

First-Generation College Students' Integration Into Higher Education: A Case Study

by

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Abstract

First-generation college students face many challenges transitioning into school. The obstacles are overwhelming and the learners often drop out. The research included details relating to the difficulties facing the scholars and how college educators can address the needs. Understanding the concerns of first-generation college students is critical for the implementation of comprehensive programs to provide support for first-generation students. Appropriate support is not being put in place, and the problem is college educators do not understand first-generation college students' burdens. An insufficient exploration of the issues surrounding institutional structures within the higher education community to support this population represents a gap in the literature. Tinto's student retention theory and Burns's transformational leadership theory served as the base of the study along with the instrumental case study. The purpose of the study was to examine the perspectives of the first-generation students and university representatives regarding the necessary interventions designed for learning. Research questions helped to identify the viewpoints of the scholars and set the foundation for all-inclusive plans. Included in the qualitative case study were 26 participants in total, 15 of whom were included in four small focus groups and 17 of whom participated in in-depth interviews. Program policy documents were reviewed as well. The analysis involved coding the information for themes and interpretations, which findings suggest providing a more collaborative system with comprehensive support for first-generation college students. Best practices for transformational changes were linked to maintaining sustainable relationships and integrating cultural competence for the learners.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family. First, to my husband Frank, you have been there every step of the way, even when you were having issues with your health, you were always there for me, many late nights, and your encouragement has helped me through the journey. Thanks for always being there and for always helping with our daily tasks so I could do whatever it takes to make it through the many winding roads leading to the dissertation. Your love has always been unconditional and your caring and unselfishness have taught me to be a better individual and to never take you for granted. Next, to my stepdaughter and her husband, Kristen and Chad and my new granddaughter, Maci whose many texts and photos have allowed me to smile and made my day a little brighter especially on the days where I struggled with confidence and the ability to write. Next, to my brothers and sisters, Diane, Ed & Maureen, Brian & Sue, and Maureen & Stephen, and many nieces and nephews, Ed, Mike, Janice, Stephen, Brian, Shane, Dylan, and Brianna, who have always been there for me no matter what the day was like always supporting me. My parents, Ed and Dorothy who were always with me in spirit cheering me on wanting something better for me than the paths which were created for them. And, for all my friends who have encouraged me along the way always being there for me giving me water at the breaks in the long marathon run, your inspiration will never be forgotten. Lastly, for my first-generation mentee, Kayla, and all the future first-generation students, may you always be guided by your passion in everything you do.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Students are entering college at increasing rates and are graduating at slower rates (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2019b). Learners integrating into a four-year school in the United States increased from 63% in 2000 to 70% in 2016 (USDE, 2019b). At the same time, one third of students graduate within six years and 2 million students drop out (Shapiro et al., 2018). The number of first-generation college students is substantial, comprising one third of all students enrolled in postsecondary institutions (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018). First-generation college students do not have parents with a college degree and are first in a family to enter college (Higher Education Act, 1965).

Cataldi et al. (2018) found only 56% of first-generation college students graduated, and some learners were still in the university after six years of enrollment. Frogge and Woods (2018) stated first-generation college students are twice as likely as second-generation university learners to drop out of four-year institutions in the second year. Hutchison (2017) argued, to increase retention rates, colleges should provide a model framework which enhances independence and empowerment for first-generation college students to thrive in a school environment.

As a result of the dropout rates for first-generation college students, learner needs must be understood and the implementation of comprehensive support programs to assist these scholars are required (Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, 2018). Means and Pyne (2017) noted an insufficient exploration of first-generation college students' challenges. This research included examining the need for comprehensive support programs for first-generation college students while developing the existing field of information. The benefits of the study included

understanding the need for comprehensive support programs for first-generation college students and how learners struggle with integration into higher education.

Throughout this chapter, the main focus is to present the issues confronting first-generation college students' assimilation into college. More specifically, the intention is to indicate how students' concerns contribute to the urgency for comprehensive support programs and retention of college students. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the qualitative case study, which comprises the background of the problem, the problem statement, and a description of relevant issues with first-generation college students. The purpose includes the rationale for the study with direct research questions. The theoretical framework provided is the conceptual lens, which was the base for the study and linkage to the research method. The significance of the study describes the need for comprehensive support programs and how policy changes can provide a more collaborative environment for students, faculty, administrators, and advisors. Key terms are defined. Reliability and dependability of the findings and the research method are strengthened when presented within the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations.

Background of the Problem

The overall rate for college students completing a bachelor's degree is 58.3% (Shapiro et al., 2018). While 58.3% of learners finish school, 41.7% do not, and poor retention rates cost colleges \$14.5 billion a year (Poynton & Lapan, 2017). High retention rates are crucial for colleges and universities to maintain more students who pay tuition and fees and achieve academic success (Burke, 2019). The risk of dropping out is much greater for first-generation college learners who face financial burdens and often work long hours to satisfy school charges (Quinn, Cornelius-White, MacGregor, & Uribe-Zarain, 2019). Students face many hurdles financially, academically, psychologically, and socially while transitioning into college which

cause these learners to leave. Goals are set within the colleges and universities to support traditional, nontraditional, transfer, and minority students coming from various socioeconomic and academic backgrounds (Manyanga, Sithole, & Hanson, 2017). First-generation learners are among the diverse groups in higher education for whom professionals seek developmental activities to understand the needs of students (Quinn et al., 2019).

First-generation college students are the focus of college representatives (Schwartz et al., 2018). University administrators are preparing criteria to meet the social and academic needs of the learners who are confronted with psychological, economic, and cultural issues transitioning into the environment (Checkoway, 2018). Thirty-three percent of first-generation college students are likely to leave three years after enrollment, compared to 26% of non-first-generation students (Cataldi et al., 2018). Thirty-four percent of the undergraduate population in the United States comprises individuals who are the first in the family to go to school (Quinn et al., 2019). First-generation college students include minorities, students with lower incomes, older students, adults with children, and students who reside at or near home (Hutchison, 2017).

First-generation college students often are overwhelmed while transitioning into school (Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016). Novices in the first semester of school have a decreased sense of belonging due to lack of support, racial microaggressions, and family challenges (Means & Pyne, 2017). Many learners are burdened with working while going to school to help pay for expenses (Adams, Meyers, & Beidas, 2016). Newcomers often lack an understanding of loans and leave college with high debt (Eichelberger, Mattioli, & Foxhoven, 2017). These disparities are leading the higher education community to come up with new approaches surrounding the issues (Schwartz et al., 2018).

Providing students with access to comprehensive support programs is a key component for integration into higher education (Whitley et al., 2018). Colleges offering a supportive environment academically and socially contribute to student endurance (Xu, 2016). Faculty, administrators, and advisors working collaboratively with students can potentially increase the retention rates for learners (Silver Wolf, Perkins, Butler-Barnes, & Walker, 2017). College representatives are combining efforts to bring synergistic support to students (Northouse, 2013). Students who connect with the college staff build a bond for transformation (Muchiri, McMurray, Nkhoma, & Pham, 2019). Transformational leadership is a process whereby leaders connect with followers to cultivate engagement and motivation to create change (Northouse, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this qualitative case study is students are not getting the proper support from faculty, administrators, and advisors in understanding the needs of first-generation college students (Manyanga et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2018). Whitley et al. (2018) found, although support programs are in place for first-generation college students, a focus on the ineffective support programs is needed for a more comprehensive approach for first-generation college students. Toutkoushian, Stollberg, and Slaton (2018) noted policymakers and higher education researchers need to consider the needs of first-generation college students and the effectiveness and efficiency of student support programs. First-generation college students face academic, psychological, social, cultural, and financial challenges transitioning to a college campus (Radunzel, 2017). As a result of these burdens, a majority of students drop out without the proper resources or necessary services for specific needs.

Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) noted first-generation college students could withdraw from college if the right guidance from academic advisors, administrators, or faculty is not received. Student support programs, such as mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and coaching, have been implemented on college campuses in a piecemeal fashion (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2016). Means and Pyne (2017) stated colleges and universities should provide social and academic support in addition to financial aid as the students transition to the college environment. Means and Pyne further stated, although student support programs have shown a positive effect on first-generation college students, college and university administrators should implement comprehensive support programs to address issues of equity and social justice to create a sense of belonging for first-generation college students. Understanding the needs of scholars is critical to gain an understanding of how the integration of institutional support structures could influence educational outcomes for learners (Manyanga et al., 2017; Means & Pyne, 2017). The gap in the literature is the insufficient exploration of the challenges for all first-generation college students and the need to provide effective, comprehensive support programs addressing these needs (Means & Pyne, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study in a large, urban, East Coast university was to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support interventions and the need for comprehensive support programs designed for students. The study was necessary to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students. If students do not receive comprehensive support programs, learners could continue to drop out and not gain the upward economic and social mobility

benefiting other college students (Mead, 2018). The study contributed to the knowledge base by providing evidence of the effectiveness of support programs and the need for more comprehensive intervention plans. As a result of this study, first-generation college students may prosper, and the higher education community may gain improved recognition with the retention of learners.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to advance the knowledge of the need for comprehensive support programs for first-generation college students. The results of this study might help representatives in higher education understand the need for all-inclusive support programs for first-generation college students. Groups benefiting from this study include students, faculty, administrators, and advisors who work collaboratively with first-generation college students. Views of policymakers and higher education researchers are heard when considering the need for more effective and efficient student support programs (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). The outcome of this study clarified the need for comprehensive support programs to support student learning and enhance collaboration among all students. First-generation college students are twice as likely as second-generation university learners to drop out of four-year institutions in the second year (Frogge & Woods, 2018).

The results of this study should lead to improved practice throughout colleges and universities with comprehensive support programs. Policy changes resulting from the findings include providing a more collaborative learning environment for first-generation college students with faculty, administrators, and advisors. These changes will further lead to best practices among college educators by providing guidance leading to transformational changes with the students and the higher education system. Relationship building between first-generation college

students and university representatives should be the primary focus of all colleges and universities to create a transformational approach between the leaders within higher education and first-generation college students (Kovach, 2019).

Nature of the Study

The comparisons between first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors are inherent in an embedded instrumental case study (Yin, 2018). Understanding the relationships and how the experiences can relate across several studies is important (Ridder, 2017). Complex issues in context can be addressed with *what* questions regarding the design of a case examination approach (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). The students and the college representatives benefited from the analysis of what was and was not working with support programs.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study included the exploration of the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support interventions and the need for comprehensive support programs designed for first-generation college students. Challenges of the students were addressed with providing evidence regarding the effectiveness of student programs and what aspects within the programs were the most efficient. The following research questions helped address the purpose of this qualitative case study by providing perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding comprehensive support programs for learners.

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of first-generation college students regarding comprehensive support intervention programs?

Research Question 2: What are the perspectives of college staff members regarding comprehensive support intervention programs for first-generation college students?

Research Question 3: What are the best practices of college staff members to support a transformational change within the higher education system for first-generation college students?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks of Tinto's student retention theory and Burns's transformational leadership theory were used in the study relating to the challenges of first-generation college students and how providing comprehensive support interventions along with inspiring role models may increase retention rates (Connolly, 2016; Northouse, 2013). The need for determining the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary interventions and the desire for all-inclusive programs designed for students is supported by the theories. Comprehensive support programs can provide a collaborative learning environment (Means & Pyne, 2017). Providing first-generation college students with academic and social integration is crucial for learner success (Ishitani & Flood, 2018).

Student Retention Theory

Tinto's retention theory is a framework comprising three principles: (a) the higher education institution's commitment to all students served, (b) education for all scholars, and (c) the development of social and education communities to support pupils (Connolly, 2016). Tinto's theory has four core elements which relate to the challenges of first-generation college students' social and academic transition into higher education: (a) how pre-entry requirements with family background skills, abilities, and prior schooling may contribute to integration; (b)

initial motivation and student intentions as factors important for goals and commitment to school; (c) whether interactions with academic and nonacademic staff have the ability to influence institutional experiences; and (d) how a sense of academic and social belonging with positive campus participation impacts retention (Connolly, 2016). Tinto's (2017) theory may help explain how student collaboration with faculty, administrators, and advisors assists institutions' integration efforts with the design of comprehensive support programs surrounding the needs of first-generation college students.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns's transformational leadership theory provides a conceptual framework whereby superiors aspire to motivate others to create a connection between a leader and a follower (Northouse, 2013). Bass expanded the transformational leadership theory with four aspects and a focus on the impact of leadership on followers: (a) considering the individual needs of the follower and the contribution to others, (b) applying intellectual stimulation, (c) articulating a vision through inspirational motivation, and (d) influencing others by being a role model (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013). Four principles apply to transformational leadership theory: (a) building a vision for what will be accomplished, (b) encouraging a growth mindset for all within the organization, (c) creating trust with others by being authentic, and (d) creating new ideas and opportunities (Northouse, 2013; Ross & Kendall, 2016). Leaders establishing trust among first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors build the bond for transformation (Muchiri et al., 2019).

Definitions of Terms

Various provisions were used throughout the research which addressed the challenges of first-generation college students and the necessary support programs. Defining important

information was essential to ensure a common understanding of key concepts. For the purpose of this study, the following are concise definitions of terms and constructs used throughout the research.

College Readiness. College readiness is the knowledge and skills necessary to enter and be successful in college (Kallison, 2017). Students at an academic disadvantage could lack college readiness.

First-Generation College Students. First-generation college students are learners whose parent(s) did not complete a bachelor's degree (Higher Education Act, 1965). These students are the first in a family to integrate into higher education.

Retention Rates. Retention rates are key indicators for the success of students in colleges and universities. The percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall is known as retention rates (USDE, 2019b).

Stop out Rate. The stop out rate is a break in a student's enrollment of four months to four years before re-enrolling (USDE, 1998). Stopping out could be a barrier to complete college as a result of increased tuition and lost earnings for the student (Shapiro et al., 2018).

Student Engagement. Student engagement refers to the characteristics a student brings to the college or university, such as parental level of education, income status, cultural identity, and academic readiness, which can influence learning within higher education (Dong, 2019).

Student Persistence. Student persistence is a learner's continued enrollment from the second year until graduation (Burke, 2019).

Support Programs. Support programs are intentional practices such as academic advising, coaching, and mentoring to improve success for first-generation college students (Whitley et al., 2018). The means of improving retention and graduation rates of first-generation

college students are interventions which can have a positive impact on learners (Swift, Bowers, McDonald, & Walter, 2019). Support programs are components of a comprehensive design focused on building collaboration to enrich the lives of scholars (Whitley et al., 2018). Objectives are set by analyzing organizational level information with input from all stakeholders. Comprehensive programs are data-centric and provide the connection between college practices, policies, and processes to reduce barriers in order for first-generation students to be successful.

Assumptions

The information in this case study included truthful assumptions which cannot be demonstrated through in-depth interviews and focus groups. This qualitative case study had four main assumptions. The first assumption was all participants answered the interview questions in an open and honest manner. There was no way to tell with certainty whether a participant answered openly and honestly. An unavoidable assumption may have occurred as a result. The second assumption was whether the establishment of criteria for participation in the study ensured all contributors had similar or the same experiences in the field of education pertaining to the topic of first-generation college students. The third assumption was all participants were motivated to work persistently with comprehensive support programs on a consistent basis. Mobley and Brawner (2018) noted that a student's self-motivation and initiative led to successful transition into the college environment and not institutional support programs. The last and fourth assumption was the study participants were assumed to accurately represent the total population of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative case study was conducted in the spring of 2020 for two months. The qualitative case study included 26 participants consisting of first-year first-generation college

students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors who work with first-generation college programs from a four-year institute located on the East Coast. The coverage of this study comprised a purposive sample of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors. Purposive sampling was used to represent a specific focus from a wide geographic spread (Ames, Glenton, & Lewin, 2019). Participants selected from the sample were familiar with programs surrounding first-generation college students. College educators worked with existing programs regarding first-generation college students. Schwartz et al. (2018) found university representatives working with learners are important for predicting success. Experiences of first-generation college students and representatives of the university were the focus of this study. Boundaries of this study included participants who are first-generation college students or who work with first-generation college students.

Limitations

Design-related limitations pertaining to transferability and dependability in this study included the constraint of the study to one group of first-generation college students, and faculty, administrators, and advisors who work with first-generation college students in one East Coast school. Transferability related to the detailed perspectives provided by the learners (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The various experience levels and knowledge of the participants were factors which may impact the study.

Design-related limitations leading to less-than-ideal conditions included conducting interviews within the limits of participant convenience. Interviews were conducted during breaks and after school. While these times were the only possible occasions to conduct interviews during the school day, participants might have been in a rush to get back to the daily routine. Interviewing during breaks and after school could have prevented participants from providing

full and complete answers to the interview questions. The interview protocol with the logistics and ground rules was disclosed to all participants to avoid any misunderstandings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Potential biases which influenced outcomes included the possibility of interjecting researcher opinions into the interview questioning process through asking original or probing questions to elicit more responses when needed. Biases are how a researcher may interpret the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A potential bias in this study may have included swaying participants toward an answer. Data obtained to enhance the coding process may have furthermore occurred as a potential bias.

Steps were taken to control limitations, including focusing on increasing validity and reliability to identify any biases. Member checks were conducted with participants to review for accuracy and credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A reflexive journal was kept after each interview and focus group to identify and address potential biases. An audit trail maintained a record of actions taken to increase validity and reliability. An audit trail is important to allow the researcher to retrace the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Subject matter experts were utilized to review questions before any of the actual in-depth interviews and focus groups took place. All of these actions may increase reliability and validity while identifying potential biases.

Chapter Summary

The chapter consisted of an introduction in which the background of the problem was discussed to give a broad perspective of first-generation college students. Reviewing the literature shed light on the problem and emphasized the need for all-inclusive support programs. Information known regarding the students and the gap in the literature regarding insufficient exploration of challenges and the need to provide effective comprehensive support programs

addressing these urgencies were included in the problem statement (Means & Pyne, 2017). The purpose of the research was to provide evidence regarding student support program effectiveness, what essential aspects were most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students, and what information can contribute to the knowledge base.

