

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF FIRST-GENERATION
COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

by

Jean Leandre

Liberty University

A Dissertation Proposal Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, 36% of community college enrollments are comprised of first-generation students (FGCS); however, little is known about FGCS as a cohort. Various initiatives have been formulated to encourage success among students with constraints related to social capital, bandwidth recovery, and the education system. The purpose of this phenomenological study aimed to understand the experiences of FGCS in community colleges in the Northeast region of the United States. FGCS are defined as students whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor's degree. This study addressed student experiences—including social interactions—that impacted academic achievement positively or negatively. Tinto's interactionalist theory of college student departure guided this study because student retention and success in college are affected by formal and informal interactions. Data were collected from 15 participants using one-on-one interviews, a writing prompt, and a focus group discussion. Data analysis was conducted using Moustakas' guidelines for organizing and analyzing transcendental phenomenology. The four main themes identified were a) shared experiences, b) defining success, c) protective factors, and d) social factors.

Keywords: First-generation, community college, low-income, student success, interactionalist theory, bandwidth recovery.

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Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my mother, Marie Gabriel-Leandre. Her support, encouragement, and constant love have sustained me throughout my life. You taught me the importance of God, family, hard work, and sacrifice.

Acknowledgments

Many people have influenced me personally, professionally, and academically over the years that culminated in this decade-long doctoral process. This research is as much an attribute to them and their excellence as it is an example of my academic achievement. I feel as if the words “thank you” do not begin to express my sincere appreciation for their contribution in developing me into the individual I am today.

To my sister Rose, my brother Marc, and Uncle Jean (Jimmy), thank you for supporting me throughout my life. Rose, you are and will continue to be both a second mother and sister to me. You have only shown me unconditional love and have sacrificed so much to ensure we are all successful. Marc, I am blessed to have a brother like you in my life. Thank you for teaching me patience. Uncle Jean (Jimmy), thank you for being a father to me. During the darkest days of my life, you were always sitting in the front row. You three gave me the drive and aspiration needed to achieve my dreams, the zeal to face challenges head on, and the power to overcome roadblocks.

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List of Abbreviations

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)

Central question (CQ)

First-generation community college students (FGCCS)

First-generation college students (FGCS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Subquestion (SQ)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of FGCS in community colleges in the Northeast region of the United States. This chapter introduces the background of the problem, including the historical, social, and theoretical contexts that contribute to the challenges faced by FGCS. Chapter 1 defines and explains the attrition problem experienced by FGCS and the lack of data to explain this phenomenon. Furthermore, this chapter describes the purpose, motivation, and significance behind this inquiry, and provides the CQ and SQs that this study attempts to answer. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the importance of the research plan and defines essential vocabulary.

Background

Colleges and universities must understand students' academic preparedness as higher education becomes more accessible and student populations become more diverse (Atherton, 2014). Few studies focus on the experiences of students attending community colleges whose parents had little or no college education, and "Although these FGCS have much in common with other disadvantaged student groups, their situation presents unique conditions and obstacles to their college experience" (Atherton, 2014, p. 824). This inquiry uses a phenomenological research design to examine the social phenomena from participants' perspectives and describe their success and failures as participants experienced them (Hébert, 2018).

Historical Background

In the United States, the fastest growing college populations are students who identify as being of the first generation to attend college (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Petty, 2014). To understand this trend, I reviewed the historical background of postsecondary education systems: the traditional gateway to obtaining a career and the middle class in the United States. At the turn of the 19th century in the United States, high school degrees—held by less than 10% of the population—granted access not only to employment, but to well-sought professional positions and served as badges that conferred middle class respectability (Stark & Poppler, 2016). Today, three-quarters of the fastest growing occupations require education beyond a high school diploma. Many seek higher education degrees to increase career opportunities, gain economic prosperity, and achieve societal mobility (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that the fastest growing and highest paying occupations will require completion of a postsecondary degree (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). For this reason, college completion has become increasingly important for the children and grandchildren of previous generations and has created a phenomenon where nearly one-third of all incoming freshman each year for the last decade have been FGCS (Thurman, 2016).

FGCS are students whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor's degree (Byrd & Macdonald, 2005; Manzoni & Streib, 2018; Tate et al., 2015). In 2009, 15.2% of the entire college-enrolled population was classified as first generation (McCoy, 2014). Currently, 36% of U.S. community college enrollments are FGCS (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This percentage is estimated to increase to 42% by 2020 in U.S. community colleges (McKenzie, 2014). Having less exposure to the college-attending culture, FGCS students often lack the

practical knowledge needed to be successful in higher education (Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009). Historically, many obstacles impact the enrollment, persistence, and degree completion of FGCS, causing considerable concern for postsecondary institutions (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Gibson & Slate, 2010). However, little information is known about FGCCS and their growing presence in higher education. The gap in literature for FGCCS inspired this phenomenological inquiry to learn more about FGCCS' lived experiences.

Social Background

Higher education stakeholders in the United States have offered a pathway to professional growth and social status, propelling the college degree to be highly valued and attractive to all students, including FGCS (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Johnson & Reynolds, 2013; Olson, 2014). This group of students confronts high levels of anxiety, dislocations, and challenges, combined with unique cultural, social, and academic experiences (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Jenkins, Belanger, Londono Connally, Boals, & Duron, 2013; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014). A significant majority of FGCS depend on academic advisors and college administrators to navigate college life (Sáenz & Combs, 2015): "To support first-generation students, colleges and universities have increasingly developed programs to promote success and retention of these students" (Swanbrow Becker, Schelbe, Romano, & Spinelli, 2017, p. 1166).

Students classified as first generation graduate at a lower rate compared with their peers who had at least one parent who attended college (Ishitani, 2006). Approximately 90% of FGCS fail to graduate within 6 years of enrollment (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007) and FGCS have a higher departure rate during their first year of college (Ishitani, 2003). FGCS are at a higher risk of experiencing mental disorders and attempted suicide due to poor social

support (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003; Sáenz & Combs, 2015). Of first-generation undergraduates in 2013, 11% attempted suicide compared with 4% of their peers who had at least one parent having attained a college-level education (Sáenz & Combs, 2016). In a study published in 2018, 92% of college counseling center directors reported an increase in the severity of psychological problems among FGCS (Morton, Ramirez, Meece, Demetriou, & Panter, 2018). The consequences of these problems can be severe and have a lasting impact.

Theoretical Background

The rate that FGCS depart colleges and universities puzzles scholars and practitioners (Berger & Braxton, 1998); however, theories provide guidance that can help FGCS acclimate to college beyond the quantitative realm. FGCS face numerous challenges as they navigate postsecondary education systems (Ishitani, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004, 2003). Tinto's interactionist theory of college-student departure posits that informal and formal interactions in college influence student retention and success (Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993). Tinto's interactionist theory suggests that college students can acclimate well in postsecondary institutions when provided with holistic support that focuses on the psychological, social, and cultural needs of FGCS.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports the idea that campuses need to apply an all-inclusive approach to integrate and retain FGCS. From this perspective, colleges must focus on how FGCS participate in formal and informal exchanges and how FGCS make meaning from artifacts, tools, and social capital (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Vygotsky's theory advocates that the persistence of FGCS depends on how well colleges facilitate students' academic success. FGCS can achieve academic success when students are aware of two important facets of the learning

process: a) social interactions play a fundamental role in the development of cognition and b) community and social capital play a central role in making meaning from what is taught in the classroom (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 1990; Saxe, 1999; Wertsch, 1998).

Similar to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement that suggests that colleges can increase persistence of FGCS by intentionally creating positive experiences for students in the cocurricular environment (Lewin, 1936; Walsh, 1973). Astin (1985; 1999) created five basic assumptions about involvement:

1. Involvement requires a physical and psychosocial commitment.
2. Involvement is constant.
3. Involvement can be qualitative and quantitative in nature.
4. Each student's development is relative to the extent they were involved at the college, formally or informally.
5. Academic performance correlates with student involvement.

This theory has produced transferable applications that can help FGCS persist and graduate from college.

Each theory helps form the theoretical basis for college persistence beyond the singular measure of academic performance. Beyond quantitative measures, qualitative frameworks such as Tinto's interactionalist theory (1975; 1987; 1993), Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement provide vital concepts that can improve student engagement to stop or decrease FGCS departure. The adoption of a transcendental phenomenological approach enabled the gathering of a vast amount of information that enhanced the understanding of FGCS experiences (McKenzie, 2014).

Situation to Self

I was a FGCCS because my parents and grandparents did not graduate from college. My mother—a single mom—migrated to the United States to provide my siblings and me all the opportunities in the world. To do so, she worked multiple jobs to assure we could take advantage of the American dream.

Along with the opportunities presented by college life, I faced five major challenges as a FGCS. The first challenge aligned with insufficient knowledge of the college experience. The 2nd challenge was feeling extreme guilt. It was not easy to leave my family behind to attend a college far from home, as is often the case for FGCS. The guilt I felt was caused by the feeling that I had abandoned my family, particularly my mother. The third challenge was a result of limited finances and social life. Students require sufficient funds to participate in various activities to assimilate on a college campus. The fourth challenge was the low support level from home; my mother had no familiarity with the college experience, which meant she was unable to prepare or support me throughout my experience.

My experience aligns with the findings by Whitehead and Wright (2017); their findings state that FGCS' lack of support from family and friends is significant when compared with students in other generation categories. This situation made me feel abandoned and without the encouragement I needed to stay the course. Lastly, I experienced the challenge of not fitting in on campus. I was not mentored to visit the campus and get a feel for the atmosphere, the demographics, the overall environment, or to understand what a typical day on campus was like before deciding on which school I would attend.

I approached this study from an ontological and epistemological perspective. Participants will have multiple perspectives and experiences that shape how they choose to understand and

participate with the world around them (Creswell, 2007; Williams, 2017). Applying a constructivist paradigm suggests that students will construct their own understanding and knowledge of college life and have experiences and reflect on those experiences (Williams, 2017). The constructivist paradigm focuses on encouraging students to use real-world problem solving and experimentation techniques through a participatory approach that helps create greater knowledge. Participants will reflect and discuss what they are doing and variations in their levels of understanding (Creswell, 2007; Oliveri, Funke, Clark, & Seifert, 2018).

Problem Statement

Students who are the first in their families to attend college are one of the fastest growing populations at U.S. colleges (Engle et al., 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Petty, 2014). FGCS represent 33% of the total college population in the United States (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Skomsvold, 2015). The percentage of FGCS in U.S. community colleges is approximately 36% of the student population.

FGCS face unique challenges when navigating educational institutions. These students are four times more likely to not complete their course of study when compared to their counterparts (Petty, 2014). FGCS confront the same difficulties, dislocations, and anxieties that other students face in addition to their unique academic, social, and cultural needs (Dennis et al., 2005; Jenkins et al., 2013; Pascarella et al., 2004; Stebleton et al., 2014). FGCS have higher attrition rates due to the unique problems they face in college, such as a greater likelihood of coming from single-parent households or low-income families and the lack of parental support on how to navigate postsecondary education institutions (Banks-Santilli, 2014; Falcon, 2015; Garriott, Navarro, & Flores, 2017; Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016).

Few studies address the experiences that determine why FGCS' academic achievement is low and FGCCS have not had the opportunity to share how their experiences affect their academic achievement and graduation rates (Craider, 2014; Evans, 2016). It is essential to study this phenomenon where the context occurs. A transcendental phenomenology was the best design for this study because it facilitates an inquiry into a specific phenomenon to provide data on the experiences of FGCCS (Carminati, 2018; Leung, 2015).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of FGCCS in the Northeast region of the United States. For this study, first generation was defined as students whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor's degree (Byrd & Macdonald, 2005; Manzoni & Streib, 2018; Tate et al., 2015). Students' experiences include social interactions that impact their academic achievement positively or negatively (Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004, 2003). Tinto's interactionalist theory of college-student departure guided this study, as it posits that informal and formal interactions at college affect student retention and success (Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993). These interactions include those that occur in formal structures between students and faculty, and those that occur in informal structures between students and the immediate community surrounding the school environment (Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993). The interactionalist theory emphasizes that off-campus students and on-campus students face different unique challenges that need to be documented to understand student experiences in the macro-educational and micro-educational environment.

