attain a baccalaureate degree lagged behind that of students in suburban and urban communities. Rural FGC students faced challenges of limited preparation for 4-year college enrollment (Attewell, Heil, & Reisel, 2011) and lower socioeconomic circumstances compared to students from suburban and urban areas

(Byun et al., 2012). Rural FGC students experienced a greater challenge of inadequate support from parents who did not achieve a college degree as compared to nonrural FGC students (Byun et al., 2012). Most important, parental support can affect students' decisions to enroll in subsequent semesters; therefore, this qualitative study explored rural FGC students' perceptions of parental support and retention.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The small private Midwestern faith-based university that was the focus of this study recruits first-generation students on a regional, national, and global scale from urban, suburban, and rural communities who represent diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and academic backgrounds. The rationale for choosing this specific local problem was the opportunity to explore parental support as a means to improve rural FGC student retention percentages. The problem of early withdrawals from the university negatively impacted rural FGC students' ability to achieve a college degree and engage in positive social change. Equally important, the inability to retain any population of students has significant financial implications for this small private-enrollment-driven institution.

Within the university's annual freshmen enrollment, 18% to 21% comprises first-generation students from rural communities, who are largely from the southeastern portion of the recruitment territories (B. Recruiter, personal communication, October 27, 2015). Despite rural FGC students' access to and enrollment in the university, the retention problem was evident in institutional withdrawal data. Academic-semester data for 2010-2013 indicated the overall traditional first-year, full-time freshmen cohort

withdrawal rates as 25% (Fall 2010), 25% (Fall 2011), 26% (Fall 2012), and 23% (Fall 2013). The corresponding withdrawal rates for the university's FGC student cohorts were 45%, 51%, 41%, and 45%. Meanwhile, the withdrawal rates for the rural FGC student population were 31%, 31%, 27%, and 25%. These percentages are detailed in Table 1 and provide evidence that there is a local problem with retaining rural FGC students at this university.

Table 1

First-Generation/Rural/Freshmen Cohort Institutional Withdrawal Rates

Semester	All first-generation	Rural first-generation	All freshmen
Fall Semester 2010	45%	31%	25%
Fall Semester 2011	51%	28%	25%
Fall Semester 2012	41%	27%	26%
Fall Semester 2013	45%	25%	23%

Note. These data represent the percentage of students who did not remain enrolled in the institution.

To further demonstrate that a problem exists in retaining rural FGC students at the university, it was appropriate to examine and compare the data with national withdrawal rates. Howley, Johnson, Passa, and Uekawa (2014) suggested that the first-to-second-year college retention rates of students from distant and remote rural schools were lower than those of students from rural-fringe and nonrural locations. A national study by Pierson and Hanson (2015) suggested that rural college students attending 2- and 4-year public and private institutions were less likely to continue their enrollment beyond the first year

compared to nonrural college students. The national retention average in the study revealed a 78% rural college student rate compared to an 83% nonrural college student rate, respectively. In addition, national first-generation student withdrawal data further substantiated the problem of retention among FGC students, as 46.8% of low-income first-generation students withdrew from college without completing a degree within 6 years, whereas 23.3% of the continuing-generation population withdrew prior to degree completion in the same timeframe (Pell Institute, 2011). These national and local data revealed a disparity in retention rates between rural and nonrural college students. These data supported the need for an exploration of rural FGC students' perceptions of parental support and decisions to remain enrolled at this small private Midwestern faith-based university.

Not only did I identify the local problem as the researcher, but the university's academic student support center personnel also acknowledged the difficulty in retaining rural FGC students. The center houses the campus tutoring, writing, and study skills professionals and is used by freshmen to senior undergraduate students. The center's staff recognized the need to provide targeted academic student assistance as a means to foster achievement and encourage successive term enrollments among rural FGC students (T. Dresser, personal communication, October 7, 2015). The center's personnel also realized that the students' early campus departures impacted their ability to achieve educational and personal goals, which resulted in discouragement and frustration.

The university retention leader also viewed university withdrawals among rural FGC students as problematic. Specifically, the institution established procedures to

provide access to and information about the campus through high school visits, parent night presentations, and open houses. In addition, the admissions process included a conditional acceptance status for academic at-risk populations and students who did not meet the minimum admittance qualifications. These allowances were made in an attempt to provide equal enrollment opportunity for all first-generation freshmen students (E. Retree, personal communication, October 15, 2015). However, the inability to retain a matriculated rural FGC student may convey a negative perception of university enrollment to a rural high school student considering this institution as a possible choice. It was important to recognize and acknowledge the concerns of the campus stakeholders who provide support to the university's rural FGC student population.

The purpose of this case study was to explore rural FGC students' perceptions of parental support while attending this small private Midwestern faith-based university. I used interviewing as a data collection method to acquire rich descriptions and in-depth details in order to comprehend the significance of parental support and retention among rural FGC students. The central phenomenon, rural FGC students, is generally defined as encompassing any student who resides in a territory not included within an urban area and who has a parent or parents who did not achieve a college degree.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Historically, rural education has faced greater obstacles compared to education in suburban and urban areas. Byun, Meece, and Irvin (2012) reported that rural high school students experienced lower curriculum rigor compared to their suburban and urban counterparts. Consequently, the reality of academic challenges may hinder matriculated

rural FGC students' ability to maintain good academic standing and may result in withdrawal from a university prior to completing a degree. In particular, such students' academic challenges and subsequent withdrawals have often been attributed to poor study skills (Stebelton & Soria, 2012) and inadequate academic preparation for the rigor of a 4 - year institution (Attewell et al., 2011).

First-generation college students also face a variety of nonacademic obstacles that may result in withdrawal from a university, such as (a) family conflicts (Wilson & Kittleson, 2013), (b) insufficient financial resources (Mehta et al., 2011), (c) inability to adjust to first-generation cultural status, (d) inadequate parental support (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014), and (e) lack of social and/or cultural capital (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012). Each challenge has the potential to negatively impact student retention; therefore, appropriate resources are required from the students' university and rural community to support their educational goals (Byun et al., 2012).

Definitions

First-generation college (FGC) student: A student whose parent(s) did not achieve a college degree (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

Parental support: A provision of social capital in a parent-and-child relationship involving several types of support, such as informational, emotional, and instrumental (Coleman, 1988; Sy, Fong, Carter, Boehme, & Alpert, 2011; Wohn et al., 2013).

Retention: A student's enrollment in successive academic terms without departure or withdrawal from college (Tinto, 1993).

Rural: An area recognized as a countryside and/or town that encompasses populations, housing, and territory not included within an urban area (United States Census Bureau, 2000).

Social capital: A collection of resources embedded in a network of relationships that may be accessible to individuals within their social relations or connections (Coleman, 1988).

Significance of the Study

The topic of this study is significant to higher education institutions because rural student enrollment in colleges and universities continues to increase. Snyder and Dillow (2010) calculated a 7% increase in a 4-year span for rural high school graduates who enrolled in a 4-year college. Specifically, rural FGC students tend to select and enroll in small universities (Ames et al., 2014). Thus, rural FGC students' selection of this small, private university was significant, as the findings provided the foundation on which to develop initiatives to promote retention.

First-generation college student enrollments have been studied in various types of institutions, including (a) Christian colleges (Ecklund, 2013), (b) community colleges (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015), (c) public universities (Thering, 2012), (d) research universities (Wilkins, 2014), and (e) tribal colleges (Schmidt & Akande, 2011). However, this small private university has not explored specific applications of these identified studies to its rural student population. This exploration of rural FGC student perceptions of parental support while attending this university is significant because the results may

guide leadership in the development of new retention programs that target these students and their parents.

Generally, FGC students experience a variety of challenges as the first in their families to attend college, which suggests a need for students to build a network of support from close friends, family or parents, and faculty while enrolled in college (Mehta et al., 2011; Padgett et al., 2012; Stebelton & Soria, 2012; Wilkins, 2014). This study contributes not only by filling a gap in local practice concerning awareness and understanding of rural FGC students' challenges in remaining enrolled beyond the first year, but also by illuminating potential ways to improve parental support. Further, this study may be useful to the local educational setting in the creation of programs to (a) connect rural FGC students with valuable resources, (b) support rural FGC students' social and academic integration, and (c) motivate rural FGC students to achieve their educational goals.

Research Questions

This study explored rural FGC students' perceptions of the parental support that shaped their decisions to remain enrolled in college. A qualitative methodology facilitated the opportunity to acquire detailed descriptions and an in-depth understanding of the students' perceptions regarding parental support. In addition, a case study design provided a means to answer the guiding research questions.

RQ1: What are rural FGC student perceptions of parental support while attending the university?

RQ2: How does the level of parental support shape the rural FGC students' decisions to remain enrolled in the university?

Review of the Literature

The search for literature about rural FGC students and parental support included keywords such as *parental support*, *parent involvement*, *rural*, *first-generation students*, *retention*, *social capital*, and *social networks*. The search engines used to locate information included EBSCOhost, ProQuest Central, Google Scholar, ERIC, Education Research Complete, Academic Search Complete, and Walden University Digital Library of Dissertations. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* was also examined for topic-related current resources.

Despite the growing number of rural students entering institutions of higher education, there was not an overabundance of recent information specifically focused on the rural FGC student population compared to similar urban-focused research studies. A review of the literature provided a synopsis of recent studies related to (a) rural and universal FGC student characteristics, (b) unique challenges that impact students' ability to remain enrolled, (c) the network of supports that facilitate subsequent student enrollments, and (d) parental support that helps or hinders student success. The review of the literature began with an examination of the conceptual framework, social capital.

Conceptual Framework

Introduced in the seminal work of Coleman (1988), social capital is embedded in the relationships between individuals. Coleman used this concept to analyze the impact of lack of social capital on high school students who dropped out of a religiously affiliated

secondary school. It was determined in the study that social capital within the family, extended relationships, and the external community was a dominant factor reducing the likelihood of students leaving high school prior to graduation. Social capital provided the opportunity for access to and use of desired resources within a network consisting of the students' interpersonal relationships (Coleman, 1988).

Three forms of social capital were identified by Coleman (1988): (a) obligation and expectation, (b) information channels, and (c) social norms. For the purpose of this study, information channels are discussed as a form of social capital for FGC students. Inherent within the students' relationships is the opportunity to attain information and support from interactions or relationships with others, such as parents, other family members, and the community (Coleman, 1988). Established social relationships are a form of social capital that provide support to students through the transmission of information (Coleman, 1988). Thus, the students' information channels are crucial in providing a foundation for their actions related to postsecondary enrollment, as the initial academic year may be their last (Budgen, Main, Callcott, & Hamlett, 2014).

Social capital in the family and community and its role in the students' ability to access, enroll, and persist in higher education were critical to the purpose of this study. According to Coleman (1988), *family social capital* refers to relationships between youth and parents or other family members. In Coleman's study, *human capital* was referenced as a measurement in the years of the parents' education. Although the human capital was considered low, the social capital available from the parent-student relationships was considerably high (Coleman, 1988). Social capital may represent the parents' time spent

with the student, interest shown in the aspirations of the student, and efforts to support the student. Further, although parents may not have the requisite college experience to provide adequate or appropriate information to help the FGC student navigate the first year of college, they may provide social capital through their own forms of support, such as inspirational messages, telephone calls, and visitations (Kolkhorst, Yazedjian, & Toews, 2010). In an older study by Gofen (2009), the family and first-generation student's day-to-day involvements and interactions were key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of college noncompletion. This form of social capital from the parents fostered an opportunity for the first-generation student to achieve college success.

Rural FGC students often rely on the support of their closely tied communities, which provide a strong form of social capital through their families and religious affiliations (Byun et al., 2012). Further, the parents' relationships with community institutions build a structure of relationships to support the student (Coleman, 1988). Most importantly, social capital from strong parent-student relationships is necessary for students to lower the risk of dropping out (Coleman, 1988). Specific to this study, as the small private university's leaders seek to understand and address the needs of the rural FGC student population, it is important to consider parental support as a source of social capital to facilitate the students' enrollment beyond the first year.

According to Moschetti and Hudley (2015), social capital is the value placed on the relationships in a social network that offers the support needed in a specific social situation. When FGC students do not receive sufficient parental support, they may depend on and be supported by an external support network, such as extended family

members, friends, alumni (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012), and/or entities within their communities (Byun et al., 2012). For example, Wohn (2013) determined that the social networks of first-generation high school students, such as Facebook and close peers, provided the information they needed to achieve a better understanding of the college application process, college enrollment, and related academic and social expectations. Carter-Francique et al. (2013) revealed that the Black student athletes attending a predominantly White institution of higher education used their social networks, which consisted of parents and other family members such as grandparents, to achieve academic success during their university enrollment. The students' social capital included monetary support and encouragement (Carter-Francique et al., 2013). According to Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012); Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2014); and Unverferth, Talbert-Johnson, and Bogard (2012), social capital is a resource accessible through social networks that provides a scaffold for FGC students, particularly in academic major selection (Martin, Miller, & Simmons, 2014) and financial aid (Choy, 2001). Conversely, a lack of social capital impacts FGC students' ability to collaborate and build a social network, as compared to their continuing-generation counterparts (Padgett et al., 2012), which may result in early withdrawal from the institution. Thus, students who develop social networks as a form of social capital have access to important information that facilitates retentive action (Coleman, 1988).

Consistent with recent studies on the concept of social capital, a qualitative research approach provided an opportunity to understand how rural FGC students perceived parental support (Byun et al., 2012; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Sandoval-

Lucero et al., 2014). A case study design facilitated the acquisition of the rural FGC students' rich descriptions of social capital in the form of parental support while attending this small private university. The qualitative data collection process consisted of one-on-one semistructured interviews to gather in-depth, detailed information about rural FGC students' parental support and answer the guiding research questions. The research approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the importance of social capital in rural FGC students' journey to achieve a baccalaureate degree.

First-Generation College (FGC) Students

Definitions for *FGC students* vary in the literature; however, the most widely used definition indicates that the term refers to undergraduates whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education (Choy, 2001). The challenges that most FGC students face as the first to attend college may affect their ability to remain enrolled (Choy, 2001). As a result, members of this population often leave institutions with loan debt and without a degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008), and the institutions are then faced with the problem of lower retention rates in the FGC student population compared to continuing-generation students (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012).

First-generation college students attempt to rationalize the costs and benefits associated with their education (Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanath, 2015). According to Byun et al. (2012), the parents of rural college students are less often recipients of a baccalaureate degree compared to the parents of suburban and urban students. The parents of rural FGC students may struggle to keep their offspring from leaving the family and community to pursue higher education (Sherman & Sage, 2011). When rural

FGC students leave their families and close communities, their action may create a conflict between home and college, which can impact their decisions to continue enrollment (Jehangir et al., 2015). Specifically, Jehangir et al. (2015) revealed that FGC students experienced stress as they attempted to achieve college success and satisfy the expectations of their families simultaneously. Likewise, Lowery-Hart and Pacheco (2011) argued that FGC students struggled with the pressures associated with give-and-take between home and university life.

It is important to consider retention beyond the initial academic year. For example, Hunt, Boyd, Gast, Mitchell, & Wilson (2012) suggested that senior student withdrawals during an academic semester or prior to graduation were the result of mental and physical distress that negatively impacted the students' ability to achieve success. Such stressors arose due to financial issues, employment needed to finance the education, inadequate family support, and the demands of family expectations (Hunt et al., 2012). Any one of these challenges can impact the students' decisions to remain enrolled and persist to degree completion.

Retention Challenges

Integration and adaption to postsecondary learning and expectations are challenges for the rural FGC student population, as the collegiate environment may test these students' level of comfort (Yiquan & Yiji, 2015). Hlinka, Mobelini, and Giltner (2015) reported that rural students experienced a lack of confidence, which served as a barrier to college enrollment and degree completion. Typically, a myriad of challenges occur during the transition into, and navigation through, college among FGC student

populations, including those from rural communities (Byun et al., 2012; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Yiquan & Yijie, 2015), as well as minority and low-income students (Garza, Bain, & Kupczynski, 2014; Jehangir, 2010). For example, students encountered the obstacles of limited financial resources (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; Thering, 2012), lack of academic rigor (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Unverferth et al., 2012), insufficient knowledge and information about the college application process (Wohn, 2013), inadequate parental support (Woosley & Shepler, 2011), and obligatory personal commitments (Ihrlbeck et al., 2014; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). These identified challenges may impede students' ability to acquire academic and social fulfillment, which can impact retention (Mehta et al., 2011). These issues are particularly applicable to low-income and minority students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Garza et al., 2014).

Student employment. Rural FGC students face the stress of a limited and competitive job environment, and this challenge is further complicated by their overall economic conditions (Yiquan & Yijie, 2015, p. 105). First-generation college students usually have limited time to devote to their studies, due to longer work hours and/or competing job responsibilities, as compared to their continuing-generation counterparts (Mehta et al., 2011; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). According to Engle and Tinto (2008) and Hunt et al. (2012), off-campus employment during a standard semester is a challenge for students working more than 20 hours per week. Working excessive hours may be necessary to pay for college expenses, but the stress of balancing work and attending classes can create a barrier to academic success (Hunt et al., 2012). Consequently,

students' academic, social, and/or personal struggles in college may increase the likelihood of early withdrawal from college.

Invisibility and isolation. According to Yiquan and Yijie (2015), rural FGC students reported feelings of marginalization, as they were challenged to find commonalities with urban students. Similarly, other researchers have determined that many FGC students experience feelings of isolation while enrolled in college (Jehangir, 2010; Stuber, 2011; Wilkins, 2014). For example, Jehangir (2010) revealed that a diverse population of low-income FGC students experienced marginalization during their enrollment at a predominantly White research university. To further support Jehangir's findings, Wilkins (2014) reported that the college transition experiences of Black male students resulted in an unexpected challenge to fitting in due to feelings of invisibility. Stuber (2011) reported that White working-class FGC students expressed feelings of alienation and marginality, as well as difficulties with social integration. However, for some students, the latter was overcome through personal motivation for "social change" (Stuber, 2011, p. 117). Furthermore, the race of these students may have also served as an asset that enabled them to blend into the environment. Yet, some White working-class FGC students may still feel unnoticed due to their socioeconomic status (Pyne & Means, 2013).

Although the working-class backgrounds of some FGC students may not fit in with the middle-class norms of the institution (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014), it is possible to create a sense of belonging by incorporating the students' cultural capital into their learning experiences within the classroom (Jehangir, 2010). Pyne and Means (2013)

provided insight into the lived experiences of first-generation Hispanic female college students, noting that the challenges of invisibility existed for them while attending a private, predominantly White university. Success in higher education requires strategies such as developing a positive outlook regardless of negative experiences (Pyne & Means, 2013). Feelings of invisibility or marginality may undermine FGC students' efforts to achieve desired educational outcomes (Pyne & Means, 2013); however, this population may also be highly motivated to succeed (Ecklund, 2013).

Family achievement guilt. FGC students choose to attend a variety of institutions. Regardless of the chosen school's institutional type, Carnegie classification, geographic location, program offerings, or enrollment size, FGC students may experience family achievement guilt as the first in the family to attend college and complete a baccalaureate degree. Such feelings of guilt may occur when students' family members have been unable to access similar educational opportunities (Covarrubias, Romero, & Trivelli, 2014). First-generation college students may struggle with feelings of guilt due to exceeding the accomplishments of their family members (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2014). Minority FGC students seem to experience more achievement guilt than their Caucasian counterparts. In addition, family achievement guilt affects students' mental health, and increased levels of guilt may bring on symptoms of depression and low self-efficacy (Covarrubias et al., 2014). However, not all groups experience these symptoms equally, as depression rates are generally higher for females than for males (Jenkins et al., 2013). On the other hand, low-income Hispanic FGC students have been found to experience no significant differences in self-efficacy, resiliency, and persistence

compared to continuing-generation students (Garza et al., 2014). Nonetheless, further supporting the reality of achievement guilt, minority FGC students reported family-study conflicts related to increased interactions with family (Meeuwisse, Born, & Severiens, 2014) and more achievement guilt than continuing-generation students (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2014). Family achievement guilt is a phenomenon that warrants awareness and comprehension, as the associated factors are critical to students' academic success and wellbeing.