The significance of the investigation was identifying how the study might advance the knowledge of the research problem. Research questions were stated to convey the focus of the problem statement. The theoretical framework referred to how the frame of reference related to the study approach. Key concepts which have multiple meanings in society were included in the definitions of terms. The assumptions consisted of truth which cannot be demonstrated and were critical to the meaningfulness of the study. Boundaries and the focus of the study were covered within the scope and delimitations, which included the participants and college staff members. The research design and methodology related to the transferability, dependability, and reasonable measures taken to enhance the findings. Transferability related to the detailed perspectives provided by the learners (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The literature review and the theoretical frameworks of Tinto's student retention theory and Burns's transformational leadership theory related to the challenges of first-generation college students, and how providing all-inclusive support interventions along with aspiring role models could increase the retention rates (Connolly, 2016; Northouse, 2013), are included in Chapter 2. The larger context of the study included issues, controversies, and principles which should be described with the theoretical constructs. The synthesized literature provides the background to support the need for integrated programs (Manyanga et al., 2017; Means & Pyne, 2017). Providing students with access to comprehensive support programs is a key component for assimilation into universities (Whitley et al., 2018).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative case study in a large urban East Coast university was to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support interventions and the need for comprehensive support programs designed for students. The study was necessary to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects were most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students. If first-generation college students do not receive comprehensive support programs, scholars could continue to drop out and not gain the upward economic and social mobility benefiting other college students (Mead, 2018). The study contributed to the knowledge base by providing evidence of the effectiveness of support programs and the need for more comprehensive intervention plans. As a result of this study, first-generation college students may prosper and the higher education community may gain increased recognition with the retention of learners.

The problem was students are not getting the proper support from faculty, administrators, and advisors who do not understand the needs of first-generation college students. Whitley et al. (2018) found, although support programs are in place for first-generation college students, focus on the clarity of the effectiveness of support programs is needed for a more comprehensive approach for first-generation college students. Toutkoushian et al. (2018) noted policymakers and higher education researchers are considering the needs of first-generation college students and the effectiveness and efficiency of student support programs. First-generation college students face academic, psychological, social, cultural, and financial challenges transitioning to a college campus (Radunzel, 2017). As a result of these burdens, a majority of students drop out without the proper resources or necessary services for specific needs.

Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) noted, if first-generation college students do not receive the right guidance from academic advisors, administrators, or faculty, challenges may not be addressed and students may withdraw from college. Student support programs, such as mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and coaching, have been implemented on college campuses in a piecemeal fashion (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2016). Means and Pyne (2017) stated colleges and universities should be providing social and academic support in addition to financial aid as the students transition into the college environment. Means and Pyne further stated, although student support programs have shown a positive effect on first-generation college students, college and university administrators should implement comprehensive support programs to address issues of equity and social justice to create a sense of belonging for first-generation college students. The gap in the literature is the insufficient exploration of the challenges for all first-generation college students and the need to provide effective comprehensive support programs addressing these needs.

A general overview of the central issues, such as rising costs of a college education, academic readiness, and student engagement, facing college students in the United States is provided in Chapter 2. Students integrating into a four-year college in the United States increased from 63% in 2000 to 70% in 2016 (USDE, 2019b). One third of students will graduate within six years and 2 million students will drop out (Shapiro et al., 2018; USDE, 2019b). As much as 14.6% of students from families in the lowest income quartile earn a bachelor's degree in 10 years as opposed to 46% of students from families in the highest income group (Cataldi et al., 2018). The retention rate is even less for first-generation college students, with one third dropping out of college in three years compared to a quarter of students whose parents have degrees (Cataldi et al., 2018).

The number of first-generation college students who start college is increasing (Cataldi et al., 2018). Thirty-four percent of the undergraduate population is comprised of first-generation college students (Quinn et al., 2019). Hutchison (2017) noted descriptive commonalities for first-generation college students: minority, lower income status, older, raising dependent children, and living at or near home. First-generation college students are confronted with academic, psychological, social, cultural, and financial challenges entering college (Radunzel, 2017).

The challenges of first-generation college students are revealed in the literature review. A minimal amount of literature exists related to the needs and support programs making an impact on students (Bordelon, Sexton, & Vendrely, 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017). The chapter includes a theoretical framework for faculty, administrators, and staff and the relationships with first-generation college students (Connolly, 2016; Northouse, 2013). Various resources were used in the literature search strategy. The literature review includes a presentation of the three major themes to describe challenges of first-generation college students and the need to provide comprehensive support programs: retention, barriers to education, and navigating student support programs.

Literature Search Strategy

The synthesis of the literature for the qualitative case study included a review of scholarly topics, Internet-based websites, books of research methods, peer-reviewed scholarly articles, and dissertations. Various databases and search engines included EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Sage, ProQuest, ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, and Springer. Other resources encompassed reports, scholarly journals, data, and historical information from the websites of the USDE; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education; Entangled Solutions; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); *Higher*

Education Studies; College Quarterly; Journal of College Student Retention; Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council; Journal of College Student Development; ACT, Inc.; Market & Social Research; Change; American Journal of Community Psychology; and Teachers College Record. The key terms utilized for this literature search were *first-generation college students, retention of college students, social belonging, student motivation, first-generation support programs, graduation rates, psychological factors associated with academic success, adjustment to college, transfer of college students, transfer of first-generation college students, racial bias, demographics of college students, social capital wealth, upward mobility, transformation, inequity of college students, equity of college students, academic support programs, and higher education institutions.*

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is critical to justify the value of a work (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). The student retention model derived from Vincent Tinto (Tinto, 2015), and the transformational leadership theory derived from studies of Burns and Bass (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Connolly, 2016; Northouse, 2013). The framework was applied relating to the challenges of first-generation college students and how providing comprehensive support interventions along with inspiring role models could increase retention rates (Connolly, 2016; Northouse, 2013).

Student Retention Theory

Tinto's (2015) student retention theory is a framework comprising three principles for the retention of students: (a) the higher education institution's commitment to all students served, (b) education for all scholars, and (c) the development of social and education communities to support pupils. Tinto's theory has four core elements: (a) pre-entry requirements, (b) initial

motivation and student intentions, (c) interactions with staff members, and (d) a sense of academic and social belonging (Connolly, 2016). Each of the elements is addressed as follows.

Pre-entry requirements. Higher education creates opportunity and a path to upward social mobility, and students from families with higher education are at an advantage (Everett, 2015). Tinto's (1993) first element of pre-entry attributes depicts how the family background and academic preparation relate to the student's ability to respond to college. First-generation college students come from parents who have little college experience (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Learners do not possess the necessary skills to become successful in universities (Kallison, 2017). Students often lack self-confidence as a result of coming from families not familiar with the college environment (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Self-efficacy is beneficial for the integration of first-generation college students (Baier, Markman, & Pernice-Duca, 2016).

Initial motivation and student intentions. The second element of Tinto's (1993) theory encompasses the motivation and intention of students, which have a direct impact on commitment and retention. Students often lack motivation and persistence to stay in school, and positive messages from faculty members could inspire the learners (Savage, Strom, Ebesu Hubbard, & Aune, 2019). Self-efficacy and perceptions of mentorship were most important for first-time students to persist in school (Baier et al., 2016). Commitment to goals is important for student success (Connolly, 2016).

Interactions with staff members. Tinto's (1993) third element indicates student interactions with academic and nonacademic staff members may influence retention (Connolly, 2016). Students who are more connected to faculty, administrators, and advisors may increase engagement for learner success (Hutchison, 2017). Mentoring relationships could boost the well-

being and success of first-generation college students (Hurd, Albright, Wittrup, Negrete, & Billingsley, 2018).

A sense of academic and social belonging. The fourth element relates to how a student's academic and social belonging impacts retention (Tinto, 1993; Connolly, 2016). Positive experiences with peers, faculty, administrators, and advisors increase integration into the college experience. Academic and social integration have shown to have a significant influence on student success (Ishitani & Flood, 2018).

Tinto's (1993) student retention theory serves as a lens to describe how the characteristics of social and academic integration and social belonging affect students' assimilation into college and why learners drop out of school (Connolly, 2016). First-generation college students face many challenges with academic and social belonging, and Tinto's theory provides the principles which may help college and university administrators and educators increase student retention (Ishitani & Flood, 2018). Tinto (2017) stated student collaboration with faculty, administrators, and advisors will help institutions design comprehensive support programs surrounding the needs of first-generation college students.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns's transformational leadership theory provides a conceptual framework whereby superiors inspire and engage others to advance motivation and morality for the leader and followers (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2013). Bass and Riggio (2006) expanded the transformational leadership theory with four aspects and a focus on the impact of leadership on followers: (a) considering the individual needs of the follower and the contribution to others, (b) applying intellectual stimulation, (c) articulating a vision through inspirational motivation, and (d) influencing others by being a role model. Four principles of the transformational leadership

theory are (a) building a vision, (b) encouraging a growth mindset, (c) creating trust, and (d) creating new ideas and opportunities (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Ross & Kendall, 2016). Each of the principles is addressed as follows.

Building a vision. Transformational leaders create the vision for others to achieve goals (El Toufaily, 2018). The vision for professional development and improved leadership sets forth positive effects on student learning (Mayes & Gethers, 2018). Faculty and staff members who articulate the vision for creating change could help students, who follow the practices of transformational leaders who serve as change agents, achieve. Leaders who portray the vision for the organization may be able to build sustainable environments for the learners (Khoo, 2017).

Encouraging a growth mindset. Positive leadership and self-efficacy are associated with employee well-being (Ahmed, Ishak, & Kamil, 2019). Students who are more confident are more likely to persist in school (Baier et al., 2016). School leaders displaying a growth mindset can lead to better performance throughout the organization (Ahmed et al., 2019). Providing a growth mindset improves overall success (Northouse, 2013; Ross & Kendall, 2016).

Creating trust. Trust is at the core of every relationship and promotes collaboration with others (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Credibility is developed when leaders believe in values and build connections with followers by acting upon beliefs. Authentic leaders who are self-aware and morally strong have the ability to improve the values throughout the organization (Saeed & Ali, 2019). Authentic leadership provides support for the professional development of individuals.

Creating new ideas and opportunities. Transformational leaders create new ideas and opportunities for others (Northouse, 2013; Ross & Kendall, 2016). Followers are encouraged by leaders who stimulate intellectually (Pradhan & Jena, 2019). Students who are motivated can

increase cognitive learning for academic success (Kovach, 2019). Kovach noted higher achievement outcomes are heightened with leaders who exhibit transformational leadership qualities.

Transformational leadership is a process whereby leaders connect with followers to cultivate engagement and motivation to create change (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leaders are charismatic and can empower others to follow with a desire to influence change. Students succeed when confronted with the right guidance, and Baier et al. (2016) noted student interactions with role models have a positive impact on retention. Transformational leaders create the environment for others to achieve goals (El Toufaily, 2018). Leaders establishing trust among first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors build the bond for transformation (Muchiri et al., 2019).

The theoretical frameworks of Tinto, Bass, and Burns focused on student retention and the academic and social needs of first-generation college students (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Connolly, 2016; Tinto, 2017). The theories of student retention and transformational leadership framed the literature review. Students who receive support from faculty, administrators, and advisors could show an increase in student retention through academic and social integration factors (Connolly, 2016). Learners who connect with faculty members, administrators, and advisors may reinforce a sense of belonging with increased self-efficacy and confidence (Tinto, 2017). First-generation college students who connect with leaders are inspired and provide the roadmap for success (Northouse, 2013).

First-Generation College Student Integration Theoretical Model

The first-generational college student integration theoretical model framework is a synthesis of Tinto's student retention theory and Burns and Bass's transformational leadership

theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Connolly, 2016; Tinto, 2017). The circles represent the blending of social and academic factors with the power of leaders to inspire and transform students. The new model (see Figure 1) demonstrates how the two theories together help create a well-balanced interconnectedness for first-generation college students.

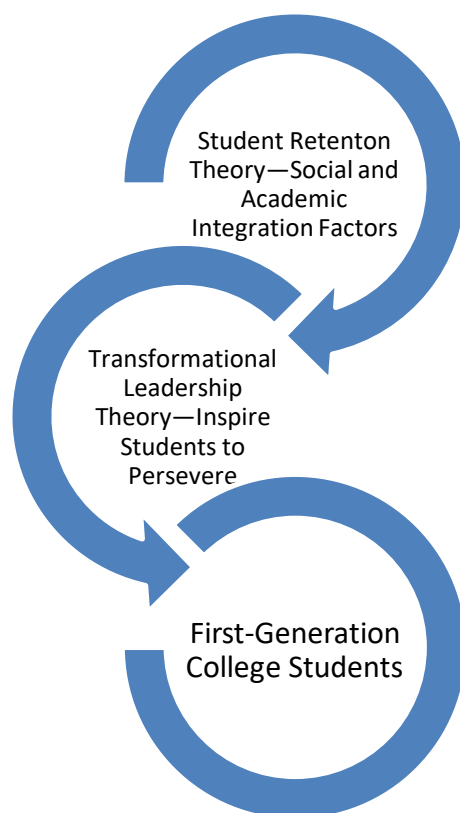


Figure 1. Theoretical interconnectedness model—first-generation college students.

Research Literature Review

This review contains an overview of the literature on first-generation college students and the need for comprehensive programs. The first subsection covers issues encountered by all college students, such as student retention and the underlying issues which may impact the ability to complete a degree (Manyanga et al., 2017). The second subsection comprises issues

facing first-generation students' ability to complete college. Emphasis is placed on students navigating support programs and the needs for integrated services (Gibbons, Rhinehart, & Hardin, 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017; Toutkoushian et al., 2018).

Issues Facing College Students

Students are entering college at increasing rates but graduating at slower rates (USDE, 2019b). Cataldi et al. (2018) reported, of 2 million students who arrive at college each year, 40% will not earn a degree. Students face many financial, academic, psychological, and social obstacles while transitioning into college. Student retention is the focus for many colleges, and the struggle to meet the needs of all students has been elevating throughout the years (Burke, 2019). Manyanga et al. (2017) stated college and university administrators are setting goals to support traditional, nontraditional, transfer, and minority students from various socioeconomic and academic backgrounds to be successful. College students face many issues, including college student retention, rising tuition costs, the student loan crisis, the value of a college education, college readiness as an academic challenge, and student engagement, which impacts the ability to complete a degree. These issues are discussed as follows.

College student retention. Each year, students drop out of school. The attrition rate for first-year students has been increasing since 2009 and was at 30% in 2013 (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). Burke (2019) defined *student retention* as maintaining continued progress from the first to the second year. The overall completion rate for all students nationwide is 58.3%, a slight increase of 1.5% from the Fall 2011 term (Shapiro et al., 2018).

Poynton and Lapan (2017) noted poor retention rates cost colleges \$14.5 billion annually, and one out of every four students does not return to school the second year. The attrition rate is higher for Black and Hispanic students than for Asian and White students (Shapiro et al., 2018).

In 2012, the student population was 10.1% Black, 11.0% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 48.1% White. Traditional students make up 77.8%, and adult learners 12.4%, followed by delayed entry at 9.1%. In addition to dropping out of school, many students are stopping out with longer breaks.

The stopout rate is a break in a student's enrollment of four months to four years before re-enrolling (USDE, 1998). The stopout rate is 46.1% at two-year colleges and universities, which is twice as high as at four-year universities at 22.8% (Shapiro et al., 2018). Stopout rates are much higher for nontraditional students than traditional students, and are identified as the number of times students take a break from school and then start back up. Stopping out could be a barrier to completing college as a result of increased tuition and lost earnings for the student. Additionally, the type of college makes a difference in the retention rate, with four-year private nonprofit institutions having the highest retention rate at 76.1%, four-year public schools at 65.7%, two-year public schools at 39.2%, and four-year for-profit universities at 37.3%. Stopout rates for learners are 52.2% at four-year private for-profit universities, followed by 46.2% at two-year public colleges. Burke (2019) found retention rates were important for all institutions from a funding perspective as well as academic achievement for the students and overall success of the college.

Rising tuition costs. The cost of college has skyrocketed, plaguing many students with debt and the inability to pay for school (Webber, 2018). Increased tuition costs create hardships for students and may cause learners to stop out for long periods of time or drop out completely (Shapiro et al., 2018). Woodson (2013) stated upper- and middle-class students go into debt, and many times low-income students are not able to afford an education and could not go to college. Webber (2018) revealed tuition at a four-year public college with room and board increased from

\$5,660 a year in 1997 to \$14,940 a year in 2017–2018. The cost of education has been increasing, while funding has been decreasing.

Students bear the burden of paying 25% in tuition fees, while 30% of school costs are split between local and state governments (Webber, 2018). Kim (2015) noted colleges have been concentrating on increasing enrollment numbers in order to capture tuition and fees, as a result of declining funding from federal and state budgets. Many colleges have been trying to capture more students with nicer buildings and state-of-the-art technology. Woodson (2013) noted, as a result of colleges investing in larger buildings and fancy amenities, tuition increased 10% to 22% in one year. Tuition covers only two thirds of the operational costs for colleges, and schools are turning to alumni to boost endowments. Many higher education institutions compete for the same applicant pool with less federal, state, and local funding and push toward a business model focusing on increases in tuition as well as partnering with businesses to create endowments in order to survive (Parvu & Ipate, 2016).

In 2017, the cost of the average private nonprofit four-year college was \$33,480 annually (Baum, 2017). The Consumer Price Index measures price increases within the economy, and between 2006 and 2016 increased by 19%, while tuition rose 50% for private nonprofit four-year colleges and 66% for public four-year institutions. A number of colleges have given out institutional grant aid in addition to federal and state allocations, education tax credits, and employer allotments, but the rising trend in the net price of college and lack of rising family incomes create barriers for all students. Students could drop out without sufficient funding to pay for college (Eichelberger et al., 2017).

Student loan crisis. The Great Recession of 2008 left the higher education industry with a loss of \$283 billion in tax revenue (Pew Trusts, 2019). Many individuals were jobless and

returned to school. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act offset recession losses, adding \$147 billion in Medicaid and education funds. The Federal Pell Grant Program became effective in 1965 with the Higher Education Act creating funding for low- and middle-income students (Umbricht, 2016). In 2010, President Obama made investments in student financial aid by increasing the Pell Grants, cutting student loan interest, and revising payment plans, with costs totaling \$50 billion (USDE, 2016). In 2017, the president and Congress restored the year-round Pell Grant allowing students to go through school (Protopsaltis & Parrott, 2017). The 2020 congressional spending package passed on December 20, 2019, increased the maximum Pell Grant by \$150 and cut the Pell reserve fund by \$500 million (Nevius, 2019; Thompson, 2019). Bird and Castleman (2016) noted research indicating college success and student persistence as a result of need-based financial aid. As the cost of college rises, Pell Grants may not pay for all college costs impacting students' ability to continue college (Protopsaltis & Parrott, 2017).