Significance of the Study

In this study, I aimed to make numerous contributions to the knowledge base through describing practical, empirical, and theoretical significances. Practical significance suggests how the results of this study can be used to guide educators. Empirical significance implies how the results of this study expand on previous research. Theoretical significance indicates how the study results can be used to build on other theories.

Practical Significance

This study makes practical contributions to the location, organization, and general population sample under investigation. The study will teach stakeholders and participants about the growth mindset, encouraging students to explore an alternative way of thinking that supports enjoyable and strengths-based perceptions (Bates, 2016). Students should be told that intelligence and abilities are not fixed and that setbacks should not affect their future success (Thurman, 2016). Students will realize the challenges associated with being a FGCS may be used as an opportunity for growth (Bates, 2016). Above all, study findings will encourage FGCS and other stakeholders to engage each other on campus to strengthen the sense of belonging and help FGCS graduate on time (Sáenz & Combs, 2015).

Empirical Significance

The study's empirical contributions expand on Tinto's interactionalist theory (1975; 1987; 1993), Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement. Additionally, the study documents specific experiences that may promote or impede the success of FGCS and provides explanations of how FGCS' success is affected by student experiences (Means & Pyne, 2017). A significant retention gap exists between FGCS and

their non-FGCS peers, despite emphasis by institutions of higher learning on recruiting and retaining FGCS (Pascarella et al., 2004, 2003; Sáenz & Combs, 2015). In this study, I aimed to discover methods of minimizing or eliminating the observed gap to increase the success of FGCS.

Theoretical Significance

This study's theoretical contributions helped build the knowledge base on FGCS and deviates from traditional norms of using deficit or quantitative studies to observe FGCS (Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993). This study supports other inquiries in developing an understanding of impediments and promoters of success for FGCS (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009). Stakeholders—such as policymakers—will gain information to determine the best interventions needed to promote positive experiences for FGCCS while reducing impediments to student success (Nasir & Hand, 2006). This information will increase the number of students graduating on time with valuable degrees and higher achievements (McKenzie, 2014). Lastly, the study's findings can be used as background information for future research on this topic.

Research Questions

The CQ and four SQs guided this transcendental phenomenological study. The formulation of these questions was grounded in the theoretical framework of Tinto's interactionalist theory (Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Lewin, 1936; Walsh, 1973), and Astin's theory of student involvement (Lewin, 1936; Walsh, 1973). These theories suggest that university campuses play a vital role in the successes or failures of FGCS (Dennis et al., 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004). The CQ and SQs will guide the interview questions to gain an understanding of FGCS' involvement in the postsecondary process.

Central Research Question

CQ: What experiences do FGCCS share that have influenced their academic success or lack of success?

The CQ frames the study. I am hopeful that the findings provide numerous contributions to the knowledge base and the discipline, describing practical, empirical, and theoretical results that can be used to guide educators who support FGCCS. This study is critical to FGCS as it teaches stakeholders and participants alternative ways to support student success (Bates, 2016; Thurman, 2016). The CQ is grounded in the theoretical framework of Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) interactionist theory, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement.

SQ1: How do FGCCS define success and how does this definition reflect their notion of success in college?

The first SQ builds on the CQ by creating a fundamental definition of success for FGCCS. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, FGCCS define success through the lens of others and through their cultural values. For FGCCS, success is shaped by the norms of their society. In addition, Vygotsky (1978) believed that parents, relatives, peers, and society all play a major role in shaping student perceptions.

SQ2: What protective factors do FGCCS perceive as promoting their academic and nonacademic success?

The second SQ builds on the CQ by allowing FGCCS to describe the protective factors that promote their academic and nonacademic success. Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement states that desirable outcomes for colleges directly correlate to students' access to campus protective factors. Students who are engaged in the college's co-curricular environment

will assimilate well; this assimilation has a positive impact on the institution's retention and academics rates.

SQ3: How have FGCCS' life experiences contributed to their understandings of success in college?

The third SQ builds on the CQ by allowing FGCCS an opportunity to delineate on their life experiences and explain how their experiences contributed to their understandings of success in college. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, a student's life experience—in addition to their understanding of societal norms—will shape the student's understanding of success while at college.

SQ4: What shared services do FGCCS perceive as contributing to their success while transitioning to college, during their first semester at college, and when preparing to graduate from college?

The fourth SQ builds on the CQ by providing FGCCS an opportunity to discuss the shared services students used and perceived as being instrumental to their success at college. According to Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) interactionalist theory, a student's decision to depart from college arises when he or she did not integrate well with the institution; therefore, understanding FGCCS' shared positive experiences, along with environmental and social integration, will allow institutions to engage students early and help them to persist.

Definitions

Key terms relating to the experiences of FGCCS and the phenomenon of interest were used throughout this study.

1. *Academic Success:* Student success is defined as the academic achievement, social and residential life, life management, and academic engagement of

universities' educational outcomes and post-college performance (Jennings, Lovett, Cuba, Swingle, & Lindkvist, 2013; York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015).

2. *Academic achievement*: Themes include getting good grades or improving one's grades, achieving college milestones (e.g., declaring a major or planning for off-campus study), and engaging in career-oriented activities (Jennings et al., 2013).
3. *Bandwidth recovery*: Themes include the social marginalization on mental, social, and cognitive capacity for learning that have been diminished by the negative effects of economic insecurity, discrimination, and hostility against marginalized groups (Verschelden, 2017).
4. *Social and residential life*: Themes include making new friends, maintaining and strengthening friendships, or pursuing extracurricular activities (Jennings et al., 2013).
5. *Life management*: Themes include maintaining psychological and physical well-being, work-ethic issues (e.g., better time management or developing effective study skills), and balancing academics with one's social or personal life (Jennings et al., 2013).
6. *Academic engagement*: Themes include expressing a desire to learn, taking interesting classes, exploring new subject areas, or engaging in independent research (Jennings et al., 2013).
7. *FGCS*: Students whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor's degree at the time of their application to the institution (Byrd & Macdonald, 2005; Manzoni & Streib, 2018; Tate et al., 2015).

8. *Growth mindset*: The theory that abilities and intelligence can be developed (Bates, 2016; Dweck, 2014).
9. *Meta-majors*: A set of classes or courses grouped by individual majors under a larger academic umbrella that can lead to the fulfillment of graduation requirements for a broader discipline such health, education, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, or business (Waugh, 2016).
10. *Nonacademic experiences*: Work, relationships, finances, social and psychological conditions, and living conditions that impact university educational outcomes and post-college performance (Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004, 2003).
11. *Protective factors*: The attributes (skills, strengths, resources, supports, or coping strategies) that help individuals more effectively address stressful events (Bates, 2014).
12. *Social capital*: Networks of relationships in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and collaborate effectively (Hanifan, 1916).
13. *Students' experiences*: Experiences, including social interactions, that impact academic achievement positively or negatively (Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004, 2003).
14. *Summer melt*: The phenomenon where prospective college students never arrive at college because of obstacles encountered after completing high school and before beginning college in the fall season (Castleman, Page, & Schooley, 2014).
15. *Undermatch*: The phenomenon that occurs in college-bound high school graduates who attend a college for which they are overqualified based on their

high school standardized test scores, grade-point average, and college-placement testing (Ovink, Kalogrides, Nanney, & Delaney, 2018).

Summary

This introductory chapter described the topic under investigation—the lived experiences of FGCS—while offering a justification for the study. Very few studies have focused on the unique challenges FGCS face in college that lead to higher attrition rates. This study centers on the following research questions:

- What experiences do FGCS share that have influenced their academic success or lack of success?
- How do FGCS define success and how does this definition reflect their notion of success in college?
- What protective factors do FGCS perceive as promoting their academic and nonacademic success?
- How have FGCS' life experiences contributed to their understandings of success in college?
- What shared services do FGCS perceive as contributing to their success while transition to college, during their first semester at college, and when preparing to graduate from college?

The findings from this inquiry gave a voice to the experiences of FGCS and provided stakeholders with data on how to support FGCS, in addition to increasing FGCS' academic achievements and graduation rates.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter explores the theoretical framework that guided this study and synthesizes the current literature related to FGCCS. This literature review evaluates the extensive research base that underpins trends (such as financial aid, social interactions with peers, classroom experiences, course load, academic preparedness, academic integration, self-efficacy, parental roles, and social capital) that exist in FGCS' lived experiences, and identifies the gaps that can facilitate future studies when serving FGCS. Colleges continue to operate suboptimally in serving FGCS (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). Examining how FGCS view their lived experiences academically will assist college administrators and other stakeholders in creating support services that ensure that FGCS persist and graduate from college (Gibbons & Woodside, 2012). This chapter concludes with a summation of the content explored and establishes the need for this study, based on the gap in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

The first year of college is essential to the success of FGCS transitioning to college, as this time presents numerous challenges (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). FGCS struggle to integrate into college socially and academically; therefore, it is unsurprising that FGCS are more likely to drop out of school compared with their non-FGCS counterparts (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Much of the data surrounding student departure relates to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, Astin's (1985) student-involvement theory, and Bean and Metzner's (1985) student-attrition theory. These theories provide a theoretical foundation for understanding why students do not persist through college graduation. Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) interactionalist

model of student persistence—that expands on Durkheim’s (1951) theory of suicide—is indicative of the framework used to study retention at community colleges. Tinto’s model is the conceptual framework that guided this transcendental phenomenological investigation into the lives of FGCCS. The interactionalist model argues that student departure from college is a longitudinal process between the student’s ability or inability to integrate with the college. A student’s sense of belonging and involvement is amplified or diminished through interactions with the university’s academic and social environments, which corresponds to the theoretical framework of Durkheim’s (1951) theory of suicide. According to Durkheim, people commit four types of suicide: altruistic, anomic, fatalistic, and egotistical (see Figure 1). Altruistic suicide is when an individual’s social or group involvement is too high; anomic suicide is when an individual’s social or group involvement is too low; fatalistic suicide is when an individual’s social or group involvement is kept under tight regulation; and egotistic suicide is when an individual’s social or group involvement is too disconnected, thus, the person perceives themselves as being alone in the world. Tinto (1975; 1987; 1993) believed that only egotistical suicide plays a major role in college-student departure as a result of the student feeling academically and socially disconnected from the college.



Figure 1. Durkheim's (1951) Theory of Suicide

Note: From *Suicide: A Study of Sociology*, by E. Durkheim, Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Tinto (1975; 1987; 1993) began his investigation by isolating variables that challenge students' persistence in colleges and universities. Tinto's persistence model identified characteristics that directly impact student persistence or departure decisions. These characteristics include personal characteristics (ability, sex, and race), family background (expectations, values, and social status), academic skills (high school and standardized-test results), and goal commitments (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 1999; Leppel, 2001; Montmarquette, Mahseredjian, & Houle, 2001). Furthermore, Tinto (1975) presented social and academic integration as key factors in students' transition to college, including the students' ability to adapt to institutional culture and how they successfully navigate academic challenges (Cabrera, Nora, Castaneda, & Hengstler, 1990).