Home and school values conflict. The conflict between home and school values generates complications for many students attending college as the first in their families. Hlinka et al. (2015) reported that rural community college students were challenged to prioritize institutional requirements and family needs. The rural students expressed concern about moving away from home to attend a 4-year institution, as they desired to receive continued parental guidance (Hlinka et al., 2015). Consequently, these students were guided to attend a community college as a first step toward achieving a baccalaureate degree while remaining close to family at home. As a result of significant levels of parental support, rural FGC students were expected to give back in return within the family structure (Guan, 2015). The conflicts associated with family demands included those related to (a) returning home for family functions or completing academic assignments, (b) spending money to return home or purchase course materials, (c) seeing/visiting family versus attending to coursework, (d) helping family versus focusing on academic work, and (e) homesickness requiring distance travel home versus remaining in school (Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, & Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2015). To further

complicate this struggle, the students second guessed their decisions, and as a result, they experienced internal stress that influenced their academic performance and wellbeing. Although the identified barriers impacted the students' ability to remain enrolled in college, knowledge and understanding of these hindrances to retention provided insight into the reasons why FGC students may fail to achieve success (Mehta et al., 2011).

Student Support Networks

Despite the multitude of obstacles encountered by FGC students, many are able to access various forms of social networks to acquire information and knowledge about college admissions, expectations, enrollment, and navigation (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Strom & Savage, 2014; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013; Wohn et al., 2013). The support that these networks provide may positively or negatively influence the students' college aspirations and educational outcomes.

Usage of social media, specifically Facebook, was examined in combination with parental support, close friends, and peers among a group of first-generation high school students aspiring to enroll in college (Wohn et al., 2013). In particular, Facebook provided the students with (a) knowledge about the application process; (b) a wide range of access to connections beyond their present environment, including instrumental and informational supports; and (c) a platform where they could inquire about the expectations of college. According to Irlbeck et al. (2014) and Strom and Savage (2014), FGC students used close friends as a source of support for their intentions to persist in college. Although initial support from friends came from within the classroom through interpersonal dialogue about course specifics, encouragement and a stronger commitment

to degree completion were the result of the modeling patterns of close friends (Strom & Savage, 2014). On the other hand, students' enrollment status can also change due to the replication of certain behaviors resulting in withdrawal from college (Wohn et al., 2013).

Due to parents' lack of sufficient information and experiences related to higher education, FGC students typically do not receive the types of support required to successfully navigate the higher education terrain (Mehta et al., 2011; Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Strom & Savage, 2014; Woosley & Shepler, 2011). Although parents may lack higher education knowledge and understanding, they may anticipate providing some form of support within the limitations of their resources (Aaltonen & Karvonen, 2016). Further, in a study to determine rural high school students' sources of information and support regarding their postgraduation plans, parents were listed as most helpful (Griffin, Hutchings, & Meece, 2011). However, a few researchers have suggested that FGC students generally rely on resources beyond their immediate family environment to acquire the social capital necessary to remain in college (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Swecker et al., 2013). Specifically, rural FGC students have been found to experience strong support through their kinships and religious communities (Coleman, 1988). In addition, even modest community social resources can have an impact on rural students' collegiate enrollment and degree completion (Byun et al., 2012). An academic advisor can also have an important connection to student retention (Swecker et al., 2013). Successive meetings with an academic advisor have been found to increase the likelihood of retention and serve as an important support for FGC students (Swecker et al., 2013). Another support network is in faculty members' relationships with

FGC students. Irlbeck et al. (2014) determined that students appreciated faculty who encouraged them to work hard to achieve success, and this effort was particularly important in the absence of parental support. A network of knowledgeable, understanding, and helpful supporters may provide the resources to foster academic achievement and shape students' decisions to remain enrolled in college.

Parental Support

The parents of FGC students are often unfamiliar with, and do not fully understand, the dynamics necessary to achieve success in college (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Parents who did not earn a college degree have been found to provide less support to their children in the college application process (Choy, 2001). However, the expectations of parents carry the potential to influence FGC students' decisions about college (McCoy, 2014). According to Low (2015), parents have expectations regarding students' direct entry into college and major or program selection. For some students, attending college is not optional, and the parents' expectations impact their choice about higher education access, enrollment, and success (McCoy, 2014). Further, parents may not possess the information necessary to guide FGC students in the college entry and matriculation process (Coleman, 1988); nevertheless, first-generation students have expressed a desire for parental involvement while attending college (Ecklund, 2013). In particular, FGC students have indicated that they want their institutions of higher education to facilitate parental involvement opportunities (Ecklund, 2013; Unverferth et al., 2012). There is evidence that parental support results in a greater likelihood of success in higher education (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Kolkhorst et al., 2010;

Leonard, 2013; Strom & Savage, 2014; Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010; Vianden & Ruder, 2012). Irlbeck et al. (2014) found that parent/family support facilitated FGC students' enrollments in higher education. Given that parental support is pivotal in the life of college students (Terenzini et al., 1996), it is important to understand the types of parental support that positively shape FGC students' decisions to remain enrolled in college.

Parental support types. There are various forms of parental support in the literature to which the academic achievement of FGC students is attributed. Specifically, students have been found to recognize the influence that parents had in their personal and educational endeavors (Jehangir, 2010; Hunt et al., 2015). Social capital in the form of parental provision of instrumental support such as time, resources, and a decrease in imposed obligations contributed to FGC students' successive term enrollments (Ecklund, 2013). Further, Sax and Weintraub (2014) reported that first-year students' interactions with both parents were instrumental in their college success. The types of support the students received during the initial term of enrollment consisted of telephone calls, text messages, electronic mail, and postal mail. In addition, the researchers reported that the students were satisfied with the amount of communication they had with mothers; however, their level of contact with their fathers was lower and represented a source of disappointment. Contrary to the results of Sax and Weintraub's (2014) study, Gibbons and Woodside (2014) reported that first-generation female and male graduates expressed that the role of the father was important in their college and career experiences and professional development. Kolkhorst et al. (2010) described effective forms of parental

support such as mutual trust and respect for independence during college, all of which promoted improvements in the family relationship. Thus, parental support in the form of communication is vital to students' success in college.

According to Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek (2012), the use of memorable messages predicted FGC students' motivation, empowerment, and satisfaction with their college experience. In an effort to build values and influence behaviors about college life, parental communication included messages of "encouragement, support, college is necessary, my two cents, do this and don't do this, work hard and/or play hard, and general advice" (Kranstuber et al., 2012, p. 53). While none of these communication types completely projected success, they served as predictors of student learning, motivation, and college satisfaction. Wang (2012) revealed that memorable messages from mentors to FGC students about college and family yielded three family-related messages: (a) compare and contrast, (b) count on, and (c) recognize the need for family. Likewise, Wang (2014) suggested that memorable messages from parents to FGC students about family included (a) count on, (b) remember, (c) focus on, (d) do not worry about, and (e) set a good example for family. According to Strom and Savage (2014), the messages from parents to college students during the first year of enrollment increased the likelihood of retention and graduation.

Parental support aimed to reduce students' level of stress associated with attending college (Kolkhorst et al., 2010; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Sy et al., 2011; Vianden & Ruder, 2012) facilitated degree completion (Strom & Savage, 2014). Some students receive support several times each week (Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselmann, Zarit,

Furstenberg, & Birditt, 2012; Kolkhorst et al., 2010). Rural community college students have reported that the push from their parents is necessary encouragement to achieve a baccalaureate degree (Hlinka et al., 2015). Parental support is also considered a scaffold or safety net and positively assists students in adulthood transitions (Swartz, Kim, Uno, Mortimer, & O'Brien, 2011).

Although rural parents may have lower expectations of their students achieving a college education than the parents of nonrural students (Byun et al., 2012), rural college students may have “an extremely strong yearning for knowledge” (Yiquan & Yiji, 2015, p. 107). It has been found that FGC students’ parents typically do not understand the stress and/or time commitment necessary for a successful transition into college; however, they expect to provide some type of support during the first year of college (Vianden & Ruder, 2012). This support comes in the form of listening, displaying patience, communicating verbally, and understanding. First-generation college students may receive emotional support in the form of faith, encouragement, and understanding (Sy et al., 2011). These forms of support do not require parents to have college experience or degrees to facilitate a positive outcome. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) suggested that students acquire emotional support in the form of personal affirmations. Although emotional support appears to be uncomplicated, minority FGC students may be challenged to transcend a history of college noncompletion due to the nonexistence of encouragement (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). However, self-motivation helps this specific population surpass the challenges that impact enrollment, retention, and graduation. Emotional support from parents in the form of encouragement is vital to FGC students,

particularly when there is a need for personal guidance with relationships and major/course selections (Kolkhorst et al., 2010).

Several researchers have provided evidence of parental support in the form of financial assistance (Fingerman et al., 2012; Kolkhorst et al., 2010; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). First-generation college students typically use grants and loans to pay for college expenses (Mehta et al., 2011); however, Moschetti and Hudley (2015) conveyed that 90% of their study's participants received financial help as a type of parental support (p. 245). Similarly, the parental support reported by Fingerman et al. (2012) and Kolkhorst et al. (2010) included financial resources. In the latter study, it was suggested that the students' financial assistance from their parents was composed of funds for tuition, room and board, books, and emergency expenses. The financial assistance provided to students seemed to foster greater parental support (Leonard, 2013).

Interpersonal, instrumental, and informational forms of parental support are vital to students' motivation and success in college. Sy et al. (2011) reported that informational support provided guidance and assistance to students; however, it was determined that FGC students perceived less informational support from their parents compared to continuing-generation students. This was attributed to the parents' lack of experience and knowledge about college life (Wohn et al., 2013). At the point when students decide to apply to and attend college, the acquisition of information about preparations and expectations is crucial. Ecklund (2013) defined interpersonal support as a demonstration of parents' values regarding their children's education, and the meaning of instrumental support was expressed as parental consideration for additional time,

resources, and decreased home responsibilities. However, in the absence of parents' interpersonal support, students need to seek relationships with other FGC students enrolled in the institution (Ecklund, 2013). Nonetheless, the positive results of students' access to college and academic achievement have been attributed to parental support (Leonard, 2013). Parental advice, coupled with personal messages of encouragement and support, impact students' motivation and satisfaction with college (Kranstuber et al., 2012). It is evident from the literature that parental support is influential in shaping rural FGC students' decisions to remain enrolled in college.

Implications

The problem of retaining rural FGC students and scholarly evidence of the benefits associated with parental support validate the need to provide opportunities for parental involvement within the institution. In addition, there is need for awareness and understanding of the competing priorities that hinder rural FGC students' ability to remain enrolled in a university (Byun et al., 2012; Yiquan & Yijie, 2015). The implications for possible project directions based on the findings from the data analysis encompassed the professional development/training curriculum and materials genre. Specifically, the project was guided by the categorized themes of the interview data collected from rural FGC students. The project included specific components that addressed the findings regarding both parental support and rural FGC student retention. Most importantly, the project was designed to facilitate rural FGC students' use of social networks and campus resources to promote improvement in retention rates at this small private Midwestern faith-based university.

First-generation college students select and enroll in private institutions due to small class sizes, close faculty contact, campus resources, engagement opportunities, and financial help (Saenz et al., 2007). The information acquired from this study should generate trust and reduce skepticism among university leadership and educators about parental involvement on the small, private campus of the study institution. Thus, this study supported the creation of a project to promote parental support and involvement as well as rural FGC student success.

Summary

In summary, FGC students aspire to attain baccalaureate degrees to improve their socioeconomic situations and shift their social mobility upward (Forbus et al., 2011; Thering, 2012). Hlinka et al. (2015) revealed that rural students attending a rural community college desired to complete a degree to increase the likelihood of a career that would yield opportunities to attain material possessions and leisure time. However, student enrollment in an institution of higher education involved various obstacles that had the potential to hinder retention (Mehta et al., 2011). In recent studies, several researchers have identified the challenges that FGC students encountered, including family achievement guilt (Covarrubias et al., 2014), intergenerational cycles (Gofen, 2009), inadequate parental support (Jenkins et al., 2013), and long work hours (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Lastly, researchers have suggested that social capital in the form of parental support promotes the retention and academic achievement of FGC students (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Vianden & Ruder, 2011). This study was an

exploration of rural FGC students' perceptions of the parental support that shaped their decisions to remain enrolled in college.

In Section 2, I describe the selected methodological approach and research design for this study. In addition, a description of, and justification for, the participant selection process, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques is presented. Most importantly, the methodology section provides insight into the local problem through inquiry, data collection and analysis to answer the guiding research questions.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand rural FGC students' perceptions of parental support and their decisions to remain enrolled in a small private university. In particular, this exploration of how the perceptions of parental support affected students' decisions to continue enrollment in subsequent semesters focused on two guiding research questions:

RQ1: What are rural FGC students' perceptions of parental support while attending the university?

RQ2: How does the level of parental support shape rural FGC students' decisions to remain enrolled in the university?

In this section, I discuss the methodology used to determine the results for the guiding research questions. A case study design facilitated the acquisition of a greater understanding of the students' perceptions of parental support that affected subsequent enrollments. Through one-on-one semi structured interviews, I determined (a) how the rural FGC students perceived parental support while attending the university and (b) the perceived level of parental support that shaped their decisions to remain enrolled. Also within Section 2, I discuss sample procedures, data collection, and data analysis methods. The case study approach provided an opportunity to gather rich, detailed descriptions of the perceptions of rural FGC students at this institution.

Research Design and Approach

The research design and approach for this qualitative research was a collective study using multiple homogenous cases to investigate the central phenomenon. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined a *case study* as an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37) that is separated by any physical boundary such as time or place in order to discover meaning (Creswell, 2012). Further, case study is used to investigate the phenomenon or the actual case, such as a single individual or persons within a group or institution (Merriam, 2002). A case study makes possible the exploration, discovery, and deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences within the case itself through the collection of multiple sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thus, the intent of a qualitative case study design is not generalization.

This case study design was based on the social constructivism framework (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Constructivists assume that an individual’s own experiences determine the development of their reality (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010); therefore, it was appropriate to acquire the rural FGC students’ perceptions through a qualitative research approach and design in order to better understand each individual’s reality of the phenomenon. Stake (1995) affirmed that constructivism provides an opportunity to use narrative descriptions of participants’ voices in the reporting of findings. The use of a case study afforded an opportunity to capture the rural FGC students’ perceptions of parental support while attending the university.

To ensure that a collective case study would be an appropriate design for this research study, other qualitative designs were explored. Grounded theory was the first

option analyzed; however, the focus of a grounded theory qualitative design is using systematic procedures to examine individuals who have experienced an action or process and then build an explanation or grounded theory (Creswell, 2012). The grounded theory design was not appropriate for use in this study, as the intent was not to generate a theory or grounded view of rural FGC students. Instead, the intent of this study was to explore the central phenomenon to better understand the case itself (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The second option considered was a phenomenological design, which has a primary focus on exploring the lived experiences of individuals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); this was not an appropriate design because the aim of this research study was to seek the rural FGC students' perceptions about parental support and decisions to remain enrolled in the university. The purpose of this study was not to explore the potential emotional or deep experiences of rural FGC students as associated with a phenomenological design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lastly, an ethnographic design was considered for use in this study. The aim of ethnographic design is to "describe, analyze and interpret" the participants' shared "behavior, beliefs and languages" (Creswell, 2012, p. 21) over an extended period of time. In order to understand the culture of a group, a researcher must spend sufficient time with the individuals studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, an ethnographic design was not appropriate, because access to the homogenous cases in this study was limited, and the collective participants were not considered a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2012). Based on the analysis of the various research design options, the use of a collective case study was deemed most appropriate for this study. Pyne and Means (2013) provided further support for the use of a qualitative case study, as

they applied this design in their exploration of FGC student experiences that facilitated matriculation and successive term enrollments at a highly selective, private, predominantly White university. The case study design afforded these researchers an opportunity to analyze the individual cases and compare certain elements across cases (Pyne & Means, 2013). A case study design was employed to explore the rural FGC students' perceptions of the parental support that shaped their decisions to remain enrolled. In addition, the case study design followed a naturalistic approach to allow the students a chance to express their perceptions in a relaxed, mutually agreed-upon environment.

Participants

Population and Sampling Procedures

The setting for this collective case study was a small, private faith-based university located in the Midwestern section of the United States. Among the nearly 450 first-time, full-time freshmen, first-generation students represent at least 46% of the incoming freshman cohort. Specifically, the target sample for this study was rural FGC students. The qualitative selection strategy used to identify the students who could provide in-depth descriptions and details about the phenomenon was purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined purposeful sampling as the deliberate effort to select participants and sites to explore and gain an understanding of a central phenomenon. The type of purposeful sampling in this study was homogeneous, which facilitated the intentional identification of willing rural FGC students who

possessed similarities and were agreeable to providing the detailed descriptions required to answer the guiding research questions.

A FGC student data report for the fall semesters of 2012, 2013, and 2014 was requested from the research setting's database administrator, which included a combined-semester listing of first-generation freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The report contained the names of first-generation students who were admitted as first-time freshmen and were in good academic standing. The information also included the students' enrollment period, primary residential and electronic mail addresses, telephone numbers, zip code, and county. The zip code and county were necessary to identify the FGC students from rural communities.

Fifteen rural FGC students were initially identified in the dataset, which was approximately one-half of the rural FGC students listed in the report. This initial sample pool was further reduced to 10, as some potential participants did not meet all of the selection criteria. Qualitative case study research often does not involve a large sample; case sizes can range from a single individual or school to as many as four or five multiple cases (Stake, 1995). Due to the time involved in the detailed exploration of each case through data collection and analysis processes, researchers tend not to select a large number of cases (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, this sample size was consistent with bounded case study research, as there was a limit to the number of potential participants at the setting (Lodico et al., 2010). The selection of a small sample was intentional and crucial to acquire thick descriptions and details, which were then coded into emerging themes (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995). Most important, the rich data collected from the

participants created a foundation to develop a project to support the rural FGC students and engage the parents.

Criteria for Selection of Participants

The definition used to determine first-generation status was *any student whose parent(s) did not achieve a college degree* (Warburton et al., 2001). Further, a rural area was defined by the United States Census Bureau (2000) as *a countryside or town that encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area*. The FGC students' communities were determined to be rural based on the residential zip codes or the office of undergraduate admissions geographic recruitment territories, specifically by county.

The primary criteria used to select the rural FGC students included (a) initial admittance as a traditional age first-year freshman, (b) identification as first generation based on the definition used in this study, (c) residence in a rural community based on zip code and geographic recruitment territory, (d) enrollment full-time in successive semesters, (e) maintenance of a minimum 2.0 grade point average representing good academic standing, (f) no significant previous contact with me, and (g) willingness to volunteer as a participant.

The use of homogenous sampling afforded the opportunity to purposefully select rural FGC students with similarities based on the identified criteria (Creswell, 2012). The sampling approach used in this study allowed me to acquire data that would inform the research setting and scholar-practitioners by providing new knowledge about FGC student parental support and retention through students' voices.

Procedure to Access Participants

To gain access to the participants and conduct the study within the research setting, I submitted an application to the university's institutional review board for authorization, which was approved on March 8, 2016. An application to conduct this research study was also submitted to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and approval was granted to proceed with the study. Walden University issued the official approval number 05-23-16-0405928 on May 23, 2016. The selection of and initial contact with the participants began after the Walden University approval was granted.

The 10 potential participants received a solicitation/introduction letter by electronic mail (Appendix B). A statement in the letter informed the individuals that there was no consequence for nonparticipation, and participation in the study could cease at any time without penalty. However, this initial invitation to participate in the study yielded no responses. Due to a low percentage of student usage of the research setting's electronic mail system during the summer, the solicitation/introduction letters were also sent by the United States Postal Service. This mailing resulted in two respondents who indicated a willingness to participate as volunteers in the study. The inadequate number of participant responses necessitated a request to both the Walden University and the research setting's IRBs to include the Fall Semester 2015 cohort data to increase the sample pool. Walden University approved this request under the original official number, and on August 26, 2016, the research setting also approved the use of the Fall Semester 2015 cohort.

The same selection criteria were used to identify potential participants from this added cohort, and 13 rural FGC students were identified. A solicitation/introduction letter was mailed to each individual in this sample pool, and four possible participants responded with interest in the study.

A follow-up to the initial electronic and United States Postal Service mailings to the potential participants from the fall semesters of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 entailed a telephone call to the nonrespondents with the single purpose of confirming receipt of the mailed introduction/solicitation letter. Within approximately a week of this follow-up, six possible rural FGC student participants responded with a willingness to volunteer for the study. Several individuals expressed appreciation for the follow-up telephone call, as they had not checked their electronic mail accounts after the spring semester had concluded or resided at a short-term summer address not on file with the research setting. A final sample pool of 12 rural FGC student participants agreed to participate in this study. The sample size was sufficient to achieve a point of saturation. The one-on-one semi structured interviews were arranged by telephone and electronic mail.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

This research study required me to establish a trusting and respectful relationship with the participants in order to attain the depth and breadth of data necessary to answer the guiding research questions. It was necessary to protect the participants and promote a level of comfort to encourage them to share perceptions of parental support and how it shaped their decisions to remain enrolled in the research setting. As the primary research instrument for the collection of data and analysis (Merriam, 2016), I felt that it was

crucial to remain transparent to show support for establishing institutional programs that facilitated student retention.