Families and students are struggling with paying the costs of the rising tuitions not funded by institutional grant aid and federal and state grants. Throughout the 1990s, student loans increased, and the purchasing power of the Pell Grants decreased (Umbricht, 2016). The Pell Grant maximum of \$4,100 covered 120% of tuition in 1990 and 63% of tuition in 2012 at a four-year public university. Families and students were left to pay the rest of college tuition through savings or student loans. Federal Pell grants were capped at \$5,550 for the 2012-2013 award year for undergraduates, leaving students to pay the rest through private student loans which may not be affordable to low-income students with bad credit (USDE, 2012; Woodson, 2013). Johnson (2019) stated between 2008 and 2018, state funding and subsidies were cut by \$7 billion, and the cost was transferred to students and families. Pew Trusts (2019) reported state funding was 13% below the fiscal 2008 levels in 2018, while tuition went up 43% per student in

public universities. The U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee (2015) revealed student loan debt is at \$1.3 trillion, twice the size of credit card debt.

Financial literacy among college students is a concern (Eichelberger et al., 2017).

Students need to become educated to understand student loans, budgeting, and time requirements to graduate. Bird and Castleman (2016) reported 16% of freshmen do not refile for Pell Grants and as a result, drop out of school. A lack of financial education could leave students exiting college with mounting debt. Prinster (2016) found 48% of college students in for-profit institutions leave with \$40,000 or more in debt as opposed to 12% of students in public four-year universities. The NCES (2020) noted 41% of overall revenues in public four-year universities comes from federal, state, and local government grants, contracts, and appropriations, while 94% of revenues in for-profit institutions come from student tuition and fees. Considering the tuition increases and rising debt, the value of an education is at the forefront of the educational journey of every learner.

Value of a college education. College graduates, on average, earn more than individuals with only a high school diploma (Lobo & Burke-Smalley, 2018). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) noted, “In 2018 adults earned an average of \$24,430 without a high school degree, \$37,020 with a high school degree, \$53,700 with an associate degree, and \$73,960 with a bachelor’s degree” (p. 1). More than 60% of jobs require a college degree, and employers are recruiting from other countries in order to meet the needs of health care and information technology (Gee, Hawk, & Norton, 2015). With the rising costs of college tuition and the burden of student loan debt, showing the benefits of a college degree is becoming more difficult for administrators in the higher education industry (Lobo & Burke-Smalley, 2018). Glater (2018) noted achieving a college education leads to individuals having a purpose, a healthier outlook,

and greater civic engagement. Lopez (2018) found students were more committed to college when shown how a degree can improve job prospects.

Many individuals believe a higher education is not necessary and the benefits do not exceed the costs. Johnson (2019) reported students were opting out of college and instead envisioning a competency-based career path with employers through job training and development. Education is valuable, and despite the rising costs, colleges should focus on the quality of learning (Bendermacher, oude Egbrink, Wolfhagen, & Dolmans, 2017). Woodson (2013) noted the purpose of college is to provide a quality education for students. A college degree increased the wage of a college graduate and allowed the graduate to lead a more stable life (Heckler, 2018).

College readiness as an academic challenge. Learners are lacking the necessary knowledge and skills needed to enter college (Kallison, 2017). Students with an academic disadvantage could have more difficulty applying to college. Jabbar, McKinnon-Crowley, and Serrata (2019) noted many high school students who lacked support from family or social capital networks struggled to complete university application essays. High school grade point averages and standardized test scores were the main predictors in determining college admissions and retention (Kim, 2015). Students in the senior year of high school who were more likely to take frequent essay writing and university prep classes had a higher chance of applying to school and pursuing a college degree (McCormick & Hafner, 2017). Despite taking more classes to get into college, many students fell behind and dropped out (Schrynemakers, Lane, Beckford, & Kim, 2019).

Transitioning from high school to college is difficult for many learners. Developmental education courses were previously administered but now are considered by policymakers to be

an impediment to college (Schrynemakers et al., 2019). Faculty members are concerned and have differing perspectives on the quality of education and the thresholds with lower academic standards for courses. Full-time faculty designing high-impact courses of study indicated 89% of high school teachers believed students were college-ready, compared to only 26% of university faculty.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative were developed as a result of one third of American students requiring remedial education (USDE, 2019a). States adopted unified standards for classes in math, language arts, and English to help students become more prepared for college. McCormick and Hafner (2017) explained California high school teachers, while working with community college faculty, discovered blending literary with rhetorical emphasis helped to prepare students for college. Simon, Aulls, Dedic, Hubbard, and Hall (2015) noted active learning blended with instructional methods increased positive development with students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

Adult learners are at risk of dropping out of college due to the gap in years after leaving high school (Kallison, 2017). Many adult students are not prepared academically to enter college after being away from high school. Adult students dropped out while taking a number of developmental education courses. College readiness programs were more successful when course content was combined with learning and study skills and the knowledge of how to access support services, according to Kallison (2017). Bloemer, Day, and Swan (2017) suggested combining specific courses with various types of students could be useful in enhancing student advising and placement for college success.

Students who are college-ready have a greater chance of staying in school. Shapiro et al. (2018) found six-year college completion rates nationwide were 58.3% for all students, 68.7%

for traditional-age students, 50.4% for delayed entry students, and 50.6% for adult learners.

DeAngelo and Franke (2016) noted, out of 210,056 full-time first-time students at 356 four-year colleges and universities, the retention rate for students who were college ready, with higher high school grades and grade point averages (GPAs), was 88%, compared to 78% for students who were less college ready with lower grades and GPAs. Students who were less ready for college accounted for 75% of attrition in the first year of college (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). Academic preparation increased students' ability to succeed and had a direct impact on income equality and future growth of the U.S. economy (McCormick & Hafner, 2017).

Student engagement. A common theme with retention rates is student engagement (Burke, 2019). Student engagement with college can increase persistence. Academic performance is increased with higher levels of student engagement and when faculty and college administrators create a learning environment beneficial for students (Delfino, 2019). Learners should sense the connection with other people on campus and throughout the college networks. The perceptions of students toward the school are important for relational commitment (Savage et al., 2019). Retention of students may rise when a sense of belonging exists (Burke, 2019). Student satisfaction with the university may be impacted by the interaction with faculty, administrators, and advisors.

The role of faculty, administrators, and advisors with students is crucial for student engagement (Basko & McCabe, 2018). Students could be energized through faculty mentorships. McKinsey (2016) noted the benefits of mentoring far outweighed the costs. Faculty who were mentors connected with the students by being role models. The student-to-counselor ratio in the United States is 471:1, and as there are no federal requirements, variations exist throughout the states (Ohrtman, Cronin, Torgerson, Thuen, & Colton, 2016). Goodman, Sink, Cholewa, and

Burgess (2018) noted academic outcomes could increase for students with the influence of school counselors, and lower student-to-counselor ratios may have a more positive effect on the students. Faculty members in colleges and universities built a quality culture through the love of teaching and passion for learning and development, as well as forming bonding relationships with the students (Basko & McCabe, 2018). The goal of faculty members, administrators, and advisors should be to work with students to create a valued culture of endurance (Hurd et al., 2018). Students are confronted with many issues related to the integration into college and more specific needs for first-generation college students.

Issues Facing First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students make up one third of the student population (Cataldi et al., 2018). Minority students, low-income students, students with disabilities, and learners whose first language is not English comprise the growing at-risk student population (Eitzen, Kinney, & Grillo, 2016). Burke (2019) noted the highest level of retention for all students is between Year 1 and Year 2. First-generation college students were twice as likely as second-generation university learners to drop out of four-year institutions in the second year (Frogge & Woods, 2018). Thirty-three percent of first-generation college students were likely to leave three years after enrollment, compared to 26% of non-first-generation students (Cataldi et al., 2018).

Demand to help disadvantaged students who are burdened with financial hardships, psychological stress, social-status stigma, academic readiness, and lack of self-efficacy has increased (Checkoway, 2018). While many support programs serve the needs of college students, including first-generation college students, a shift has occurred to using an integrated framework for a more inclusive environment (Hutchison, 2017). Students are often unmotivated, but with collaborative efforts from the faculty, advisors, peers, and the college institution, retention rates

could increase (Silver Wolf et al., 2017). First-generation college students face various issues, such as lack of retention, lack of social and cultural capital, various challenges, and lack of support programs (Gibbons et al., 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017; Toutkoushian et al., 2018). These issues are discussed as follows.

Retention. Cataldi et al. (2018) revealed only 56% of first-generation college students graduate, and most students are still in college after six years of enrollment. Frogge and Woods (2018) stated first-generation college students are twice as likely as second-generation university learners to drop out of four-year institutions in the second year. Xu (2016) noted persistence to stay in school is a challenge linked with socioeconomic status, academic performance, and active learning behaviors. Millea, Wills, Elder, and Molina (2018) recognized retention increased for institutions when smaller class sizes were provided and the focus was on the financial constraints of the students.

A supportive environment from faculty along with academic achievement should contribute to student endurance (Xu, 2016). Bowman, Jarratt, Polgreen, Kruckeberg, and Segre (2019) noted social integration and close connections with friends had a positive effect on retention. To increase retention rates, colleges should provide an integrated model framework which enhances independence and empowerment for first-generation college students to thrive in a college environment (Hutchison, 2017). College administrators are considering the needs of first-generation college students and beginning to assess the necessary support interventions to heighten the urgency for the implementation of comprehensive support programs as a result of the dropout rates for first-generation college students (Whitley et al., 2018).

Social and cultural capital. Social and cultural capital are concepts which encompass value systems (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). Bhandari and Yasunobu described the critical

elements of social and cultural capital, including shared norms, trust, networks, and social relations, and traced these concepts back to the 1980s and 1990s with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam. Bourdieu (1986) identified three elements of social capital: (1) resources through social connections, (2) the number of relationships, and (3) the quality of the resources. Three forms of social capital regarding relations among people were found through Coleman (1990): (1) reciprocity (including trust), (2) the flow of information, and (3) norms which are enforced. Putnam (2000) argued social capital possesses the same characteristics as a public good with social networks affecting the productivity of individuals and groups. Social and cultural capital have been linked to how social values can shape overall economic behavior in the improvement process.

The connection with social capital is important for first-generation college students navigating the university environment (Schwartz et al., 2018). Program initiatives for underrepresented groups in the national program initiated through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Early College High School program, included the opportunity to obtain an associate's degree while attending high school (Sáenz & Combs, 2015). The program was designed to address a possible remedy for the challenges of access and equity, career readiness, and retention. Cultural capital is the knowledge and practices learners possess prior to entering school and is often not valued by underrepresented groups in the higher education environment (O'Shea, 2016). Identifying development, which encompasses the strength, skill, and versatility of the student, while transitioning to the campus environment is vital to overcome barriers (Liversage, Naudé, & Botha, 2018). Students with parents who attended college often benefit from the experience and knowledge of established social networks (Almeida, Byrne, Smith, & Ruiz, 2019). Learners who connect with peers alongside college-educated mothers and fathers

had increased motivation and intellectual improvement. Family and social webs comprise environments which support students with academic, psychological, social, cultural, and financial challenges. Policymakers in education are considering the need to address how learners are identified as *first-generation* (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; Toutkoushian et al., 2018).

Social and cultural capital is important for students who do not have parents with college degrees (Almeida et al., 2019). A strong correlation exists between the educational attainment of parents and how learners make decisions regarding college (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Current university policies for first-generation learners are varied, and how the school defines and applies the term *first-generation* determines the number of learners in the category. In the absence of universal policies, staff members consider the criteria within the school definition of *first-generation* to address the needs of the students.

Defining a first-generation college student is complex, and higher education administrators and researchers use many variables (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Two definitions exist for what characterizes a first-generation college student. On one side, Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) and Choy (2001) defined *first-generation college students* as learners whose parents did not attend college. On the other side, Collier and Morgan (2008) and Pike and Kuh (2005) defined *first-generation college students* as learners whose parents did not graduate from college. The Higher Education Act (1965) specified first-generation college students as learners whose parents did not complete a bachelor's degree.

Cataldi et al. (as cited in NCES) defined *first-generation college students* as learners whose parents never achieved a postsecondary education. The linking of postsecondary education to parental involvement is fundamental. Mitchall and Jaeger (2018) underscored this point in their study correlating maternal and paternal engagement as a motivational factor with

first-generation college students staying in college. Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) noted inconsistencies among researchers' interpretations of the definition of a first-generation college student. As a result, Nguyen and Nguyen noted the definition of *first-generation college student* should not be limited to parental involvement and should include an intersectional approach identifying the student's identity and social background as well.

The definition of *first-generation college student* is vital to the higher education community because institutional funding is tied directly to the number of students earning postsecondary degrees (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Many first-generation students do not enroll in or finish college, and having a standard definition of *first-generation college student* will help policymakers better understand which learners are counted as first-generation students and how best to fund programs and serve the students on a national scale. Costs are involved to design and implement support intervention programs for the number of first-generation college students and are directly linked to the backing supported by the federal government, nonprofit organizations, and private entities. The support intervention programs created could vary based on the number of first-generation college students entering college and how the higher education institution interprets the definition of *first-generation college student*. Peralta and Klonowski (2017) noted first-generation college students, researchers, and the higher education community could benefit from a standard definition of *first-generation college student* as an individual whose parents or guardians do not have a postsecondary degree, linking social and cultural resources of peers, family, and friends to the enrollment and retention of the students.

Challenges. A growing number of first-generation college students are overwhelmed transitioning into the college environment (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). First-generation college students face many challenges, with cultural identity, financial hardships, psychological well-

being, social status, family support, and academic issues having a direct impact on transitioning into the college environment. Mead (2018) noted 33% of undergraduate students receive funding from Pell Grants, 24% of whom are low-income and first-generation college students. Many first-generation college students do not complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid for fear of the process and embarrassment with not fully understanding the criteria.

First-generation students are academically at risk as a result of not being afforded adequate academic preparation prior to entering college. Many first-generation college students are completing remedial courses on campus prior to taking college credit courses (Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). Academic readiness has a positive effect on retention, and 75% of students who are not academically prepared account for attrition during the first year of college (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016).

First-generation college students are self-conscious coming from racial-ethnic backgrounds and social classes different from the majority of Whites in many colleges (Checkoway, 2018). Students have experienced feelings of isolation and the need to belong as a result of a lack of support for social identities such as race and ethnicity (Means & Pyne, 2017). A sense of belonging has been linked to students persisting in college (Davis, Hanzsek-Brill, Petzold, & Robinson, 2019). Although various bridge programs are available to help first-generation college students adjust to the college environment, the students may feel inferior as a result of participating in the programs (Checkoway, 2018).

Social status can be a stigma associated with a first-generation college student, leading to feelings of not belonging and not wanting to go to social functions on campus (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Family support is crucial for the persistence and retention of first-generation college students (Covarrubias, Valle, Laiduc, & Azmitia, 2019). According to Longwell-Grice et al.

(2016), first-generation college students lack family support and sense a disconnect upon returning home to families, making the stay in college more difficult. Many students have full-time jobs to support themselves and their families, which hinders social and academic involvement on campus (Adams et al., 2016). First-generation college students who overcame the obstacles and completed college were motivated by support from families, peers, faculty, administrators, and staff (Azmitia, Sumabat-Estrada, Cheong, & Covarrubias, 2018).

Support programs. Students leave college as a result of not knowing how to navigate programs for specific needs as well as inadequate internal support programs and policies (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Manyanga et al. (2017) emphasized the need for colleges and universities to support student success through effective programs. Demographics shifted from 1980 to 2020, with student populations of predominantly working-age Whites decreasing from 81.9% to 62.5%, while ethnic minority populations increased from 18.1% to 37.5% (Burke, 2019). These changes reflect the need for colleges to invest in more academic and social support programs. A social capital gap exists between high- and low-socioeconomic students, and intervention programs providing for underrepresented and disadvantaged students are needed (Chen & Starobin, 2019).

Various programs exist to help college students persist in college. The Federal Pell Grant Program of 1972 provides \$33.7 billion in grants to 9.2 million students, 46% of whom receive a certificate or earn a degree (Baum, 2015). The program services low-income students and affords the opportunity to achieve a college degree. Many students enter college through Pell Grants and lose momentum. The Federal Pell Grant Program could be improved by providing students support with college transition and strategies for success.

Federally funded programs exist to support disadvantaged students (Ohrtman et al., 2016). Under President Lyndon Johnson, support programs grew, such as the Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO), which include Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Training Program for Federal TRIO Staff, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, and Veterans Upward Bound (Ohrtman et al., 2016). The programs increase college access and success, but the range of students the programs cover is minimal. For example, TRIO has limited funding and is available to only 10% of the eligible population. As a result of insufficient funding for these programs, various other programs exist for all students, including low-income students.

College programs support the financial, academic, mentoring, and orientation needs of students. While the programs provide effective support, a lack of uniformity among the programs makes it difficult to determine which components are the most beneficial (Swift et al., 2019). Millett, Saunders, and Fishtein (2018) noted the promotion of Promise programs, which provide financial and student support from entry through completion of college and are significant as a result of the customized design based on community demand. The Promise programs are place-based within communities and are eligible to students based on residency, merit, and need. Burke (2019) found when students were involved in academic cohort models, lived in learning communities, and participated in co-curricular programs, their retention rates were higher.

College administrators have focused on institutional needs, but the changing student demographics reflect the need for new ideas and strategies to meet their needs (Swift et al., 2019). Summer bridge programs provided support for low-income and first-generation college students. Students were more engaged after combining writing, math, and lab science courses with active learning and participation. Grace-Odeleye and Santiago (2019) noted a new model

program design contributed to first-generation college students' success by sharing common experiences and networking with peers within the surrounding campus and community. The implementation of an Accelerated Study in Associate Programs at six community colleges in New York providing financial, academic, and personal support proved beneficial for increasing student completion rates and included comprehensive reforms ranging from hiring more staff to aligning recruitment and enrollment processes with college admissions while meeting the personalized needs of the students (Cormier, Sanders, Raufman, & Strumbos, 2019). The nationwide Dell Scholars Program afforded to first-generation and low-income students provides financial and intensive social support for students through an effective model of tracking and arranging follow-up support for increasing student success (Page, Kehoe, Castleman, & Sahadewo, 2019). High-impact writing-intensive classes with faculty learning communities proved to be successful for the students with higher learner engagement, performance, and persistence while attending first-year seminars (Bordelon et al., 2019).

College educators work closely with learners in various support programs. The need for faculty, administrators, and advisors to understand the various perspectives of college students is vital for the success of scholars. First-generation college students are overwhelmed with feelings of isolation, limited income, lack of motivation, and cultural mismatches (Nin & Keeton, 2019). University representatives who incorporate cultural competence into teaching and advising can increase engagement, academic performance, and persistence of students (Green & Wright, 2017). Romine, Baker, and Romine (2018) found relationships with university administrators can have a positive effect on student retention and success within programs. Academic, psychological, and cultural support services are critical for students to succeed. Student interactions with faculty had a positive effect on the socioemotional and individual advancement

on learning outcomes (Green & Wright, 2017). Students who received early support for counseling and career readiness were more likely to have an increased vision of getting into and staying in college (Poynton & Lapan, 2017).