According to Tinto (1975), students complete higher education when they socially or academically integrate. The decision to drop out or persist is a longitudinal interaction process between the college's social and academic systems and the student (Braxton, Hirschy, &

McClendon, 2004). Students' characteristics and attributes dictate institutional commitment (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007) and student commitment and goals reflect the students' college experience and influence their decision to drop out or persist (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009). Tinto (1975) indicated that academic and social integration of students into the college environment is crucial to a students' decision to stay in college. Learners arrive at college with specific goals and expectations, and their integration into the school environment influences their educational outcomes. Involvement in groups and extracurricular activities, peer interactions, and faculty-student interactions help in student integration and strengthen students' commitment to the institution and their own goals (Tinto, 1975), which results in persistence.

Even though Tinto's (1975) interactionalist theory has been referred to as student-persistence theory, studies have cited its limitations and provided other models to explain student attrition (Leppel, 2001; Nora, 1987). Tinto's theory is criticized because it primarily considers students attending 4-year higher learning institutions, Tinto's theory does not consider 2-year and nontraditional college students (W. B. Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009). Initially, Tinto recognized that the theory did not focus on underrepresented and nontraditional student populations (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Tinto later revised and expanded the theory to incorporate diverse variables such as the external factors of community, employment, family, and financial resources on a students' decision to drop out of college (Tinto, 1993). Moreover, Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) were concerned with the theory's applicability to student departure from 2-year or commuter colleges; however, Kuh et al. (2007) maintained that the key concept of Tinto's theories were the integration of students to the college and community. Braxton et al. (2004) confirmed that Tinto's work on student retention had been tested and validated as an

established framework for higher education institutions, and any failure of the model is due to the culture or commitment of the institution, as each college or university is unique.

Tinto (1993) worked to expand earlier literature concerning college student departure by adding characteristics that support traditional and nontraditional students in addition to 4-year and 2-year colleges or universities. A student's admission commitment impacts the degree of their social and academic assimilation at college, which influences their subsequent commitments and affects their ability to obtain their goals (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986). Tinto theorized that the stronger the individual's academic and social integration, the greater the chance the student will continue their education; however, the college must be equally committed to creating a sense of belonging to meet or surpass the student's expectations (See Figure 2) (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995).

Related Literature

This section provides a synthesis of the most recent literature on FGCS. As previously stated, colleges and universities must understand students' academic preparedness as higher education becomes more accessible and student populations become more diverse (Atherton, 2014). Few studies focus on the experiences of students whose parents had little or no college education. This study is rooted in the transcendental phenomenology design and provides rich, detailed experiences of FGCS attending a community college. Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) interactionalist model of student departure guides this chapter and provides a comprehensive review of empirical literature written about FGCCS experiences.

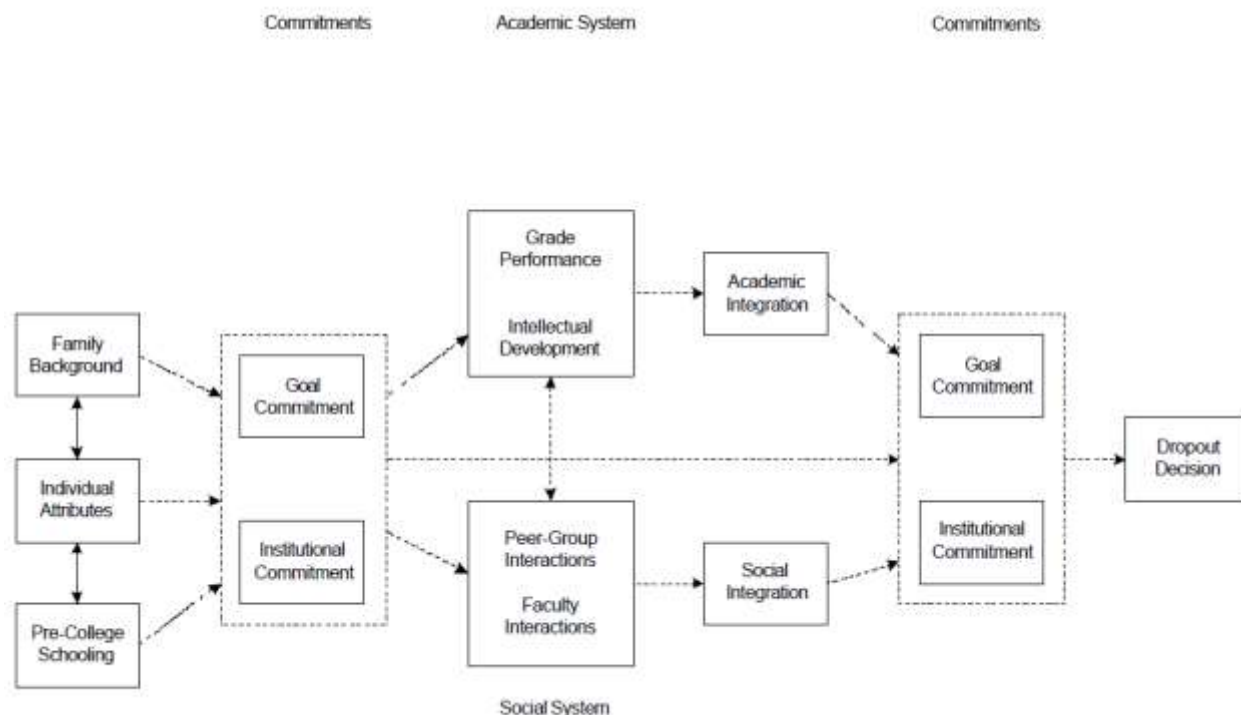


Figure 2. Tinto's model of Student Departure.

Note: Adapted from *Leaving College Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, 2nd ed., by V. Tinto, 1993, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, p. 115.

FGCS and Colleges

FGCS are defined as individuals whose parents lack a college or university experience, or the first generation of individuals in a family to acquire an education that is beyond the high school level (Dynarski, 2016; Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2003; Toutkoushian, Stollberg, & Slaton, 2018). To increase program efficiency, the U.S. Department of Education perceived that the first generation includes students from families where parents lack a college degree, including those who attended but did not graduate (Lowry, 2017). Many scholars associate their definitions of FGCS with the student's parents lacking any experience of higher education (Billson & Terry, 1982).

FGCCS are often perceived as individuals who are the first in their immediate family to engage in post-high-school education (Schackmuth, 2012); however, different concepts have

been formulated on who should be considered FGCS. A key aspect of FGCS is that the students come from different economic and cultural backgrounds. The AACC (2018; NCES, 2015) identified that approximately 36% of FGCS are from minority communities. In this context, 53% of Hispanic, 43% of Native American, and 41% of African American students are identified as FGCCS (Nomi, 2005). From these insights, a lower percentage of White and Asian students comprise the FGCS demographic (Nomi, 2005). Drawing from insights from the AACC, most FGCS share these common characteristics:

- Many students are not of traditional college age because some have been out of school for some time and are often in a transition mode by attending college to complete their studies.
- Many FGCS work full-time or part-time to meet their financial needs while attending college. These students experience additional time and financial challenges in the academic process.
- Some FGCCS engage in a smaller course load as they try to balance work, family, and their studies.

The characteristics presented by the AACC are present in much of the literature surrounding FGCS (Atherton, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2012; Schackmuth, 2012; Shumaker & Wood, 2016). Notably, most studies identified that FGCS emerge from minority and low-income families. Minority and low-income students are considered to be at high risk of dropping out, which has increased the focus on this group (Gibbons & Woodside, 2012). Minority and low-income populations are prone to poor performance in studies, a situation affiliated with the lack of parental support, low socioeconomic status, and inappropriate academic preparation (Atherton, 2014; Byrd & Macdonald, 2005; Manzoni & Streib, 2018; Tate et al., 2015). This

phenomenon offers insights on how FGCS can succeed in their academic quest and identifies support and mentorship programs that should be implemented to help FGCS achieve success (Lowry, 2017).

Certain transition aspects can facilitate an effective transfer from high school to college for FGCS. The theoretical perspective in this study focused on assessments of self-esteem, motivational aspects in achieving a college education, and the character and identities students develop (Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993). These concepts highlight the need to employ different theoretical concepts when developing insights about FGCS.

The purpose of community college is to provide low-cost open access for students (Aulck & West, 2017). Community colleges enroll more than 50% of all undergraduate students who attend U.S. public institutions (Stebbleton et al., 2014). In 2016, the Pell Institute indicated that 5.5 million low-income FGCS enrolled in U.S. universities and colleges, with a third of them enrolled in 2-year colleges (Evans, 2016). Three-quarters of FGCS started their college education at for-profit or 2-year colleges, whereas half of non-FGCS commenced college at 4-year institutions (Evans, 2016). Community colleges provide FGCS an accessible and affordable path to obtain their degrees (Aulck & West, 2017). When comparing FGCS attending 4-year and 2-year schools, the data indicates that FGCS attending 4-year schools have a greater probability of attrition in higher education (Petty, 2014).

Public community colleges provide local communities with skilled labor that would otherwise not be accessible to them (Phillippe, 2016). Moreover, such colleges give access to employment to underserved populations in rural communities. In addition to a skilled workforce, community colleges offer significant economic benefits to taxpayers and students (Chae & Jenkins, 2015; Evans, 2016). When comparing students with high school diplomas, students who

go on to earn baccalaureate degrees earn 64% more money than those who do not. (D'Amico & Dika, 2013). D'Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, and Ginn (2014) examined the average earning premium for individuals with only a high school diploma versus students earning an associate degree. It was found that earnings premiums for women and men were 21% and 13% over those with only a high school certificate. On average, the total associate degree taxpayer benefit was 2.5 times more than the taxpayer investment. Overall, communities and students acquire great economic benefits from U.S. community colleges (Brand, Pfeffer, & Goldrick-Rab, 2014).

While the economic benefits of attaining a college certificate or degree are clear (Engberg & Allen, 2011; Trostel, 2017), rural FGCS enrollment rates are lower than those of their urban counterparts (Tieken, 2016). In 2015, 37% of urban 18 to 24-year-olds enrolled in college compared with 27% of students living in rural areas (Tieken, 2016). The lower educational aspirations of rural first-generation students are tied with lower levels of enrollments (Evans, 2016; Tieken, 2016). Low-income FGCS are more likely to receive weaker academic preparation and experience increased socioeconomic barriers than their urban counterparts (Warren, Park, & Tieken, 2016).

Low-Income Students

Low-income college students are those who had no expected family contribution from their Federal Pell Grant rate or families with incomes below 200% of the poverty line (Davidson, 2013). FGCS who are low-income are less likely to attend college and are six times more likely to withdraw from college (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011), despite the fact that 90% of young people in today's society desire to attain a college degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). Low-income students are more likely to demonstrate varying college-attendance patterns like transferring to a 2-year from a 4-year college and regularly taking time

away from college to address a myriad of challenges (Melguizo, Sanchez, & Velasco, 2016). Additionally, low-income FGCS work throughout college to offset the cost of attending college (Lee & Mueller, 2014), leading to lower rates of retention and graduation. Compared to 56% of higher income students, only 26% of lower income students earn a 4-year degree in 6 years (Melguizo et al., 2016). Only 24% of students at a community college attained a bachelor's degree within 6 years after moving to a 4-year school (Atherton, 2014). In 2014, discrepancies in graduation rates of low-income students displayed a racial gap in which 41% of White students (25 to 29 years of age) obtained a 4-year college degree while only 22% of African American students and 15% of Hispanic students obtained a four-year degree (Kena et al., 2015).

These statistics demonstrate that lower income FGCS are less likely to graduate from college when compared to their more affluent peers (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Students' low-income, first-generation status is one of the strongest predictors of attrition for community college students before they enter their 2nd year (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015), even when accounting for barriers such as working full-time, financial aid status, gender, race, and ethnicity (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Horn & Nevill, 2006). Low-income students could be compelled to drop out in the absence of loans. Even after accepting loans, their attrition rate remains high, therefore increasing the number of first-generation loan defaulters (Chen & DesJardins, 2008; Davidson, 2015; Hillman, 2014).