To achieve a researcher-participant relationship within the research setting, official approval was secured from the local site's IRB as well as Walden University's IRB. These authorizations to conduct research with the rural FGC students on the topic of parental support and retention served as a safeguard for the participants. In addition, to secure a researcher-participant relationship, a guarantee to adhere to ethical considerations and protect participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty was stated in the documents prior to beginning the interview. I provided my contact information to each participant, as well as the name and email of the doctoral committee chairperson and the contact information of the institutional review board at the research setting. The provision of these documents ensured the participants' understanding of their rights and responsibilities as associated with participation in the study.

Upon authorization from Walden University's IRB to conduct the study, the research setting's database administrator was contacted and asked to generate a data report of FGC students. The initial solicitation letter to participate in this study was sent to the potential participants by electronic mail and the United States Postal Service. Further, each potential participant who indicated a willingness to participate in the study received an unsigned informed consent form with instructions to read it, sign it, and return it directly to me. The informed consent form detailed the nature and purpose of the study, data collection procedures, and benefits and risks of participation. All of the rural

FGC student participants signed and returned their informed consent forms, and a copy of the document was returned to each participant with my signature either on the day of or prior to the scheduled interview.

Each participant determined a mutually agreeable date, time, and location for the one-on-one semi structured interview. In addition, the time expected to complete the interview session was provided. Of the 12 participants, nine were interviewed in a small, comfortable, unoccupied space at the university, two were interviewed by telephone due to lengthy travel distances, and one was interviewed at a nearby local coffee shop/eatery.

Protection of Participants

Evidence of my understanding of the ethical considerations associated with the protection of participants was supported by the completion of two human research protection certificates: Collaborative Institutional Training (CITI) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research. CITI is a mandate of the IRB at the research setting. Participation in this study involved some risk of minor emotional discomfort, as some of the interview questions were personal in nature related to parental support. However, this study did not pose any risk to the participants' safety or wellbeing. Most important, the confidentiality of each participant was protected through the use of a pseudonym and the safekeeping and security of all collected data. The audio-recorded data were immediately deleted after transcription and transmission to a secured, password-protected account. Hard-copy data, such as handwritten notes taken during the interview, have been maintained in a personal locked file cabinet accessible only to me. All data will be maintained for 5 years per Walden University guidelines.

Data Collection Methods

The qualitative methodology in this study involved the identification and collection of data representative of words or images rather than numerical presentations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative collected data typically includes interviews, observations, audio-visual materials, and archival documents, as each affords an opportunity to engage in the discovery of meaning for the purpose of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). The collected data should represent a portion of a larger dimension that will enhance the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The method of data collection in this study was interviews to acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the participants' rich descriptions and in-depth details.

Interviews

Specific to this study, interviews were utilized to collect the descriptive data from the participants' own words which revealed insights on how they perceived parental support. Interviews are typically used when the data cannot be collected through an observation (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). According to Lodico et al. (2010), an advantage of conducting interviews is the researcher's ability to individualize the structure of the interview questions and probes. Further, an additional advantage to using interviews is the opportunity to gather in-depth information from extensive data. A disadvantage of utilizing interviews as a data collection method is that the information received, transcribed, and analyzed is solely through the view of the researcher as the primary instrument (Creswell, 2012). Consequently, interviewing may lend itself to

personal interpretations of the researcher rather than the participants' views. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Yin (2003), the researcher must attempt to remain nonbiased by any preconceived notions to achieve accuracy in the interpretations of the collected data.

The data in this collective case study were collected from multiple cases using semi structured interviews and open-ended questions. This interview structure enabled me to compare the perceptions of the participants across cases to establish greater accuracy of the results as the data were collected (Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2003).

The interviews were guided conversations rather than structured inquiry, and the participant was considered an informant instead of a respondent to yield the desired data (Yin, 2003). In addition, the interviews were purposed to gather the participants' descriptive and detailed responses to the open-ended interview questions (Appendix C). The IRB at the research setting reviewed and approved the interview questions effective March 8, 2016. The open-ended questions were designed to facilitate unconstrained conversation and avoidance of yes or no responses (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, the interview questions encouraged the rural FGC student participants to share their perceptions of the parental support that shaped their decisions to remain enrolled in this small, private university.

After the participants confirmed their willingness to participate in the study, they each received an informed consent form. In addition, a confirmation was sent to each respondent with information about the interview, including the mutually agreed upon location, date, time, and anticipated length of the session. A copy of the signed informed

consent form was provided on the day of the in-person interviews and electronically mailed prior to the scheduled telephone interviews.

As recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the interview sessions began with a general opening that included small talk to remove any anxiousness that the participant was experiencing. Further, the content of the conversation included: (a) a review of the description and purpose of the study, (b) the data collection process, (c) an assurance of confidentiality through the use of a pseudonym, and (d) the risks and benefits of the study. Most important, each participant was reminded that their participation was strictly voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The participants were encouraged to ask questions and relax, as the interview would proceed as a natural conversation.

During the interviews, a digital audio recorder was used to record the conversations, and a cellular phone was used as a back-up recorder. In addition, an interview protocol was developed to maintain structure and record hand-written notes during the interviews (Appendix D; Creswell, 2012). The one-on-one semi structured interview sessions actually lasted between 35 to 45-minutes, which was less time than anticipated.

Prior to the transcription of the audio recordings, I organized the interview protocols by pseudonym to ensure protection of the participants' confidentiality. The transcriptions of the recordings and any hand-written notes on the interview protocols will be kept in a personal locked file for five years.

Researcher Role and Bias

My past professional role was registrar and presently a university dean responsible for academic support to students. There are several layers of professional and support staff who provide front-line assistance to students who enter the campus student center, which is the location of the registrar. The structure of this area resulted in minimal student contact with my role as determined by the magnitude of the students' problems. Further, my current professional role involves limited opportunities for close and personal relationship building with rural FGC students. Thus, the ability to successfully develop a trusting relationship and ensure the protection of the students' rights may open future opportunities for administrative support to the participants.

It was crucial that any bias was acknowledged and addressed, as it may have altered the direction of the study and the analysis (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, the research findings were validated for accuracy and credibility. Specific to this study, my experience as an urban first-generation college graduate from a small, predominantly White, private Catholic college in the Midwest helped to reduce any recognized bias, as there were no presumptions about the rural FGC students attending this small, private faith-based university. On the other hand, parental support and the problem of student retention were familiar subjects to me and generated some personal bias based on my experiences as first-generation. In particular, an area in which I needed to exercise diligence was the avoidance of personal bias in considering parental support as a facilitator of persistence to degree completion. However, this bias was addressed through continuous personal reflections to hold firm to the purpose of the study and acquire a

deeper understanding of the descriptions provided solely by the rural FGC student participants. In qualitative research, subjectivity may impact the analysis and interpretation of the data (Lodico et al., 2010); therefore, I recognized, acknowledged, and addressed any bias as I examined my expressions in the writing process.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative inductive analysis in this study was a continuous process of synthesizing the data as it was collected, organized, and analyzed (Stake, 1995). The qualitative analysis enabled me to identify ideas, patterns, and themes from the collected data. The goal of the analysis was to determine what information the rural FGC student participants provided that would answer the guiding research questions. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggested that each data source not be treated or reported as independent; instead, the data should be converged to acquire an understanding in a larger context. Yin (2003) described techniques for analyzing case study research, such as logic models, cross case, and explanation building, and Stake (1995) discussed the aggregation and direct interpretation methods. The data from this collective case study was analyzed from a narrative perspective by examining the detailed stories of each rural student to gain a greater understanding and insight of their perceptions of parental support.

Data Transcription and Coding

The data analysis process began with the transcription of the collected interview data. The audio recording of each interview was transcribed into Microsoft Word within 2 weeks after each session. Initially, the transcripts were carefully read once, and notes were recorded in the right margins, which enabled me to acquire a general sense of the

underlying meaning of the responses to the interview questions. The subsequent reviews of the transcriptions required an in-depth, critical reading of each transcript and involved the actual coding process. The left margin space was utilized to record the generated codes. The coding process was crucial to (a) gain an understanding of the data, (b) label segments of the data with codes, (c) identify repetitions, and (d) generate broad themes. The concept of lean coding was applied in the analysis, which allowed me to convert fewer codes to broad themes (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the coding process was more controllable compared to converting an unmanageable collection of codes. Lastly, the codes were transferred to the software computer program, EXCEL, to store, organize, and manage the data. Qualitative data collection can result in a large amount of information; therefore, Baxter and Jack (2008) suggested that computerized data management systems are appropriate for coding, analyzing, organizing, and searching a large amount of collected data. Similarly, Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) suggested that a database might provide accessibility to raw data as a tool to effectively store and retrieve information. Most important, the EXCEL computer software program enabled me to effectively sort and merge the codes to identify redundant and discrepant data. The effective organization of the research data was critical to achieve reliability (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

Theme Development

The refinement of the data involved the continuous reading of the transcripts to acquire a sense of the collected information and analysis of the transcriptions. The generated codes were further examined for redundancies and appropriately merged into broader common themes. According to Creswell (2012), themes are developed when

similar codes are grouped together to form a central notion. The codes generated through this qualitative analysis were reduced to six ordinary themes essential to answer the two guiding research questions and thoroughly understand the phenomenon. Ordinary themes are those that I anticipated finding in the results (Creswell, 2012). The development of the six themes involved the criteria, “responsive to the purpose of the research study, exhaustive, mutually exclusive”, and answered the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p, 210-213). Lastly, negative or discrepant case analysis was conducted to intentionally identify data that did not align with the literature or expected results (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Lodico et al. (2010), negative case analysis in qualitative research involves identifying sources that may support the researcher’s interpretation. The discrepant data in this study were highlighted and discussed to support the credibility of this collective case study.

Limitations

This collective case study research revealed that there are limitations. The study involved 12 rural FGC student participants in an exploration of how parental support shaped their decisions to continue enrollment beyond the first year. Although the case study design was bound by a limited number of cases, a larger sample pool may provide additional insights on parental support that were not acquired from the smaller cases.

The study did not intentionally consider the financial aid or the socioeconomic status of the students attending this private university. Specifically, a diverse population of students receiving and not receiving financial aid coupled with the parents’

socioeconomic status may have presented different findings in the student perceptions of the form and level of parental support.

Further, this study was limited to one research setting and one type of institution. Although rural FGC students often select small, private 4-year colleges, the study did not consider other possible perceptions of parental support that may disseminate from students attending a 2-year community college or a large public university.

Lastly, the population sample represented rural FGC students from a variety of areas in the Midwestern state. However, the definition chosen for rural population did not expand to include specific types of rurality, including rural fringe, rural distance, or rural remote. The selection criteria did not specifically identify FGC students based on these extended definitions. There may be differences in types and levels of parental support within each of the identified areas, as well as variations in the students' enrollment outcome.

The data collected from the research setting indicated that an attrition problem existed in the general first-generation student population. Thus, there may be greater diversification in the data collected from a broader representation of first-generation students, including variations in demographic and geographical characteristics.

Data Analysis Results

The findings from the data analysis were presented in a narrative format to discuss the participants' perceptions related to the identified themes (Creswell, 2012). This format for discussing the findings allowed me to report details and descriptions from the voices of the participants. The individuals shared their perceptions on how parental

support shaped their decisions to continue their enrollment at the research setting. While the study's primary focus was parental support, several participants described the support received from extended family in addition to the parent's support. Other participants disclosed that their parental involvement was representative of an extended family member for reasons they did not choose to share.

All 12 participants in the study were first-generation, as their parents did not attain a college degree. Each participant met the selection criteria and chose a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Specifically, the participants resided in a rural community determined by their zip code or county. Although the selection criteria did not include the selection of rural FGC students who utilized financial aid at the research setting, the data analysis revealed that 66% of the participants received some form of financial assistance. The aid represented local, federal, state, and/or institutional funding through various types of scholarships, loans, and/or grants while enrolled at this small, private faith-based institution. The data analysis did not indicate whether the remaining participants received these forms of financial funding. According to Mehta et al. (2011), it is common for FGC students to utilize grants, student loans, and scholarships to pay for college expenses.

The opportunity to collect and analyze the data stemmed from the inability to retain rural FGC students attending the small, private university. The two guiding research questions were applied in the analysis, as I considered the research problem and identified themes in relation to the participants' shared perceptions of parental support. Specifically, the participants' responses to the two research questions served as a guide to identify six themes displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Qualitative Themes from Data Analysis

Parental support	Financial support
Extended family relationships	Community networks
Campus connection	Institutional support

Each theme captured the essence of the participants' perceptions about their successive enrollments and the impact of support from parents, extended family, rural communities, and the campus. The six themes generated from the data analysis provided insight into the support networks of the participants and demonstrated consistency in my explorations of parental support and retention.

The interviews were the primary data collection instrument and incorporated open ended questions to acquire data for analysis and theme development. The research questions were answered through the participants' detailed responses during the interviews: RQ1: What are the rural FGC student perceptions of parental support while attending the university? RQ2: How does the level of parental support shape the rural FGC students' decisions to remain enrolled in the university? The specific interview questions displayed in Table 3 addressed the two guiding research questions.

Table 3

Data Points to Address RQ1 and RQ2

Research questions (RQ)	Interview questions
RQ1	<p>What ways did your parents show support during the transition from high school to enrollment at this university?</p> <p>What is the one parental support you perceive as most crucial in your decision to continue your enrollment from one year to the next at this university?</p> <p>Talk about any specific kinds of supports that you requested from your parents. What kinds of supports did you actually receive from them that helped you remain enrolled in college? Were there any kinds of supports you needed and did not receive?</p>
RQ2	<p>Talk about the level of parental/familial support provided to you as a full-time college student. Did you perceive this to level to be sufficient? If not, what do you perceive as an acceptable level of support from your parents?</p> <p>Talk about any perceived changes in the level of parental support received since your first year of enrollment.</p>

Parental Support Theme

Although the parents of FGC students may lack the necessary higher education experience and knowledge, Tieken (2016) determined that parents of rural FGC students are much more flexible and open about the importance, necessity, and worth of a college education than in the past. In particular, the findings from the data analysis and themes revealed the answer to the guiding research question: *RQ1: What are the rural FGC student perceptions of parental support while attending the university?* Specifically, rural

FGC students' perceived that parental support enabled them to achieve success while attending this small, private university. The provisions from the parents during the students' enrollment resulted in encouragement, motivation and increased appreciation for the opportunity to attend the institution. Most importantly, the parents' support enabled the rural FGC students to remain enrolled beyond the first year of college.

Parental involvement was a form of support in the rural student's college selection and application processes (Nelson, 2016). According to Nelson, a collaborative process between parent and student involved support in the form of attending college visits, completion of college applications, and encouragement to participate in extracurricular activities. In addition, parental involvement and support during the first-year experiences positively influenced the students' intentions to remain enrolled and persist to degree completion (Strom & Savage, 2014).

Several rural FGC student participants in this study conveyed parental support in their college selection, application process, and freshmen orientation. Diana described her parents' involvement in the final decision to select this small, private university. She described,

They were very involved in all of my college visits. They took me to all of them and went on tours with me as well. They helped me with paying the application fees with a credit card and drove me to my SAT tests.

Gabrielle also disclosed that her parents "were very involved and loved this university and the fact that it was close to home." She also said, "My mother was the one

who sat there through the completion of all my applications that I did. She proofread all of my essays.”

As well, Sue, conveyed that her grandparents, in lieu of parents, came with her on the first official tour of the university. She shared, “they walked around and saw how clean everything was on the campus, like the bathrooms [laughter]. They were very involved in my decision and selection of this university the whole way through.” Another participant, Vincent, explained,

When it came to the application for school, housing and Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), I don’t think that I would have been able to do it without my parents’ help. It’s one of those things like I had never dealt with before. I would have been way over my head without their help.

Likewise, some of the participants shared that their parent’s support was provided by their accompaniment to the freshmen orientation. This was considered an important form of parental involvement. For example, Hayden, expressed “I believe my stepdad actually came with me.” Further, Sue said, “my grandmother and grandfather both came with me, and it was a good time.” Tom shared, “My father came with me to the orientation.” In addition, Elizabeth, spoke, “My mother came to orientation with me, and Oh my, gosh! My mother was so emotional.”

The qualitative findings of this study suggested that parental support was evident in various forms, which positively shaped the participants’ decisions to continue enrollment in this university. Parental support was an important contributor to retention

and included communication, encouragement, emotional support, advice, provision of basic necessities, and high expectations.

Researchers Kranstuber, Carr, and Hosek, (2012), examined the relationship between parent communication and student success. Their findings revealed that the parents' memorable messages consisted of encouragement, hard work, and general parental advice. Hayden, a participant who liked the idea of attending a small school, described an example of parental memorable messages. He talked about the fact that his parents supported him with verbal encouragement, pushed him to work and study hard, and follow the correct path. He expressed, "They encouraged me to keep my head straight and just focus." In addition, Gabrielle humorously described the first year support provided by her parents. She conveyed,

They were the parents calling every day asking, do you need me to come visit you [laughter]. I know that they are only 45-minutes away, but I was like that is why I am only 45-minutes away. I am okay, but I will let you know if I need anything [laughter].

The researchers, Sax and Weintraub (2014), suggested that the primary student-parent communication occurred by telephone and text messaging. The participant, Elizabeth, described the importance of good communication with her mother. She called at night during her freshman year with updates about the day; however, the text messaging and frequent visits were very important forms of parental support during her enrollment. As an education major, she was involved with the parents of her students and

realized as an adult, she did not have to tell her mother that she was placed on academic probation at the very beginning of college. Elizabeth expressed,

Communication in general is huge. I did not have to tell my mother that I got on academic probation. I am an adult. I actually had to sign for her to even know any of it. So, with that open communication was important. I didn't want to tell her, but I told her, you know. She co-signs my loans and that's communication.

Alice conveyed that she appreciated the reassurance and encouragement, which helped her to realize that she was capable to accomplish her goals. This form of support instilled confidence in her. For example, Alice initially experienced difficulty at the university, "I didn't think that I could do it. I didn't think I could handle all the courses and things, and I did not have the confidence in myself." The reassurance provided to her from caring parents helped to build encouragement that she could succeed.

Madelyn revealed that her mother's support included helping with basic necessities, such as laundry so that she did not have to worry about finding quarters. Additionally, her mother made certain that she had the necessary school supplies to return to campus well stocked. Further, Elizabeth shared that the parental support she received was related to campus residential life. Her parents were a tremendous support with helping her to move in and out of the dorm every semester. Elizabeth elaborated,

Just the car space needed was a challenge. Mother's car did not fit all the stuff, and my car didn't fit the things either. We had to get the truck. I really needed this support to move in and out. I don't see how people do it without that type of support system.

A crucial manner by which Wally's mother participated in his learning was to share her expectations that he would continue his enrollment in college. He spoke, "She pushes me to do better, although she knows that I do well in school." Similarly, Vincent projected that his parents consistently showed evidence that they cared about his academic journey. He expressed, "They want to make sure that I am safe and that I am doing what I am supposed to do and keeping out of trouble." Diana's parents expressed their unwavering commitment to make sure she persisted to degree completion. She conveyed, "...it was an unchanging standard that I would finish and all the support that came from that behavior towards me." Lastly, Kristen's parents showed their support on move-in day. She provided this example,

My parents both moved me in, and that was really helpful. We set our room up, and we came up a lot in the summer to check out the area. They both wanted to see where it was and what was around here to make sure that I had everything set-up. So, I had my pharmacy set-up here, because I am two hours away from home. It was important to kind of have lifelines set up here. They were a great support in that aspect by trying to help me buy everything to live on campus.

Although parents contributed to the participant's educational journey with various types of support, there was some concern that the parents were unable to fully comprehend the academic requirements. For example, Kristen's parents were not aware nor did they fully understand her need to enroll in multiple science courses at the same time. Unknown to them, the prescribed combination of science classes was standard to

continue on the required course rotation schedule and not delay graduation. She explained,

They thought it was overwhelming. I was taking biology and chemistry at the same time, and my parents had a high school education and that was it. They did not even take science classes most of the time. So, just the fact that I had a strong passion for science kind of just freaked them out. They did not know anything.

So, I took science and math classes my first semester here, and they were kind of taken back by how I would do it all.