The retention and graduation rates for all first-generation college students could be in jeopardy without comprehensive support programs. First-generation college students leave college as a result of a lack of social and academic integration (Connolly, 2016; Quinn et al., 2019). Schwartz et al. (2018) noted first-generation college students had higher attrition rates and were less likely to seek out support services on campus due to being uncomfortable engaging with faculty, administrators, or advisors and feelings of not belonging in the college environment. Mead (2018) pointed out the admissions office plays a vital role with college students and should account for all variables with the college application process, including the identity of first-generation college students. Sanacore and Palumbo (2016) noted first-generation college students complete loan applications with admissions counselors without any further guidance while navigating the college environment. First-generation students may not be receiving the necessary support as a result of a lack of collaboration among college and university administrators working in silos within the institution (Cormier et al., 2019).

Means and Pyne (2017) recognized programs within colleges and universities should be integrated and provide comprehensive support not only with the financial aid office but also with social and academic interventions which enhance a student's belonging and self-efficacy and increase academic achievement and retention. Peralta and Klonowski (2017) noted bridge programs and TRIO interventions have helped first-generation college students with academic and social support, and comprehensive interventions tracking student success with integration, expectations, feedback, and involvement in a collaborative learning environment are beneficial

to the learners. First-generation college students lack information for what to expect within the college environment and often do not have family or others to help guide them through the process (Gibbons et al., 2019). Means and Pyne argued comprehensive support programs give first-generation college students a positive outlook with relationship building and a sense of belonging in the college environment.

Gibbons et al. (2019) stated first-generation college students benefit from counselors and academic advisors working together to help students before, during, and after the implementation of programs. When faculty, administrators, and advisors do not work together, first-generation college students could sense isolation stemming from a lack of direction within the university environment (Cormier et al., 2019). Cormier et al. found when administrators from the admissions, recruitment, and advising departments worked together in a need-based model for disadvantaged students, completion rates increased from 26.9% to 54.2%. Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) stated students were unmotivated when a college lacked a collaborative environment supporting first-generation college students. Comprehensive support programs should include faculty who are committed to providing proper guidance for first-generation college students to graduate. Schmid, Gillian-Daniel, Kraemer, and Kueppers (2016) noted students benefit from faculty development through communities of practice which are focused on student learning, relationship building, and faculty understanding needs through the lens of first-generation college students. Relationship building between first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors should be at the forefront of every college or university to create a transformational approach between the leadership within higher education and first-generation college students (Kovach, 2019).

Gap in the Literature

Faculty, administrators, and advisors may not understand the perspectives of first-generation college students (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Few scholars have identified the necessary support interventions and the need for comprehensive support programs designed for first-generation college students. Limited research has explored internal higher education stakeholders who can support practices for overcoming student challenges. Issues exist with how to design integrated support programs (Bordelon et al., 2019; Swift et al., 2019). Comprehensive support programs ensure issues around equity and social justice are addressed for student college success (Means & Pyne, 2017). Colleges and universities are leaning toward an integrated model (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Ways to bring faculty, alumni, employers, and families closer to create a network of support to impact student challenges are beginning to be investigated at colleges (Arnold, 2018). The gap in the literature is the insufficient exploration of the challenges for all first-generation college students and the need to provide effective comprehensive support programs addressing these needs (Gibbons et al., 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017).

Chapter Summary

Retention and success rates for students are critical for colleges and universities. The significant issues confronting first-generation college students are at the forefront of higher education (Everett, 2015; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Many support programs exist throughout the higher education system. The literature review focused on issues facing all college students and the barriers of first-generation students, as well as the challenges of navigating the student support programs for the successful completion of college. Navigating student support programs is complex and requires relationship building between first-generation

college students and faculty, administrators, and advisors. Colleges and universities provide a range of successful programs, including bridge designs transitioning first-generation college students from high school to college, TRIO services providing guidance, and academic interventions accommodating tutoring and mentoring for students (Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). Despite these programs positively impacting first-generation college students, the scholars do not feel connected to others on campus and have enhanced feelings of not belonging (Means & Pyne, 2017).

This chapter contained an overview of the literature on first-generation college students and the need for comprehensive programs. The first section of the literature review covered issues confronting all college students, such as student retention and the underlying issues which could impact the ability to complete a degree (Manyanga et al., 2017). The second section was comprised of issues facing first-generation college students with the ability to complete college. Emphasis was placed on students navigating support programs and the need for integrated services (Gibbons et al., 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017; Toutkoushian et al., 2018). The literature review established the basis for the methodology identified in Chapter 3.

The analysis, data collection, and methodology applied for the instrumental case study are presented in Chapter 3. Validity, reliability, and objectivity in the research methodology are addressed in the research method design. Ethical procedures are introduced.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Cataldi et al. (2018) stated the number of first-generation college students is increasing. First-generation college students face academic, psychological, social, cultural, and financial challenges transitioning to a college campus (Radunzel, 2017). As a result of these obstacles, the majority of students drop out because they lack the proper resources or necessary services for specific needs (Schwartz et al., 2018). The purpose of the applied qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors regarding comprehensive support programs. The study was necessary to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects within the curriculum are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of first-generation college students regarding comprehensive support intervention programs?

Research Question 2: What are the perspectives of college staff members regarding comprehensive support intervention programs for first-generation college students?

Research Question 3: What are the best practices of college staff members to support a transformational change within the higher education system for first-generation college students?

An instrumental case study was used to outline the lack of understanding among faculty members, administrators, and advisors to provide comprehensive support programs designed for first-generation college students. Means and Pyne (2017) noted the need to implement comprehensive support programs within colleges to address issues of equity and social justice and the lack of sense of belonging for first-generation college students. Students may continue to

drop out and not gain the upward economic and social mobility benefiting other college students if guidance is not provided for navigating comprehensive support programs (Mead, 2018).

The chapter includes an explanation of the research method and design, which provides the rationale. The role of the researcher reveals the relationship with the participants. The target population and sampling method consist of the individuals within the study. The instrumentation section includes the tools to collect data: focus groups, in-depth interviews, and documents. The data collection and data analysis comprise how the information was collected and interpreted. Finally, the chapter includes the issues of validation and reliability, ethical procedures, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated the basis for qualitative research is to explore a social or human problem with the process of understanding in a natural setting through the meanings of the participants. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because the investigation involved interpretations and meanings of individuals and groups within a social problem setting within higher education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An instrumental case study design was used to explore the issues of first-generation college students, among faculty members, administrators, and advisors, and the need for comprehensive support programs. Harrison et al. (2017) noted case study design can address the *what* questions of an issue and evaluate complex issues in context. Variation of individual experiences within a single case can provide for the generalization of results (Zittoun, 2017). The focus of the instrumental case study was to understand relationships leading to categorical aggregation and how the phenomenon can relate across several studies (Ridder, 2017).

The instrumental case study was a single embedded research design with several subunits of analysis centering on first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors (Yin, 2018). The embedded instrumental investigation allowed for comparisons between first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors. Harrison et al. (2017) stated cases are chosen to produce similar or contrasting findings of the issue. Yazan (2015) noted Stake's (1995) beliefs in the bounded case study as an integrated system considering the interrelationships between the phenomenon and the situation. Stake pointed out the use of vignettes or storytelling is important to portray aspects of the case. Yin (2018) identified a single analysis, known as a common case, creates a snapshot of an everyday situation. The goal of the application approach is to generalize theories and not extrapolate probabilities.

Case study design is based on constructivist paradigm. Yin (2018) noted the different perspectives of the participants will add diverse meaning to the case study. Stake (1995) recognized constructivism provides justification for the narrative descriptions with interpretations of others. The qualitative case study included rich data through interviews and focus groups to uncover the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors. The interactions of faculty members, administrators, advisors, and first-generation college students are essential to support a transformational change for the students. The case study benefited the first-generation college students by analyzing the emic perspectives of the various participants of what is and is not working with support programs.

Role of the Researcher

The investigator was a skilled interviewer and archival analyst throughout the qualitative case study to develop a rapport with the students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors to build trust and to avoid any bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There were no conflicts of interest

with the participants. Ethical protocol was followed to limit bias throughout the study. The interviewer's relationship with the participants was professional. Reflexivity was utilized throughout the research process which enabled self-awareness during interviews to minimize influence with bias (Leavy, 2017).

Research Procedures

The research procedures comprise the sampling strategy and various inclusion and exclusion criteria for sample selection. A range of participants is described, and recruitment steps are outlined. The instrumentation subsection includes the tools used to collect the data.

Population and Sample Selection

The target population included first-year first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors on the East Coast institution and was estimated to be 5,000 people (Wells & Bettencourt, 2019). The sample size included 26 participants consisting of first-year first-generation undergraduates, faculty members, administrators, and advisors who had experience with first-generation college programs from a four-year institute located on the East Coast of the United States. Purposive criterion sampling was used to select the participants (Ames et al., 2019). Each prospective participant had to be either a first-year first-generation college learner or a faculty member, administrator, or advisor who worked with first-generation college programs. Participants were recruited from the educational community of the college. The members were selected on a first-come, first-served basis.

To recruit participants, an information session was held at the four-year university to explain and identify all criteria for first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors who may participate in the study (see Appendix A). The prospective participants who volunteered for the study received an informed consent form to review and sign

prior to participation (see Appendix B). After the signatures were received, two e-mail messages were sent, one about the focus group and the other about the interview date and time (see Appendices C and D). Signorelli et al. (2018) noted scheduling interviews through e-mails was more effective than calling on the phone.

Instrumentation

Focus groups, in-depth interview questions, and program policy documents comprised the sources used to collect data. The study consisted of focus groups which involved 15 participants and one 60-minute in-depth interview with 17 of the participants. Program policy documents encompassed the mission, objections, and the standard operating procedures of the university. The most important ideas and themes come from the data collected through interviews in a qualitative study (Weller et al., 2018). Saturation may occur in a small sample size with extensive probing once the most salient ideas are gathered (Weller et al., 2018).

Focus group inquiries were constructed to improve understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In-depth interview questions were created to capture the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors. Key themes from the literature review were modified from Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and used to develop the interview questions (see Appendices E, F, and G). Merriam and Tisdell stated semistructured interview questions helped to focus on specific issues, while broader open-ended questions allowed an investigator to listen for rich contributions. Further, the importance of the interviewer–respondent interaction is to be free of biases and judgments to allow exploration of the issues. Several types of interview questions relating to the participants' experiences, behaviors, opinions, values, feelings, knowledge, and background were necessary to stimulate responses (Patton, 2015).

Focus groups provided interactive discussion among the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus groups were comprised of 15 participants which included first-generation college students, administrators, and an advisor. The focus group participants were afforded sufficient space and time for micro-dynamics of power to be performed within the discussion in order to allow valuable insights (Ayrton, 2019). There were no concerns with the interviewer managing power within the group and the focus group discussions flowed smoothly within the parameters of the issue. Information from the focus group questions (see Appendix E) provided knowledge which could not have been collected through in-depth interviews (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). In-depth interview questions (see Appendices F and G) were created to understand the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors on the need to provide effective comprehensive support programs. Sensitive descriptive data regarding the phenomenon can be revealed through in-depth interview questions (Guest et al., 2017). The in-depth interview questions, with *how* queries, were asked to frame the types of responses received from participants (Jepson, Abbott, & Hastie, 2015). Five subject matter experts in the fields of education and psychology reviewed and provided expertise on the in-depth interview questions (see Appendix H). The focus group and in-depth interviews were recorded using a digital recorder for accuracy. Probing inquiries followed to seek more information or clarify details (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Program policy documents from the four-year university were reviewed and analyzed to study the structure of the college programs. Program policy documents encompassed the mission, objections, and the standard operating procedures of the university. The program policy documents were obtained through the university website. Program documents may enable the researcher to verify information and make inferences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Krysiwski

(2018) noted document reviews should enable the investigator to gather background information, providing more insight. Yazan (2015) asserted using multiple sources of evidence may help link the initial research question with the final conclusion.

Data Collection

Data collected for this study came from three sources: program policy documents obtained from the university website, focus groups, and 17 in-depth interviews. Documents were collected to obtain information about the support programs available to first-generation college students. Shaw (2018) noted the importance of reviewing organizational documents before conducting interviews.

The program policy documents were reviewed and notes were taken about the content on a laptop computer. During the review of the documents, care was taken to exclude records with a prior version of the current policy which would contain obsolete information. The official documents were public and stored on a password-protected laptop kept in a locked office and would not require additional security.

Focus groups were used to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of a group of people toward a particular topic (Ilgaz, 2019). The focus groups included first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors. The focus groups were comprised of 15 participants which included first-generation college students, administrators, and an advisor. The focus group participants were afforded sufficient space and time for micro-dynamics of power to be performed within the discussion in order to allow valuable insights (Ayrton, 2019). There were no concerns with the interviewer managing power within the group and the focus group discussions flowed smoothly within the parameters of the issue. The focus groups, conducted at a date and time convenient for the participants, were

expected to last 60 minutes. The ability of focus groups to foster discussion and alter opinions in addition to providing direct responses is important (Then, Rankin, & Ali, 2014). The protocol for conducting the focus groups (see Appendix I) was based on Krueger and Casey's (2015) model. The list of focus group questions is in Appendix E.

Recording the focus groups and all interviews using an online conferencing tool (Zoom) was planned. Pseudonyms were used for the participants, and all data collected regarding identifiable information were removed to ensure anonymity. The interview recordings were stored on a password-protected laptop and kept in a locked office. The data were encrypted to protect participant privacy (Schmidlin, Clough-Gorr, & Spoerri, 2015).

The hard copy of the transcript from the focus group interview was stored in a locked filing cabinet. Maintaining a journal to capture reflections on any biases is important while analyzing the data (Yin, 2018). The journal and reflexive field notes taken during the interview process were kept in a separate notebook and stored in a locked filing cabinet in a home office. All data will be retained for three years in accordance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 2019c) and thereafter will be destroyed with a shredder and deleted from the Google Drive.

Stake (1995) noted in-depth interviews can be used to gather clear statements, depictions, connections, and interpretations of the issue. Each interview via an online conferencing tool was scheduled for 60 minutes at a date and time convenient for the participant. Probing and prompting questions (see Appendices F and G) were necessary for this study (Weller et al., 2018).

An in-depth interview protocol was used to help strengthen the data and provide for flexibility and openness within the qualitative study (see Appendix J; Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

The protocol framework involved a four-phase process: (a) interviewing inquiries aligning with research questions, (b) composing an inquiry-based conversation, (c) obtaining feedback, and (d) piloting the protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The lists of in-depth interview questions are provided in Appendices F and G. Interview questions can be divided into four subcomponents: introductory, transitory, valuable insight, and closing. The in-depth interviews were conducted and recorded via an online conferencing tool.

An opportunity to debrief the participants was provided at the end of the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Cruz and Tania (2017) noted debriefing allows participants to ask questions, provide feedback, and give further insight into the data collected during the interviews. Participant debriefing experiences included substantial variability in the content, format, and general quality of examining practices (Brody, Gluck, & Aragon, 2000).

Data Analysis

The recordings from the focus groups and participant interview material were transcribed using an online service for data security. The transcripts were given to the respective participants for member checking to verify the information, provide any further insights, and allow inaccurate data to be removed from further analysis. Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, and Rees (2017) described member checking as helping the investigator further understand the data from the insights of the participants.

Data analysis involves making sense out of the information, reading through the evidence collected, coding the details for meaning, organizing themes, and forming results through an interpretation of the details (Belotto, 2018). The transcripts of the focus groups and in-depth interviews were converted into rich text format and uploaded into NVivo for coding. NVivo was used to organize and store the data collected into a single file. Once the data were organized, the

codes were put into categories and analyzed for themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Notes taken during the interviews were summarized using paper and pencil. Analytic memoing was used as a tool to synthesize the ideas collected in each interview (Saldaña, 2016).

Coding involves analyzing and interpreting the information collected by linking the data to a concept (Saldaña, 2016). Making decisions using unconscious routines refers to *heuristic* (a Greek word meaning *discover*) coding (Ryan, Duignan, Kenny, & McMahon, 2018). The process of coding includes assembling the data into categories of information, using a word or phrase to symbolically capture the evidence from the study, and assigning a label to the code (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). Data analysis included in vivo codes which depicted the words and phrases from participants; process coding to track down action in the information; value coding to represent the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the individuals interviewed; and emotion coding to sketch the sentiments for the first-generation experiences.

The first-cycle coding allowed categories to form through shared characteristics of the data (Saldaña, 2016). After coding the information, categorizing the data enabled the researcher to organize the information by specific characteristics. An outline with categories and subcategories was created to find themes among the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors regarding student support programs. The second-cycle coding involved pattern translating to identify emergent themes and flow of actions in the interview data to reorganize into a smaller list of categories and themes.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity have four main components: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Cypress (2017) described the importance of rigor with reliability and validity in a qualitative case study. Pandey and Patnaik (2014) noted the

importance of trustworthiness in a qualitative research study to lead to generalizability of the research findings. Multiple sources of data allow for reliability and validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility is the ability for the research to be plausible (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Building trust and rapport with the participants in addition to the participants reviewing the material from the focus groups and the interviews established credibility. Triangulation using multiple sources, such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, and program policy documents, and member checks cross-checking the data from the focus group interviews and in-depth interviews built credibility. Yazan (2015) noted the importance of researchers validating the research through triangulation. Case study management involved utilizing multiple sources of evidence, linking chains of evidence, member checking, and creating patterns and analytic generalizations through internal and external validity and reliability. Participants had the opportunity to member-check the data collected from the interviews for accuracy and authenticity (Weinbaum & Onwuegbuzie, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to describe the findings in sufficient detail using thick description in order to transfer or apply the findings to other settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transferability was obtained by providing detailed descriptions of the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors. Pandey and Patnaik (2014) stated specific information leads to evaluations based on the transfer of conclusions to another research setting.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the findings being consistent and the ability to be captured again (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Establishing an inquiry audit showed how the data were collected, analyzed, and interpretations made throughout the qualitative case study (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). The repetitive process allows outsiders to see any problems which may exist with the research findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability confirms the value of the data is based on the information received from the participants and not the investigator's preferences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Confirmability was obtained by an audit trail to document processes and interpretations of data throughout the qualitative case study. The audit trail consisted of the data collection, analysis, and report of the research findings. A reflexive journal was kept throughout the research to reflect on any personal values or interests (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).