The problem of attaining equal opportunity for low-income students has remained challenging in the United States (Hoxby & Turner, 2015). Students experience numerous forms of oppression while navigating college and university systems—covert and overt—such as discrimination and classicism (Means & Pyne, 2017; Pyne & Means, 2013; Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). For example, in 2012, 57% of affluent students—

compared to 33% low-income students—earned bachelor’s degrees (Hoxby & Turner, 2015). By 2015, these numbers increased by 9% for affluent students and 3% for low-income students (Hoxby & Turner, 2015); therefore, low-income FGCS are generally at a disadvantage when compared to their more affluent peers (Davidson, 2015).

Community College Acculturation Process

Acculturation is the psychological experience defined as an individual’s process of assimilating to the dominant culture (Berry, 2006; Hernandez, Cohen, & Garcia, 2011; Quintana & Scull, 2009). College and university systems have their cultural characteristics, much like FGCS. Students perceive college environments as having an independent climate for everyone involved (D’Amico et al., 2014). Furthermore, college and university systems develop new middle-class ideals and values (D’Amico et al., 2014). U.S. higher education institutions create and enforce new societal values of merit, mobility, and professionalism that are commonly expected in modern U.S. society (Holloway-Friesen, 2018).

One concern is that college and university environments were only created for a few members of society: primarily White members of the affluent classes (Castillo, Lopez-Arenas, & Saldivarxys, 2010). This system was not designed for FGCS—who currently constitute a greater percentage of the student population in higher education—considering how many originate from underrepresented social classes and ethnic and racial minorities (Holloway-Friesen, 2016). The poor academic success of FGCS demonstrates a lack of compatibility with the institutional culture of the college environment (D’Amico et al., 2014). Students are not to blame for this injustice; rather, U.S. institutions have continued to fail in creating an environment sensitive to various student needs (D’Amico et al., 2014; Holloway-Friesen, 2016, 2018). Higher education systems need to accept responsibility in these students’ limited successes (DeRosa & Dolby,

2014). An acculturation process occurs when an FGCS is thrust into a setting in which the student and members of their family have never had any relevant, practical experience.

(Archuleta & Perry 2016).

Scholars have attributed the acculturation process to FGCS' lack of college readiness. College readiness alludes to the academic and practical knowledge that individuals need to achieve success in colleges or universities (Tierney & Sablan, 2014). FGCS who are from low-income families attend low-performing schools that cannot shape them for experiences in higher education (Duncheon, 2018). Many low-performing schools lack quality educators and are often underfunded, which directly influences the quality of education offered (Duncheon, 2018; Rose, 2013). The lack of core academic preparation and low-test scores highlight the subsequent challenges these individuals might face in higher education (Lowry, 2017). The SAT and ACT test scores—coupled with students' grade-point average—are considered when determining if students will be successful in college (Duncheon, 2018; Gewertz, 2015).

Parents of FGCS play a vital role in how prepared their child is for college (Schackmuth, 2012). This argument rests on the notion that parents and guardians of FGCS are less likely to demand and encourage the student to perform well in high school (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Additionally, parents and guardians of FGCS are less likely to engage students in advanced-placement courses that might shape their success in academic integration at the college level (Camara, 2003). These factors influence students' readiness for college studies.

The lack of social capital and guidance from family members implies that FGCS lack insight into how the college system works and do not understand how to apply for college (Archuleta & Perry 2016; Collier & Morgan, 2008). Students lack knowledge of how to apply for financial aid or how to choose a major that the student is enthusiastic about (Elliott, 2014).

Further arguments suggest that the lack of family guidance leads to a students' inability to differentiate among various institutions of higher learning, which might result in selecting an institution that does not meet the students' educational needs and objectives (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Parents of FGCS might be unable or unwilling to offer help to students to adequately prepare them for college (Kuh et al., 2007). Consequently, students must rely on high school stakeholders—educators and their peers—to help them make an appropriate decision about college (Lowry, 2017). Students face substantial challenges that influence their college aspirations when they are less engaged with high school stakeholders. Few students from minority communities engage high school staff concerning their future education aspirations; therefore, many FGCS rely on themselves for academic success (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

Challenges Facing Academic Achievement for FGCS

FGCS present a unique demographic characterized by the need to contend with various challenges to achieve academic success (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012; Tinto, 2012). These challenges put barriers in place that are contrary to the notion that colleges are pathways for students to explore their interests, expand their social-cultural experiences, and develop a career path (Perna & Thomas, 2008). Many FGCS do not accomplish these achievements; nevertheless, it is upheld that colleges provide a pathway for students to explore themselves and their interests, to expand their social and cultural familiarities, and to shape a more promising career (Tate et al., 2015). It has been difficult for FGCS to achieve the rich diversity of productive rewards that higher education offers.

Post-secondary education opportunities are often limited for individuals from minority groups and those with low socioeconomic status (Pyne & Means, 2013; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001). Programs focused on enhancing school integration, service learning, leadership

opportunities, government-assistance initiatives, and population shifts have increased the engagement of minority students (Thelin & Gasman, 2016). Despite these improvements, minority and low-income students still face challenges such as the lack of college readiness, compromised financial stability, lack of family support, and low self-esteem (Pyne & Means, 2013). Nonetheless, FGCS are increasingly becoming successful in college following the deployment of effective college preparation programs and student support services such as tutoring services, intrusive advisement, peer-mentorship programs, and structured learning communities (Jehangir, Williams, & Jeske, 2012; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Shumaker & Wood, 2016).

Despite the increased engagement and graduation rate of FGCS, compelling factors limit their engagement and completion of college (Pascarella et al., 2004, 2003). These factors range from personal attributes to societal aspects, along with the role of the government in enhancing higher education (Harlow & Bowman, 2016). These challenges align with the lack of college readiness, family support in education, and the financial stability of the students and their families (Lowry, 2017). Other factors that are imperative to consider in the context of FGCS' academic success include racial underrepresentation, low academic interest, student self-esteem, and complications in adjusting to the college environment (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003). These factors align with the low rates of college completion among FGCS who are enrolled in community colleges compared to other students who have parents or guardians who have received a college degree.

As noted earlier, parents and guardians of FGCS influence the performance and intent of students to complete college through providing motivation and support (Schackmuth, 2012; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). The experiences of FGCS significantly differ from those of their

non-FGCS counterparts. First-generation parents do not assist their children in making financial decisions and in the process of selecting colleges as much as parents who have attended college (Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2014). FGCS tend to be from underrepresented groups and lower socioeconomic-status homes and typically have lower educational aspirations (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2014). The following student demographics are often grouped together when studying students in higher education: students of color, students from underserved groups, ethnic minorities, students-at-risk, nontraditional students, first-generation students, those from low-socioeconomic incomes, and disadvantaged students (Atherton, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2012; Schackmuth, 2012; Shumaker & Wood, 2016).

Most FGCS struggle to simultaneously cope with family responsibilities, economic instabilities, and attending college (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). FGCS are likely to work longer hours and attend college part time because FGCS tend to be older, have families to support, and live off-campus (Melguizo et al., 2016). FGCS study less and work more than their non-FGCS counterparts (Stebbleton et al., 2014). For example, FGCS are more likely to drop out of college before reaching their second year because FGCS work more hours than their counterparts (Troester-Trate, 2017). Similarly, family obligations and part-time and full-time employment responsibilities contribute to an increased drop-out risk for FGCS (Troester-Trate, 2017).

FGCS require remedial coursework and are more likely to be unprepared academically for college (D'Amico & Dika, 2013). In high school, these students tend to have lower grade-point averages and less rigorous coursework (Evans, 2016). FGCS have lower academic self-efficacy, less self-esteem, and lack strong study skills (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). Grades earned in college among FGCS differ. While Stebleton et al. (2014) reported insignificant

differences between FGCS and non-FGCS, DeRosa and Dolby (2014) revealed that FGCS earned lower college grades compared with their non-FGCS peers.

Additional studies have investigated other aspects of FGCS academic achievement and challenges (Elliott, 2014). Stebleton et al. (2014) investigated variations in community college student retention and academic engagement between FGCS and their non-FGCS counterparts. A survey of 1,864 first-year students was conducted at a large, public community college in the United States. The data revealed FGCS to have lower academic achievement. The academic achievement rate was determined by the rate that students asked insightful questions during classes, brought ideas from various courses, contributed to class discussions, and interacted with faculty. The data indicated a lower retention rate among FGCS. Thus, higher education faculty and staff should work to promote student retention and academic achievement (Swecker et al., 2013).

The decision to attend college among FGCS aligns with their capacity to pay for education (Lee & Mueller, 2014). The lack of appropriate and necessary information about how the financial aid system works limits opportunities for FGCS, especially those from low-income families (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Students from low-income families are less likely to join clubs or complete their college education (Harlow & Bowman, 2016) and often lack substantial financial knowledge and resources when compared to students from high-income families with college-educated parents (Schackmuth, 2012). Additionally, many FGCS students work full-time or part-time while attending school to sustain themselves, their families, and pay for various college expenses (Harlow & Bowman, 2016; Stebleton et al., 2014). Employment conditions influence students' capacity to perform effectively by affecting their dedication to classwork, homework, and their engagement in the college education system (Ortega, 2018). Many FGCS

leave school to increase their job productivity with the intent of supporting themselves and their families, especially if they perceive that completing college is not economically feasible.

Throughout the historical development of the U.S. education system, racial and ethnic disparities have been a key consideration in formulating education-provision strategies (Pyne & Means, 2013); however, these government-driven initiatives have not been substantially inclusive. Attempts have been made to investigate the rates and factors influencing the educational engagement of African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, along with individuals from low-income families (Lowry, 2017). Students from minority and low-income families continue to show low college participation (D'Amico & Dika, 2013). The underrepresentation of minority communities and low-income families in college education highlights that racial and ethnic disparities persist and need to be addressed to enhance FGCS participation and completion of college education (Warburton et al., 2001).

Lack of self-esteem, ineffective adjustment to the college environment, and lack of family support are all linked to low-income and racial disparities in the college environment (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003). Students from different cultural backgrounds might feel uncomfortable in the college setting (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). This situation is aggravated by the lack of preparation for college education. Consequently, students from different cultural backgrounds have limited communication with peers because cultural aspects create disparities in the interests, experiences, and resources available to students. These disparities contribute to the development of self-esteem and impact how students adjust to the college-learning environment.

FGCS often face the task of seeking extra developmental coursework to align themselves with the requirements of a college education (Atherton, 2014). This task impacts the confidence

of students, their ability to be academically competitive, and their ultimate success in college (Williams, Karahalios, & Ferrari, 2013). Some students are subjected to discrimination that discredits their academic abilities and discourages them from engaging in college education (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). A combination of low self-esteem and alienation from peers makes it difficult for FGCS to be successful (Elliott, 2014).

Assimilation to college exposes students to a culture embraced by college-going individuals. The lack of this influence among FGCS implies that students must struggle to fit in the educational processes experienced in the college setting (Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanath, 2015). The perception of a hostile climate, lack of productive student-faculty interactions, and limited communication with individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds discourages the engagement of FGCS in college education (Williams et al., 2013). Such factors impact individuals' self-esteem and sense of belonging (Jehangir et al., 2015), contributing to poor performance and high rates of withdrawal among students.