Similarly, Wally's mother noticed that he was enrolled in 17 semester credit hours his first semester, and she asked him, "Are you sure you want to take that much"? He admitted that there was parental concern that he might get overwhelmed with sports and his academic course load. Likewise, Madelyn's parents were surprised by her registration schedule of courses for the accounting major. Their particular concern was related to her first semester curriculum. Madelyn expressed,

I came in as an accounting major, and I only had one business class. So, they thought that I would be taking like five business classes. But that is when they realized that this university is about liberal arts, and you're well rounded when you come out. I think it took my parents about two years to understand this, such as the need to take Theology, English, psychology and science. They were like more concerned that I should be taking four or five business classes since accounting was my major [laughter].

While some of the parents were anxious about the schedules, Tom, as a freshman student, also experienced anxiety taking a host of science courses and laboratories. Yet, his grandmother and father encouraged him and instilled a sense of accomplishment based on his high school performance. He stressed that this type of support helped him tremendously during the first semester of enrollment.

Balance between home and school. Tieken (2016) suggested that rural FGC students experienced resistance from parents, which created a conflict between college enrollments and/or home demands. Yet, the participants in this study who experienced conflicts between home and college attendance acknowledged that they received tremendous support from parents. In response to the students' desire to perform well in the research setting, the supportive actions of the parents empowered the students to persist beyond the first year.

An example of home and school tensions was evident in Tom's description of his experience each time he called home and spoke with his grandmother or father. He described,

When I am on the phone with my grandmother or father, they both are encouraging me to come home. It seems that they really miss me a lot and want me to come home. So, it's difficult when I know that I have so much going on here, like now I am a resident assistant. I have all that responsibility on top of school. So, it is challenging to get home and see my family. It does make me feel bad when I don't go home, because I know that they miss me. I also miss them a lot.

Although there is pressure to come home, Tom conveyed that both his father and grandmother are always supportive, especially when it is too difficult for him to leave campus. He said, “They totally understand. So, that makes me feel a lot better when I have other responsibilities. I don’t have to worry so much knowing that they understand and support me.” Similarly, Vincent’s freshman year was challenging as he struggled to balance his schoolwork, social life, and family. He stressed, “All three are important, but it can be difficult to balance sometimes. You want to spend time with your friends and family, but you have all these things that you have to do.” His parents provided support and encouragement to help Vincent remain focused on his education and build lasting relationships. Sue shared a very similar experience with her family each time she went home to visit. Sue’s grandparents provided much support to her during this time. They were understanding, good listeners, and actually helped her with craft projects for her classes.

I would take this and that and would not get any of it done. So, as the years went through, I kind of learned my lesson, and I would space stuff out through the week to get it done ahead of time. When I went home, it was just I’m home and want to spend time with my family. I don’t want to work on all this stuff, so it was a hard balance sometimes.

Another participant, Diana, put her family before extra-curricular activities so that she could spend time socially with her family at special gatherings. She said,

I learned very quickly to say no and how to prioritize my family, which is very, very helpful now as I enter the actual workforce as opposed to school. There were

responsibilities at home, but I also knew that my younger siblings were home and could step up and help with some of those things.

The unconditional support received from her parents was vital in her decisions and college enrollment.

Likewise, family was very important to Madelyn as she discovered ways to balance schoolwork and see family. She stressed,

I think it is important to do whatever it takes to set aside time with family. Time management is important, even if it meant my mother would leave me at home alone for a couple of hours so that I could get my work done. That's what she did.

Kristen acknowledged that she received pressure to come home to watch her younger brother's games. Her family perceived that she did not come home often enough. Kristen lives two hours from campus, so the challenge to visit family is difficult. "I know that when I go home, I don't do much other than just spend time with family." Kristen travels home for extended weekends and holidays. To show support, her mother has a 2 week rule "either she comes up, or I come home is what she calls it. So even if it's hard for me to come home, she will take time out of her Saturday to come up." Kristen admitted that the compromise is super helpful, and her father enjoys the visit so that he can buy some things from one of the local stores.

Level of parental support. The participants suggested that parental support was key to their retention beyond the first year of enrollment, and equally important was the level of parental support. The findings from the data analysis answered the guiding research question: *RQ2: How does the level of parental support shape the rural FGC*

students' decisions to remain enrolled in the university? The results revealed that consistent parental support shaped their decisions to remain enrolled beyond the first year. A consistent level of support meant that the participants could always count on their parents to provide necessities, guidance, advice, prayers, and encouragement. Further, some students reported that the level of support changed between freshmen to junior year due to growth, independence, and/or closer parent-student relationships. Yet, none of these fluctuations in the level of parental support were perceived as a disturbance in the students' persistence and did not result in early withdrawals during the first year.

Specifically, the participants were asked to discuss and describe their perceptions of the level of parental support received. Their responses varied.

First, one participant described her mother as having a higher level of support than her father. Kristen shared that a text message was sent from her mother before an examination informing her that “a couple of Hail Mary’s” were said on her behalf. On the other hand, her father’s level of support was lower, because he did not usually do as much as her mother. Kristen explained, “My parents are divorced, so it’s kind of coming from two sides of a family.” Yet, her father’s support was definitely consistent. Kristen also shared that her mother’s level of support decreased when her brother enrolled in college. As a result, any available resources to support college enrollment were split between the two siblings.

Both participants, Katelyn and Elizabeth, perceived that the levels of parental support they experienced were sufficient; however, both students disclosed that the levels decreased over time during their enrollment. For example, Katelynn explained that her

parents began providing a high level of support initially as they asked many more questions and sought to answer any that she had for them. However, “as time went on and they saw that I was adjusting well, they backed off. They realized I was doing fine and didn’t say as much.” Although there was some decrease in the level of support, Katelynn was well aware that her parents were still present in the event she needed anything from them. Similarly, Elizabeth communicated that her mother provided basic necessities such as groceries and gas so that she could save money for post-graduation expenses. However, she described the changes that occurred due to the need to split the resources between her and a younger brother.

After my junior year, the level of parental support had decreased less and less. My brother was now in school. Also, I had become much more self-sufficient and did not need to call every single night. So texting was used more. I mean, we realized that we did not need to call everyday like we did as freshmen. It was just needier on her [mother] end than mine. She was just used to her two babies being at home [laughter]. But when my brother went away to school, and I was a junior, I definitely saw a decrease in the level of parental support.

Although Sue perceived that the parental support in her journey was sufficient and consistent, she also noted that the level of support decreased during the time between her freshman and junior years. She related this change to the study abroad opportunities provided by the university. Sue disclosed, “...that’s when she [mother] realized that I was growing up.”

Gabrielle did not perceive any noticeable changes in the level of support received during her enrollment; however, she did perceive a change in the kind of support received namely, financial. She articulated,

The level of support from my parents is definitely sufficient and consistent. I know that they will always be there throughout. Since I was so involved with sports, I did not have time for a job. But now I have a job, and they pushed me to get the job to regulate my own financial needs. So that is a change. Their emotional support has always been there, but it's just the responsibility of learning different life skills is now on me. That is why I did not want to live at home, so that I could learn how to support myself and live by myself.

Most important, Gabrielle disclosed how much she appreciated this release into independence. Consistent with Gabrielle's perceptions, Diana perceived that her parents recognized that she was independent and could handle the tasks set before her. She shared, "The support they have given me has been above and beyond what I expected and very sufficient for exactly what I needed to do well in school." This level of support from her parents enabled her to embark on leadership opportunities and a rigorous course load.

Wally explained that he perceived the level of parental support received, as a full-time college student, was fine. He admitted, "It was just enough so that it wasn't over the top. But it definitely was not too little. I would say that the level has maintained consistency." Whereas, Tom shared that he appreciated the parental support in his college experience from his father and grandmother. He passionately shared that he received the perfect level of support in the form of advice and encouragement. He humbly expressed,

“They always tell me what I need to hear, not necessarily what I want to hear. I appreciate that a lot.” Tom further disclosed that over time the level of parental support actually increased and improved. He continued by stating,

Now that I am older, I go to them more often for support, and that may seem opposite. But I really value their opinion and the things they have to say. I guess the distance has made us closer, and so we talk about more things. In high school, I may not have talked about my problems as much and didn’t want to deal with it. But now that I am older, I just value it more. I share a lot more with them, and they share a lot more with me. It’s perfect as we talk as adults.

Similar to Tom’s perception of increased levels of support, Vincent also perceived that support from his parents was “above and beyond.” He conveyed,

I have just gotten more with my parents being there and all my family being there. They have my best interests in mind, and my father has told me that this is something that you have to handle on your own. I do realize that. The amount of support has been consistent, but definitely changed in how it has gone about in the support.

Financial Support Theme

The theme of financial support was consistently repeated in the responses of the participants. First-generation college students generally utilize grants and loans, and researchers have documented the financial contributions that cover institutional tuition and fees, residential housing, and general college expenses as a form of parental support (Fingerman, et al., 2012; Leonard, 2013; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). While some

researchers indicated that FGC students faced the challenge of college enrollment due to limited financial resources (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014), the findings of this study suggested that rural FGC students received financial assistance as a form of parental support, which enabled them to enroll and persist in this institution. For the participants, financial contributions from the parents were perceived as one of the most crucial forms of parental support for successive enrollments.

Madelyn shared that the most crucial support in her decision to continue enrollment from one year to the next was financial assistance. Although she worked four part-time jobs her senior year, her parent's financial support was still needed. She said,

My parents helped me to get the parent plus loan, and without them, I would not have been able to come here. Without them helping me to get them, I would not have graduated from here or just continue. College is expensive and a necessity.

Similarly, Katelynn, discussed her perception of the most important parental support that enabled her to continue enrollment each year. She explained that her parent's financial assistance was most crucial, "without them helping me pay for it, I definitely would not be able to come here."

Some of the participants passionately spoke about the expenses associated with attending a private university; yet, they were appreciative of the financial assistance from parents to help with the costs of attendance. For example, Gabrielle, from a small, rural community shared that the parental support she considered to be the most important in her continued enrollment was financial help. She revealed, "Financially, they were kind of nervous about this university, because it is a private school and kind of expensive.

Their financial support helps me right now.” Similarly, Vincent, a participant in the study, expressed sincere gratitude for his parents’ financial assistance to help him with college expenses. He shared,

I know by attending this university, I’m sure I asked them to help me with things like finances, of course. While it is an amazing school, it is not necessarily cheap to go here. But, it is a private institution with doctors and professors, so it is definitely worth it. In everything, my parents go above and beyond to make sure that I have this opportunity.

The data analysis consistently revealed that the parents’ financial assistance was also in the provision of food or groceries as a cost-saving support to their students. Gabrielle, an athlete, expressed that the type of food she ate was important to her. She explained, “I don’t really eat the campus food. It’s not the healthiest I don’t think for my athletics, so my parents provide groceries for me.” Likewise, Hayden disclosed, “If I ever needed money or anything, they would help me out. They help me get food.” In addition, Kristen’s parents also provided food during her college enrollment. She elaborated, “I never really asked, but my mother voluntarily helped me with groceries.” Kristen paid her own tuition, fees, and residential campus living expenses. She declared, “So just having that sort of financial help where I can still have some spending money is appreciated. They take care of some of the other stuff, and that is really helpful.”

Extended Family Relationships Theme

Extended family relationships were central to the rural FGC students’ retention. Although this case study focused primarily on parental support, the participants discussed

the impact of receiving assistance from other members of their family. In some of the cases, the extended family network served as the primary parent. According to Rio-Aguilar & Deil-Amen (2012), support from extended family members was common when the parental support was not available or sufficient. Specifically, these relationships involved grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings, and godparents, as each provided a unique support that was instrumental in the acquisition of key information and guidance about college. According to Strom and Savage (2014), family support positively influenced the students' decisions to persist beyond the first year of enrollment. The participant, Elizabeth, shared sentiments for her grandmother's support.

During my freshman year, I had a lot of support from my grandmother. She lives in another state now, but she used to live up here. She is my closest grandmother, and she would send me care packages with random magazines that she found at the store, such as silverware and other stuff that you need as a freshman. She's a thoughtful one.

Advice was another important form of support for Madelyn, who talked about academic and career advice received from her aunt. Madelyn explained,

One of my aunts went to college for sign language, and she said pick a school somewhere where you might want to stay. That is where you find a job, because people know people in that area and not from where you come from. This really helped me a lot.

Wally, an athlete, expressed his gratefulness for supportive uncles and a grandmother. He shared, "All were available to talk with me about anything when I was stressed or needed

advice. He continued with an example, “My one uncle has a master’s in history. When I have questions about that subject, I can always ask him a few questions.”

A few of the participants expressed gratitude for their siblings, who provided information to help them navigate the admissions, enrollment, and financial aid processes. For example, Katelynn’s older brother guided her in choosing this small, private institution. He provided advice about college and answered questions. She expressed, “So, he helped me with picking out colleges and told me, Katelynn, you do not want to go to a big school. You are too shy for that.” Similarly, Diana expressed gratitude for her extended family support structure, as many of them visited, mailed packages, and offered invitations to receive a home cooked meal.

The majority of the participants’ spoke candidly about their family relationships and the support provided to them during their college enrollment. Tom, an only child, passionately talked about his aunt.

I am very close to my aunt, and she has been helpful and always available when I needed anything or someone to talk to. She’s always been there for me like an extension of my father and grandmother. She’s been great. She lives 15-minutes from me, and I would go over there very often. She used to cut my hair. I would talk to her about my concerns of leaving my grandmother, but she told me we got this, so don’t worry.

Gabrielle also shared sentiments about her family relationships. She said, “I have a very close family, and they are supportive of college and whatever I choose to do. They were all happy to hear that I was going to college to further my education.”

Community Networks Theme

According to Byun et al. (2012), close-knit relationships within the rural communities provided the social capital necessary to help rural FGC students achieve success. In Coleman's (1988) social capital research, the community was a primary factor in the reduction of attrition. Further, Byun et al. (2012), stressed that rural FGC students relied on the support from within the close-knit communities.

The findings from this data analysis suggested that community networks provided support in varied forms to promote student retention. For example, Alice was very close to members of her church community, and this connection supported her while enrolled in the research setting. She expressed, "I was very involved with my church, and that helped me immensely. The decision was not so much where to go to college, but we were pushed to do better than where we were at."

Several of the students experienced support from the research setting's alumni who either worked or lived in the participants' home communities. The participants revealed that these individuals provided the requisite information and advice in an effort to ensure a smooth transition and enrollment into college. Kristen's community support came from her fourth grade teacher, who at one time attended the university as an education major. Kristen explained, "She was my favorite teacher, and I still keep in contact with her. She's the one that's kind of been seeing me on ever since I was her student. She urged me to visit the campus." By the same token, Wally shared that he also was convinced to attend the university due to his coach's encouragement. He said, "My high school cross-country coach really saw potential in me and wanted me to run while

attending college, especially this university.” Wally’s coach also previously attended the institution.

The most common community network that generated consistent support to the rural FGC student participants was the high school guidance counselor. Tom shared,

My guidance counselor from high school was very close to me and very supportive. She helped me throughout the process to find a college, and I can’t thank her enough for the support she gave me. She also wrote letters of recommendations for me. Coming from a small town, I know everyone pretty much, and they know about me. Everyone from the town is super supportive.

They always ask how I am doing, and what’s going on at school.

Likewise, Sue’s guidance counselor provided instrumental support to her. She disclosed,

He actually attended this university for two years, and then he switched. He played baseball here. Great guy. He helped me through this whole process, because he knew I was struggling with the decision to stay home or go out on my own.

Madelyn received encouragement from her employers to follow her dreams and do everything she desired to accomplish. In addition, she shared that her guidance counselor was “helpful and supportive.” Gabrielle also talked about her high school, “It was a public school of excellence. They always pushed higher education and doing what you love, whether it be college or going right into the work field.” Similarly, Vincent appreciated his high school teachers and guidance counselor, as they helped him immensely. He explained, “She [guidance counselor] definitely helped me make the

decision to go to school, where to look, and what to look for.” Equally, Hayden’s guidance counselor from high school was instrumental in providing support. He expounded, “I can call and talk to her as well as some of my other teachers back from school whenever I need help with anything.”

The community support described by the participants functioned as their information channels and was specifically a financial connection for Diana. She said, “I received multiple local scholarships actually from organizations within my community.” In addition, Diana’s high school guidance counselor provided strong support through encouragement to enroll in honors classes and also wrote letters of recommendations to support admissions requirements.

Campus Connection Theme

The selection of and enrollment in the university was noteworthy, as several participants passionately described the various characteristics about the campus that fueled their desires to remain enrolled. In addition, some of the participants described how the campus affected their parents. The findings revealed the distinct reasons the participants selected and enrolled in the university which included: (a) religious faith, (b) aesthetics and climate, (c) close proximity to family, and (d) campus size.

Religious faith. Two participants, Alice and Vincent, provided parallel detailed descriptions of the reasons they decided to enroll in the small, private faith-based Midwestern institution. First, Alice expressed that she grew up nondenominational or Free Methodist, which helped to establish a platform for entry into the campus. She eloquently spoke,

The more that I kept going around campus, exploring for myself, and interviewing people, I kind of had a feeling like I was stepping towards home. I felt very comfortable just being on the campus. The people were welcoming and warm, and I wanted to be around them.

Vincent desired an institution of higher education that would enable him to develop and grow in his faith. He shared, “Well, to make a long story short, my entire family converted to Catholicism.” Vincent’s parents were very supportive during his college selection process, and he desired a school that would enable him to achieve his academic and spiritual goals. He also disclosed that his enrollment in this university provided opportunity to surround himself with “people who shared the same faith, morals, etc.,” and he concluded by sharing that he loves the university.

Aesthetics and climate. The campus’s physical aesthetics and overall climate were impressive to both Madelyn and Sue. The distinctiveness that captivated their attention and eventual enrollment was noted in the reasons for their college selection.

Madelyn’s father accompanied her on a visit to the campus, and she fell in love with the campus environment. She said, “It was so clean, and everybody was so nice, and the food was pretty good. It felt like home.” Madelyn and her family visited the campus several times before a final decision was made, as she was also looking at two other private colleges. Her parents’ reactions to the university’s aesthetics echoed her descriptions. Madelyn also provided her thoughts about small private colleges.

I always thought when I was looking at a college, whether public or private, I think the private schools offer a more personal feel where you are not just a

number to them. That makes all the difference, because you feel like part of the family.

Sue's grandparents visited the campus with her for the first official tour. She described their initial visit in their walk around campus, "We saw how clean everything was on the campus like the bathrooms [laughter]." The decision to attend this private university was tough for Sue primarily due to the potential 4-year commitment. However, she revisited the campus multiple times before making the final decision to attend.

The appeal of the university aesthetically impressed me, so I just wanted to keep coming back to campus. It felt like home as soon as I was on the campus.

Everyone was great and so polite holding doors open. I would go home and someone; a stranger of course, would close the door and not hold it open. I would say, well, they held the door open at this university [name removed].

The small, private university also welcomed Sue's grandparents on campus when they requested clearance from campus security to stay in their camper overnight. Sue's grandparents were pleased that the university was accepting of the students' families.

Close proximity to family. Some of the participants expressed that their decisions to select the private university was related in part to distance. For example, Diana revealed, "One of the main reasons I chose it was because it is a faith-based [denomination removed] university, and it was in close proximity to my family." These were crucial factors in her decision to enroll, as Diana is very close to her family. Likewise, Gabrielle also shared similar sentiments, as she selected the campus for the athletic program. Yet, she was pleased that her parents loved the institution. Her parents

especially liked the fact that the institution was located close to home. Gabrielle described, “It’s not too close where I could go home every weekend. It’s about 45 minutes from my house, and I wanted that too.” Equally, Elizabeth’s parents were glad that this university, in comparison to other potential selections, was much closer in proximity. Coming from a small, rural area, Elizabeth realized that she wanted to attend a small school. She especially appreciated the comfortable college experience during her overnight stay with friends prior to enrollment.

Katelynn originally planned to commute, but she later decided to reside on campus. She conveyed, “When I visited, it felt really comfortable, and it was still close to home. So if I decided not to live here anymore, it would not be a big deal to change my mind.” Katelynn’s parents were very appreciative of the distance, as she would still remain close enough for visits. Lastly, Wally explained that his college choice was in part related to the best financial option and the close proximity to home. Both Wally and his parents specifically liked the latter.

Campus size. The research setting is small with an estimated 450 recruited freshmen each year and an approximate 3,000 total student enrollment. Some of the participants were particularly attracted to the size of the university campus.