Ethical Procedures

The USDHHS (2019b) provides the code of federal regulations for the protection of human subjects. Protecting participants' identification is important to build trust. Azim (2018) noted, to gain trust between the participant and the researcher, all personally identifiable information should be kept confidential and a participant's right to privacy be protected at all times throughout the research. *The Belmont Report* provides three basic ethical principles for the protection of human subjects of biomedical and behavioral research: respect for persons to enter into the research voluntarily and with all related information for the study, beneficence with avoiding harm and maximizing benefits, and justice in fairness with selecting participants.

Adashi, Walters, and Menikoff (2018) stated the importance of informed consent with respect for persons as one of the ethical principles within *The Belmont Report*. Informed consent provided protections to the participants in this qualitative case study by giving the purpose of the research, disclosing the voluntary nature, and ensuring the respondents' information will be kept confidential (see Appendix B). The informed consent form combined all three basic ethical principles for the protection of human subjects. The American College of Education requires the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to review all applications for a research study to assure the principles of ethics are followed. The IRB approved the qualitative case study and any related participant forms (see Appendices K, L, and M).

All participant data collected and analyzed throughout this qualitative case study will be retained for three years in accordance with 45 CFR 46 (USDHHS, 2019b). Coding and pseudonyms replaced participants' identifiable information to protect the confidentiality of participants. Confidentiality of the participant information was further secured by including a password-protected file, portfolio, and laptop kept locked in a cabinet at the home office with no one else having access. No ethical issues occurred. After three years, data will be destroyed by shredding the material and deleting the information from the Google Drive (USDHHS, 2019c).

Chapter Summary

The justification for the qualitative case study was detailed in Chapter 3. The research design was appropriate for this study to gain an insider's perspective of first-generation students and the academic, psychological, social, cultural, and financial challenges of transitioning to a college campus (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Radunzel, 2017). An instrumental case study was found to be relevant to explore the issues of first-generation college students, among faculty members, administrators, and advisors, and the need for comprehensive support programs. Stake (1995)

noted the use of an instrumental case study to provide an understanding of the case selected and maximizing what can be learned from the research.

The role of the investigator involved building a rapport with the participants. The research procedures included the population sample and procedures for recruiting participants in the study. In the instrumentation subsection, tools used throughout the study were identified. The organization and interpretation of the participant data were described.

Reliability and validity were described with the concepts of credibility and trustworthiness, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility involved the trustworthiness of the data. Transferability described the data in detail. Dependability was achieved by providing an inquiry audit for others to evaluate the accuracy of the findings, interpretations, and conclusions supported by the data. Confirmability ensured the research was based on the participant experiences and the ability to be corroborated by others. Ethical procedures involved protecting the identity and confidentiality of the participants.

In the following chapter, the results of the study and findings comprise the data collection and analysis and the reliability and validity of the research. The data analysis is presented in separate sections and involves a description of how the information was secured, prepared, sorted, categorized, and coded. The results are organized by research question and theme and supported by specific representative data.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results

The overall rate for college students completing a bachelor's degree is 58.3% (Shapiro et al., 2018). The risk of students dropping out is much greater for first-generation college learners who face financial burdens and often work long hours to satisfy school charges than for non-first-generation college students (Quinn et al., 2019). Students face many hurdles financially, academically, psychologically, and socially while transitioning into college which may cause those learners to leave. The problem addressed in the qualitative case study was students are not getting the proper support from faculty, administrators, and advisors who do not understand the needs of first-generation college students (Manyanga et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2018). The purpose of the qualitative case study in a large, urban, East Coast university was to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support interventions and the need for comprehensive support programs designed for students.

The research findings and data analysis are organized into four sections comprising data collection, data analysis, reliability and validity, and summary. The data collection components consist of the tools, protocols, and procedures. In addition to the research questions, the detailed processes for the coding system, themes, and any discrepancies are included in the data analysis. The credibility, reliability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability details are presented with the summary.

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of first-generation college students regarding comprehensive support intervention programs?

Research Question 2: What are the perspectives of college staff members regarding comprehensive support intervention programs for first-generation college students?

Research Question 3: What are the best practices of college staff members to support a transformational change within the higher education system for first-generation college students?

Data Collection

Data were collected from 26 participants via four small focus groups and 17 in-depth interviews in a virtual environment. Due to a significant event, the IRB approved the virtual in-depth interview changes on March 27, 2020, and the virtual focus group interviews on April 16, 2020 (see Appendices L and M). Selection criteria included first-year first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors who have experience with first-generation college programs and were involved in the educational community of a large, urban, East Coast university. A total of 26 participants expressed interest in participating in the qualitative case study, and all 26 participated.

The data collection phase was conducted between March 9 and June 25, 2020. On March 4, 2020, an invitation letter containing a brief outline of the study (see Appendix A) and informed consent form (see Appendix B) were presented in an information session to potential participants by the head of the First-Generation Low-Income Program on the campus of a large, urban, East Coast university. A follow-up e-mail was sent to each participant to schedule the focus group (see Appendix C) and in-depth interview (see Appendix D). A follow-up e-mail was sent confirming the date and time for the in-depth interview and focus group along with a copy of the informed consent form. The informed consent forms were signed and returned by all 26 participants who participated in the in-depth interview and focus group.

Data collected for the study were from three sources: program policy documents obtained from the university website, four small focus groups of 15 participants total, and 17 in-depth

interviews. Program policy documents encompassed the mission, objectives, and the standard operating procedures of the university. Upon review of the policy documents, notes were taken and stored on a password-protected laptop kept in a locked office. The interview protocol was utilized for the focus groups (see Appendix I) and in-depth interviews (see Appendix J) which consisted of reviewing the ground rules of confidentiality, open discussion, purpose, and protection of confidentiality of participants. Focus group interviews (see Appendix E) and in-depth interviews (see Appendix F) served as the primary tools for data collection. In-person in-depth interviews were recorded using the iPhone 8 voice memo function; the average interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Virtual in-depth interviews were recorded using Zoom online software. Each of the four small focus groups was recorded using Zoom and lasted an average of 60 minutes. Upon completion of the interviews, participants received a thank you for participating e-mail and a request to review the respective transcripts for accuracy (see Appendix N).

Audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups were uploaded to the Rev.com password-protected account for transcription. The transcripts were cross-checked against the audio recordings for accuracy and then downloaded to a Microsoft Word document and revised, with all nonparticipant-generated information removed to prepare for the coding phase. Pseudonyms were used for the participants to ensure anonymity. A copy of the transcript was provided to each respective participant to review for accuracy and to correct any discrepancies for member checking. Suggestions for revisions of transcripts were received from participants and included spellings of “FIGLI” to “FGLI,” “kappa” to “CAPA,” and “Libraries Community” to “Libraries Community Engagement.”

Deviations and Significant Events

A significant and unusual event occurred during the data collection phase: the COVID-19 global pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the city and surrounding counties were forced on lockdown beginning March 17, 2020, until further notice. Additionally, all students on the East Coast campus were ordered to go home until the Fall 2020 term. Changes were made to the proposal from conducting in-person interviews to conducting the remainder of the in-depth interviews and focus groups with an online conferencing tool. The IRB approved the virtual in-depth interview changes on March 27, 2020, and the virtual focus group interviews on April 16, 2020 (see Appendices L and M). As a result, only six interviews were conducted in person at the public library between March 9 and March 11, 2020. The other 11 interviews were virtual interviews and were recorded using Zoom online software between March 28 and June 25, 2020. The four small focus groups were recorded using Zoom between April 19 and April 24, 2020. There was a total of 26 participants which participated in the in-depth interviews and focus groups.

Participant Sociodemographics

The qualitative case study participants were first-year first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, or advisors who had experience with first-generation college programs and/or were involved in the educational community of a large, urban, East Coast university. Data were collected from 26 participants using in-depth interviews and focus groups. Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sociodemographics of Participants

Characteristic	Frequency	In-depth interview	Focus group
Participants			
First-generation students	14	12	9
Faculty	1	1	0
Administrators	7	1	5
Advisors	4	3	1
Total	26	17	15
Gender			
Female	14	11	5
Male	12	6	10
Total	26	17	15
Ethnicity			
White	14	5	11
Asian	4	4	1
Black or African American	5	5	1
Hispanic or Latino	3	3	2
Total	26	17	15

Data Analysis and Results

Analyzing the data required reviewing all the information, coding for details, identifying themes, and understanding and forming the results (Belotto, 2018). No epiphanies or significant revelations arose from the use of the data instruments. The transcripts of the focus groups and in-depth interviews from Rev.com were converted into rich text format and uploaded in NVivo for coding. NVivo was used to analyze, store, and categorize the data into codes and organize the codes for themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Notes taken during the focus groups and in-depth interviews were used as a tool to synthesize the ideas collected through the process of analytic memoing (Saldaña, 2016).

Coding was used to link the data for themes (Saldaña, 2016). Words and phrases were depicted using in vivo coding, actions were depicted through process coding, value coding exposed attitudes and beliefs of the individuals being interviewed, and the feelings were captured with emotion coding for the experiences of the first-generation college students and staff members. The coding involved two cycles. The first cycle of coding involved connecting the data into categories (Saldaña, 2016). In the second cycle of coding, themes emerged from the patterns found throughout the coding associations and were reorganized into a smaller list of categories.

The data analysis involved providing an overview of the themes and codes used in the data collection coding process. The three overarching themes—collaborative support, integrated support, and transformative changes—were developed from the coding analysis. Collaborative support included first-generation college students' need to connect with others and build relationships within a comprehensive support program. Integrated support involved process changes aiding a more all-inclusive environment within a comprehensive support program. Transformative changes incorporate the best practices for the higher education industry to create transformational change. The themes and codes used for the data analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and Codes Used for Analysis

Theme	Codes
Collaborative support	Sense of belonging Social equality Connection with others Systemic resources Navigation with a trusted advisor Low socioeconomic status Academic readiness Developing supportive relationships Cultural understanding
Integrated support	Holistic needs of the students Supportive relationships Cultural integration
Transformative changes	Comprehensive support Sustainable relationships Cultural competence

Discrepancies in the need for support for first-generation college students were found during data analysis. Twenty-three participants reported the need for academic, social, and financial support services, while one believed there was no need to seek support services. P5 stated,

So I think in a lot of cases, like, I didn't actually use many of the programs that were available to me, for a variety of reasons, either because, like, I didn't feel like I needed those resources and I thought they could better help other students instead who might need them more so.

Two participants noted being uncomfortable seeking help for the services. P13 stated,

And so that took a really long time to really feel confident and to feel like I could really take advantage of the resources there, because to me, anytime that I remember—someone, one time I was really struggling in my calculus class, and someone was like, “Well, just get a tutor or, like, go to tutoring,” and to me it felt like, if I took advantage of those resources, it would just prove that I should not be at this university, that I didn’t have what it took to be there. So that was really hard.

P24 noted, “I didn’t feel like I was entitled to the professor’s time, I didn’t feel like I was entitled to take up space in the classroom.”

As the data were reviewed, categories were created through an inductive approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative study involved a social problem which revealed themes surrounding the issues of first-generation college students. The three overarching themes were collaborative support, integrated support, and transformative changes.

Collaborative Support

The theme of collaborative support was linked to Research Question 1, What are the perspectives of first-generation college students with comprehensive support intervention programs? Collaborative support was additionally established as a key component of the needs of first-generation college students. The perspectives of first-generation college students with comprehensive support intervention programs were identified as (a) the need to belong with others in the campus environment, (b) a desire for social equality, (c) the influence of connecting with others, (d) having systemic resources within the programs, (e) the requirement to navigate resources with a trusted advisor, (f) amplification of the awareness of the stigma associated with low socioeconomic status, (g) the importance of academic readiness, (h) the significance of

developing supportive relationships, and (i) the ability for others to understand the various cultures of first-generation college students. The participants reported the desire for collaborative assistance within the comprehensive support intervention programs. Collaborative support represents the social, psychological, and academic infrastructure stemming from the challenges faced by the learners. P24 stated, “But again, it all started off, like, I felt extremely far behind as a first-generation student because I lacked a lot of the academic, social, and professional capital that my non-first-generation or maybe wealthier counterparts had.” P23 noted,

Besides the adjustment, just having friends who had parents who went to college and they kind of felt like they were ahead of the game and I was always trying to catch up in terms of academics, and then also in terms of trying to find internships, jobs, and then kind of knowing what I exactly wanted to do and how I was going to do it after graduation.

Transitioning into college may be overwhelming, and collaborative support highlighted the social, psychological, financial, and academic issues facing the participants. The collaborative support framework describes the necessary structure for the students. The first-generation college students who had experiences with the comprehensive support intervention programs disclosed the three highest needs while integrating into college. The three highest needs of first-generation college students are described in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of Codes Related to the Collaborative Support Theme

Code	Frequency
Sense of belonging	14
Social equality	12
Connection with others	14

Sense of belonging. The sense of belonging code reflected the students' need to belong and the influence on the college experience for the first-generation college students. Challenges with the need to belong were present with the transition of students on campus. Collaborative support from peers, faculty, administrators, and advisors served as the catalyst for the students within the community network. All 14 first-generation college students noted the significance of belonging. P11 stated, "I felt alone at times, felt misunderstood, I felt as if people saw me as less, and I think it also had something to do with my Mexican background." P15 stated,

Because physically literally I looked different, I act different. To recognizing that when I entered college was a very huge awakening for me, to understand my place in the world, to now work against it, and how to work within it. And how do I make myself, how do I adjust and adapt?

The importance of adapting to the college environment had an impact on the learners. P3 noted, "When I did feel like I belong in this space is when I learned more and addressed where I had an issue and so someone coming in would not have the same crisis as I did." The participant's need to belong reflected the importance of the desire for all participants to be

included within the college environment. Understanding the struggles of the students and the feelings of inferiority are vital components for collaborative support. Setting up an environment complete with synergistic support is necessary for the retention of students.

Social equality. The code of social equality represented the participants' experiences with identity and culture as first-generation college students. All 14 first-generation college students desired to create social equity. P15 noted, "I thought I was exiting one system for oppression and then I enter this new system of, like, higher education and recognize that I was at the bottom of the whole hierarchy." P4 stated,

So I wasn't that poor and I'm a female, but I'm not a diversified population. I'm Caucasian, I'm White, so I felt they were never talking to me. I felt like I was the missed generation, where they usually want to talk to those that are in such a struggling position or such a suppressed population that they know how to speak to them. But when you're right on the cusp of being hard working, but not knowing I felt like I was being ignored.

The participants reflected the importance of social equality for all first-generation college students. Nine of the 14 participants were minorities and noted ethnicity was a significant part of feeling inferior to nonminorities within the college environment. The feeling of inferiority made the participants' fitting into the university setting more difficult. Five White participants (a) referenced being frustrated with not being able to get financial help because of not being poor enough and (b) linked having money with inequality. One White participant felt her middle-class status hindered her ability to get financial aid and the necessary resources to allow her to afford college. Social equality was recognized as important to inspire the learners transitioning into higher education. Social equality was noted as a key component by the students.

Connection with others. The connection with others code served to show the eagerness of participants to relate to others. All 14 first-generation college students mentioned the importance of connecting with others. P13 stated, “So, like, at [student program], I got connected with other students that were running a magazine on campus, and I eventually became the editor-in-chief.” P24 revealed, “And I think being able to touch into that kind of network made me feel a lot more empowered.” P7 noted,

I think just kind of getting to meet people that are first-gen but also maybe a different religion or whatever. It just kind of helps you to broaden your base of friends you can go to, because I think you can find a common identity in being a first-generation student. So, kind of just strengthening a lot of connections I think will be good.

All the participants referenced the need to connect with other first-generation college students as an integral part of feeling motivated in the college setting. The learners felt the need to interact with others as a component to belonging to the community of first-generation college students. Being a first-generation college student was a commonality which allowed the learners to bond. The connection with other students enabled the learners to broaden the network and form a group with a common purpose. A community and sense of belonging give first-generation college students confidence and establish an identity for learners.

Systemic resources. The systemic resources code involved the importance of linking the resources to meet the needs of first-generation college students. Connecting resources which are accessible to all learners is invaluable. All 14 first-generation college students recognized the significance of setting up a system supporting the learners. Participant P3 noted, “Initially it was handled on a case-by-case basis, but we had this commonality that was underneath every case that they dealt with asking for a systemic approach.”

P4 stated:

Getting the 101 of how the university works. What's the university systems. What is a registrar. What is a provost, what is the bursar's office, what are the systems of a university, and how those systems all work to get you through to get the degree, because there's a lot of smart people that have not finished college because they didn't understand the system.

Systemic resources were referenced as the supporting mechanisms with college staff. A critical component for first-generation college students is to understand the logistics of each program and how the programs interrelate to facilitate the path of the students through college. The learners identified the need to have guidance within a university environment. Understanding how the components are intertwined was a critical element. Creating an environment in which the learners can freely access systemic resources available to all first-generation college students is important.

Navigation with a trusted advisor. The navigation with a trusted advisor code represented the significance for staff to build trust while helping first-generation college students navigate college-provided resources. All 14 first-generation college students referenced the importance for advisors to listen and have trust with navigating the social, financial, psychological, and academic resources available to all students, particularly for the needs of first-generation college students. P13 stated, "And just making me feel like, oh, I'm not alone in this. I can help. Someone can help me navigate this, and I can help someone along the road navigate this as well."

P11 revealed:

And how I can just sit there and talk about all of my problems and she would empathize and listen to what I was going through. If there was something that she couldn't help you with and she knew there was another program on campus to help me, then she would point me in that direction.

The trusted advisors helped build confidence for the participants while navigating the system. The learners needed to be with someone throughout the process. The critical element of listening is a key component for students with understanding the guidance. The importance for the student to realize the trust of the advisor is invaluable. A crucial issue for students is to acknowledge the sincerity and support of the counselor. The advisor listens, empathizes, and directs the students through the maze of college life.

Low socioeconomic status. The code of low socioeconomic status was created to highlight the awareness of the differences in social status and the stigma associated with first-generation college students. Nine of the 14 first-generation college students identified as having low socioeconomic status. P2 noted, "Just kind of seeing how everybody was from upper middle class or higher, and just kind of seeing how everybody's kind of experiences are shaped by these different upbringings."

P25 remarked,

But I will say that it was a really big culture shock to see the range of socioeconomic statuses range here because a lot of the students here are very wealthy, and I was not aware that it was the arena that I was going to put myself in. Because making friends and things like that—a lot of it is not really how I made friends, but students will go out together, they will go out to do things together. Things like that cost money that may not be as big of a deal to them and they might not be as sensitive to it as I am.