FGCS find notably greater success when they do not separate from their families; however, students who separate from their families tend to be more socially active and easily adapt to college culture. On the same note, the lack of family support among students influences their personal opinion of college (Hernandez, 2016; Mcfadden, 2016). Many students perceive college as a venture for the rich, and parents might perceive their children's venture to achieve a college education as offensive or arrogant. Even parents who support their children's ventures in college might lack a clear understanding of the time, resources, and academic focus required by students to achieve success. Parents may provide limited emotional support for students and may not ensure that students are comfortable in the college setting (Pike & Kuh, 2005). This lack of

support demotivates FGCS in pursuing college education as they opt for lighter academic workloads, which attributes to high dropout rates among the students.

Factors Affecting the Success of FGCS

FGCS experience college differently from their non-FGCS peers (Gibbons, Rhinehart, & Hardin, 2019). FGCS struggle with college adjustment and encounter inadequate guidance and support from family or friends who did not go through the higher education system themselves (Gibbons et al., 2019). Various factors impact FGCS success at college (Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Dennis et al., 2005; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). One factor is the need for FGCS to build their social capital to navigate the college environment successfully (Schwartz et al., 2018). Students whose parents did not attend college had insufficient capital access compared to students with parents who attended college (Warren et al., 2016). The lack of social capital has a negative impact on FGCS because such capital aligns with a range of positive outcomes, from high correlation to retention and grade-point average, to a sense of belonging to the college community (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Typically, parents without a college education do not effectively prepare their children for a college-level education; this explains why FGCS are four times more likely to depart college when compared to their non-FGCS peers (DeVilbiss, 2014). In addition, FGCS are less likely to seek help (Stebbleton et al., 2014) and use fewer campus support services such as tutoring or professional guidance on the college transition (Barry, Hudley, Kelly, & Cho, 2009). Parents' educational level is one of the strongest indicators of college-student persistence (Wang, 2014b).

Academically, FGCS perform poorly compared with non-FGCS (DeVilbiss, 2014), perhaps due to FGCS' lack of a parent or guardian to share their experiences and individual and

collective family goals (Bui, 2002). Compared with parents of non-FGCS, parents of FGCS lack knowledge of college navigation, creating a disadvantage for their children concerning financial aid, acknowledging the value of a college education, degree planning, and navigating the process of enrollment (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Low parental expectations link to greater attrition rates of FGCS (Soria & Stebleton, 2012)s.

Factors That Contribute to the Success of FGCS

Although FGCS face various and persistent challenges in completing a college education, several factors have contributed to their success and increased their participation in the education system (Dennis et al., 2005). These success factors vary across groups (Muuss, 1996). Among these contributing factors are the students' level of participation and success in high school, engagement in college-readiness initiatives, and academic and social integration practices in colleges. Personal characteristics and family support remain imperative in determining the success and achievements of college students. The integration of these factors contribute to students successfully enrolling, engaging, and completing a college education (Petty, 2014).

An individual's level of involvement in high school is connected to achieving college success (Schackmuth, 2012). FGCS' ability to be active in college-readiness programs influences their perception of a college education (Wang, 2014b). High school students must make relevant connections with professionals and peers who can help identify the students' strengths to determine where the student can fit in and succeed (Swanbrow Becker et al., 2017). A supportive peer relationship fosters the continuous pursuit of academic goals and encourages behaviors that are appropriate for academic success (Stebleton et al., 2014). High school students must connect with like-minded individuals who focus on academic prosperity. Students who surround themselves with peers who share similar educational aspirations have a better opportunity to

develop academically at the college level. These types of encouraging relationships create an opportunity for FGCS to develop skills that facilitate effective social engagement with other people in college (Mcfadden, 2016). Interconnectedness also encourages students to engage with school personnel and ask for help with issues associated with a college education (Stebbleton et al., 2014).

Students' participation in college-readiness programs is imperative for the student to develop a clear and sustainable focus on college education (Wang, 2014a). These initiatives have legal support with the enactment of the Federal Higher Education Act. This act mandates the U.S. Department of Education to support educational initiatives that foster increased enrollment and completion of college education among students from low-income families or underrepresented ethnic communities. Such programs include the federally-funded TRIO program and the Advancement Via Individual Determination, a nonprofit program. These programs offer opportunities for FGCS to engage in college preparation in different stages of the process, including the college application process and tutoring. Engaging in these programs creates opportunities for FGCS to acquire financial assistance, understand the college admission requirements, and develop relevant social and learning skills that foster a successful college career (Mcfadden, 2016).

Community colleges also offer support programs that address the challenges faced by minorities in the pursuit of education (Windham, Rehfuss, Williams, Pugh, & Tincher-Ladner, 2014). Support programs offer psychological support to show that people from different backgrounds can be successful in college (Wang, 2014a; 2014b). In addition, motivation programs focus on enhancing the value of education and using interventions to address the barriers faced by certain minorities (Mcfadden, 2016; Stebleton et al., 2014).

Educators are increasingly encouraging students to develop problem-solving skills that enable students to navigate the challenging college environment (Williams et al., 2013; Windham et al., 2014). FGCS students are emerging as hardworking, goal-oriented, independent, and mature in pursuing their educational objectives (Swanbrow Becker et al., 2017). The challenges that emerge from the perception that college is meant for the wealthy have a limited impact when FGCS are seriously invested in their education. This personal investment results in better academic performance among groups with the increased persistence and social engagement necessary for success in college.

American Association of Community Colleges Guided Pathways Initiative

U.S. educators and legislators are urgently trying to increase the number of college graduates and decrease the attrition rate of at-risk students. Community colleges are under enormous pressure to contribute to these national goals (Bailey, Smith Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015a). *Guided Pathways* is an initiative focused on transforming the community college culture and mindset. The aim is to give students a clearer path to success (Van Noy, Trimble, Jenkins, Barnett, & Wachen, 2016). The motive of the initiative is to help FGCS examine education options, assist in the sequencing of courses, and provide individualized support to help students succeed while at college, specifically community college (Bailey et al., 2015a). This support makes the transition from high school to college easier (Vargas, Hooker, Collins, & Gutierrez, 2018). Guided Pathways gives colleges an opportunity to reach successful completion rates. The approach also aims to reduce or entirely eliminate equity gaps and differences in achievement and create the opportunity for students to receive and access education regardless of income or race (Gaze, 2018; Bailey et al., 2015a). This kind of initiative requires assistance from a variety of stakeholders, resources, and finances to be sustainable.

Initiatives like Guided Pathways require a variety of activities and programs to support students and encourage changes to the traditional mindset of participating institutions (Bailey et al., 2015a). A new student-focused culture can be explored through the use of various approaches and strategies (Mery & Schiorring, 2011). Educators must make difficult decisions, question preconceived notions about student success, and face accountability pressures if they are to become truly ready for diverse groups of students (Newhall et al., 2014).

The California Guided Pathways Project is an example of an institution-wide approach that successfully integrated supports for students from college entry, to graduation, to careers (Banks-Santilli, 2014). The school system shares best practices and ideas while each college develops plans and practices to meet student needs based on four guiding principles (P. D. Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017). The initiative required new counseling and support service techniques to be introduced to keep students on the path to graduation (Newhall et al., 2014) and several colleges undertook enormous reforms. Irrespective of the challenges associated with the initiative, the result was a marked increase of a 35% transfer rate in California Community Colleges by 2021. In turn, an additional 26,000 students will enter the 4-year system every year (Shulock & Jenkins, 2011). Guided Pathways is key to ensuring community colleges remain an opportunity path to students (Bailey et al., 2015a).

The success of this model requires combined efforts and coordination between faculty members and staff involved in student services, creating the four themed pillars shown in Figure 3 (Bailey et al., 2015a). The first pillar requires the institution to clarify the path. During this initial stage, faculty and advisors simplify students' choices with default-program maps that identify pathways to completion, transfer opportunities, and employment (Bailey et al., 2015a; P. D. Jenkins et al., 2017). The second pillar focuses on community colleges' efforts to help

students chose and enter their college pathway. Institutions should align foundational course work and credit-bearing or non-credit bearing courses with a student's curriculum (Cullinane & Treisman, 2010). Colleges should adopt a meta-major technique to organize programs for students to get into the right college pathway (Waugh, 2016). The third and fourth pillars focus on community college students staying on the path and achieving desired learning outcomes. To support students' ability to stay on the path, institutions embed academic and nonacademic services that strengthen the likelihood of success and completion, and program-learning outcomes that ensure competitive employment opportunities (Bailey, Jaggars & Jenkins, 2015b).

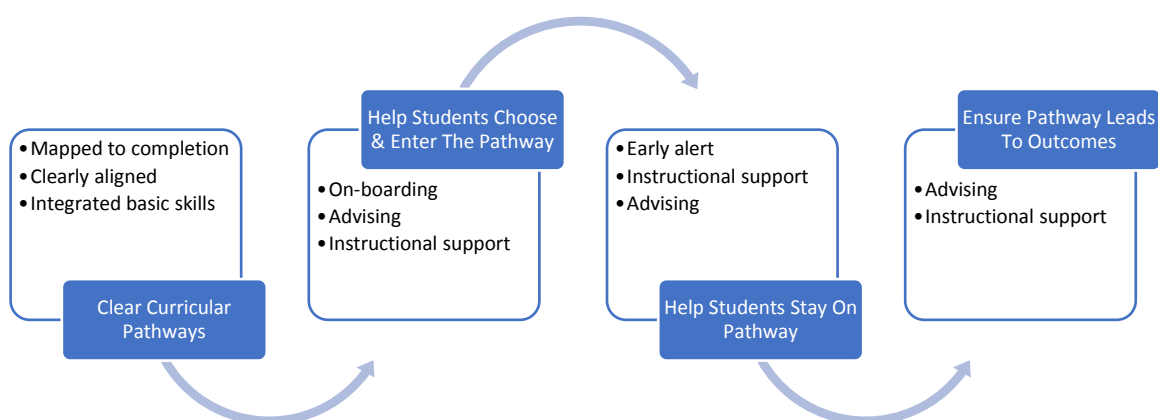


Figure 3. Guide Pathway Model.

Note: From *A New Paradigm for Student "Readiness,"* by L. Whitley-Putz, 2019, retrieved April 2, 2019, from <https://onlinenetworkofeducators.org/2018/10/01/4368/>

Impact of Summer Melt on FGCCS

Every year, one third of all college-attending high school graduates are accepted and plan to attend college but never officially arrive at any college campus in the upcoming fall semester (Castleman & Page, 2015; Rall, 2016). Parental engagement during a FGCS summer transition process plays a major role on their child successfully arriving at college the fall following high school graduation (Castleman & Page, 2017). Through sheer hard work and determination,

FGCS attain their dreams of making it to college and increase their chances to create a better life. (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009; Gibson & Slate, 2010); however, the rate at which college-intending high school graduates fail to actually join colleges in the fall is significantly high (Handel, 2015). This phenomenon is called the summer melt, and for universities, it remains a puzzling problem.

Summer melt is the phenomenon where college-attending high school graduates never arrive at the college of their choice because of obstacles encountered after the completion of high school and the beginning of college in the fall season (Castleman et al., 2014). Students who melt are those who have tackled the necessary tasks needed to enroll to college; then, after being accepted to the colleges of their choice, never attend. This phenomenon occurs in both FGCS and non-FGCS (Castleman, Owen & Page, 2015). Data from Harvard University indicates that 10–40% of high school graduates do not show up at college in the fall. For instance, in the Fort Worth Independent School District, the summer melt rate was a staggering 48% in 2010 (Center for Education Policy Research, 2019).