Kristen explored a variety of colleges that offered her program of study; however, she was determined to attend a small school. She said, “I started to narrow them down by that [major and size]. I picked three schools, toured them all, and fell in love with this one.” In the same way, Hayden desired to find a small college with a good nursing program, which is his current major. He explained, “I visited a lot of nearby bigger

schools, but this university was the only small school that I visited. I really like the small school feel better, and they have a good nursing program.” In addition, Hayden’s parents were also “keen on the smaller school with possibly less distractions.” They accompanied him on all the college visits.

Closely aligned with the statements from Kristen and Hayden, Tom also preferred a small school. He voiced his preference, “When I was looking for a college, I was looking for a small school where I could have a close connection with the professors and obviously the students as well.” Tom admitted that the university was unknown to him until an individual within his local community informed him about the campus location. Tom and his grandmother visited the university, and he commented that he “absolutely fell in love with it.” He passionately expressed, “It’s been the perfect choice for me. I am so happy that I chose it.”

Institutional Support Theme

The participants were asked to provide their perceptions on how the research setting could provide support to rural FGC students and their parents. The data analysis revealed a variety of findings.

First, Madelyn suggested that the university establish a group guided by a faculty advisor who was also a first-generation college student. The purpose of the group would be to serve as a connection for rural FGC students to find one another for support. She explained, “I was in two clubs with peers who helped me to get through the tough times.”

A second suggestion came from Sue who recommended that the university provide a special program designed to meet the needs of the parents, especially

concerning financial aid. It is critical for incoming freshmen and parents to understand the financial aid process. Further, Elizabeth's suggestion included parent-student group discussions about financial aid. Kristen also echoed similar comments concerning financial aid and parents. She said, "Financially, parents should know much more. My parents did not know what Perkins Loans versus Stafford Loans were or anything about aid." Gabrielle suggested increased time spent with parents and students during the freshmen orientation to discuss financial aid and purchasing textbooks. She expressed, "Even I had a problem buying books. I knew I could get them at the bookstore, but they said that they were more expensive. Other FGC students have the same questions."

Tom recommended an expanded version of the current freshmen orientation through which FGC students could learn about college expectations. He also suggested pursuing active lines of communication with parents to ensure they are aware of campus events and student requirements. He stated, "This is a new experience for them too, and they may not know how to deal with college life. More support systems for parents would be exceptional." Katelynn offered a suggestion to create a parent's weekend program to encourage campus involvement. She said, "Maybe have some programs to encourage parents to come to campus other than when their kids are in sports." Similarly, Alice suggested the institution develop a training program to provide parents with vital information and personal support. Lastly, Diana passionately shared that some rural FGC students and parents do not consistently have Internet access in remote rural areas. She recommended, "Instead of a lot of communication being electronic, the campus should

still send mailings home.” Diana’s suggestion was applicable to campus magazines, university announcements, tuition billing statements, and final grades.

Overall, the findings suggested that parental support was perceived as necessary and appreciated by the rural FGC student participants. Further, the consistent and various levels of support from parents shaped the students’ decisions to remain enrolled beyond the first year. Based on the participants’ responses, it was central to write the qualitative findings in a narrative format and incorporate the voices of the participants’ rich descriptions to answer the guiding research questions. Moreover, it was necessary to fully explain the perceptions of the 12 student participants represented in the data collection. The students’ expressive details were incorporated throughout the writings in a manner by which the reader was transported into the world of the individuals (Stake, 1995).

Credibility and Dependability

In this qualitative research, credibility implies that the rural FGC students’ perceptions of parental support aligned with the results outlined in the transcription and in the data (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, the credibility was centered on whether the data collection methods produced accurate details and descriptions of the participants’ perceptions. It was crucial to ensure that the findings and interpretations in the research study were accurate throughout the data collection and analysis phases. The means to ensure credibility in this study was the utilization of member checking. Member checking was aimed to make certain that my personal bias did not impact how the rural FGC students’ perceptions were depicted (Lodico et al., 2010).

Each participant was contacted by electronic mail and/or text messaging and asked to confirm the accuracy of their transcribed interview responses and interpretations of their perceptions. The process of member checking provided an opportunity for each participant to modify and/or clarify the information (Appendix E; Creswell, 2012). None of the 12 student participants in this study submitted a request for changes to the documents, and each responded with approval as written. Most important, the collection of data from the multiple participants' perspectives supported triangulation (Lodico et al., 2010).

The dependability of the research referred to the ability to monitor or track the data collection and analysis procedures (Lodico et al., 2010). The utilization of the audio recorder in this collective case study supported dependability. Further, dependability demonstrated the manner by which the study was conducted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the description of how the researcher-participant relationships were cultivated, and how the interviews were designed (Lodico et al., 2010). As with credibility, dependability was necessary in this qualitative research to establish evidence of trustworthy findings.

Merriam (2002) suggested the need to purposefully identify cases that may not confirm the emerging results. The contrary information was labeled as discrepant or negative cases and were identified and acknowledged with an explanation of the reason the case did not fit (Lodico et al., 2010). Specific to this study, the collective case study involved 12 participants, which increased the likelihood of discrepant cases. As part of the data analysis, I reviewed the coded themes to determine whether any discrepant cases existed.

According to Creswell (2012), discrepant cases may be used to explain the contradictory data, as they add credibility to the research. For example, an assumption based on recent literature suggested that rural FGC students experienced achievement guilt; however, none of the cases displayed this notion in the codes. One case contained this statement, “She never told me this, but I think she [mother] lives through me a little bit through the opportunities that I get.” This case did not confirm the results or findings among the other cases. It was singled in the coding process. Further, the literature review presented in section one did not present findings of this nature and was not considered in this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this collective case study aligned with the research problem and the research questions. The decision to utilize a qualitative research case study method enabled me to gather the voices of the participants’ personal experiences and perceptions about parental support. The participants openly and willingly shared information about their high school and college enrollment experiences, family relationships, personal challenges, and recommendations for institutional changes. During the data collection process, it was apparent that each participant had strong family connections. A few of the individuals were emotional when speaking about the encouragement, compassion, advice, guidance, and prayers received from their parents.

The social capital established through the close relationships may be the reason the rural FGC students did not withdraw early (Coleman, 1988). Specifically, the findings of this qualitative research are integrated in and represent a form of the conceptual

framework social capital, namely, information channels. According to Coleman and Byun et al. (2012), the acquisition of information and support from social networks is vital to student retention (Byun et al., 2012; Coleman, 1988), and specific to this study, the rural student participants' decisions to continue beyond the first year. The parents of rural FGC students appear to have a greater appreciation for the value of a college degree than was evident in the past (Tieken, 2016); however, it is crucial that scholar practitioners explore further studies on how the role of the parents and support networks of urban and suburban students' shape their decisions to persist beyond the first year. First-generation college students represent 46% of the research setting's freshmen population; thus, the findings from this analysis reflected there is need to support these students with programs and initiatives to improve their ability to graduate and contribute to social change.

The data analysis yielded six themes, which gave insight into the research problem. The themes primarily focused on the participants' decisions to remain enrolled and the vital support networks that facilitated their retention. The six themes included: a) parental support; (b) extended family relationships; (c) financial support; (d) community networks; (e) campus connection, and (f) institutional support. Each theme reflected the participants' rich descriptions and in-depth details from their responses to the interview questions about parental support.

The findings supported the assumptions that rural FGC students relied on various information channels or networks to provide support during the first-year of college (Coleman, 1988). The type of parental support was wide-ranging among the participants,

but the most common and consistent forms of support included: (a) financial, (b) concern for the students' wellbeing, (c) grocery purchases, (d) encouragement, (e) advice, (f) visitations, (g) communication, and (h) gifts (Fingerman et al., 2012; Irlbeck, et al., 2014; Kolkhorst et al., 2010; Sy et al., 2011). Although the types and levels of support may have varied from freshman to senior year, the participants unanimously agreed that their parents and extended family provided sufficient support. Thus, the participants did not withdraw prior to the second year.

Outcome of the Findings

An outcome of this case study research is a project deliverable designed to address the rural FGC student participants' perceptions of institutional support aimed at parents. The chosen project genre is a professional development/training in the form of a 3-day parent experience program during the fall, spring and summer semesters. The early exposure to some of the program topics suggested by the student participants and supported by scholarly research may reduce the parents' insecurities or fears about college enrollment. Further, the information presented in the development program may enhance the parents' ability to further support their students from the first year of enrollment to degree completion.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study utilized a collective case study design to explore the rural FGC students' perceptions of the parental support that shaped their decisions to remain enrolled. The qualitative design provided opportunity to acquire the data necessary to answer the guiding research questions regarding parental support and

retention. A purposeful sampling method was used to select a population of rural FGC students. The data collection methods included structured one-on-one interviews. Each participant received an informed consent form detailing the purpose of the study, risks and benefits, and their ability to withdraw without penalty. Most important, measures were taken to ensure the rights of the participants through the approval process of the Walden University and the research setting's institutional review boards.

In the data collection and data analysis processes, I conducted interviews, transcribed and coded data, identified themes, analyzed and interpreted the results, and determined an appropriate project deliverable. The computer software, EXCEL, was utilized for storing, sorting and securing the data. Member checking and triangulation were applied to the findings to ensure validity and dependability. Lastly, I identified any bias throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

This study focused on parental support and retention of rural FGC students; therefore, the research-supported project was created to address the recommendations generated from the rural FGC student participants. Section 3 provided in-depth details on the project deliverable, including the introduction, goals, rationale, literature review, project description, evaluation plan, and implications.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 consists of a detailed description of the project that originated from the findings of this study on rural FGC students' perceptions of parental support. Within this section are the project description and goals, the rationale, a review of scholarly literature, an analysis of the conceptual framework, and the case study research as they interconnect with the project design. In addition, the required project resources, existing support structure, possible barriers, and suggestions to address any challenges are included in this section. Lastly, Section 3 incorporates project implementation, roles and responsibilities, the evaluation plan, and project implications as aligned with social change.

Project Description and Goals

The project represents the professional development/training curriculum and materials genre. The project, called Parents Assisting Students to Succeed (PASS), is specifically designed for parents of rural FGC students (Appendix A). As the primary participants of the PASS project, the parents and family will be invited to attend this 3 day parent experience program, which will incorporate a series of presentations derived from the results of the data analysis and literature. The parent development program will occur prior to the freshmen orientation in an effort to address rural parents' fears, concerns, and questions regarding the value of a higher education.

The project is content-specific and aligns with the research problem. Further, the PASS project incorporates applicable components of the themes that resonated from the

students' voices about their perceptions of parental support and successive term enrollments.

The primary goal of the PASS project is to improve the retention rates of rural FGC students attending a small, private faith-based university. Generally, this population of students is less likely to remain enrolled beyond the first academic year of college compared to nonrural college students (Pierson & Hanson, 2015). Therefore, this project aims to provide parents with the knowledge and understanding of various aspects of the college experience.

The purpose of the PASS project is to introduce parents to the campus community and the vital resources and services available to foster student support. As a form of social capital, parents are instrumental in students' decisions to remain enrolled in college. The content of the PASS project will help parents to expand their knowledge of college life, reduce any anxieties they feel, and receive answers to their questions. The PASS project is designed with a purpose to expose and educate parents on the pertinent subject matter generated from the findings of the data analysis and scholarly literature. As a result, the project will help to enhance the manner in which the parents support their rural FGC students during the first year of enrollment. The PASS project will enable parents to build a community of support among other parents of FGC students. This introduction to various parent connections may support the fact that they are not alone in the first-year college experience.

Project Rationale for Genre and Content

The rationale for this project is the necessity to address the research problem of rural FGC student attrition. It has been documented through the scholarly review of literature in Section 1 that parental support has a direct impact on student retention (Leonard, 2013; Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Vianden & Ruder, 2012). Thus, it is crucial that parents are introduced to and receive appropriate guidance, pertinent resources, and exposure to information networks as a means to increase their knowledge and understanding of students' college experiences. Further, as parents are equipped to provide enhanced support to their students, they will continue to help improve rural FGC student retention. Tieken (2016) suggested that deliberate conversations occur with parents to understand how institutions of higher education can support them and their students in the quest for a college education. The PASS project is an appropriate vehicle to engage parents in conversations about matriculation and continued enrollment.

The design of this project is appropriate and timely, as efforts to recruit rural FGC students into the small, private university are intentional and purposeful (E. Retree, personal communication, June 30, 2016). The parents will be invited to participate in the PASS project, which will include daily information sessions throughout the 3 days of the program. Any parent participants in need of childcare will have access to free onsite care provided by volunteer senior-level students enrolled in their final student teaching seminar. In addition, any parents traveling more than 50 miles to the campus will be offered overnight accommodations.

Each of the 3-day sessions will include campus stakeholders who will present information about key areas determined to be most relevant to student success based on the data analysis and literature. According to Tieken (2016), the parents of rural students are more supportive of students' decisions to attend college compared to parents of past years. Many of these parents now have greater appreciation of the value of a college degree. It is appropriate to equip parents with the tools necessary to appropriately and effectively assist their students.

The PASS project will incorporate content representing the six themes that originated from the data analysis. The research problem will be addressed through the content of this project, as the presentation themes originated from the students' one-on-one interview responses. For example, themes will include parent and student support resources, academic majors and programs, financial aid, career services, residential life, and parent-student connections.

The first day of the parent experience program will include a series of introductory topics:

- Rural high school and private university: What's the difference?
- Understanding the university life cycle
- How to have a smooth parent transition
- Building a community of on-campus support
- Learn to identify and overcome first-generation student challenges
- Student community connections in mind, body, and spirit

The second day will include an exploration of one of the most complex topics to understand as voiced by the rural FGC student participants: financial aid. The purpose of the full-day workshop is to introduce the rural parents to a variety of components associated with the application process, required financial documents, and explanations of grants, scholarships, and student loans. The financial aid workshop topics will be divided into two components:

- Financial Aid 101
- Financial aid packaging and awards (specific to each parent-student)

The third day will include a final tour of the surrounding areas near the research setting, including the hospital, grocery stores, mall, and banks. The final presentations will include the following topics:

- Student college success habits
- Academic major requirements and career explorations
- Academic support services
- Student wellness and counseling services
- Residential life: Home away from home
- How parents stay connected

The findings of this qualitative case study demonstrated evidence that rural parents desire their students to enroll in college and are willing to provide support to them. Further, Ecklund's (2013) study revealed that the student participants desired parental involvement in their education; however, the institution did not provide many opportunities for parents to engage or connect. The approval to implement the PASS

project at the research setting demonstrates the high level of importance and priority associated with providing support to parents as well as rural FGC students.

The content of the project targets the challenges experienced by the parents as voiced by the student participants and the literature. In addition, the content fosters a greater understanding of the complexities that impact student retention. The research setting provides first-time, full-time freshmen a 12 week, one-credit-hour, first-year college experience course to introduce and expose them to college life at the small, private university. It may be valuable to provide parents with an intentional guide to college life, given that they are the primary information channels for their students. Therefore, the PASS project integrates relevant topics in the presentations to parents as they provide instrumental support to their students. Lastly, this project may empower and encourage rural FGC students' parents to engage in a greater participatory role in their students' educational journey than in the past to facilitate increased retention.

Review of the Literature

The search for literature related to the specific genre of this project included keywords such as *first-generation college students*, *parent involvement*, *parental influence*, *parental support*, *higher education retention*, *social capital*, and *rural college students*. The search engines used to locate information included Academic Search Complete, EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, ERIC, Education Research Complete, and PsycINFO.

Support for Project Genre

Current literature specific to rural parental support and parent programs in colleges and universities is limited; however, the research presented was aligned with the findings of the data analysis and supported the chosen project genre. Based on the results of this qualitative case study, it is vital for this small private faith-based university to make available a specific development program to meet the needs of the parents of rural FGC students. Specifically, the data analysis revealed recommendations for institutional programming designed intentionally for parents. For example, one participant, Tom, suggested that “having more support systems for parents would be exceptional, and they would appreciate the university getting them involved.” He also talked about the significance of parents having exposure to the same campus resources available to the rural students. Therefore, the project genre, a parent development program, was selected to help the parents of rural FGC students understand the essential areas associated with first-year college enrollment.

Byun, Irvin, and Meece (2015) examined whether or not rural college students continuously enrolled in subsequent academic terms without breaks, excluding summer. The findings of their study revealed that rural students were less likely to enroll in successive semesters compared to their nonrural counterparts. On the other hand, the results of this case study showed that sufficient and consistent support from parents shaped the students’ decisions to remain enrolled in college. Hence, there is a necessity to provide parents with a development program purposed to increase awareness,

understanding, and knowledge about the college experience, particularly during the first year of enrollment.

In a less recent study by Bryan and Simmons (2009), it was determined that “programming for first-generation students and their parents can help increase communication and ultimately improve retention and graduation rates” (p. 405). Moreover, in a current study, Nichols and Islas (2015) suggested that both FGC and continuing-generation college students viewed their parents as significant contributors to their college achievements. The rural FGC student participants, Alice, Gabrielle, Katelynn, Wally, Tom, and Kristen, confirmed this research finding with comments indicating that their parents pushed them to pursue a postsecondary education, as college was deemed important. In some instances, their parents were not concerned about where they chose to attend college, as long as they enrolled in an institution of higher education. It was a general expectation of the parents that their rural FGC students would enroll in a college or university. Hence, the PASS project will not only support the parents in the students’ decisions to attend college, but also provide parents with an opportunity to acquire the appropriate skills to assist their students.

Parental support was a vital prerequisite to the rural FGC students’ successive term enrollments. The data analysis confirmed the crucial role of parental support in the students’ decisions to remain enrolled. Some of the rural FGC student participants described consistent and varying levels of parental support, and others in the sample population clearly expressed that their enrollment would have ceased without parental support. Thus, it is important for this private university to afford the parents of rural FGC

students a development opportunity to expand their knowledge and gain a better understanding of the rural students' first-year college experiences. Specifically, the PASS project will introduce parents to institutional support services and resources, as well as campus connections to strengthen their ability to help rural FGC students from the point of matriculation to degree completion.

Coleman (1988) suggested that students who lack social capital are more likely to drop out of school. The theory of social capital as “a resource of persons” is relevant to the project genre (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). The form of social capital inherent within social relations that aligns with the chosen genre is information channels. In particular, parents and/or extended family of FGC students may serve as information channels (Coleman, 1988). According to Coleman, students with access to social capital had a better perspective on education and were less likely to drop out of school. Researchers Myers and Myers (2012) noted that the “college choice process includes separate social capital” (p. 302), namely, (a) student and parents separate in their own social networks in the college planning activities and (b) parent and student jointly discuss college planning processes. In a study by Dukhan, Cameron, and Brenner (2012), it was suggested that students with social capital had a more realistic college experience and greater exposure to various opportunities compared to students who were not afforded such chances. According to Martin (2015), the FGC student's ability to access critical college information is of greatest importance in the decision-making process.

Researchers Howley, Chavis, and Kester (2013) noted in their study on rural community college students the necessity for institutional flexibility to meet the needs of

rural adult students. In addition, key institutional stakeholders influence the success of students when a shared common ground has been established (Museus & Neville, 2012), such as generational status or race. The willingness of college personnel to meet rural college students' needs was found to increase satisfaction with the institution and the enrollment experience (Howley et al., 2013), which may result in higher retention rates. The intentional outreach to engage the parents of rural FGC students in the PASS project makes possible the acquisition of critical knowledge from essential campus support networks. Specifically, university stakeholders possess the information and resources required for parents to sufficiently and appropriately support their rural FGC students. According to Martin (2015), there is a need for “proactive outreach, educational and support systems to form research-rich networks” (p. 180).

Ashtiani and Feliciano (2015) suggested that students' access to family social capital through parental involvement might effectively facilitate the college entry process. Hence, the parent connections established through the PASS project will afford the opportunity for parents and students to build strong social structures through the accumulation of social capital. As supported by the data analysis of this study, parental support impacted rural FGC students' decisions to remain enrolled beyond the first year of college. Most importantly, parents' and students' acquisition of information and exposure to resources may result in the desire or need to assist younger generations within the family structure (Mwangi, 2015), which may help to break intergenerational cycles of noncompletion.

Based on the current literature and the voices of the rural FGC student participants, the theme of parent connection resonated. Many of the student participants disclosed that without the connection of their parents in their education journey, they would not have been able to remain enrolled in the small private faith-based university. In an earlier study, Ecklund (2012) explained that it is difficult for parents of FGC students to connect or engage in the college campus environment and still provide their students with the support necessary to achieve success. In Ecklund's (2013) research at a private Christian college, students desired parental involvement within their educational institution; however, institutions of higher education often do not provide many occasions for parents beyond the traditional freshmen orientation.