Low socioeconomic status was a stigma reported by the participants. Nine first-generation college students revealed the difference in socioeconomic status was part of the college environment and feeling of belonging. The other five first-generation college students were from a middle-class socioeconomic status and did not sense the same stigma. Being from a middle-class socioeconomic status was a hindrance in moving to a wealthier status for the five participants. Students were able to see the effects of wealth within the social aspects of the college. The example of wealth contributes to the creation of the barrier between students with different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Academic readiness. The academic readiness code is related to the knowledge and skills of first-generation college students upon entering college and the influence on the retention of learners. Inadequacy of academic preparedness was reflected in the learning of first-generation college students. All 14 first-generation college students reported challenges with academic readiness. P12 noted, “I feel like I’ve been held back; it’s like an uneven kind of playing field.” P15 stated, “My college essays were weaker than all the other students’. And I had to go to the writing center way more than anybody in my classes because of my grammar.” Students may seem inadequate and unprepared for the academic demands of college life. The learner could

develop low self-esteem and have subpar performance compared to other students. The lack of academic readiness may allow the students to lose engagement, fail, and drop out of school.

Academic readiness is a crucial component for the success of students and the college.

Successful students can add value to the communities.

Developing supportive relationships. The code of developing supportive relationships was found to be a significant factor with the first-generation college students in building close connections for increasing student confidence in the integration into college. All 14 first-generation college students felt the need to develop supportive relationships to be more comfortable in the university community. The learners acknowledged the ability of others to understand and empathize is a critical part of the framework surrounding the integration into higher education. P11 stated,

And I think one of the needs besides financial is just knowing that there is a group on campus that understands me. So I could be going through not a good time, and I could go to these support programs and they would understand me and they would empathize with me.

P2 noted,

We had more students and a lot more social programming that allowed us to interact with one another and get to know each other. On my side, it was very, very helpful for developing these relationships with faculty and staff. And then of course they introduce you to people that come through and visit, like, the dean would come once in a while or the previous provost. He will come and we will be able to chat with him on a very casual basis that kind of let you put names to faces and know where the resources were.

The participants reported the supportive relationships were a positive influence on the commitment of college learners. Students acknowledged empathy and understanding were critical elements contributing to a sense of purpose as well as developing a rapport with others. Interacting with the support staff is a key component of helping the learners connect to resources.

Cultural understanding. The cultural understanding code related to the participants' identifying the impact one's culture has on the learning and development of first-generation college students. Of the 14 first-generation college students, 12 indicated a lack of understanding of the culture of the learners. P2 stated, "It was hard to find that connection between myself and other White people our first time because they didn't understand our experiences." P15 revealed,

Because they [college staff members] didn't live through it, they really didn't understand the layers, because there were so many layers, right, in terms of not only class, not only race, not only gender, but there was all of these layers that I think some layers, like, connected with them, but on the others, I'm, like, okay, this is where we don't see each other.

The participants felt the need for others to understand how culture impacts the daily interactions of the students. The necessity for others to have lived experiences with cultural differences was crucial for the learners to be empowered and able to connect as first-generation college students. A key component within the college environment is the acknowledgment of culture.

Integrated Support

The integrated support theme was linked to Research Question 2, What are the perspectives of college staff members regarding comprehensive support intervention programs for first-generation college students? The college staff members identified a vision of an all-

inclusive environment to meet the holistic needs of students, developing supportive relationships, and building cultural integration around the needs of first-generation college students within the comprehensive intervention programs. Integrated support catering to the specific needs of each student was established through the staff members' relationships with the first-generation college students in the programs. The college staff members were committed to providing a network of resources for addressing all the social, psychological, financial, and cultural issues facing first-generation college students. Building a close rapport with the students inspired the learners to grow professionally. Mentoring, coaching, and counseling were found to be necessary services within the chain of support for the students.

P18 noted, "I really love doing work that kind of create pathways for students." Setting forth a network helps foster a place of unity and growth for the learners. P9 stated, "Now I get to be in the front, making and building infrastructure for first-generation students in a way that is more institutional than just ad hoc." The framework of integrated support through college staff members is a key component for the students to advance in higher education.

Holistic needs of the students. The code of holistic needs of the students reflected the responses of college staff members regarding how current resources may be adapted to serve the needs of first-generation college students better within the comprehensive support intervention programs. All 12 college staff members noted the importance of recognizing the support from a holistic view. Looking at the complete needs of the learner would be beneficial as students integrate into higher education. P10 indicated, "So the ideal program, which is looking at them holistically, the financial standpoint, the academic standpoint, the mental health standpoint, and the career coaching." P18 stated, "Resources that both help students get the financial support

they need but also help students navigate [courses], kind of like that hidden curriculum of higher ed.”

The resources available to the students were not sufficient to support the needs from a holistic standpoint. Communication of the student issues more fluently between the college staff members and the students may help the administrators develop programs to better adapt the services for first-generation college students. The accessibility of the programs is necessary to provide holistic support for the students.

Supportive relationships. The code of supportive relationships included the importance of the college staff members to provide a trusting partnership for first-generation college students within the roles of mentors, coaches, advisors, administrators, and faculty. The 12 college staff members noted the value of supportive relationships with the learners. As noted from P18, “Developing relationships with students and creating those spaces where students feel like they can build that relationship with you and be open and honest.” P1 stated,

So, when I meet with these students, it’s important for me to learn about the overall experience, not only within this institution but also prior to coming here because when you understand somebody’s experiences prior to the arrival to a new environment, it gives you a good understanding as to who they are.

The staff members’ ability to develop relationships helped build a safe secure network for the students. Understanding the experiences of learners is vital to create trust. Establishing a bond with first-generation students is essential to provide support.

Cultural integration. The code of cultural integration included the need to recognize the significance of culture related to first-generation college students within the work of college staff members. P1 stated, “To really support our first-generation students, we find a way to celebrate

their identities, that there was a community which belongs to first-generation [students].” P18 noted,

How do we understand each other? Because if we want education to be an equal level, like, equal playing field, I think that there needs to be a lot of work within knowing yourself and knowing the other so that we can adapt our behaviors, and adapt our thinking about the world.

One of the key components of cultural integration is the acknowledgment of the identity of first-generation college students. The college staff members’ ability to understand how the culture of the students is integrated throughout the journey of education was crucial for the personal and professional growth of the students. Adapting the behavior of college staff members is a key component for learners to grow within the college environment.

Transformative Changes

Transformative changes were linked to Research Question 3, What are the best practices of college staff members to support a transformational change within the higher education system for first-generation college students? All 26 participants from the interviews and focus groups recognized the need for best practices to support transformative changes within the higher education system for the integration and retention of first-generation college students in school. The best practices of college staff members were identified to highlight the integral support needed for a transformational change within the higher education system for first-generation college students. Transformational change is created by change agents who follow best practices to serve first-generation college students (Mayes & Gethers, 2018). Three best practices were revealed from the participants to help support the transformational change for first-generation college students within the higher education system: comprehensive support, sustainable

relationships, and cultural competence. Each of the best practices is discussed as follows (see Figure 2).

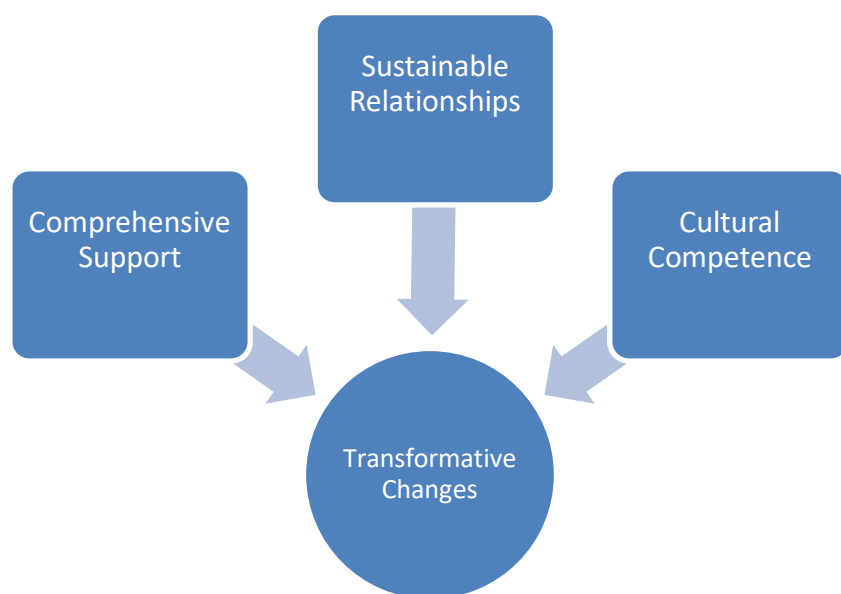


Figure 2. Transformative changes. This figure shows best practices for transformational change.

Comprehensive support. The code of comprehensive support represented the assimilation of services and programs provided by college staff for first-generation college students. Comprehensive support is a critical element of best practices to support all the needs of first-generation college students. Transformative changes within the college or university may be identified by a model framework consisting of a comprehensive support environment. The need for more comprehensive support is a vital part of best practices to support transformative changes within the higher education system for the integration and retention of first-generation college students.

Creating strategies to centralize resources was reported as a key component for comprehensive support. Building an infrastructure to reinforce equity and inclusion are fundamental for a comprehensive system. Designing accessibility within the network is crucial.

P1 stated, “And even, you know, the strategy piece, it is important. You know, it is important for higher education institutions to really find a way to help them to not only integrate your campus but also to graduate.” P14 commented, “While folks have good intentions with the advice they provide, bouncing a student around between resource buckets is not helpful and actually delays them from getting the help or the access that they’re actually seeking.” The desire for more comprehensive support was evident with P1 also. P1 stated,

But the fact that everything has to be centralized has made it more exciting to work here because we have a chance to fix what is, what we have in a more equitable way, and in a more accessible way to our students, without having to create everything from the ground.

Sustainable relationships. The code of sustainable relationships emerged which demonstrated how the influence of college staff members make a difference with first-generation college students. Building sustainable relationships may help with the retention of students linking to a transformative practice within higher education. Forming long-lasting bonds with first-generation college students is an integral part of the role of college staff members. Mentoring initiatives were reported as having an impact with the learners. Understanding the personal and professional needs is a key component with forming sustainable relationships. P1 stated, “I take time to learn about the background, their families, their passion and their interest, or check the challenges and failures, the feelings.” P19 stated, “They started referring lots of students for me to mentor, to talk to. And then I started to see this pattern of needs and started thinking about a better way to serve them.” The value of the daily interactions of college staff members made an impact on the students. P1 stated, “Because the faculty have almost daily interaction with students, you can impact those lives in greater detail than people that are not

faculty members, so I think universities need to do a better job in creating effective mentoring initiatives.”

Cultural competence. The cultural competence code was developed from recognizing the need for college staff members to build cultural awareness for first-generation college students in the programs. Cultural competence is an integral part of transformative practices for the assimilation of first-generation college students into higher education. P18 revealed, “One of the things that I’m learning is that we do need more representation of the types of administration and admins who reflect our student population, our student body.” P1 stated, “Break down those walls to create a more liberating and equitable college experience for all of your students.” P18 noted,

And I hope that I can be a beacon of light for students who can come to me and say, “I live abroad and I’m the only Black student in, or the only person in this program. And this is how I was treated, and this is how I feel.” And I can look at them and say, “I get it, I really get it” instead of somebody, which at the time, who looked at me and just said, “I’m so sorry that you had to live through that.”

Cultural competence sets forth the practices of incorporating cultural differences throughout the college environment. Creating more equitable experiences for first-generation college students was acknowledged as a key component. Providing the learners with college staff members who lived through the experience as first-generation college students is crucial for the students.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are an integral part of qualitative research. Consistency and accuracy of the data represent reliability and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus groups and

interviews utilizing open-ended questions were used to explore the issues of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors and the need for comprehensive support programs. The open-ended questions were reviewed by subject matter experts. Protocols were created for the focus groups (see Appendix I) and in-depth interviews (see Appendix J).

Credibility occurred through triangulation using multiple sources, such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, and program policy documents; through participants member checking the data from the focus groups and in-depth interviews for accuracy (see Appendix N); and through linking the data and creating patterns (Yazan, 2015).

Transferability was presented within the research findings through detailed descriptions of the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors. The participants were selected using purposive sampling in a large, urban, East Coast university. Confirmability was achieved through the data collection using a reflexive journal throughout the study, direct testimonies, and data analysis, and verified through transcripts of the research findings. Biases were reduced and controlled by refraining from engaging in social conversations throughout the interviews. Throughout the study, trust was developed with the participants and any biases were avoided (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An audit trail was utilized for dependability which consisted of a detailed data collection protocol, data collection log, and data collection checklist for the transcripts, questionnaires, and notes. The qualitative case study was strengthened with consistency by dependability and confirmability through triangulation and an audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Chapter Summary

Data collected were analyzed to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support interventions and

the need for comprehensive support programs designed for students. The qualitative case study consisted of 14 first-year first-generation college students, one faculty member, seven administrators, and four advisors who had experience with first-generation college student support programs on the campus of a large, urban, East Coast university. Three research questions governed the data collection, analysis, and presentation of results. Data collection included transcribed audio-recorded in-depth interviews and focus groups. The participants reviewed the transcripts for discrepancies to ensure proper representation. Themes and codes were reported from the participants' statements to capture the essence of the phrases.

Responses to Research Question One revealed the perspectives of first-generation college students regarding comprehensive support intervention programs. The perspectives of first-generation college students with comprehensive support intervention programs were identified along with the experiences of the learners and linked to the desire for collaborative support within the comprehensive support intervention programs. The desire for collaborative support was the most significant portion of the coded segments of the data analysis.

Research Question Two concerned the perspectives of college staff members regarding comprehensive support intervention programs. The perspectives of college staff members revealed the importance of integrated support for first-generation college students within the comprehensive support intervention programs. Integrated support represented the staff members' relationships with the first-generation college students in the programs.

College staff members' best practices to support a transformational change for first-generation college students within the higher education system were addressed in Research Question Three. Data analysis linked best practices of comprehensive support, sustainable

relationships, and cultural competence. The best practices are an integral part of comprehensive support intervention programs setting forth the groundwork for the needed changes.

Reflections on findings, interpretations, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and implications for leaders in higher education are the focus of the next chapter. The data analysis and research findings are related to the literature review. Recommendations for best practices in education are provided. The impact of transformational changes for educational leaders from the qualitative case study is presented. The theoretical frameworks of the student retention theory and the transformational leadership theory are applied as a focus for the implications for educational leaders.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Students face many academic, psychological, social, cultural, and financial challenges transitioning into college (Radunzel, 2017). The overall completion rate of college students between 2012 and 2018 was 58.3%, with approximately 40% of students leaving school during the same period (Shapiro et al., 2018; USDE, 2019b). First-generation college students are twice as likely as second-generation university learners to drop out of four-year institutions in the second year (Frogge & Woods, 2018). The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support interventions and the need for comprehensive support programs designed for students. The study was necessary to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students. The problem is students have not been getting the proper support from faculty, administrators, and advisors who may not understand the needs of first-generation college students. A more comprehensive approach for first-generation college students must focus on the challenges faced by learners as well as the effectiveness of the current support programs (Whitley et al., 2018). The qualitative case study was conducted to explore the challenges for all first-generation college students and the need to provide effective comprehensive support programs addressing these needs (Means & Pyne, 2017).

An instrumental case study design was used to explore the issues of first-generation college students, among faculty members, administrators, advisors, and the students, to support the need for comprehensive support programs. Data were collected from a sample of 26 participants who met the selection criteria of being either first-year first-generation college students, or faculty members, administrators, and advisors who had experience with first-

generation college programs and were involved in the educational community of a large, urban, East Coast university. The sample size included 14 first-generation college students, one faculty member, seven administrators, and four advisors. Fourteen participants were female and 12 were male. Fourteen participants were White, four were Asian, five were Black/African American, and three were Hispanic (see Table 1).

Data were collected using in-depth interviews and focus groups, which were recorded using the iPhone 8 voice memo and Zoom online software. The recordings were transcribed using Rev.com and analyzed using NVivo coding software. Protocols were put in place for the in-depth interviews and focus groups to ensure all ground rules of confidentiality for each participant. Pseudonyms were used to ensure participant anonymity.

Data analysis consisted of coding the information from the transcripts, categorizing the codes, and connecting the data to themes (see Table 2). The overarching theme of collaborative support emerged through exploring Research Question One —What are the perspectives of first-generation college students with comprehensive support intervention programs? Research Question Two—What are the perspectives of college staff members regarding comprehensive support intervention programs for first-generation college students?—included the broad theme of integrated support. Transformative changes were the overall theme which emerged from Research Question Three, What are the best practices of college staff members to support a transformational change within the higher education system for first-generation college students?

The data were analyzed to compare with the findings from the literature review. When comparing the study's findings to the literature review, a connection was found with the theoretical frameworks of student retention theory and transformational leadership theory linking student retention with transformative practices of transformational leaders. A more

comprehensive approach was needed for the support programs in place for first-generation college students (Whitley et al., 2018). Challenges exist in providing effective comprehensive support programs addressing the needs of first-generation college students (Means & Pyne, 2017).

The discussion and conclusion chapter includes the findings, interpretations, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and implications for leadership. Interpretations are presented in two sections, one in comparison to the literature and the other in comparison to the conceptual framework. Validity and reliability are described in the limitations of the study. The recommendations address policies and practices for further research. Implications for leadership identify and describe the methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications of the study's findings for educational leaders. The new knowledge and critical outcomes of the study are reflected in the conclusion.

Findings, Interpretations, Conclusions

Poor retention rates cost colleges \$14.5 billion a year (Poynton & Lapan, 2017). A third of first-generation college students are more likely to drop out within the first three years, compared to 26% of non-first-generation college students (Cataldi et al., 2018). College staff members work collectively to increase retention rates for learners (Silver Wolf et al., 2017). Postsecondary students face many academic, psychological, sociocultural, and financial challenges when transitioning to college (Radunzel, 2017). Without the proper resources for specific needs, learners drop out of school. The problem addressed in this qualitative case study was students are not getting the proper support from faculty, administrators, and advisors in understanding the needs of first-generation college students (Manyanga et al., 2017). Although support programs are in place for first-generation college students, focus on the clarity of the

effectiveness of support programs for a more comprehensive approach for first-generation college students is needed (Whitley et al., 2018). Comprehensive support programs should address issues of equity and social justice to create a sense of belonging for first-generation college students (Means & Pyne, 2017).