FGCS melt at a higher rate than their non-FGCS counterparts (Pascarella et al., 2004; Sirin, 2005; Stephens et al., 2014). Summer melt is a common problem, especially among FGCS who come from low-income families (Center for Education Policy Research, 2019). Many high school graduates lose their college focus due to lack of understanding student aid, lack of support from close friends and relatives, or by missing school deadlines (French & Oreopoulos, 2017). Up to 40% of high school students emanating from low-income and first-generation families never report to the first day of college (French & Oreopoulos, 2017; Kolodner, 2015). Financial concerns are often central to why low-income FGCS melt away during the summer; the family's lack of understanding on the financial-aid process, the costs of college, and benefits of

postsecondary education creates a barrier that ultimately ends the college-going journey for prospective students (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016; Rosinger, 2017).

How Summer Melt and Undermatch Impacts FGCCS

Between 1998 and 2012, national college enrolment in the United States increased by 42% (Williams, 2017). Although the number of college enrollments has steadily increased in past decades, FGCS continually lag behind (Castleman, Arnold, & Wartman, 2012). In addition, immigrant students who are the first in their families to attend college and have been accepted to their college of choice have found themselves being undermatched the summer before entering college (Castleman et al., 2012). Undermatch is a phenomenon that occurs in college-bound high school graduates who attend a college for which they are overqualified based on their high school standardized test scores, grade-point averages, and college-placement testing (Ovink et al., 2018). Although most literature suggests that undermatch occurs because of poor planning, FGCS—specifically immigrant students who have low incomes—disproportionately undermatch because of geographic concerns, social capital, and financial barriers (Ovink & Kalogrides, 2015; Perna, 2000).

Another dimension to the discussion of social inequalities in education is the pattern of inequality due to racial, generational, and societal norms (Deutschlander, 2017). For example, in the fall of 2010, 51% of Latinos, 41% of Asians, and 40% of African Americans enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions were attending public 2-year colleges compared to 38% of Caucasians (see Figure 4) (NCES, 2011; Ovink & Kalogrides, 2015). Furthermore, the number of students who undermatch is approximately 40% nationally, with half of that percentage identifying as coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds; in contrast, 34% identify as being from high socioeconomic backgrounds (Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013).

Undermatched students spend more time in their degree programs and have lower graduation rates when compared to their non-undermatched peers (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2011).

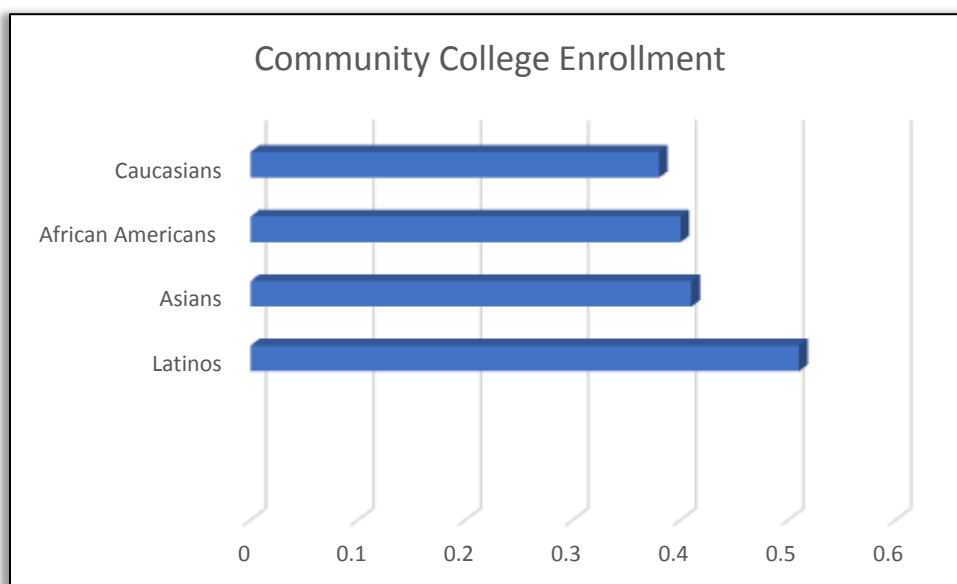


Figure 4. Community College Enrollment.

Note: From *No Place Like Home? Familism and Latino/a–White differences in College Pathways*, S. M. Ovink and D. Kalogrides, 2015, *Social Science Research*, 52, 219–235. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.12.018

Solutions to Summer Melt and Undermatch

Through the U.S. Department of Education (2019), postsecondary institutions can apply for prestigious grants if the institution has a proven track record of providing access, academic development, and successful completion rates for first-generation or low-income students. Student Support Services is a countrywide federal program designed to facilitate college retention among FGCS and many others who endure summer melt and undermatch (Mahoney, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Student Support Services programs focus on the fundamentals of access, academic excellence, and personalized individual support for under-resourced undergraduate students (North Carolina State University, 2019). Increasingly, the program is a success story and provides avenues for academic development, answers the needs

of students, and encourages students toward successful attainment of their degree (Quinn, Cornelius-White, MacGregor, & Uribe-Zarain, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Proactive outreach and accessible counseling services are another effective transition tool to encourage first-generation high school students who are going to college (Castleman et al., 2014). A pilot program offering counseling services to high school graduates revealed that about one in every three students required assistance in filling out financial aid forms, showing most are not knowledgeable about the aid process for college. Secondly, nearly half of respondents had academic challenges and needed help communicating with their prospective college regarding transcripts and housing information. Lastly, approximately 10% sought emotional reassurance and motivation (Castleman et al., 2012; Center for Education Policy Research, 2019; Rall, 2016).

Along with Student Support Services and counseling services, mentoring of FGCS provides benefits to those with limited knowledge about campus life (Arnold, Holzman, Newcomb, Srinivasan, & Bloch, 2018). Mentors can offer critical information around academic choices, applying for subsidized government loans, and accessing crucial campus resources. Peer mentorship often yields positive outcomes for mentees (Holt & Winter, 2018). For instance, college students with mentors achieved better grades, were more active in campus programming, and were less likely to withdraw (Schneider, Broda, Judy, & Burkander, 2013). Mentor and mentee relationships equip FGCS to cope with difficulties in college and increasing their self-esteem.

Summary

This study aimed to review the trends that exist among the lived experiences of low-income and FGCCS. Low-income and FGCCS have certain characteristics that influence their

success in college education, such as lack of parental support, inadequate information about financial aid, academic integration, social interaction with peers, classroom experiences, course load, academic preparedness, and academic integration. These factors can cause FGCS to face challenges that impact their academic performance, retention, and graduation. This review also highlights the various factors that contribute to the success of FGCS. Programs that contribute to increased college preparedness are critical and help develop channels for students to acquire the moral and financial support necessary for success in college.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of FGCS in community colleges in the Northeast region of the United States. To better understand these experiences, three methods of data collection and analysis were conducted. In social sciences, studies are classified into many different categories based on the methodology, the user group, the knowledge the study creates, and the research problem the study attempts to solve (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this chapter is to present the research method, design, and approach that was used in the study. The chapter also describes the setting, research site, target population, sample technique, and methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter 3 closes with a description of the methods used to establish trustworthiness and the ethical issues considered during the research process.

Design

This qualitative study used a phenomenological design to describe the lived experiences of FGCCS. This is a scientific method of assessment that involves gathering non-numerical data and critically analyzing trends depicted by the data to draw conclusions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2015; Neuman, 2013). The nature of this study is descriptive and exploratory; its purpose was to provide an understanding of the fundamental perceptions, opinions, reasons, and motivations of FGCCS experiences. Unlike quantitative inquiries where numerical data is used to analyze social reality (Gaertner & McClarty, 2015), a qualitative research method is more suitable when the goal is to collect more comprehensive and rich descriptions of experiences to gain an abundant amount of knowledge of the setting where the phenomenon occurs (Lewis, 2015). This study

aimed to understand the experiences and social realities that have been constructed by FGCCS (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When analyzing types of qualitative research methodologies, a transcendental phenomenological approach is most appropriate for collecting abundant but detailed descriptions of participants' shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, methods of case study, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative have a focus more tailored to understanding a case, developing a theory, or examining a specific culture or story (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2015; Moustakas, 1994; Ozuna, Saenz, Ballysingh, & Yamamura, 2016).

Phenomenology is a research methodology used to investigate the perceptions, perspectives, and emotional states of individuals experiencing a particular phenomenon. It provides a system to describe lived situations (Schwandt, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is reflective in nature and seeks to highlight an aspect of a person's life specifically related to the phenomenon being studied (Schwandt, 2007). I chose phenomenology for its uniqueness; among the exceptional characteristics of phenomenology is the participant-researcher relationship, which is closely linked to the idea that the researcher is the data-collection tool. This format is believed to significantly improve results (Bryman, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology is a holistic exploration of the phenomena; transcendental phenomenology captures the reality of FGCCS' shared experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Moustakas's (1994) framework, a transcendental phenomenological research approach is best suited to this study of human experience because it aims to investigate FGCCS' lived experiences. The common methods for phenomenological studies are hermeneutic and transcendental. Hermeneutic phenomenology is non-foundationalist; it focuses on the

interpretations of the meaning of the phenomenon. Transcendental phenomenological studies are foundationalist; the study seeks to describe an experience independently (Allen, 1999; Moustakas, 1994)

The cornerstone of a transcendental phenomenological framework is that it focuses on reality and the fluid meanings of the participants' experience; this framework is referred to as epoche (Moustakas, 1994). The use of epoche in the transcendental phenomenological framework enabled me to set aside bias, prior knowledge, judgments, and preconceptions about FGCCS' experiences (Husserl, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental phenomenological framework also allowed me to hear the contributions of study participants with an open mind (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This allowed me to reach original conclusions by using patterns, resemblances, and regularities in the described experiences (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015).

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this transcendental phenomenological study.

CQ1: What experiences do FGCCS share that have influenced their academic success or lack of success?

SQ1: How do FGCCS define success and how does this definition reflect their notion of success in college?

SQ2: What protective factors do FGCCS perceive as promoting their academic and nonacademic success?

SQ3: How have FGCCS' life experiences contributed to their understandings of success in college?

SQ4: What shared services do FGCCS perceive as contributing to their success while transitioning to college, during their first semester at college, and when preparing to graduate from college?

Site

I targeted students from a community college in the Northeast region of the United States. I have used pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the college and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I proposed this site for the study because the college demographic can be easily replicated, thus promoting further research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton 2015). The college's total enrollment for the fall 2017 semester was 6,506 with 52% full-time students. Historically, the college had reasonably balanced gender distribution, with a fall 2016 enrollment of 48.6% men. Aligned with U.S. Department of Education categories of ethnicity, enrollment of full-time students were represented as follows: 68.7% White students, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native students, 6.0% Asian students, 11.3% African American students, 8.1% Hispanic or Latinx students, 3.2% of two or more races, 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students, and 1.8% non-resident Aliens and unknowns (Carney, 2017). The percentage of full-time matriculated students receiving aid were 68% through Pell grants, 69% through the tuition assistance program, and 36% from federal loans. The overall graduation rate for students who began their studies as first-time, full-time, degree and certificate-seeking students within 150% of the regular time for the program was 30% (Carney, 2017).

This site offered a diverse student population with a substantial number of students who are FGCS. I considered the school to have the ability to produce a sufficient sample of FGCS because the research focus is on student experiences.

Participants

Qualitative inquiries allow for several different participant-sampling strategies. The two most standard sampling techniques in qualitative inquiries are purposeful and convenience sampling. These types of sampling align across nearly all qualitative research designs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary intent of these strategies is “selecting information rich cases—cases from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance and therefore worthy of in-depth study” (Patton, 2002, p. 242).

To gather information-rich cases during this study, I used a purposeful selection from an available sample to find students who were easily accessible and convenient to me (Dornyei, 2007). I chose study participants through criterion sampling. Criterion sampling allowed me to focus on students who had experienced a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I only selected students who were 18 years of age or older, who were the first in their family to attend college (Byrd & Macdonald, 2005; Manzoni & Streib, 2018; Tate et al., 2015), and who have studied for more than 1 year or attempted more than 24 credit hours at the site selected.

Convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling methods that relies on data collection from members of the population who are conveniently available to participate in the study (Robinson, 2014). Despite the limitations associated with convenience sampling, this sampling method was the only option available in the presented situation. A major advantage of convenience sampling over simple random sampling, stratified, and cluster sampling is that convenience sampling data collection occurs in a short period of time (Valerio et al., 2016). Convenience sampling is helpful in generating a hypothesis and it is the least expensive method to implement. I believe convenience sampling was the most appropriate method to sample

participants. I did not consider probability sampling because probability sampling only selects a specific class of samples, making the method redundant and monotonous in nature (Speak, Escobedo, Russo, & Zerbe, 2018).

The site required that I obtain IRB approval from Liberty University and the university's research review team before participant selection could begin (See Appendix A). The research review team is the committee that reviews, approves, or denies research proposals involving human or animal subjects at the research site. After securing approvals from the university and from the site, I e-mailed an introductory letter (see Appendix B) to the Chair of the Research Review Team to initiate the study and participant selection. After gaining permission, I used flyers (see Appendix C) to promote the study. Students who were interested were sent an email to their student email to request their participation (see Appendix D). I chose participants on a first-come, first-served basis, as long as participants met the research criteria. This process allowed for a systematic selection of cases without prior knowledge of participants (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). I sent students who agreed to participate in the study a short participation-information form (see Appendix E) and an unofficial transcript to confirm eligibility. These steps followed the suggested steps of Creswell and Poth (2018), Patton (2015) and the *Dissertation Handbook for Liberty University* for a phenomenological study.

The nature of phenomenological studies is to discover in-depth lived experiences of people, and sampling participants is at the heart of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010; Patton 2015). Unlike quantitative studies that require large sample sizes of randomly selected participants to solve the hypothesis, qualitative studies typically have smaller sample sizes with strategically chosen participants to investigate the research question(s). Identifying a sample size is based on the variations and nature of the study (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Selecting a sample size rests on outside factors such as the validity, meaningfulness, and the insights needed to be generated from the qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015).

This study conducted interviews with 12 to 15 students (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton 2015). The sample size was appropriate because the study was qualitative and required me to collect lengthy data that is habitually bulky in nature. Qualitative analysis typically requires a researcher to select a smaller sample size than would be necessary in quantitative research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). The sample size was large enough to obtain enough data to sufficiently describe the phenomenon under investigation and address the research questions. I remained cognizant of data saturation and noted it when necessary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data saturation occurs when the participants begin to offer no new or additional understanding of the phenomenon (Gall et al., 2015).

Procedures

A comprehensive planning and analysis of the procedures was necessary prior to conducting this study. Following the *Dissertation Handbook for Liberty University*, I defended the proposal and, once approved, I secured IRB and approval from the research review team (See Appendix A). I did not collect data until both approvals were granted. Once I secured both approvals, I e-mailed the Chair of the Research Review Team of the college (see Appendix B) to initiate the study and participant selection.

I posted flyers (see Appendix C) across campus to identify FGCS students who were at least 18 years old. I sent inquiring students an e-mail (see Appendix D) requesting their participation officially. After responding, prospective participants met with me to submit the participant consent and information form (see Appendix E and Appendix F) that explained the study, explained why the student was chosen to participate, detailed the known risks and

expected benefits of the study, and stated the students' right to withdraw from the study at any point in time. The informed-consent form included the steps that would be taken to protect participants' identities, explained data-collection and analysis activities, and shared the process through which I would provide participants with information regarding the research findings. I collected the consent form before commencing data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The questionnaire captured demographic information and confirmed student eligibility for participation in this study. To maintain confidentiality, students were required to only use their college e-mail address and I used my Liberty University e-mail address. This method of obtaining participant information is effective in avoiding any potential violations or data breaches to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The college was not be responsible or liable for disclosing any student information due to the collaborative nature of the relationship between the participants and the researcher. The planning and analysis, the informed-consent forms, and method of collecting participating information followed the suggested steps of Creswell and Poth (2018), Patton (2015) and the *Dissertation Handbook for Liberty University* for a phenomenological study.

Using convenience sampling, I selected a maximum sample of 15 students to participate in the study on a first-come, first-serve basis. The sample size of 15 students helped with attrition in case one or more of my interviews did not yield usable data. The same 15 participants were asked to participate in the narrative prompt and focus group interview. After I chose the 15 students, I e-mailed all students previously solicited to notify them that the research participants had been selected (see Appendix G). Data accrued from participants using open-ended interviews, narratives, and focus groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I conducted in-person interviews using the interview items presented in Appendix H. Narrative data was

accrued using the writing prompts presented in Appendix I. I conducted a focus group and data accrued using the items listed in Appendix J. All interviews were video and audio recorded and personally transcribed. As supported by Creswell and Poth (2018), I saved data on an external USB drive that were later uploaded to my computer, which is password protected to safeguard participants. Data collection continued until I created all themes and obtained sufficient information to replicate the inquiry (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). In the next section, I provide more information concerning the specific data-collection procedures, data-analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

The Researcher's Role

My role was to be the human instrument (Greenbank, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) responsible for conducting a transcendental phenomenological design. I interviewed, observed, collected, analyzed, and interpreted data by bracketing, using epoche, and setting “aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). I intended to use this study to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences—including social interactions—that positively or negatively impact FGCCS’ academic achievement. Before conducting the study, I highlighted any bias or presupposition I had regarding the study (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008; Tinto, 1993).

I am currently employed by the college that is the site of the study. To avoid bias, I did not use participants with whom I have a prior relationship. Furthermore, I maintained a neutral stance during the investigation and interview process to limit moderator reinforcement that causes sponsor bias (Sarniak, 2015). Sponsor bias is a form of prejudice that occurs in qualitative research when the interviewee knows the researcher and because of this, the interviewee’s answers are biased by the interviewee’s own feelings and opinions (Sarniak, 2015).

In addition, I am an FGCS who attended community college and eventually graduated from a 4-year institution, with both colleges located in the Northeast part of the United States. I have worked in higher education and had the privilege of collaborating with workplace development centers and with college, high school, and middle school students. I have over a decade of supporting historically underrepresented, economically disadvantaged, and FGCS to persist while at college and worked to ensure my experiences do not bias participants' opinions by practicing Moustakas's (1994) guidelines for epoche. Additionally, I ensured that participants' shared experiences did not skew the data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

In this transcendental phenomenological inquiry, I employed various data-collection methods to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). Qualitative methods use triangulation to establish and verify validity by evaluating the proposed research questions from multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2007, 2013). I chose to use questionnaires, personal interviews, writing prompts, and focus groups to gain a richer understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015). In using these various data-collection methods, I was able to gain an understanding of the phenomenon and confirm and verify participants' lived experiences.

I began by coordinating unstructured questionnaires and structured interviews with participants. During the initial meeting, I provided each participant with a narrative writing prompt with a 2-week deadline to submit their answers. To conclude, I scheduled coverage-focused group interviews. Transcendental phenomenologists often use these methods to compare and contrast participants' subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Seidman, 2012). Using Tinto's (1975) interactionalist theory and Bean and Metzner's (1985) student-attrition theory, I

clarified how college interactions influence student retention and success in college at the informal and formal levels. Triangulation theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used to enrich research findings and explain the phenomenon.

I chose to follow these specific research steps: participant consent, questionnaires, individual interviews, narrative prompts, and focus groups. The information gathered informed the development of the focus-group interviews. Furthermore, the objective of qualitative data collection and analysis is to uncover emerging themes (Patton, 2002, 2015). Strategically sequencing data collection helped build on concepts, insights, and understandings of participants' lived experiences to help construct how they interrelate (Moorefield-Lang, 2010; Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews

The first method of data collection used during the study was open-ended, semi-structured interviews to enable meaningful and consistent analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to use predeveloped items and guides and enabled me to change topical trajectories in the conversation when appropriate to gain deeper meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Transcendental phenomenology studies involve conducting in-depth interviews to describe the meaning of the phenomenon from a small number of individuals who have experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The open-ended interview was the first form of data collection and the information obtained from these interviews guided the narrative items and focus-group interview format and items.

The interview methods and procedures were grounded in various theories to remain focused on the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2015). I obtained IRB approval before conducting interviews. I conducted face-to-face interviews; however, the logistics of each

interview were dependent on the availability of participants. I tentatively planned to secure space at the site and the site approved this plan. Interviews occurred on weekdays and were scheduled for 2 hours each to ensure participants were already on campus. I recorded each interview using video and audio on my Apple iPhone 7 plus. Before each interview, I tested the recording device for functionality and sound. After each interview, I immediately uploaded the interview to my personal laptop and a USB flash drive. The laptop and USB flash drive were securely locked in my office or at my house when I was not conducting interviews. Additionally, after transferring each interview to my laptop and USB flash drive, I deleted the interview from my iPhone for additional security. I used reflexive journaling to ensure I bracketed previous experiences before each point of data collection (Moustakas, 1994). The interview items shown on Table 1 provide information on which research questions I sought to answer with each interview question.

Table 1
Open-Ended Interviews

Opening Items	
1. Tell me about yourself in general. (Where were you born, where did you grow up, and how did that shape your worldview?)	CQ1
2. Tell me about your family. (Do you have siblings, what did or do your parents do for a living, what was your family environment like, and how did that shape your worldview?)	CQ1
3. Tell me about how your childhood and family life has impacted who you are today.	CQ1
4. Tell me about your life growing up. (Tell me about your experiences as a child; talk to me about your experiences at school, with friends, etc.)	SQ3
5. Tell me about your decision to go to college. (Encouragement from family, friends, and mentors to attend college)	SQ3
Items Related to Situation, Self, Social Capital, and Supports in Transitioning to College	
6. Describe your experience in applying to college. (How many schools did you apply to? Talk to me about their response to your application.)	SQ3
7. Describe your decision to attend this community college. (Affordability, convenience, etc.)	SQ4
8. Describe your friends and family's idea of what you do while at college. (Do they know your major, what are their expectations of you, and do they understand what college means to you, what college means to them?)	SQ2
9. Describe your experiences while here. (With instructors, with friends, clubs, in relation to your personal goals in life)	SQ4
10. Describe how connected you are to the college.	SQ4
11. Describe the services you use at the college. (Tutoring, academic counseling, etc.)	SQ4
12. Describe your expectations of attending college. (What is your purpose of attending?)	SQ1
13. Describe some of the most challenging times you faced during college. (Personal, professional, or academic)	CQ1
14. Describe your understanding of what it means to be successful at the community college. (What does college success mean to you?)	SQ1
15. Describe your thoughts on failing college. (What does failure mean to you?)	SQ1
Items Related to Situation, Self, Social Capital and Supports While at College	
16. Tell me about your goals for your future. (Career, family, etc.)	SQ1
17. Talk to me about your goals and how they impact your choices today.	SQ2
18. Tell me about the goals you think the college has for you. (What are the expectations put on you at the college by teachers, by administrators, by peers, etc.?)	SQ3
19. Tell me about how you think others view your ability to reach these goals. (How does this impact you?)	SQ4
20. Tell me about your plans after graduation from this college. (Do you plan to transfer, obtain employment, or take time off?)	SQ1
21. How connected are you to the community at large? (Do you work; how often do you go out for personal enjoyment or work?)	SQ4
Conclusion Questions	
22. What advice would you give to students entering their first year of college?	SQ2
23. What do you wish you knew about college before you began your freshman year?	
24. Please share an additional point about being a first-generation college student you would like me to know about, even if it is a perspective we have not previously discussed.	