The transition from high school to college is challenging for students and often results in a variety of emotions, including fear and anxiety (Ganss, 2016). The rural students had limited awareness of the campus expectations, which resulted in academic and social challenges (Ganss, 2016). King (2012) reported that parental support is critical in the rural students' decisions to select and enroll in a college. The parental support in this case study was beneficial to the rural FGC student participants in their transition to the university, as they were able to openly discuss their worries, fears, and frustrations. In addition, the parent-student communication during the transition process was considered valuable and appreciated. Lowery-Hart & Pacheco (2011) suggested that universities and colleges, particularly private, consider more inclusive methods or practices in a supportive environment, which includes the students' parents and family.

The opportunities for extended parent-student connections through university outreach programs may give rise to the notion of helicopter parents (Fingerman et al., 2012; Schiffrin, Liss, Miles-McLean, Geary, Erchull, & Tashner, 2014). According to Fingerman et al. (2012), social culture has stigmatized the behavior associated with extreme parental connection or involvement in the lives of students and deemed it as having a negative impact. Although over-controlling parents may be perceived as an obstacle to the FGC students' success (Schiffrin et al., 2014), Fingerman et al. (2012) determined that the intense support fostered greater satisfaction with the students' adult life situation than their continuing-generation counterparts who did not receive the same intensity from their parents. Moreover, Schiffrin et al. (2014) reported that highly intense parental involvement increased the students' levels of dissatisfaction with life events. On the other hand, Vianden and Ruder (2012) revealed in their study that parents were not prone to engage in helicopter or hovering behaviors, as they chose to defer responsibilities to the student, particularly in conflict circumstances. Harper, Sax, and Wolf (2012) revealed that students from low-income, working, or middle class statuses were positively influenced by parental involvement. Hence, there is need to determine an appropriate balance of the type and intensity of parental involvement, and the PASS project may be the avenue for parents to work through their temptations to hover over students, which might be due to the unknown about college life. In addition, the PASS project will help the parents to dispel any myths associated with college life.

A major concern for the parents of rural FGC students is the possibility of the students' decisions to graduate and not return to the rural community. A college-going

dilemma exists for some students who must face the crucial decision, namely, leave for college or remain at home (Tieken, 2016). For some rural students, this can be a difficult decision, and the messages communicated by the parents are crucial in the decision-making process. In the study by Ganss (2016), first-generation rural students relied on community relationships which served as mentors in their decisions to enroll in college. In addition, some rural students received varying levels of family support in the form of encouragement to attend college. Further, according to Wright's (2012) findings, rural students associated college enrollment with a departure from their rural community. Other rural students opted to attend an institution of higher education with the intentions of contributing to improvements in their family and rural community life after completing their college education. Ganss (2016) stressed the importance of university leadership to actively assist rural students in the transition from their rural community to the university environment. As FGC students enter higher education, they do so with limited knowledge, skills, and resources required to successfully navigate the first year (Strayhorn, 2014). King (2012) found that parental support in the form of encouragement to enroll in college impacted the rural students' college-going decisions. Several participants in this case study discussed the value of inspiration as a form of support from their parents during the college search, application, and enrollment processes. Hence, the PASS project will enable parents to access and utilize key resources to support their rural FGC students.

According to Tieken (2016), some private institutions host the parents of first-generation students in overnight visits, while public colleges and universities generally

provide full-day orientations. Institutional workshops, events, and programs hosted specifically for parents helped to increase parental participation and involvement (King, 2012). The PASS project will engage and expose parents to the campus student support services, financial aid, academic, and social resources prior to the traditional parent-student orientation. Hence, the PASS project will promote increased parent-student communication and involvement in the students' college experiences (Harper, et al., 2012). Most important, the 3-day professional development project genre is appropriate, as it may evolve into a sustainable relationship and collaborative program opportunity between the university and the parents of rural FGC students. The efficiency of the PASS project will be determined by how well the university is willing and able to connect parents and students to the vital academic and social support networks during the first-year of enrollment (Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013).

Support for Project Content

The rural student participants in this case study desired, received, and appreciated the support from their parents. According to Nichols and Islas (2015), the parents of FGC students were instrumental in providing encouragement to help students persist in college for the family, community, and themselves. Several rural FGC student participants admitted that neither they nor their parents understood every aspect of the admissions application, room and board, financial aid, major requirements, and/or academic course scheduling processes. However, the close student-parent relationship and open communication between them supported the navigation through the complex components of college enrollment. Consequently, the content of the PASS project is deliberate and

will deliver essential tools for parents to utilize in their efforts to assist their rural FGC students. Specifically, the project's content addresses the research problem of rural FGC student early withdrawals before the second academic year of college and is aimed to increase retention rates.

The content of the PASS project is designed to introduce and share important aspects about college life from the point of entry to graduation. The parents of the rural FGC students will be introduced to the academic and social support networks on campus from whom they can access information that is not readily available from other sources. These individuals will include department leaders and administrators. The design of the three-day parent experience program allows for sufficient time to build relationships and reduce the anxieties associated with the first year of college enrollment. Moreover, the parents will participate in various workshop activities, including managing stress and emotions associated with a child moving from high school to college (Levens, Elrahal & Sagui, 2016), career selection opportunities (Raque-Bogdan, Klingaman, Martin, & Lucas, 2013; Shen, 2015), and financial aid (King, 2012). In addition, the academic services and social support areas will introduce the integrated academic and social resources designed to support freshmen students and their parents. The PASS project will also encourage parental involvement and engagement in the university, which may result in encouraging and supportive behaviors towards the student's enrollment (Ecklund, 2013) and potentially increase rural FGC student retention rates.

According to Kallison and Stader (2012), the more information parents receive about the application process and the value of a college degree, the more comfortable

they will be in the decision-making process with their students. Although the parents of the rural FGC student participants were challenged to grasp all the details associated with college selection and enrollment, the students received encouragement and emotional support, as they diligently attempted to complete these institutional requirements. The parents were unable to comprehend some aspects of the educational experience due to their own lack of college exposure. Although the college-planning process can be daunting, parents desired (a) access to the information about the transition to college, (b) connection to other rural parents, and (c) empowerment to confidently communicate to their students about college life (Hallett & Griffen, 2015). Further, Hallett and Griffen and Dyce, Albold, and Long (2013) stressed that some college-access programs provided parents and students with exposure to and understanding of the information required for success in higher education. In addition, Means and Pyne (2016) completed a study on the perceptions of college access capital and recommended that colleges and universities consider partnerships with college access programs to enhance student support, especially for at-risk populations. Such programs might include Upward Bound (Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015), Summer Bridge programs (Kallison & Stader, 2012), and articulation agreements for rural student success (Jaeger, Dunstan, & Dixon, 2015). The PASS project parent development program will provide parents with access to the pertinent university materials, resources, support services and connections to prepare them for their students' role as a rural FGC student.

The PASS project content will reflect intentional and careful outreach to parents as they aspire to help their rural students. The participants and the literature connect the

content of the PASS project to the needs of the parents as revealed in the data analysis. Specific areas were noted in the findings of the case study and included in the content of the PASS project. For example, some of the rural FGC student participants shared that their parents did not understand the reasons for their academic major and/or career selections during the first semester of college. Since there is an established institutional partnership between academic advising and career services, the PASS project will feature a collaborative session with the respective leadership of the two areas to address the parent concerns and provide detailed explanations of the resources available to assist students.

The freshmen academic advisors will aim to help parents understand the importance and purpose of academic advising and its impact on the students' successive term enrollments. Swecker (2013) noted that academic advising was instrumental in the retention of FGC students. It is crucial for parents to realize the value of academic advising, as well as the role and responsibility of the academic advisor as a mentor, coach and/or advocate for their students. According to Suvedi, Ghimire, Millenbah, and Shrestha (2015), freshmen perceived academic advising as a positive experience and beneficial to their progress. Thus, the content of the academic advising presentation will include a model of a student's advising and term planning session, which will foster a better understanding of the academic major, course selection, and credit hour determinations. Most important, the academic advisor will be an integral part of the process to engage and connect not only the rural students but also the rural parents. According to Workman (2015), students appreciate dialogue with the advising staff about

their transitions from high school to college. Lastly, Soria and Bultmann (2014) suggested that academic advisors communicate with students from working-class backgrounds in a manner that will foster a sense of belongingness, which might result in increased retention rates.

The career services leadership will engage parents in the importance of major exploration activities to demonstrate the instruments used to help students discover potential career opportunities, entrepreneurships, and/or internships. Specifically, the presentation will be focused on career possibilities that may afford the students an opportunity to contribute to their rural communities. In addition, the PASS project session on the topic of career opportunities will address the parents' concerns about how the rural FGC students' enrollment may impact their family and community life upon graduation. Harlow and Bowman (2016) reported that first-generation students had lower levels of career maturity compared to their continuing-generation counterparts. Hence, career-related support from parents in the form of encouragement was important in the students' ability to cope with career barriers (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2013). Further, Raque-Bogdan et al. recommended the need for presentations during parent programs like the PASS project that speak to the support parents can provide to help their students handle career barriers.

The collaborative programming efforts of the academic advising and career services leadership will serve as essential resources for rural parents and rural FGC students. The inclusion of this partnership in the PASS project is critical. Estes, Estes, Johnson, Edgar, and Shoulders (2016) stressed that rural geographic areas are concerned

about their students' departures from their close-knit communities to attend an institution of higher education without returning to the community. Hence, the career services presenters will exercise caution as they address rural parents who may still be unsure about the value of a college education (Tieken, 2016).

The most prevalent concern of the rural FGC student participants was the financial aid process. The ability for parents to fund their students' college education was a major concern (Hallett & Griffen, 2015), particularly for struggling families (Tieken (2016). The rural FGC student participants reported that the financial aid presentations during the standard freshmen orientation were confusing for their parents. In addition, the participants in the study voiced concern about the limited time allotted for parents to ask questions and fully digest their students' specific information. For example, one participant shared that her parents felt rushed during the brief exposure to the billing statement, scholarship, grants, and student loan information. Consequently, some participants and their parents did not know the difference between the student loans and the federal grants.

The topic of financial aid is strongly associated with college enrollment and retention; yet, it was perceived to be complex and difficult (King, 2012). The PASS project's inclusion of an all-day financial aid workshop will be vital to help the parents of rural FGC students acquire more knowledge and a better understanding of financial aid. Solis and Durband (2015) disclosed that the students' financial satisfaction was independent of their family or parents' financial support. Parent participation in the PASS project's financial aid workshop is crucial to acquire the confidence and skills needed to

better assist students with the completion of the FAFSA. The financial aid workshop will include an explanation on the cost of attendance using the university's tuition, fees, room, and board structure. There is a need for parents to receive more information about financial aid, as their involvement in and understanding of the process will enable them to provide greater support to their students (Kallison & Stader, 2012).

The content of the PASS project is relevant as parents often desire to support their students (Ecklund, 2013); yet, some parents of FGC students have concerns about postsecondary enrollment (Tieken, 2016). Therefore, this parent development program may help the rural parents gain an understanding about college life from a variety of perspectives at the university setting, which might foster a better understanding of the expectations and requirements associated with student enrollment in the small, private institution. In addition, a session will be presented on the university life-cycle, which will provide the rural parents with a specific calendar of year-round events. The parents' awareness and knowledge of the cycle details will enable them to be proactive and confident in preparing the students for upcoming events and handling difficulties associated with various enrollment requirements, such as subsequent term registrations and course examinations.

The PASS project presenters will aim to help parents feel more confident in their approach to support their rural students. This goal will be accomplished through the exposures and connections to key campus support services and resources. As a result, the parents may begin to feel more at ease during the traditional parent-student orientation, as they will have acquired in-depth knowledge and a better understanding about financial

aid and general information about college life through the PASS project. Lastly, the design and content of this parent development program should incline the senior leadership of other institutions to regard parents as vital connectors rather than obstacles in the students' transition to and through college (Vianden & Ruder, 2012).

Project Description and Implementation

The implementation of the project will require institutional authorization from senior leadership to deliver the program and solicit parent participation. Specifically, the chief academic officer, vice president for student affairs, vice president of finance, and director of undergraduate admissions will receive and review a summary about the program, including the design, purpose, goals, and content of the program presentations. After the approval to implement the program is obtained, the solicitation process to secure commitments from the program presenters, director of special events, auxiliary services, and parent participants will begin. The final portion of the project implementation process will be to evaluate the program to determine its viability and success.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The utilization of potential resources and existing supports at the university will enable me to provide the program participants with the depth and breadth necessary to effectively fulfill the purpose and goals of the project. These initial resources and supports may include the (a) Office of Advancement and Alumni to establish connections with parents of rural FGC student graduates, (b) Office of Financial Aid staff to conduct a full-day workshop and provide one-on-one consultations on financial aid options, and (c)

Counseling and Support Center to assist parents experiencing difficulty letting go. In addition, other potential resources to support this project may include (a) campus space reservations, (b) dining services, (c) print shop, (d) campus bookstore, (e) campus security, (f) accessibility services, (g) information technology, and (h) campus ministry. Lastly, a project evaluation will enable me to determine any additional required resources and supports for future sessions.

Potential Barriers

The creation of any program has the potential to involve barriers to a successful execution. In particular, the implementation of the PASS project may involve possible barriers such as (a) limited financial resources to execute program logistics, (b) insufficient number of parent participants, (c) lack of volunteer presenters for the 3-day parent development program, and (d) insufficient support within the campus community.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Naturally, the program participants will be the parents of the rural first-generation freshmen accepted to begin Fall Semester of the next academic year. The timetable for the project implementation includes the months of October, February, and April. These timeframes will enable me to reach the parents of the incoming freshmen cohort at various phases prior to the traditional parent-student orientations. The project will consist of a series of presentations and a full-day financial aid workshop. The 3-day schedule format will convene Friday, Saturday, and Sunday and will begin at 8:30 a.m. with a continental breakfast followed by introductions and presentations at 9:00 a.m. Each day will conclude at 3:00 p.m. The days of the week were intentionally chosen to help reduce

the total number of days the parents would need to make arrangements to alter employment schedules.

Roles and Responsibilities of Parents and Others

The primary roles and responsibilities of the parents are to attend and engage in the 3-day program. The presenters will encourage active participation from the parents who attend the daily sessions and allow sufficient time for questions and in-depth discussions.

Other roles and responsibilities relate to the program presenters. Each individual must commit to his or her assigned day, time, and session topic(s). The presenters will be asked to submit copies of their presentation materials in advance for the project archive. As an appreciation for their participation, all presenters will receive vouchers for the campus dining services to be utilized breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Further, the individuals and stakeholders who commit to support the PASS project are expected to deliver and/or confirm their services in a timely manner. Lastly, as the researcher and project facilitator, my role and responsibility will be to ensure that the implementation is successfully completed, all presenters are secured and confirmed, including the university president to officially welcome the parent participants. In addition, it will be my responsibility to ensure that all logistics are finalized in advance of the program implementation, such as classroom and auditorium reservations, refreshments, and donated door prizes displaying the university's logo. Lastly, as researcher, it will be my responsibility to prepare and conduct the project evaluation to assess the sustainability of the project.

Project Evaluation Plan

The implementation of the PASS project requires a program evaluation.

According to Lodico et al. (2010), program evaluation is necessary to determine the value of the program and suggest recommendations for modifications. Primarily, the project evaluation will determine what works and what does not work. Further, the evaluation process encompasses prescribed actions intended to assess the goals and objectives of the program (Spaulding, 2015). Spaulding recommended the use of an evaluation matrix that contains the involved constituents, timelines, and evaluation purpose.

Type of Program Evaluation

The program evaluation for this project will utilize two qualitative forms: formative and summative. First, formative evaluation will be used to acquire immediate feedback on the program, and if necessary, make appropriate changes as the program is occurring (Lodico et al., 2010). The justification for selecting the formative evaluation is the allowance that it affords for the collection and reporting of data based on current, on-going, and consistent feedback to me in my roles as internal evaluator and program coordinator (Spaulding, 2015). All parent participants will be asked at the end of each day to share their feedback concerning the financial aid workshop, topic-specific presentations, and an overall assessment of the day.

Spaulding (2015) provided examples of data collection surveys and scales, and I determined the most appropriate type for this purpose is one that uses a 4-point Likert-scale survey with space for open-ended responses. The survey will be utilized to collect

immediate feedback, which will help me to determine how and where to adjust the content and outcomes of the program.

Second, the justification for utilizing a summative evaluation is the ability to measure the overall program outcomes and determine whether the program is deemed sustainable and successful. The summative findings will answer the question, “Did the program provide parents with increased knowledge, understanding, skills, and resources to better support their students during the first-year of college?” Further, the specific learning outcomes include:

1. Knowledge of the basic components of the FAFSA and differences between grants, scholarships and loans.
2. Understand the role of an academic advisor.
3. Familiar with the academic support services.
4. Knowledge about student support in body, mind and spirit.
5. Awareness of ways parents can connect with the campus community.

The utilization of a summative evaluation will enable me to justify the program goals and objectives and determine whether they were met. A summative evaluation will occur the last day of the parent experience program and will include the parents’ degree of awareness and comprehension of campus resources and support services and aspects of the financial aid process. The summative data will be collected in the survey about the overall program experience and presentation content. Specifically, a 4-point Likert-scale document will be administered to parent participants, and there will be space for open-ended response items to allow for in-depth descriptions of how and what (Spaulding,

2015). The final data will be compiled and presented in the form of an evaluation report and presented to all stakeholders, including senior leadership at the university. The final report will address the program changes, which occurred during and at the conclusion of the implementation.

Project and Evaluation Goals

First, the most prominent goal of this project is to increase the retention rate among rural FGC students attending the small, private institution. Parental support is crucial to the success of the rural students, and the PASS project may provide the parents with the knowledge about and access to appropriate resources and services to further support enrollments beyond the first year to degree completion.

Next, the overall program evaluation goal is to determine whether the PASS project successfully conveyed the depth and breadth of information that parents require to help guide their rural FGC students' in their decisions to remain enrolled. In addition, the goal of the program evaluation is to establish whether the parent program is justifiable and successful.

Key Project Stakeholders

The parents of the rural FGC students will be the primary stakeholders, as they are the participants. Additional key project stakeholders will include participants, program presenters, and leaders of campus support services. The program presenters will represent the areas of academic services, academic advising, career services, counseling, financial aid, residential life, and student affairs. The campus auxiliary services will

include office of accommodations, bookstore, dining facilities, residential housing, print shop, and campus security.

After the implementation and initial program evaluation, I will engage in ongoing periodic program reviews. The purpose of the program reviews will be to determine whether continued adjustments are required.

Project Implications

Social Change

An implication of this qualitative case study research is the social capital provided by the parents as a means to support the students' college enrollment. The study specifically focused on how parental support shaped the students' decisions to remain enrolled. The aim of this study is to increase retention, and as a result, provide students with an opportunity to contribute to social change. The attainment of a college education will enable rural FGC students to contribute to their communities and support rural economic sustainability. Further, the students' college enrollment may serve as an inspiration to other rural community FGC students to consider postsecondary education. For example, the participant, Tom, noted that he has been able to share information about the university to other students within his small community. Just as he was not aware of the university, these individuals were also not aware of this small, private campus. Similarly, Elizabeth reported that she was impressed and influenced by two close friends who previously attended the university. Mwangi (2015) reported that family and community support could leave students feeling a sense of responsibility to be an educational role model, a source of college information, and a college supporter for

younger generations and/or the local community. Thus, the rural FGC students' ability to serve as channels of information has the potential to promote social change.

Local Community

The implementation of the PASS project will serve as a connector for both parents and students to vital information networks, resources, administrators, and local surrounding community partnerships. The knowledge, understanding, and skills acquired by the parents will enable them to effectively guide, inform, and support their students in decisions related to college enrollment. As a result, the rural FGC students also have the potential to become an integral part of the campus due to their introduction and exposure to new social networks and support resources. Their sense of belongingness as a FGC student instead of feelings of invisibility or marginality may encourage rather than undermine their retention during the first year of college (Pyne & Means, 2013).

The PASS project is designed to increase rural FGC student retention, which may eventually lead to degree completion. The latter will increase the student's social and economic mobility as a college degree recipient and carry the potential to contribute to economic growth through partnerships within their rural communities. Further, the university will benefit from the students' graduation status. For example, alumni and advancement office may request the rural FGC student graduates to (a) become professional mentors to currently enrolled students and/or (b) contribute time or resources to support FGC student programming initiatives.