Minimal research has linked the needs of first-generation college students and a comprehensive framework which can provide the social and educational commitment from higher education to support the learners with assimilation and retention in college (Connolly, 2016). The shift in focus from institutional demands to the obligation to recognize the challenges of the students was addressed in the literature (Swift et al., 2019). The challenges of first-generation college students, the need for comprehensive support, as well as the importance of increasing retention rates were noted in Tinto's student retention theory (Connolly, 2016; Northouse, 2013). As referenced in the literature review, transformational leadership theory demonstrated leaders can empower others to create positive change (Northouse, 2013).

Findings in Comparison to the Literature

The gap in the literature reflects the insufficient exploration of the challenges for all first-generation students and the need to provide effective comprehensive support programs addressing these needs (Means & Pyne, 2017). The research gap was confirmed in the literature with the retention, social, and cultural capital issues facing first-generation college students and the recognition for comprehensive support programs (Gibbons et al., 2019; Toutkoushian et al., 2018). The importance of linking successful support programs with student retention was included in the literature (Manyanga et al., 2017).

Supportive relationships. Confirmed in the findings of the study was the overall influence of supportive relationships between first-generation college students and faculty,

administrators, counselors, and advisors to help build student confidence with integration on college campuses. Faculty, administrators, counselors, and advisors were noted in the literature as being crucial for the engagement of students (Basko & McCabe, 2018). College staff members as mentors and role models for students were a key focus with supportive relationships (McKinsey, 2016). All the participants emphasized the importance of having supportive relationships when integrating into college.

The ability of first-generation college students to connect with others was paramount throughout the research. Evident throughout the literature was the need for learners to sense a connection with others within the campus environment. Close connections with friends had a positive effect on retention (Bowman et al., 2019). Silver Wolf et al. (2017) noted an increase in the retention rates for students after working collaboratively with faculty, administrators, and advisors. The students' need to belong was essential and was associated with the capability to connect with others and be understood. Student perseverance within the college setting was linked to having a sense of belonging with others on campus (Davis et al., 2019). All the participants reflected the need to connect with others and a sense of belonging to the community as an integral part of being motivated to learn. Bonding with other first-generation college students who shared the same commonality helped to establish an identity for the learners and a sense of belonging within the college community which was reflected in the findings of the study.

Supportive relationships provide students with a trusted partnership through mentoring, coaching, or advising. Students come to the university with a variety of experiences prior to arriving at the college. The first-generation college student experiences are very personal coming from families with low income, and academic and psychological challenges which often

leave the students feeling behind the traditional student. Developing supportive relationships and networks can help build student confidence for long term sustainability in higher education.

Building trust. Building trust with college staff members helped raise students' confidence throughout the college experience while navigating resources geared toward first-generation college students. Almeida et al. (2019) noted the significant impact social and cultural capital have on students whose parents do not have college degrees. First-generation college students often lack social and cultural capital and need guidance from someone who listens and understands the struggles of the learners. The support of counselors and academic advisors was a key component which helped build trust with the students before, during, and after implementation of the programs (Gibbons et al., 2019).

The component of building trust emerged from the students' need to have devoted guidance while navigating the resources for first-generation college students. Understanding the learners' needs through the lens of first-generation college students was important for building trust and relationships with faculty through communities of practice focused on student learning (Schmid et al., 2016). The element of trust between students and faculty helps to provide a smoother journey through college and alleviates the lack of social and cultural capital.

Trust is earned by the students when others listen and empathize with the needs of first-generation college students. Faculty, administrators, and advisors who take the time to listen and understand the needs of first-generation college students are invaluable and were reflected in the findings of the study. Guidance received from the faculty, administrators, advisors, can help the student to understand not only how to navigate the system but to have better self-awareness of their strength and weaknesses. Mentoring, coaching, and advising students are precious gifts for the students to grow and flourish with a clear path along the college journey.

Integrating cultural competence. Integrating cultural competence throughout the college environment was evident in the findings from the study. Green and Wright (2017) noted the engagement, academic performance, and persistence of students increased when university representatives incorporated cultural competence throughout the learning environment. Throughout the present study, the participants acknowledged the importance for college staff members to understand the culture of oppression and being a first-generation college student as it relates to learning and development. Reflected in the findings of the study was the need for college staff to have lived experiences as a minority and first-generation college student. It was evident work needed to be done on college campuses to connect minority first-generation college students with White students to gain a better understanding of cultural differences. Attrition rates are higher for Black and Hispanic students than for Asian and White students (Shapiro et al., 2018). When students begin to acknowledge and learn from the various cultures within the classroom and on campus, students will begin to feel a sense of belonging and cultural competence will become cultural wealth. Programs which contain curriculum surrounded by the cultural wealth of the students will help strengthen retention rates.

Providing intervention programs to help students succeed is important to address the social gap between high- and low-income students (Chen & Starobin, 2019). The findings from the study reflected the socioeconomic problems associated with affording a college education. It was evident there were income inequities set within the university to subsidize the tuition for students who were poor which was then phased out with the students whose income were middle class. Creating an equitable pathway for first-generation college students was a significant factor within the study, with lower and middle-income participants wanting socioeconomic and cultural understanding within the university setting.

Manyanga et al. (2017) noted colleges and universities support traditional, nontraditional, transfer, and minority students from various socioeconomic and academic backgrounds and the success of the students is directly related to the setting of goals for the students. Reflected in the findings of the study was the importance of the university to acknowledge the identity of the first-generation student. The need for college staff members to adapt behaviors to understand how cultural upbringing can influence the learning and development of students and the success of the college was reflected in the findings from the study. A curriculum rich in diversified cultures and activities gives the students a sense of inclusion and creates an environment of cultural competence. The component of integrating cultural competence into higher education closely aligns with the transformative changes theme.

Transformational changes. Transformational changes were linked to best practices of college staff members to support first-generation college students and were validated throughout the study. The best practices were comprehensive support, sustainable relationships, and cultural competence. The necessary changes needed to support first-generation college students and the integration into higher education were reflected as best practices. The shift in using an integrated framework for a more inclusive environment with support programs serving the needs of college students, including first-generation college learners, was addressed in the literature (Hutchison, 2017). Whitley et al. (2018) noted comprehensive support programs are a key component of providing students access to a full range of services for integration into higher education. Comprehensive support was found in the study as a critical element to provide the model framework linking the services for intervention programs with first-generation college students.

The importance of faculty, administrator, advisor, and counselor mentoring of first-generation college students was revealed in the findings from the study. Kovach (2019) and

Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) noted the significant impact bonding and long-lasting relationships between college staff members and first-generation college students have on the retention of students. Sustainable relationships were revealed throughout the study as an integral part of the growth of students' personal and professional lives. Learners are motivated by support from families, peers, faculty, administrators, and staff as noted in the literature (Azmitia et al., 2018).

Cultural competence for college staff members to build awareness with the integration of first-generation college students into higher education was evident throughout the findings from the study. The importance of the students to learn from faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors who reflect the culture of the population was noted in the findings from this study. Checkoway (2018) revealed the self-consciousness of first-generation college students from racial-ethnic backgrounds and social classes different from the majority of White students in college. Incorporating cultural competence within the curriculum and activities within the university environment will help create the awareness needed for the integration of cultural competence. The engagement, academic performance, and persistence of students increased with university representatives who incorporated cultural competence into teaching and advising within the college setting (Green & Wright, 2017).

Findings in the Context of the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study was guided by Tinto's retention theory and Burn's transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Connolly, 2016; Northouse, 2013; Tinto, 1993, 2015). The theories were applied relating to the need for comprehensive support interventions along with inspiring role models to address the challenges of first-generation college students and the vision for an increase in retention rates (Connolly, 2016; Northouse, 2013). Academic and social needs of first-generation college students were outlined

in the conceptual theories of Tinto, Bass, and Burns (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Connolly, 2016; Tinto, 2017).

Tinto's retention theory. Tinto's retention theory served as the vision for the commitment of higher education institutions to provide a supportive community for students (Tinto, 2015). Learners embrace the challenges of social and academic integration and a supportive environment (Connolly, 2016). Tinto's theory provides four elements: (a) pre-entry requirements, (b) initial motivation and student intentions, (c) interactions with staff members, and (d) a sense of academic and social belonging (Tinto 1993).

Pre-entry requirements. Success in college relates to attributes associated with prior schooling, skill and abilities, and family background (Tinto, 1993). The various needs impacting all first-generation student participants before entry into college, such as lack of academic readiness, the need to belong and connect with others, the effects of low socioeconomic status, and the social stigma of cultural differences, along with being a first-generation college learner, were revealed in the study. The challenges of first-generation learners, who do not have parents with college degrees, regarding integration into higher education must be addressed by colleges and universities (Almeida et al., 2019).

Initial motivation and student intentions. Having a strong sense of purpose is significant for students to succeed (Tinto, 1993). All first-generation college students in the study reflected the need to connect with other first-generation college students as an important part of being motivated within the school environment. Retention rates may increase for unmotivated students with collaborative efforts from faculty, advisors, peers, and the college institution (Silver Wolf et al., 2017).

Interactions with staff members. Mentoring and coaching relationships have an impact on the retention of learners (Tinto, 1993). The findings from the study revealed the desire of the participants to reach out to faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors for support and the positive impact on the learners. Mentoring has influenced the lives of first-generation college students (Hurd et al., 2018).

A sense of academic and social belonging. Interpersonal relationships and positive campus experiences impact retention (Tinto, 1993). The need to belong was a key component of the study and was evident with the participants' feelings of inferiority and the academic, financial, psychological, and social struggles. Retention is possible when students sense belonging to the higher education environment (Burke, 2019).

Burns's transformational leadership theory. The commitment of educators to inspire and lead first-generation college students was derived from Burns's transformational leadership theory (1978). Bass's expansion of leadership contained four aspects with a focus on the impact of leadership on followers: (a) considering the individual needs of followers and the contribution to others, (b) applying intellectual stimulation, (c) articulating a vision through inspirational motivation, and (d) influencing others by being a role model (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013). Four principles related to the effects of connecting college staff members serving as role models to students and the increased confidence of learners as a result: (a) building a vision, (b) encouraging a growth mindset, (c) creating trust, and (d) creating new ideas and opportunities (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013; Ross & Kendall, 2016).

Building a vision. Faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors have the ability as leaders to provide a vision for first-generation college students (Ross & Kendall, 2016). Participants in the study revealed an integrated support system with leaders providing a network

of resources may address the social, psychological, financial, academic, and cultural issues facing first-generation college students. The role of leadership is to build a vision for students to succeed through integrated support systems (Khoo, 2017).

Encouraging a growth mindset. The role of leaders to inspire and engage students is important for the success of the students (Ross & Kendall, 2016). Throughout the study, the participants noted forming relationships with faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors is influential in providing guidance and allowing the students to build confidence. The support of college staff members will enable students to grow and persist in school (Baier et al., 2016).

Creating trust. Building trust within the higher education environment is vital (Ross & Kendall, 2016). Credible leaders are paramount for students to succeed. The study revealed the importance for college staff members to listen and empathize with students to build trust. Trust is built when leaders act upon credible beliefs (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Creating new ideas and opportunities. Transformational leaders encourage others to succeed and meet their full potential (Ross & Kendall, 2016). The study revealed the importance of leaders recognizing the holistic needs of learners to grow and prosper. Students are motivated for success when driven by transformational leaders (Pradhan & Jena, 2019).

Limitations

The study's limitations became apparent after data collection and data analysis. The limitations included purposive sampling and time constraints. This exploratory case study used purposive sampling instead of random sampling, and the results could not be easily applied to a larger population. Purposive sampling may provide a more selective perspective from the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Time was another factor, with the data being produced within a three-month time frame, which limits the parameters of the study. Limitations to

credibility were controlled using member checking and triangulation. Transferability of the results can easily occur from other first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, advisors, or counselors in higher education. The credibility of the study is absolute due to the participants being well informed of the study. Limitations existed with the cross-participant make-up of the focus groups. The focus groups were comprised of 15 participants which included first-generation college students, administrators, and an advisor. The focus group participants were afforded sufficient space and time for micro-dynamics of power to be performed within the discussion in order to allow valuable insights (Ayrton, 2019). The focus group discussions flowed smoothly within the parameters of the issue in light of the limitations.

Recommendations

The study explored the challenges of first-generation college students and the need to provide comprehensive support programs addressing the needs (Means & Pyne, 2017). Themes emerged from the study through data analysis and findings, and recommendations for future research and changes in policies and practices are set forth. Three areas for future research were identified from the results of the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Studies related to parents without a college degree and how families may receive support from higher education institutions and be supportive of first-generation students are recommended. The desire for first-generation college students to develop supportive relationships to help with feelings of inferiority and a sense of belonging on campus was revealed in the study. Insights from another study could determine whether providing more support to the families of first-generation college students would increase retention of the learners.

A second recommendation would be to conduct quantitative studies which may reveal the disparities between race/ethnicity and wealth as factors relating to the retention of higher education students. The importance of social equality as a factor perceived by the students was noted in the study. Linking social inequality to the decreasing retention rates should be included in the study.

The third recommendation is to include an explanatory case study focusing on an existing comprehensive support system and the increase or decrease in retention rates. A specific focus on a particular comprehensive program may lend to underlying causes and preventive measures for an effective comprehensive support program. The conclusion may lead to adapting practices outlined in a comprehensive model for all colleges and universities.

Recommendations for Changes in Policy and Practice

The data analysis and findings revealed emerging themes throughout the study. The results of the study identified a need to explore three areas of policy and practice. First, comprehensive support programs should be provided to support all the needs of first-generation college students integrating into higher education. Second, colleges and universities should provide supporting networks to help build sustainable relationships with faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors. Third, cultural competence should be integrated throughout the college or university environment.

The first recommendation for changes in policy and practice is for the higher education industry to provide comprehensive support programs to support all the needs of first-generation college students integrating into higher education. The study's findings confirmed creating strategies to centralize resources was a key component for comprehensive support. The higher education industry could benefit by providing a model framework of programs for a more

comprehensive supportive environment to help with the transformative changes within the college or university.

The second recommendation for changes in policy and practice is for colleges and universities to provide supporting networks to help build sustainable relationships with faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors. All the participants in the study revealed the importance for college staff members to understand the personal and professional needs of first-generation college students and to form long-lasting bonds. Building supportive relationships can help motivate the students and greatly increase retention for the colleges and universities.

The third recommendation for changes in policy and practice is for higher education institutions to build awareness for cultural competence and integrate cultural understanding throughout the college or university environment. Revealed in the study was the significance for colleges and universities to incorporate cultural competence throughout the campus environment as well as having faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors reflecting the student population. Incorporating cultural competence throughout higher education institutions may help create a more equitable experience for first-generation college students.

Implications for Leadership

Emerging themes indicating best practices to support transformative changes within the higher education system for the integration and retention of first-generation college students were revealed in the data analysis of the study. Noted in the study was the importance of the higher education industry to provide comprehensive support programs to support the needs of first-generation college students with the integration into higher education. The study's findings confirmed a key component for providing comprehensive support is to create strategies to centralize resources. The importance of faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors to build

sustainable relationships with first-generation college students for college success was noted in the results of the study. The significance of higher education institutions to integrate cultural competence throughout the college environment to support the assimilation of first-generation college students into higher education was outlined in the study. These findings could help better support the needs of all first-generation college students. The methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications for educational leadership are discussed as follows.

Implications for Higher Education Governance

The findings and conclusions drawn from the research could have implications for the boards of directors, executive officers, and other governing stakeholders in higher education. The governing leaders should encourage the recommendation for the support of comprehensive support programs to increase the retention of first-generation college students as well as to create a national blueprint for integrated support systems. By addressing the best practice, governing leadership boards may better understand how comprehensive support programs can transform leadership practices as well as increase retention of first-generation college students.

Implications for Higher Education Leaders

Implications for higher education leaders such as faculty, administrators, advisors, and counselors were drawn from the findings and conclusions from the research. Leaders may benefit from the study by having a better understanding of how building sustainable relationships with the students can increase retention and provide a more productive learning environment. Understanding the culture of first-generation college students may help support the assimilation of first-generation college students into higher education as well as provide a transformational change for all leaders within the college environment.

Implications for First-Generation College Students and Society

The implications for future leaders of all first-generation college students and society were drawn from the findings and conclusions from the research. These findings could help better support the needs of all first-generation college students as well as have a positive impact on society from the value of an education provided to the students. The transformational practices of leaders providing a more comprehensive support system for first-generation college students may inspire future leaders to provide innovative solutions within society.

Conclusion

The purpose of the qualitative case study in a large, urban, East Coast university was to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support interventions and the need for comprehensive support programs designed for students. Needs of first-generation college students and the importance of comprehensive support programs were examined in the study. The exploratory case study provided evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students.

The study's findings confirmed the overall influence of developing supportive relationships between first-generation college students and faculty, administrators, counselors, and advisors to help build student confidence with integration on the college campus. Building trust with college staff members to help build students' confidence throughout the college experience while navigating resources geared toward first-generation college students was confirmed with the findings from the study. Integrating cultural competence throughout the college environment was evident in the findings from the study. Transformational changes were linked to best practices of college staff members to support first-generation college students and

were validated throughout the study. The best practices were comprehensive support, sustainable relationships, and cultural competence. Comprehensive support was found in the study to be a critical element to provide the model framework necessary for linking the services for intervention programs with first-generation college students.

The results of the study revealed three overarching themes for each of the three research questions guiding the study. The major theme which emerged through exploring the first research question was collaborative support. Providing integrated support emerged as the major theme for the second research question. Transformative changes emerged as a major theme for the third research question.

The themes emerging from the data may serve as guidance for higher education institutions, leaders, and future leaders of first-generation college students. Participants in the study confirmed the need for comprehensive support programs to support the needs of first-generation college students with integration into higher education. The comprehensive support programs may benefit the higher education industry, leaders in higher education, first-generation college students, and future leaders of the students.

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Appendix A: Information Session

I am a doctoral candidate at the American College of Education. I am conducting a study on exploring the experiences of first-generation college students and integration into higher education.

The purpose of the research study is to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support programs and the need for comprehensive programs designed for first-generation college students. The study is necessary to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects within the programs are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students.

To learn more please come to the Information Session at:

WHERE: Community Room in Public Library

WHEN: February 16, 2020

I am looking forward to meeting you in person. For any other information please contact me at 215-694-4169 or ColFar@comcast.net.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

Project Information

Project Title: Exploring the Experiences of First-Generation College Students

Researcher: Colleen Farrell-Felici

Organization: American College of Education (ACE)

Email: ColFar@comcast.net

Telephone: 215-694-4169

Researcher's Faculty Member: Barry Chametzky, Ph.D.