Far-Reaching

According to Nichols and Islas (2015), FGC and continuing-generation students recognize that parents are critical forms of social capital and contributors to their college success. Parents helped to shape the students' decisions to remain enrolled beyond the first year. Parental involvement is far reaching in the fact that university leadership must begin to view parents as partners in the education process (Vianden & Ruder, 2012). There is a gap in the number of rural FGC students attending college compared to those in urban populations. However, it is anticipated that rural high school guidance counselors and admissions recruiters will continue in their attempts to validate the purpose and worth of a college education (Tieken, 2016). Therefore, the creation of a parent development program is important in the larger context, as the PASS project introduces the parent into the campus community in a non-threatening manner prior to the start of the students' Fall Semester. Lastly, the efforts of campus and community constituents are required to help the rural FGC students reduce or eliminate barriers to achieve success.

The project's intentional and purposeful design and content may result in increased college enrollment among the rural FGC student population. The primary intent of the parent's connection to the campus is to provide them with the skills necessary to help the university retain a larger percentage of rural FGC students. The students' degree completion will create an exultant state for all stakeholders including the parents, students, university, and community. The successful outcome of the project may be influential and encouraging for this private institution as well as other universities to

consider such programming as a means to increase rural FGC student retention and graduation rates.

Conclusion

The genre for this study is a professional development/training program created for parents of rural FGC students. The program is called Parents Assisting Students to Succeed (PASS). The project envelops the themes from Section 2, which originated from the students' in-depth descriptions and details of their perceptions of parental support. The purpose of the program is to provide parents with professional development and training to facilitate increased student retention. The review of literature supported the project genre and program content. Parental support was vital to rural FGC student success, and the data analysis revealed that the research participants perceived that they could not have continued enrollment without the support of their parents. Therefore, there is a necessity for outreach and support systems for parents to acquire the skills and resources necessary to better assist their students before and during the first year of college (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011).

The first phase of the project implementation will require institutional authorization. Moreover, a project evaluation will be necessary to determine the sustainability and success of the program and to suggest potential program improvements. Both formative and summative evaluations will be incorporated as part of the program evaluation. The program's implications for social change, the local community, and the larger context were discussed in detail.

Most important, the retention of rural FGC students will benefit the student as a college graduate thereby improving financial sustainability, socio-economic status, and social mobility. As a result of the PASS project, the university's retention and graduation rates might increase; whereby, the students' can earn the credentials to utilize within their rural community and support the local and state economy. Furthermore, as baccalaureate degree recipients, the students may encourage other rural community students to follow similar educational pathways and contribute to social change.

The final Section 4 comprised my personal reflections and conclusions as a researcher, the project strengths, recommendations for remediation and scholarship, project development, leadership, and change. In addition, the implications and directions for future research were included.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Section 4 contains a discussion of the strengths of the project and possible recommendations for addressing the limitations of the study. Also within this section are my reflections as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Lastly, a discussion of the implications of the study and directions for future research is incorporated into this final section of the study.

Project Strengths

A strength of the PASS project is the parents' connections to the campus community. The PASS project affords parents an opportunity to acquire knowledge from sessions about campus support services, resources, and the necessary skills to foster increased student retention rates. The strength of the PASS project will provide parents with an opportunity to receive purposeful information to enhance the support they offer their students. Further, the content of PASS may be transferable to other parents of first-generation students as appropriate with future studies and literature.

The project's theme of a connection to the campus community is a strength, as this concept attends to the needs of both the parent and the student. According to Byun et al. (2012), rural communities serve as a form of social capital through the close connections and relationships within the community. This small private faith-based university may become a surrogate community and a social network for the students who are unable to return home frequently. In addition, the program participants will be encouraged to build a parent community through engagement and connection with other

parents of rural FGC students through the PASS project. Further, the parents' early introduction to and experience in the campus environment should provide them with a greater level of confidence in the students' academic and social wellbeing during college enrollment.

Finally, there is strength in the content of the various presentations, especially on the topic of financial aid. The data analysis revealed that one of the greatest challenges for parents in the enrollment process was understanding financial aid. On behalf of their parents, several participants voiced concerns and frustrations about the insufficient time allotted for in-depth discussion and questions during the traditional parent-student orientation financial aid session. According to Engberg and Gilbert (2013), resources such as financial aid are predictors of whether a student chooses to attend a 4-year college. Further, based on the participants' responses during the interviews, an understanding of financial aid was critical to their enrollment and persistence from the freshmen year to the sophomore year. Therefore, the PASS project will incorporate this topic in a full-day workshop. The format will provide parents with sufficient time to gather information, formulate questions, and participate in individualized financial aid sessions personalized based on their award package. Further, the content of the financial aid presentation will enable parents to attend the traditional parent-student orientation with increased confidence, knowledge, and understanding about financial aid policies and procedures due to participation in the PASS project.

Lastly, a major strength in the project is the cooperation of key stakeholders. The PASS project will require the participation and support of many campus constituents,

including senior administrators and department leaders and staff. The ability to secure the human and financial capital necessary to successfully implement the project speaks to the university's prioritization of rural FGC student retention and parental involvement.

Project Limitations

As with any new project implementation, there will be limitations that must be acknowledged and addressed. Specific to the PASS project, one of the limitations is the challenge of funding to cover the expenses associated with dining services, transportation to tour the city, housing (on-campus), supplies and presentation materials, and childcare services. In addition, there will be costs associated with mailing the solicitations to the potential parent participants.

The distance for some parents to travel from their rural residence to the campus is also a limitation. The long-distance travel requirement may be hampered by the need to leave early to arrive on time for the first session, which might result in an extra half-day request from work. Consequently, the parent participant pool may be representative of the local rural areas and not reflective of the actual population in the numerous rural communities throughout the state.

Another project limitation is securing enough presenters who are willing to volunteer their time and resources during the fall semester and spring semester. The presenters must be willing to contribute to the success of the project by volunteering their time to conduct a presentation during the program. Their time and resource commitment may be perceived as a burden due to the challenges associated with daily operations with a small staff and increasingly demanding workloads.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The project was designed to increase collaborative efforts between the university's directors of academic and social student support services through volunteer contributions. A different approach to address the project limitation of funding would be to reduce some of the expenses with modified versions of the requested items. For example, the daily program menu may include a la carte breakfast and lunch items instead of made-to-order items, and the tour of the city might be modified from a bus trip to an electronic media presentation of the city's sites that are most applicable to the students' needs and wellbeing during their enrollment. In addition, the creation and submission of a cost and benefit report to secure funding from the institution's advancement office may yield financial support from external donors who desire to support student retention initiatives.

According to the results of this study, participants wholeheartedly believed that their parents would place attendance and participation in a university-sponsored program specifically for parents of FGC students as a top priority. Information on and introductions to university resources and services are key to increasing parents' understanding and knowledge of the tools that will enable them to expand support to their students' enrollment. However, realistically, it is unlikely that all rural parents will attend the parent experience program. Thus, to address the possibility of insufficient parent participation, the university information technology team could create webinars of the 3-parent development program that would be available through secured access by parents unable to attend due to the distance and/or employment conflicts. The presentation

materials would also accompany the link to access the webinars. The resolution of this problem would ensure that the project deliverables reach the parents and would include a follow-up contact from me as the program coordinator.

The challenge of securing a sufficient number of campus presenters may be addressed in a manner that encourages participation. A way to address this problem might be to seek authorization to grant each individual presenter one extra day of vacation as a token of appreciation for his or her role in this retention project.

Lastly, the work of this study is solely aimed at retaining rural FGC students from matriculation to degree completion. The potential life-altering results would create opportunities for the students to contribute to social change and possibly give back and/or return to their home communities.

Scholarship

In the professional roles I held prior to pursuing this Doctor of Education degree in higher education leadership, the term *scholarship* had limited meaning and application for me. Through a desire to acquire new knowledge through applicable research, my level of understanding and appreciation for scholarship has increased. In particular, the learning associated with the process of seeking new information about first-generation college students, parental support, and retention was a significant factor in my ability to engage in scholarship firsthand. My research skills were further enhanced through the use of the procedures to select the research approach, methodology, design, sampling method, and data collection and analysis methods to complete this study on rural FGC students' perceptions of parental support. In addition, I have the understanding and ability

to conduct a program evaluation to determine whether the PASS project is valuable and sustainable. As a practitioner, I understand that scholarship represents my pursuit of knowledge, and as a researcher, I am able to generate new knowledge through appropriate methodological methods about a specific phenomenon such as parental support and rural FGC students.

Project Development and Evaluation

The project development was determined based on the responses of the rural student participants. The findings of the data analysis revealed that parents were instrumental in providing necessary and desired support to the students. Parental support of these rural FGC students began prior to their enrollment in the research setting. Consistent with this finding, Griffin et al. (2011) reported that 72.2% of rural high school students engaged in conversations about their plans for the future. Parents have a significant role in the transmission of information, advice, encouragement, and financial support to their students. The findings supported the necessity to design a 3-day parent experience program to increase the parents' knowledge and understanding about campus resources, services, and key topics such as financial aid and academic advising. Project development should align with the data analysis to ensure that the design and content address the research problem. Most important, the PASS project designed for parents of rural FGC students must be evaluated to determine whether it is sustainable and fulfills the outcomes established for the project. In addition, the appropriateness of the type of evaluation is critical to measure the effectiveness of the program. Specifically, the evaluation types chosen for this study are formative and summative. These evaluations

will help me as the program coordinator determine whether the PASS project fulfilled the ultimate goal of rural FGC student retention beyond the first academic year.

Leadership and Change

Change is inevitable, and to guide transitions through various shifts and adjustments, effective leadership is necessary to address the fears or concerns that often result when the normal activities or transactions are no longer operating. This suggestion may be particularly applicable with the introduction of the PASS project to a campus community in which the effort to educate parents on resources and support services primarily resides in the traditional parent-student orientation. The concern that parental involvement may encourage increased helicopter parenting is valid; however, Section 3 illustrated scholarly research that suggested that parents' participation in students' education did not yield such behavior. Thus, leadership will be an important factor to ensure that parents are embraced as partners in the education process (Vianden & Ruder, 2012). Through many course readings and conversations with faculty and senior leaders, I learned that leadership effectiveness requires a proactive approach. Engaging in conversations with and soliciting feedback from key stakeholders involved in the PASS project before and during the implementation process will be necessary to secure support and input on applicable modifications to yield the desired program goal. In addition, change through the introduction of the PASS project may involve difficult conversations concerning parent participation that should be approached with an open mind and a willingness to consider modifications in program design or content to achieve the goal of increased rural FGC student retention.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

As a scholar, it is rewarding to have gained knowledge, understanding, and an appreciation for scholarly research. Exposure to quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research enabled me to competently select an appropriate methodology to explore my passion and an institutional need to support first-generation college students. At this stage of the project study, I am comfortable as a qualitative research scholar, particularly in the areas of identifying a problem, creating guiding research questions, selecting a research design, identifying a sample population, collecting data, analyzing data, and designing a program or project to address a problem based on evidence and program evaluation. I also understand the ethical standards that must be applied in all research. Further, the requirement to complete the NIH and CITI ethical training certifications helped me to gain a greater appreciation and respect for the protection of participants as well as to maintain ethical standards. As a scholar, I accepted the responsibility to conduct my research in a manner that protected my participants and the information they entrusted to me. Lastly, as a scholar, I am confident, motivated, and excited to pursue research that will contribute to the success of students in all aspects of higher education and facilitate social change within communities at large.

Analysis of Self as a Practitioner

My role in higher education affords me an opportunity to facilitate positive changes to improve student enrollment and persistence at my campus. As a practitioner, I desire to continue my learning through attendance and/or participation in local, state, and national conferences related to topics on issues and changes in higher education. This

level of participation in dialogue on higher education affairs will ensure that I continue to remain informed, educated, and qualified to assist with or lead the creation of future initiatives that will foster student retention and degree completion.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

As a developer of the PASS project, I struggled to remain focused on the initial research problem, retention of rural FGC students. As I developed the PASS project, the presentation topics shifted several times as I was inaccurately focused on the parents as the problem. Instead, the emphasis should have been placed on the results of the data analysis, which clearly indicated that parental support contributes to the success of students as evidenced in this study and the scholarly literature. Overall, I realized that project development is an area in which I needed to refine several skills, especially creativity. On the other hand, as a project developer, I clearly understand that a project cannot successfully accomplish the identified goals without support and buy-in from key stakeholders. Finally, as a project developer, I am most satisfied with the completion of a project that will be used at the research setting to help both parents and students achieve success.

The Potential Impact on Social Change and the Importance of the Work

According to Snyder and Dillow (2010), there will be an increasing number of students from rural communities attending institutions of higher education. Thus, this work is important and occurs at a time when rural parents are considering the value and importance of a college degree (Tieken, 2016). This qualitative case study on parental support and rural FGC student retention will add to the growing body of research on the

topic of rural college students (Byun et al., 2012a; Byun et al., 2012b; Nelson, 2016; Tieken, 2016; Wright, 2012; Yiquan & Yijie, 2015). As rural student enrollments increase, particularly in 4-year colleges (Snyder & Dillow, 2010), the need for programs such as the PASS project will be crucial as a means to provide parents with practical and useful information to better equip them in their efforts to support rural students. The project's potential impact on social change will be driven by the partnership between parents and the university, as both have the same goal: increasing student retention. Further, the students' persistence to degree completion will result in the students' ability to contribute to social change within their own rural communities and, particularly, in the lives of other rural students who aspire to attend college. In addition, the students' completion of a college education may positively contribute to the national challenge of rural outmigration. Finally, rural students who achieve a college education will have more opportunities to contribute toward the local, state, and national economy with greater knowledge, improved social mobility, and financial sustainability.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The selection criteria of the sample population required good academic standing based on grade point average. The project study did not intentionally explore the perceptions of students who remained enrolled with a probationary standing based on their academic performance. Despite their inadequate academic performance, the students did not elect to withdraw from college early. There may be value in further explorations of rural students on academic probation who continue their college enrollment beyond the

first year. Specifically, there is a need to further explore how parental support influences students' decisions to remain enrolled in spite of poor academic achievement.

Parent programming based on the participants' responses in this study is aligned with the need to support parents as they guide and assist their rural students during college enrollment. The project's focus involves the parents of rural FGC students from the general definition of a rural residence. Therefore, the degree to which there may be variations in the kinds and levels of parental support based on rurality was not identified in this study. I believe that additional research is warranted to explore enrollment decisions based on potential differences of parental support in each of the rural geographical areas, including rural fringe, rural distance, and rural remote.

Several studies explored the challenges associated with a changing rural economy, rural brain drain, and outmigration of rural bright students (Sherman & Sage, 2011; Tieken, 2016; Wright, 2012). The researchers, Petrin, Schafft, and Meece (2014), did not find much evidence that the rural schools or educators prepared students to leave their rural areas. This qualitative case study did not address the rural FGC student participants' intentions after graduation. Hence, future research is necessary to explore the role of parents, extended family, and community networks in the students' decisions to return to the community or migrate beyond the rural area after degree completion.

According to Tieken (2016), the rural FGC students viewed college enrollment as a means to employment and a solid investment in their future. The necessity for students and parents to understand the challenges as well as the support resources and services is crucial to support retention efforts in all institutions of higher education. Although rural

students are encouraged to attend 4-year colleges, many are underprepared for the rigor they will encounter (Attewell et al., 2011). Applicable to the education field, it is important that rural schools begin to prepare students and parents for the college experience early in the college exploration process. This exposure may result in pre-college academic collaborations between schools and universities or colleges. Most students seek information about their future from the parents (Griffin et al., 2011). Thus, it would be appropriate for institutions of higher education to partner with rural middle and high schools to create programming designed to inform parents and students about college as early as possible to help them make informed decisions.

Conclusion

The selection of the project topic on parental support and rural FGC student retention is important as it demonstrates the value of and investment in the students' success. The implementation of the PASS project at the small, private faith-based Midwestern institution signifies the commitment and dedication of leadership and key stakeholders to support rural FGC students and their parents. Although the project study did not explore or acquire every aspect of the students' college enrollment needs and obstacles, there are suggestions for future research opportunities.

As a scholar, practitioner and project developer, I am honored to contribute to the scholarly research on student retention, specifically, for first-generation college students. The PASS project provides a new opportunity for the research setting to connect with parents to pursue a mutual goal, namely, increase student retention. Vianden and Ruder (2012) shared from their research "...parental partnerships represent a welcome and

necessary expansion of the support structure that colleges and universities offer to students” (p. 71). Lastly, the PASS project is aimed to support both parent and inevitably the student and might be the beginning of a dedicated collaborative relationship to facilitate rural FGC student success.

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Appendix A: The Project

The PASS Project *A Parents Assisting Students to Succeed Program*

Introduction

As a commitment to student success from matriculation to degree completion, the university has generously dedicated resources to support its first-generation college (FGC) student population through the Parents Assisting Students to Succeed Program (PASS). Specifically, the PASS project is designed to provide college life information to parents of rural FGC students. Specifically, the project is a three-day program which includes a series of topics and a special workshop related to common themes experienced by parents and students during the first-year of college enrollment.

Program Purpose

The purpose of the PASS project is to introduce parents to the university community and the vital support services offered to support students.

Program Goal

The goal of the program is to increase retention rates among the rural FGC students attending the university.

Program Participants

The parents of the rural FGC students will be personally invited as the key participants in the program. Representatives from various campus departments will present information regarding their respective areas. The parents will receive copies of the presentation hand-outs and power point slides. In addition, a tote and academic

calendar/planner will be given to parents at registration/check-in on Day One of the PASS Program.

Cost to Participate

The participation cost is **FREE** to all parents of rural FGC students.

Parent Invitation to Participate

Date

[Inside address]

Dear [Insert parent(s) name]:

You are cordially invited to participate in a new program designed to support rural first-generation college students attending [name of university]. The name of the parent experience program is Parents Assisting Students to Succeed (PASS). The purpose of the PASS program is to provide parents with important information about university support services and resources that will help their first-generation student achieve success.

The rural FGC student population is small yet very important to [name of university]. In a recent study, students shared an appreciation for parental support as it influenced their decisions to remain enrolled. The campus community is dedicated to the success of each student, and the delivery of this parent experience program is an example of its commitment.

Participation requires a total of three-days, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. You may elect to participate in any *one* of the monthly program sessions in October, February or April. Each session includes breakfast, lunch and afternoon refreshments. In addition, on-site free child care will be available, if needed. There is not a charge for parking. Most important, the cost to participate in this program is **FREE**.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email me at edna.mcculloh@waldenu.edu. If you would like to participate in this program, please complete, sign and return the attached form in the enclosed postage-paid return envelope. Sincerely,

Edna McCulloh
Walden University Higher Education Leadership Doctoral Candidate

The PASS Program Participation Form

Instructions: Please complete the information below and return in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Upon receipt of this form, you will receive confirmation of your chosen program session, temporary parking pass and campus map from campus security. The form submission deadline is listed below.

Parent	First Name	Last Name
Parent	First Name	Last Name
Student	First Name	Last Name
Student	First Name	Last Name
Home Address		
City	State	Zip Code
Home Telephone		Cell Telephone
Email		

Participation Agreement: I (we) would like to participate in one of the following PASS Program sessions. I (we) understand that participation requires attendance at each of the three-day sessions.

Signature: _____ Date: _____
 Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please select ONLY one-month program and submit this form no later than 2 weeks prior to the session date.

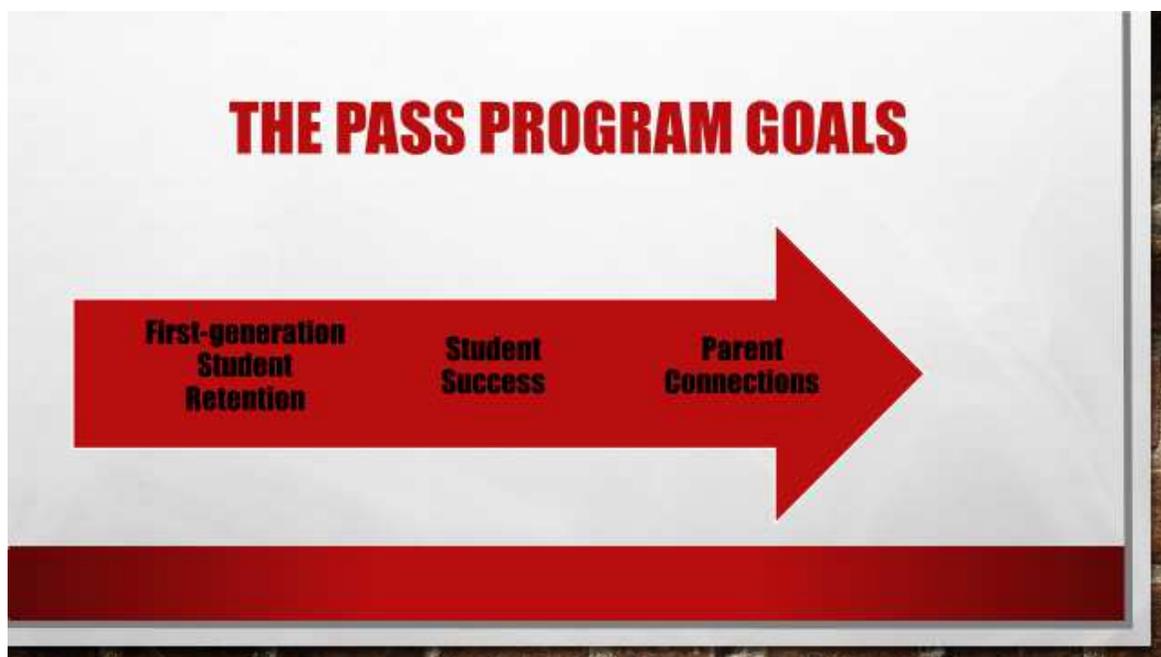
(The session dates will be inserted in the actual letter.)