Organization and Position: Dissertation Chair

Email: Barry.Chametzky@ace.edu

Introduction

I am a doctoral candidate student at American College of Education. I am doing research under the guidance and supervision of my Chair, Dr. Chametzky. I will give you some information about the project and invite you to be part of this research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. This consent form may contain words you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them then.

Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study which will assist with understanding the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors and the need for comprehensive support programs for students. This qualitative study will examine how viewpoints and behaviors and beliefs may impact first-generation college student support programs.

Research Design and Procedures

The study will use a qualitative instrumental case study research design. Emails will be disseminated to specific participants within the four-year university. The study will comprise of at least 15 participants, purposively selected, who will participate in the study. The study will involve interviews and focus groups to be conducted at a site most convenient for participants. After the interviews and focus groups, a debrief session will occur.

Participant selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because of your experience as a first-generation college student, and/or faculty member, administrator, and advisor working with student support programs who can contribute much to the reliability and validity, which meets the criteria for this study. Participant selection criteria: You must be either a first-year student

who is a first-generation college student, faculty member, administrator, or advisor who have experience with first-generation college programs, and/or are involved in the educational community of the college.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate. If you choose not to participate, there will be no punitive repercussions and you do not have to participate. If you select to participate in this study, you may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

Procedures

We are inviting you to participate in this research study. If you agree, you will be asked to be interviewed. The type of questions asked will range from a demographical perspective to direct inquiries about the topic of first-generation college students and integration into higher education.

Duration

If you are selected to participate in the interviews, the time expected will be a maximum of one hour. If you are chosen to be selected, the time allotted for the interview will be approximately one hour at a location and time convenient for the participant. A follow-up debriefing session will take place by telephone following the interview.

Recording

The information collected during the focus group and in-depth interviews will be recorded.

Risks

The researcher will ask you to share personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion if you don't wish to do so. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question.

Benefits

While there will be no direct financial benefit to you, your participation is likely to help us find out more about first-generation college students and integration into higher education. The potential benefits of this study will aid the study with first-generation college students.

Confidentiality

I will not share information about you or anything you say to anyone outside of the researcher. During the defense of the doctoral dissertation, data collected will be presented to the dissertation committee. The data collected will be kept in a locked file cabinet or encrypted computer file. Any information about you will be coded and will not have a direct correlation, which directly identifies you as the participant. Only I will know what your number is, and I will secure your information.

Sharing the Results

At the end of the research study, the results will be available for each participant. The results will be published so other interested people may learn from the research.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

Participation is voluntary. At any time, you wish to end your participation in the research study, you may do so without repercussions.

Questions About the Study

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me at 215-694-4169. This research plan has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American College of Education. This is a committee whose role is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to ask questions of this group, email IRB@ace.edu.

Certificate of Consent

I have read the information about this study, or it has been read to me. I acknowledge why I have been asked to be a participant in the research study. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I certify I am at least 18 years of age. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print or Type Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

I confirm the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my ability. I confirm the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print or type name of researcher: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

I have accurately read or witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm the individual has freely given assent.

Print or type name of researcher: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Signature of faculty member: _____

Date: _____

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Appendix C: Focus Group Participant E-Mail

Dear ,

Thanks so much for agreeing to participate in the focus group for Exploring First-Generation College Student and Integration into Higher Education. Your willingness to share what you know to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects within the programs are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students are greatly appreciated.

Here are the details you need to know:

The focus group will take place April-May, 2020.

Your time is truly valued. It will be a 60-minute focus group which will be recorded. The time will begin at 7:00 pm and finish no later than 8:00 pm.

The meeting will take place in an online conferencing tool.

The focus group discussion will be led by me.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email or call me at ColFar@comcast or 215-694-4169.

Sincerely,

Colleen Farrell-Felici

Doctoral Candidate

American College of Education

ColFar@comcast.net

Appendix D: In-Depth Interview Participant E-Mail

Dear ,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the in-depth interview for Exploring First-Generation College Student and Integration into Higher Education. Thank you for your willingness to share what you know to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects within the programs are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students.

Here are the details you need to know:

The 60-minute in-depth interview, which will be recorded, will take place March, April, and May, 2020.

Your time is valued. The time will begin at 7:00 pm and will be finished no later than 8:00 pm.

The meeting will take place in an online conferencing tool.

The in-depth interview will be led by me.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email or call me at ColFar@comcast or 215-694-4169.

Sincerely,

Colleen Farrell-Felici

Doctoral Candidate

American College of Education

ColFar@comcast.net

Appendix E: Focus Group Questions

1. What are the needs of first-generation college students?
2. What do you think about the program for first-generation college students?
3. What do you like best about the program for first-generation college students?
4. How do you think the program could be improved for first-generation college students?
5. How can faculty, administrators, and advisors develop better practices for the program?
6. What are some aspects of the program for first-generation college students that are effective?
7. How can the program for first-generation college students meet the needs of all students who are first-generation?
8. What will help to motivate first-generation college students?
9. Thank you for your time. What else might you like to share with me?

Appendix F: First-Generation College Students—In-Depth-Interview Questions

1. How would you describe where you grew up?
2. How would you compare the way you view the neighborhood where you grew up to the way your parents or guardians grew up?
3. How did you go about making a decision to pursue a college education?
4. How would you describe your experiences as first-generation college student?
5. How would you describe your experiences in the four-year college/university?
6. How would you describe your experiences with the support programs for first-generation college students?
7. Suppose it were your first day in the support programs for first-generation college students. What would it be like?
8. Tell me about a time when you did not feel like you fit in to the college/university environment. What was it like for you?
9. How would you describe a time when you did feel like you fit in to the college/university environment?
10. How would you describe your experiences with faculty members, administrators, and advisors within the first-generation college programs?
11. What is an example of your day to day environment within the college/university?
12. Thank you for your time. What else might you like to share with me?

Appendix G: Faculty, Administrators, and Advisors—In-Depth Interview Questions

1. What encouraged you to become involved with the college/university?
2. What encouraged you to become involved with first-generation college students?
3. How would you describe your experiences working in the college/university environment?
4. How would you describe your experiences with the support programs for first-generation college students?
5. What do you find most challenging working with the support programs for first-generation college students?
6. Would you describe what you think the ideal support program for first-generation college students would look like?
7. Tell me about your current interactions with first-generation college students at the college/university. What is it like for you?
8. What kinds of challenges do you experience when working with first-generation college students?
9. How would you describe what are some best practices for faculty, administrators, and advisors that help first-generation college students?
10. Thank you for your time. What else might you like to share with me?

Appendix H: Subject Matter Experts

As many of you know I am in the process of writing my dissertation on "Exploring the Experiences of First-Generation College Students and Integration into Higher Education".

The purpose of the research study is to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support programs and the need for comprehensive support programs designed for first-generation college students. The study is necessary to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects within the student support programs are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation college students.

I am attaching two sets of questions: (1) In-depth interview questions addressed to first-generation college students; and (2) In-depth interview questions addressed to faculty, administrators, and advisors.

Please review for accuracy and I look forward to hearing from you.

Colleen Farrell-Felici, CPC, ACC
215-694-4169

Hi Colleen,

I reviewed your focus group and interview question and they look fine to me. Good luck with your dissertation!

Thanks,

Hi Colleen

Thank you for the opportunity to review your doctoral research questions. The questions are targeted to the objective of your study. I look forward to reading the findings of your study in the future.

Hi Colleen,

I have reviewed your questions and they look good.
Best of luck,

Dear Colleen,

I have reviewed the questions in Appendix H: In-depth interview questions addressed to first-generation college students, and Appendix I: In-depth interview questions addressed to faculty, administrators and advisors.

I believe the questions prepared are accurate and concise.

Please call or email me if you require any additional comments.

Hi Colleen, looks like some good questions you came up with. I reviewed them and they look fine to me.

Thanks,

Appendix I: Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to participate. My name is Colleen Farrell-Felici and I will be the moderator for today's focus group. The purpose of this focus group is to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support programs and the need for comprehensive programs designed for first-generation college students. The study is necessary to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects within the programs are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation students. Your personal information will not be connected to the results of this focus group.

Logistics

The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes.

Please turn off your cellphones or pagers. If you cannot and if you must respond to a call, please do so as quietly as possible and rejoin as quickly as you can.

Ground Rules:

Leave – If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the meeting, you have the right to leave or to pass on any question. There is no consequence for leaving. Being here is voluntary.

Confidentiality – Everything discussed in the focus group will be kept confidential. I will be sharing the information of the results within the study anonymously. Each participant will be identified with a pseudonym to ensure identities are protected and kept anonymous.

One Speaker at a Time – Only one person should speak at a time in order to make sure everyone can hear what is being said.

Use Respectful Language – Please respect everyone's ideas. Do not comment on or make judgments about what someone else says, and do not offer advice. Please avoid any statements or words that may be offensive to other members of the group.

Open Discussion – This is a time for everyone to feel free to express their opinions and viewpoints. You will not be asked to reach consensus on the topics discussed. There will be no right or wrong answers.

Participation is Important – It is important that everyone's voice is shared and heard in order to make this the most productive focus group possible. Please speak up if you have something to add to the conversation.

Recorded – This focus group session will be recorded in an online conferencing tool and all information will be kept confidential and emailed to a password-protected laptop kept in the moderator's locked home office.

Note-Taking – Notes will be taken throughout the discussion. The field notes will be labeled and stored in the moderator's locked home office.

Closing

Thank you for your time today. The moderator will debrief and ask if there are any additional thoughts and if something occurs to them later, to please email the comments to the moderator.

Appendix J: In-Depth Interview Protocol

Introduction

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to participate in the in-depth interview aspect of the study. The purpose of the study is to explore the perspectives of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors regarding the necessary support programs and the need for comprehensive programs designed for first-generation college students. The study is necessary to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of student support programs and what aspects within the programs are most efficient to address the challenges of first-generation students. Your personal information will not be connected to the results of this focus group.

Logistics

The in-depth interview questions will last approximately 60 minutes. Please turn off your cellphones or pagers.

Ground Rules:

Leave – If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the meeting, you have the right to leave or to pass on any question. There is no consequence for leaving. Being here is voluntary.

Confidentiality – Everything discussed in the in-depth interview will be kept confidential. I will be sharing the information of the results of the study anonymously. You will be identified with a pseudonym to ensure your identity is protected and kept anonymous.

Participation is Important – Please let me know if at any point you would like me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.

Recorded – This in-depth interview session will be recorded in an online conferencing tool and all information will be kept confidential and emailed to a password-protected laptop kept in the investigator's locked home office.

Note-Taking – Brief notes may be taken throughout the discussion. The brief notes will be labeled and stored in the investigator's locked home office.

Closing

Thank you for your time today. The moderator will debrief and ask if there are any additional thoughts and if something occurs to them later, to please email the comments to the moderator

Appendix K: Institutional Review Board Approval dated March 4, 2020

March 04, 2020

To : Colleen Farrell-Felici
Barry Chametzky, Dissertation Committee Chair

From : Institutional Review Board
American College of Education

Re: IRB Approval

"First-Gen"

The American College of Education IRB has reviewed your application, proposal, and any related materials. We have determined that your research provides sufficient protection of human subjects.

Your research is therefore approved to proceed. The expiration date for this IRB approval is one year from the date of review completed March 04, 2021. If you would like to continue your research beyond this point, including data collection and/or analysis of private data, you must submit a renewal request to the IRB.

Our best to you as you continue your studies.

Sincerely,

Becky Gerambia
Assistant Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix L: Institutional Review Board Changes Approval dated March 27, 2020

3/28/2020

Xfinity Connect RE_Changes to Proposal_Dissertation Information - Memo-Dr-Elizabeth-Johnson-3-24-20 Printout

ACE IRB <irb@ace.edu>

3/27/2020 10:47 PM

RE: Changes to Proposal/Dissertation Information - Memo-Dr-Elizabeth-Johnson-3-24-20

To COLLEEN FARRELL <colfar@comcast.net> Copy
Barry Chametzky <barry.chametzky@ace.edu>

Colleen –

I have reviewed your requested changes, and they are approved. You may commence with your study. I will file these changes along with your IRB proposal file.

Becky Gerambia

Assistant Chair, Institutional Review Board
American College of Education
ace.edu



**AMERICAN
COLLEGE of
EDUCATION**



From: COLLEEN FARRELL <colfar@comcast.net>
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2020 9:35 AM
To: ACE IRB <IRB@ace.edu>
Cc: Barry Chametzky <barry.chametzky@ace.edu>
Subject: Changes to Proposal/Dissertation Information - Memo-Dr-Elizabeth-Johnson-3-24-20

Please be cautious

This email originated from outside of ACE organization

Dear Sir or Madam:

3/28/2020

Xfinity Connect RE_ Changes to Proposal_Dissertation Information - Memo-Dr-Elizabeth-Johnson-3-24-20 Printout

I am requesting changes to my proposal "An Instrumental Case Study: First-Generation College Students Integration into Higher Education" as a result of an emergency crisis regarding COVID 19. I live in Philadelphia, PA and my city and surrounding counties are on an ordered "lockdown" with limited outside contact except for going to the grocery or pharmacy store. Additionally all students were ordered to go home until the Fall, 2020. My proposed changes to my proposal are outlined in the attached matrix along with the actual proposal.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Colleen Farrell-Felici, CPC, ACC

215-694-4169

CONFIDENTIAL EMAIL: This e-mail is intended solely for the addressee. The information contained herein is confidential. Any dissemination, distribution or copying of this e-mail, other than by its intended recipient, is strictly prohibited. If you have received this e-mail in error, please notify me immediately and delete this message.

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Page No.	Current Proposal	Proposing Change to Proposal
54	The focus group is expected to last for 60 minutes at the public library near the university at a date and time convenient for the participants.	The focus group is expected to last for 60 minutes in an online conferencing tool at a date and time convenient for the participants.
54	Recording the focus group and all interviews using the voice memo function on an iPhone 8 is planned.	Recording the focus group and all interviews using the online conferencing tool is planned.
55	Each interview is to last approximately 60 minutes at a time convenient for the participant in a private break-out room in the public library near the university.	Each interview is to last approximately 60 minutes at a date and time convenient for the participant in an online conferencing tool.
55	The in-depth interviews will be recorded via the voice memo function on the iPhone 8.	The in-depth interviews will be recorded in an online conferencing tool.
56	The recordings from the focus group and participant interview material will be transcribed using Rev.com, an online service for data security.	The recordings from the focus group and participant interview material will be transcribed using an online service for data security via an online conferencing tool.
56	The transcripts of the focus group and in-depth interviews received from Rev.com will be converted into rich text format to be uploaded into the NVivo software for coding.	The transcripts of the focus group and in-depth interviews received from the online conferencing tool will be converted into rich text format to be uploaded into the NVivo software for coding.
90 – Appendix C	The focus group will take place March, 2020.	The focus group will take place April-May, 2020.
90 – Appendix C	The meeting will take place in the public library near the university.	The meeting will take place in an online conferencing tool
91 – Appendix D	The 60-minute in-depth interview, which will be recorded, will take place March, 2020.	The 60-minute in-depth interview, which will be recorded, will take place March, April, and May, 2020.
91 – Appendix D	The meeting will take place in the public library near the university.	The meeting will take place in an online conferencing tool.

93 – Appendix E	This focus group session will be recorded on an iPhone 8.	The focus group session will be recorded in an online conferencing tool.
95 – Appendix G	This in-depth interview session will be recorded on an iPhone 8.	This in-depth interview session will be recorded in an online conferencing tool.

Appendix M: Institutional Review Board Changes Approval dated April 16, 2020

4/16/2020

Xfinity Connect RE_ Changes to Proposal_Dissertation Information - Memo-Dr-Elizabeth Johnson - 3-24-20 Printout

ACE IRB <irb@ace.edu>

4/16/2020 10:57 AM

RE: Changes to Proposal/Dissertation Information - Memo-Dr-Elizabeth Johnson - 3-24-20

To COLLEEN FARRELL <colfar@comcast.net> Copy
Barry Chametzky <barry.chametzky@ace.edu>

These changes are approved; I will save out a copy of these documents in your IRB review folder.

Becky Gerambia

Assistant Chair, Institutional Review Board
American College of Education
ace.edu



From: COLLEEN FARRELL <colfar@comcast.net>
Sent: Wednesday, April 15, 2020 11:09 PM
To: ACE IRB <IRB@ace.edu>
Cc: Barry Chametzky <barry.chametzky@ace.edu>
Subject: Changes to Proposal/Dissertation Information - Memo-Dr-Elizabeth Johnson - 3-24-20

Please be cautious

This email originated from outside of ACE organization

Dear Sir or Madam:

4/16/2020

Xfinity Connect RE_Changes to Proposal_Dissertation Information - Memo-Dr-Elizabeth Johnson - 3-24-20 Printout

I am requesting changes to my proposal "An Instrumental Case Study: First-Generation College Students Integration into Higher Education" as a result of an emergency crisis regarding COVID-19. I live in Philadelphia, PA and my city and surrounding counties are on an ordered "lockdown" with limited outside contact except for going to the grocery or pharmacy store. Additionally, all students were ordered to go home until the Fall, 2020. My proposed changes to my proposal are outlined in the attached matrix along with the actual proposal.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Colleen Farrell-Felici, CPC, ACC

215-694-4169

CONFIDENTIAL EMAIL: This e-mail is intended solely for the addressee. The information contained herein is confidential. Any dissemination, distribution or copying of this e-mail, other than by its intended recipient, is strictly prohibited. If you have received this e-mail in error, please notify me immediately and delete this message.

- image001.jpg (43 KB)

Page No.	Current Proposal	Proposing Change to Proposal
52	The study will consist of one focus group consisting of at least 15 participants and one-60-minute in-depth interview with each participant.	The study will consist of one or more virtual focus groups if 15 participants cannot come together at one time.
54	A single focus group comprised of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors will be conducted.	One or more virtual focus groups will be conducted and comprised of first-generation college students, faculty members, administrators, and advisors if 15 participants cannot come together at one time.
89 – Appendix C	The focus group will take place on March 20, 2020.	The focus groups will take place April-May, 2020.

Appendix N: Thank-You E-Mail/Request Review Transcripts

Dear Participant:

It has been a pleasure meeting you. Thank you again for participating in the study. I am providing your transcript and would appreciate your review to let me know if any changes are needed. Please email me and let me know of any changes with an email to me.

I really appreciate your time!

Thanks again.

Colleen Farrell-Felici

Doctoral Candidate