October _____

February _____

April _____

The PASS Program Welcome to Participants Opening Session Power Point Slides



PASS PROGRAM AGENDA

- **PRESENTATIONS**
- **FINANCIAL AID WORKSHOP**
- **CAMPUS CONNECTIONS**
- **PARENT CONNECTIONS**
- **OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCUSSIONS, QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**
- **EVALUATION OF THE PASS PROGRAM**

PASS PROGRAM TOPICS – DAY 1

- **RURAL HIGH SCHOOL AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITY: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?**
- **THE UNIVERSITY LIFE CYCLE**
- **HOW TO HAVE A SMOOTH PARENT TRANSITION**
- **BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT**
- **LEARN TO IDENTIFY AND OVERCOME FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT CHALLENGES**
- **STUDENT COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT**

PASS PROGRAM TOPICS – DAY 2

- **FINANCIAL AID 101**
 - **FINANCIAL AID PACKAGING (SPECIFIC TO EACH PARENT)**
 - **QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

PASS PROGRAM TOPICS – DAY 3

- **ACADEMIC MAJOR SELECTION AND CAREER CHOICES**
- **ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES**
- **COLLEGE SUCCESS HABITS**
- **STUDENT WELLNESS AND COUNSELING SERVICES**
- **LEAVING THE SMALL RURAL COMMUNITY: HOME AWAY FROM HOME**
- **HOW PARENTS CAN STAY CONNECTED**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **DURING PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOP – SILENCE ALL CELL PHONES**
- **RESTROOMS LOCATED ON MAIN FLOOR**
- **LIGHT BREAKFAST, LUNCH AND AFTERNOON REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED DAILY**
- **ON-SITE CHILD CARE LOCATED IN EDUCATION CENTER**
- **CERTIFICATES WILL BE AWARDED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE PROGRAM (DAY 3)**
- **RELAX – LEARN – AND ENJOY!**

- **YOUR PARTICIPATION IS APPRECIATED AND**

WE ARE GLAD THAT YOU ARE HERE!

The PASS Program DAY 1 Agenda
[Actual date/year/locations of presentations/workshop will be assigned.]

Session Time	Activity/Presentation/Workshop
8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.	Light Breakfast w/coffee/tea/juice PASS Program Official Registration and Check-in <i>(complimentary tote bags will be distributed)</i>
9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.	Official Welcome to Parents by the President of the University Legacy of Service and the University
10:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Program Presentation 1: Rural High School and Private University Enrollment: What's the Difference? Presented by Office of Admissions Rural Freshmen Student Recruiter
11:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.	Morning Break
11:15 a.m. to 11:45 p.m.	Program Presentation 2: The University Life Cycle. Presented by PASS Program Coordinator
11:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.	Program Presentation 3: How to Have a Smooth Parent Transition. Presented by Director of Health and Wellness and Counseling Center Staff
12:15 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.	Program Presentation 4: Building a Community of On-campus Support. Presented by Vice President of Student Affairs
1:45 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.	Program Presentation 5: Learn to Identify and Overcome First-generation Student Challenges. Presented by Director of Student Achievement
2:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.	Afternoon Break <i>(light refreshments)</i>
2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	Program Presentation 6: Student Community Connections: Mind, Body and Spirit. Presented by Campus Ministry Team
3:00 p.m.	Evaluation of Day 1

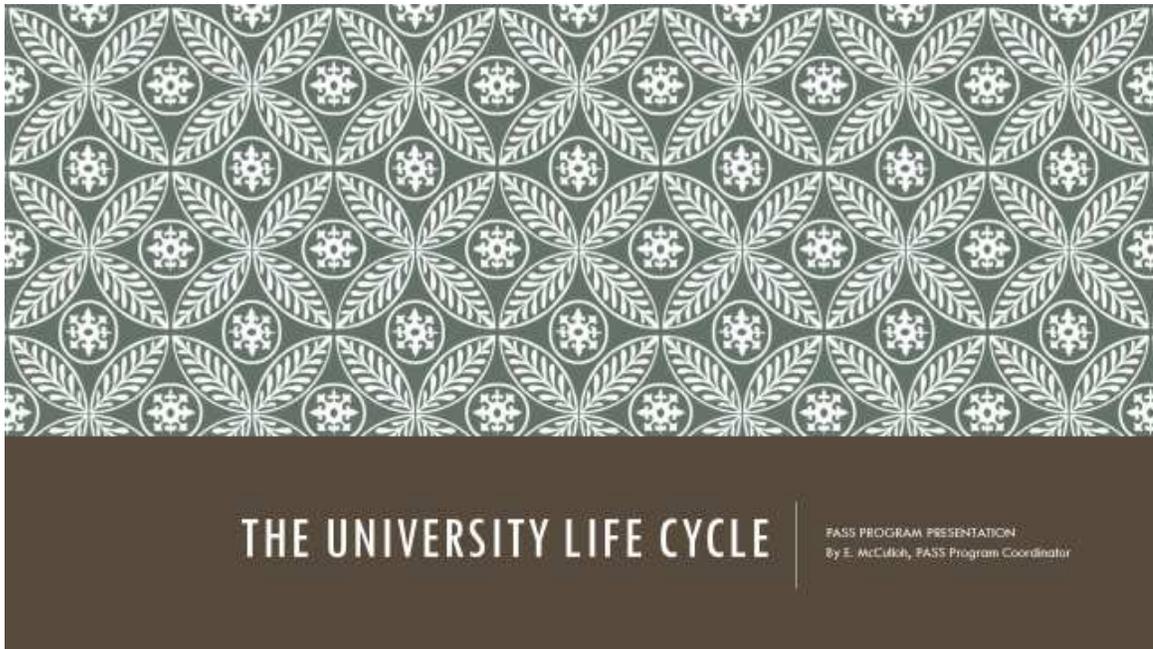
The PASS Program DAY 2 Agenda
[Actual date/year/locations of presentations/workshop will be assigned.]

Session Time	Activity/Presentation/Workshop
8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	Light Breakfast w/coffee/tea/juice
9:00 a.m. to 10:50 a.m.	Tour of the City
11:00 p.m. to 12:00 p.m.	Lunch
12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.	Program Workshop: Financial Aid 101. Presented by Director of Student Financial Aid.
1:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.	Break-out Sessions: Financial Aid and Student Support Representatives and Parents (personalized meetings)
3:00 p.m.	Evaluation of Day 2 <i>Light refreshments for departure/travel</i>

The PASS Program DAY 3 Agenda
[Actual date/year/locations of presentations/workshop will be assigned.]

Session Time	Activity/Presentation/Workshop
8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	Light Breakfast w/coffee/tea/juice
9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.	Program Presentation 1: Academic Major Selection and Career Choices. Presented by Director of Freshmen Student Advising and Director of Career Services.
10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.	Program Presentation 2: Academic Support Services. Presented by PASS Program Coordinator
10:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Program Presentation 3: College Success Habits. Presented by First-year Academic Advising Staff
11:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.	Morning Break
11:15 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.	Program Presentation 4: Student Wellness and Counseling Services. Presented by Director of Wellness Center and Counseling Center Staff
11:45 a.m. to 12:15 a.m.	Program Presentation 5: Leaving the Small Rural Community: Home Away from Home. Presented by Residential Life Team
12:15 p.m. to 1:15 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.	Program Presentation 6: How Parents Can Stay Connected. Presented by Alumni Relations and University Programming Representatives
1:45 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.	Program Wrap-up Session with Questions and Answers
2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	Evaluation of Day 3 and the PASS Program <i>Light refreshments for departure/travel</i>

The PASS Program Day 1 Presentation by the PASS Coordinator



THE UNIVERSITY LIFE CYCLE OF ACTIVITIES OFTEN CHALLENGE STUDENTS DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF ENROLLMENT.

<p><u>First Three Months of the First Semester</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Excitement <input type="checkbox"/> New-found Freedom <input type="checkbox"/> Homesickness/ Miss Family Gatherings and Close Relationships from Home <input type="checkbox"/> Community <input type="checkbox"/> First Tests <input type="checkbox"/> Residential Living Challenges <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety 	<p><u>Mid-semester to End of Term</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mid-term Exams <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Papers Due with Close Due Dates <input type="checkbox"/> Variety of Emotions Regarding Going Home for Thanksgiving and Christmas <input type="checkbox"/> Possible Health Concerns, (Colds, Flu) <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness About Leaving New Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Final Exam Stress
---	---

THE UNIVERSITY LIFE CYCLE OF ACTIVITIES....

First Three Months of Second Semester

- New Beginnings (Term/Year)
- Excited or Disappointed by Fall Semester Final Grades
- Homesickness and Miss Family Traditions and Close Relationships from Home Community
- Loneliness
- Excited to be Away from Home
- Winter Blues
- New or Continued Residential Living Issues

Mid-semester to End of Term

- Mid-term Exams
- Stress from Concerns About Summer Employment
- Unhappy About Winter Weight Gain
- Excitement About Spring Season
- Worry About Selecting Correct Major
- Anxiety About Leaving Campus and Returning Home for Summer
- Final Exam Stress

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?



QUESTION AND ANSWER

REFERENCES

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The PASS Program Day 3 Presentation by the PASS Coordinator
Academic Support Services

The PASS PROGRAM:
Academic Support Services

Presented by E. McCulloh, PASS Program Coordinator

The Academic Services Support Team

- ▶ Expert Staff
- ▶ Easily Accessible
- ▶ Compassionate
- ▶ Always Willing to Help
- ▶ Desire Students to Succeed

THE ACADEMIC SERVICES TEAM ARE HERE AND READY TO SUPPORT YOU!



Library

- ▶ Each student will be assigned a personal librarian to assist them with locating books, articles and/or journals for classroom assignments.
- ▶ Personal librarians can help students utilize the technology to search for scholarly sources and properly cite resources.

Freshmen Academic Advising

- ▶ All freshmen are assigned an academic advisor who is an academic expert in the student's chosen major.
- ▶ The academic advisors personally meet with their assigned advisees multiple times during each semester.

Academic Support Services

- ▶ The Academic Support Center (ASC) helps students to build and access support networks during the first year.
- ▶ The ASC Tutor Team offer free tutorial for all undergraduate course subjects.
- ▶ The Center's staff provide students with guidance to build good time management, study and goal-setting skills.

Office of the Registrar

- ▶ Provides support to help students with semester registrations, adding or dropping courses, declaration or change of majors and minors, graduation audits, and veteran services.

Accessibility Services

- ▶ The Accessibility Officer supports students who have a documented physical or mental diagnosis which may require extended assistance with academic or residential tasks.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS ARE AVAILABLE!

- ▶ THE ACADEMIC SERVICES RESOURCES ARE READY TO SUPPORT YOUR STUDENT FROM DAY ONE TO GRADUATION!
- ▶ PLEASE ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENT TO VISIT EACH OF ACADEMIC SERVICE AREAS AND BEGIN BUILDING A SOLID SUPPORT NETWORK!
- ▶ WE WANT TO HELP EACH OF YOUR STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE GREAT SUCCESS!

QUESTION AND ANSWER

THE PASS PROGRAM DAY 1 EVALUATION FORM

Thank you for your participation. We value your input regarding the PASS Program presentations today. Please take a moment to provide us with valuable information which will be used to identify necessary improvements to the program.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please rate today's presentations and general program format on a scale of 1 to 4 (1=poor and 4=Outstanding).

	Outstanding (4)	Very Good (3)	Satisfactory (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Presentation 1				
Presentation 2				
Presentation 3				
Presentation 4				
Presentation 5				
Presentation 6				

1. How would you rate the registration and check-in process? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1
2. How would you rate the program opening session? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1
3. How would you rate the hand-out materials? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1
4. How would you rate the comfort of the facilities? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1
5. How would you rate the parking this morning? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1
6. How would you rate the dining services? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1

Do you have any suggestions for program improvement? ___ Yes or ___ No If yes, what would you like to suggest?

What other information would you like to provide?

THE PASS PROGRAM DAY 2 EVALUATION FORM

Thank you for your participation. We value your input regarding the PASS Program presentations today. Please take a moment to provide us with valuable information which will be used to identify necessary improvements to the program.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please rate today's Financial Aid 101 workshop on a scale of 1 to 4 (1=poor and 4=Outstanding).

	Outstanding (4)	Very Good (3)	Satisfactory (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Workshop 1				
Personalized Sessions				

1. How would you rate the Tour of the City today? ___4 ___3 ___2 ___1

2. How would you rate the FA 101 workshop materials? ___4 ___3 ___2 ___1

Do you have any suggestions for improvement? ___ Yes or ___ No If yes, what would you like to suggest?

What other information would you like to provide?

THE PASS PROGRAM DAY 3 EVALUATION FORM

Thank you for your participation. We value your input regarding the PASS Program presentations today. Please take a moment to provide us with valuable information which will be used to evaluate and identify necessary improvements to the program.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please rate today's presentations and general program format on a scale of 1 to 4 (1=poor and 4=Outstanding).

	Outstanding (4)	Very Good (3)	Satisfactory (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Presentation 1				
Presentation 2				
Presentation 3				
Presentation 4				
Presentation 5				
Presentation 6				

1. How would you rate the PASS program structure? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1
2. How would you rate the presentation materials? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1
3. How would you rate the childcare services? ___ 4 ___ 3 ___ 2 ___ 1

Please circle Yes or No for each of the statements below.

1. I have a better knowledge about financial Aid. Y or N
2. I understand the role of my student's academic advisor. Y or N
3. I am knowledgeable about the academic support services on campus. Y or N
4. I understand the campus connection to body, mind and spirit. Y or N
5. I am aware of the opportunities to connect with the campus community. Y or N

Appendix B: Introduction and Solicitation to Participate

To: (First-generation College Student Participant by Name)

From: Edna E. McCulloh, Walden University Doctoral Candidate

Date: To Be Determined

Re: Participation in Doctoral Study

You have been selected to participate in a study about parental support and retention of this university's first-generation college students representing a rural community or county. This is a small yet very important population of students currently attending or who have recently graduated from this institution, and we especially value the participation of everyone represented in this select group. Whether you are a freshman, sophomore, junior or senior, your participation is significant and valued.

My name is Edna McCulloh, and I am a Walden University doctoral student and a proud member of the university's community conducting a brief study about rural first-generation college students' perceptions of parental support and the decision to continue enrollment in and/or graduate from this institution. The information gained from this study may provide a direction to create parent orientation and other parent-student programs.

Your participation will involve one 45-minute interview. We will mutually determine an interview date, time and location. Please be assured all information gathered will remain confidential, and your identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym that you may select. The study will not pose any risk to your personal safety or wellbeing, participation is voluntary, and you may stop participation at any time without penalty. If you would like to participate in this study or have any questions, ***please email me at edna.mcculloh@waldenu.edu no later than TBD 2016.***

Thank you in advance for your consideration to be a part of this opportunity.

Edna McCulloh
Walden University Higher Education Leadership Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C: Qualitative Interview Questions

The following interview questions are aimed to generate in-depth descriptions and details to answer the two guiding research questions:

- RQ1: What are the rural FGC student perceptions of parental support while attending the university?
- RQ2: How does the level of parental support shape the rural FGC students' decisions to remain enrolled in the university?

A. College access and selection

1. How did you make the decision to select this private university? How did your parents assist you with your college search? Did the distance between your home and the institution influence your college selection? How involved were your parents in the final decision to select this university?
2. Tell me about the types of supports you may have received from your community in your decision to attend college, for example, your local church congregation, former teachers, friends, and/or neighbors.
3. Who assisted you with accessing and completing the university's admission application? What role did your parents have in the completion of the online admissions application?

B. Freshmen orientation

1. What members of your family accompanied you to the freshmen summer orientation? Did they have any particular reactions to the orientation?

C. College enrollment

1. In what ways did your parents show support during the transition from high school to enrollment at this university?
2. When you received your registration schedule, how did your parents react to this official confirmation of college enrollment?
3. Describe the kinds of supports received from extended family, such as aunts or grandparents during your college enrollment?

D. Parental support

1. What is the one parental support you perceive as most crucial in your decision to continue your enrollment from one year to the next at this university?
2. Talk about times during your enrollment that you may have experienced internal conflict between your school studies and home responsibilities. What kinds of supports did your parents provide to help you during this time?
3. Talk about any specific kinds of supports that you requested from your parents. What kinds of supports did you actually receive from them that helped you remain enrolled in college? Were there any kinds of supports you needed and did not receive?
4. Talk about the level of parental/familial support provided to you as a full-time college student. Did you perceive this to level to be sufficient? If not, what do you perceive as an acceptable level of support from your parents?
5. Talk about any perceived changes in the level of parental support received since your first year of enrollment.

6. Talk about any perceived changes in the kinds of parental support received since your first year of enrollment.

E. Institutional support

1. Describe how this small, private university can better assist a first-generation student like you from a rural community achieve college success.
2. What suggestions can you offer to involve your parents more in the campus community? Do you see this opportunity as desirable?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol Form

Date of Interview:

Time:

Place:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

The description of the project will be provided to the interviewee including: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the data collection process, (c) protection of the interviewee's confidentiality, (d) length of the interview and (d) reminder that participation is voluntary and can cease at any time without penalty.

The copy of the signed Informed Consent Form is given to the interviewee.

Audio recorded is turned on and interview begins.

Questions (will follow as indicated on the interview questions listing). Extra space will be inserted at time of interview to record notes.

A. College access and selection

- 1 How did you make the decision to select this private university? How did your parents assist you with your college search? Did the distance between your home and the institution influence your college selection? How involved were your parents in the final decision to select this university?
- 2 Tell me about the types of supports you may have received from your community in your decision to attend college, for example, your local church congregation, former teachers, friends, and/or neighbors.

- 3 Who assisted you with accessing and completing the university's admissions application? What role did your parents have in the completion of the online admissions application?

B. Freshmen orientation

- 1 What members of your family accompanied you to the freshmen summer orientation? Did they have any particular reactions to the orientation?

C. College enrollment

- 1 In what ways did your parents show support during the transition from high school to enrollment at this university?
- 2 When you received your registration schedule, how did your parents react to this official confirmation of college enrollment?
- 3 Describe the kinds of supports received from extended family, such as aunts or grandparents during your college enrollment?

D. Parental support

- 1 What is the one parental support you perceive as most crucial in your decision to continue your enrollment from one year to the next at this university?
- 2 Talk about times during your enrollment that you may have experienced internal conflict between your school studies and home responsibilities. What kinds of supports did your parents provide to help you during this time?
- 3 Talk about any specific kinds of supports that you requested from your parents. What kinds of supports did you actually receive from them that

helped you remain enrolled in college? Were there any kinds of supports you needed and did not receive?

- 4 Talk about the level of parental/familial support provided to you as a full-time college student. Did you perceive this to level to be sufficient? If not, what do you perceive as an acceptable level of support from your parents?
- 5 Talk about any perceived changes in the level of parental support received since your first year of enrollment.
- 6 Talk about any perceived changes in the kinds of parental support received since your first year of enrollment.

E. Institutional support

- 1 Describe how this small, private university can better assist a first-generation student like you from a rural community achieve college success.
- 2 What suggestions can you offer to involve your parents more in the campus community? Do you see this opportunity as desirable?

Appendix E: Member Check Request Correspondence

Date

Good morning (or afternoon):

Please find attached the detailed transcriptions of our interview session. At your earliest convenience, please read through and add, delete or expand on areas as necessary. Let me know the changes, and I will update the information promptly.

Again, it was a pleasure to speak with you, and I sincerely appreciate your participation in the study.

Edna McCulloh
Walden University Doctoral Student/ Project Study Researcher