All the interview items were grounded and focused on exploring the lived experiences of FGCS, which aligned with phenomenological-interview procedures (Patton, 2015). I designed the interview items to obtain rich and substantive descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). I developed Items 1 through 5 to help facilitate conversation with participants; these items are also considered knowledge items (Patton, 2015). FGCS represent one third of college students and these students are more likely to be students of color and come from low-income families (Gibbons et al., 2019). I created Items 1 through 5 to obtain demographic data to investigate whether an association exists between being a FGCS and certain socioeconomic characteristics (Afeli, Houchins, Jackson, & Montoya, 2018; Covarrubias, Valle, Laiduc, & Azmitia, 2019; Gibbons et al., 2019; NCES, 2011; 2015; Wang, 2014b). These interview items helped me establish a positive rapport at the beginning of the interviews and provide background information (Patton, 2015).

Items 6 through 21 aligned with Tinto's (1975) interactionalist model of student persistence. By isolating variables that challenge students' persistence, Items 6 through 21 shift Tinto's (1975) model into tangible interactions between me and the participant. This method allowed me to interpret what directly impacts FGCS persistence or departure decisions and helped me determine if FGCS share the same experiences (Patton, 2015).

Items 6 through 15 investigated the social, cognitive, and academic integration of the FGCS transition to college (Afeli et al., 2018). Unlike traditional students, previous studies identified that FGCS college choice has little to do with college prestige, degree specification, or overall institutional suitability (Ovink et al., 2018). FGCS' choices are predicated on family responsibilities, finances, and other nonacademic considerations (Bui, 2002; Byrd & Macdonald, 2005; DeRosa & Dolby, 2014; Everett, 2015; Garza & Fullerton, 2018; Moschetti & Hudley,

2015). Items 6 through 15 helped me and the participants familiarize ourselves with the phenomenon and garner information on experiences that are rich in nature (Evans & Whitcombe, 2016).

Items 16 through 21 focused on the social, cognitive, and academic integration of FGCS while at college (Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993). I queried these items to investigate FGCS goals—academically and nonacademically—while trying to identify how FGCS define success (Patton, 2015). Many factors should be considered when investigating the influences of persistence for FGCS; I created items 16 through 21 to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of college environments on FGCS' persistence (Dika & D'Amico, 2016; House, Neal, & Kolb, 2019; Stephens, Townsend, Hamedani, Destin, & Manzo, 2015; Torres, 2019).

Items 22 through 24 allowed the participants to reflect on the overall experience of the phenomenon and add information that is relevant for them. The additional information contributed value to the overall study by giving insight into FGCS' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Item 24 concluded the interview and provided participants an opportunity to share their thoughts on experiences I might not have asked them about. I designed all items to acquire in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences of FGCCS (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Narrative Prompt Responses

The method of collecting data was a writing prompt. Writing prompts are valuable and elicit creative responses from participants (Muylaert, Sarubbi, Vicente, Gallo, & Neto, 2014). Narrative prompts create a place to explain life stories in sociohistorical contexts and provide a venue to convey subjective experiences (Adams & Van Manen, 2017; Muylaert et al., 2014).

I asked participants to submit a written response to an open-ended prompt. I gave the prompt to participants after their one-on-one interviews and through e-mail, for convenience. Participants were given 2 weeks to read and write their responses. The prompt was accompanied by a pre-stamped envelope that was labeled with my office address. I presented a neutral stance regarding the investigation process to limit sponsor bias and reduce the risk of participation bias due to envelope indicating that I am a college employee (Sarniak, 2015). I also offered participants an opportunity to complete their responses after the one-on-one interviews. I told the participants that it should take them no more than half an hour to complete the one prompt.

When grounded in theory, narrative research methods are an ideal tool to provide first-hand accounts of FGCCS experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplica, Berg, & Strickland-Cohen, 2015). I developed the question shown in Table 2 to provide me with subjective experiences, thoughts, and reflections that I would not be able to observe (Muylaert et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). Lastly, I aimed for the narrative prompt to address the central question of this inquiry, as it is “positioned to encourage and stimulate the interviewee to tell the interviewer something about some important event of his or her life and the social context” (Muylaert et al., 2014, p. 185).

Table 2
Narrative Prompt

Question	
1.	What academic, nonacademic, and personal advice would you provide to an incoming first-generation student? CQ1

Focus Group

To conclude the study, I scheduled an open-ended, focus-group interview with 10 to 15 participants from the original pool of study participants (Patton, 2015); however a small sample

of six to 10 participants is also acceptable (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Focus groups generally last 1 to 2 hours (Patton, 2015). Focus groups are an effective way to gather a wide range of perspectives to establish patterns and themes (Patton, 2015). Focus groups need to be large enough to garner diverse perspectives but small enough to create a small and welcoming environment for participants (Morgan, 1996).

To establish safeguards, I grounded the focus-group methods and procedures in various theories to maintain focus on the CQ and four SQs (Creswell, 2013; Patton 2015). The group meeting lasted 2 hours. Using information from the one-on-one interviews, I grouped participants together with relatively homogeneous experiences to identify commonalities and patterns (Patton, 2015).

Continuing with the same logistic method as in the one-on-one interviews, I tentatively planned to secure space at the site location, which had been preapproved. Focus groups took place on weekdays and were scheduled for 2 hours each (Patton, 2015). Meetings were recorded using video and audio on my Apple iPhone 7 plus. Before the session, I tested the recording device for functionality and sound a half hour before the focus group. At the end of the session, I immediately uploaded the interview to my personal laptop and onto a USB flash drive. The laptop and USB flash drive were securely locked either in my desk or my home. After securing my laptop and USB flash drive, I deleted the interview from my iPhone for additional security. I used follow-up questions strategically and used discretion to ensure data saturation did not occur (Stewart et al., 2007).

I only asked nine questions during the focus-group sessions, as illustrated in Table 3. My goal was to ensure that each participant had enough time to elaborate on responses and ensure that I had enough time to further examine responses as needed (Morgan, 1996; Stewart et al.,

2007). Item 1 allowed me to introduce participants to each other and helped me examine the focus-group session and observe how the group interacted (Connelly, 2015; Patton 2015). Questions 2 through 6 helped orientate the group towards exploring the influence of the institution on participants' academic and nonacademic experiences and provide information on intervention strategies that participants perceived as effective or ineffective (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). Questions 7 through 9 sought to understand stories of lived experiences that would generate a deeper, more subjective knowledge of how FGCS overcome barriers and achieve success, along with what is needed to duplicate this success for incoming students (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shumaker & Wood, 2016; Tate et al., 2015; Tinto, 2006).

Table 3
Open-Ended Focus-Group Questions

Opening Questions		
1.	Please introduce yourselves, share your major.	CQ1
2.	What made you decide to attend college? And why did you decide to attend this college?	SQ4
3.	Talk about a time when you felt discouraged. How did you cope?	SQ2
4.	What was your greatest feeling of accomplishment in terms of academics?	SQ1
5.	When or did you ever learn who your advisor was? How did you learn of these?	SQ2
6.	When or did you ever learn about the support services here to support you in your academic and nonacademic needs? How did you learn of these?	SQ4
Concluding Questions		
7.	What are your plans after college?	SQ1
8.	How successful would you say you are currently at this college? And how would your families and friends measure your progress?	SQ1
9.	Please share an additional point about being a first-generation college student you would like me to know about, even if it is a perspective we have not previously discussed?	CQ1

Data Analysis

The study analyzed the data using the guidelines provided by Moustakas (1994), Schutz (1970), and Schwandt (2007). I began the analysis process by applying a bracketing, thematic, and epoche approach of qualitative data by identifying codes, identifying themes, and examining

and recording data patterns (Maguire & Delahunt 2017; Moustakas, 1994; Schutz, 1970). I underwent a process called phenomenological reduction to identify the themes that significantly describe the phenomenon and that align with the CQ and SQs (Moustakas, 1994; Schutz, 1970; Schwandt, 2007). Phenomenological reduction is a technique where the researcher “determines the underlying structures of an experience by interpreting the originally given descriptions of the situation in which the experience occurs” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). According to Schutz (1970), phenomenological reduction was appropriate for this study because my phenomenological research was positioned to generate a significant amount of data, including interview notes, prompts, video, and audio recordings (Moustakas, 1994; Schutz, 1970; Schwandt, 2007).

Using the data acquired from the questionnaires, interviews, narratives, and focus groups, I synthesized and articulated the findings of FGCCS shared experiences that have influenced their academic and nonacademic success (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The analysis process was divided into the seven steps, depicted by Acosta (2019) and Moustakas (1994): epoche, coding, horizontalization, core themes of the experience, textural descriptions of the phenomenon, imaginative variation of the phenomenon, and synthesis (see Figure 5) (Moustakas, 1994).

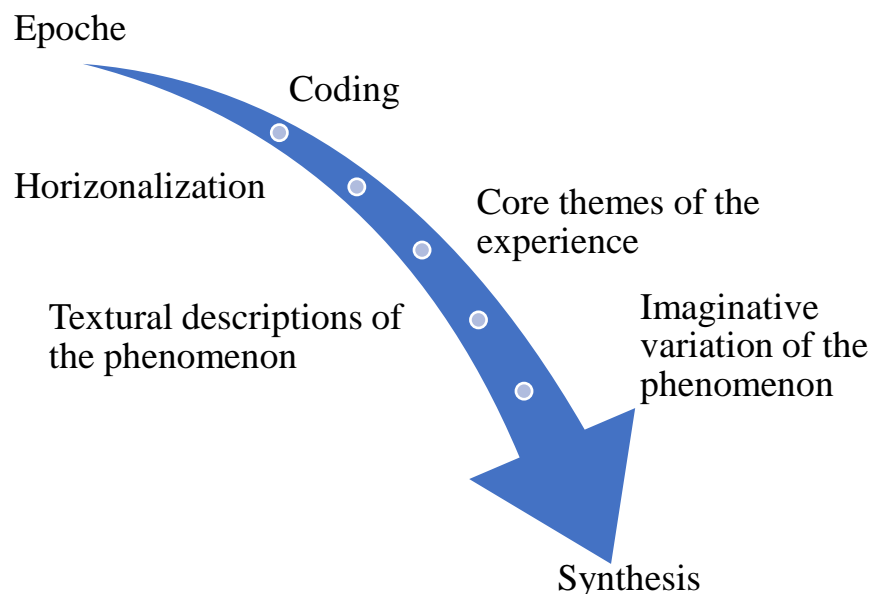


Figure 5. Phenomenological Data Analysis.

Note: From *Phenomenological Research Methods*, by C. Moustakas, 1994, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Epoche

The first step following the phenomenological reduction process involved bracketing my subjectivity, which is described as epoche (Patton, 2015). The Greek word epoche means to “refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary ways of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). As a college administrator, FGCS, and because this research is being completed at the college where I am currently employed, it was imperative that I set aside my preconceived notions and perspectives regarding FGCCS, the barriers they face, access to social capital, and their success or failure while at college. Reflective journaling analysis is vital during qualitative research, especially as the researcher begins to finalize the codebook (see Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña, 2016).

Coding

Open coding refers to the process of placing the data into codes and later identifying themes (Moustakas, 1994). Immediately following epoche—while reviewing the interview transcripts, narratives prompts, and focus-group transcripts—I coded essential information into Microsoft Excel to make the data easy to sort, find, and filter key codes. Microsoft Excel allowed me to view all the coded data separately and reduce bias (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, Excel allowed me to use the sort functionality to easily review the statements to determine which information is irrelevant or insignificant. This phenomenological-reduction process led to a richer triangulation of data (Patton, 2015).

Horizontalization

Horizontalization refers to the initial grouping of data after the phenomenological-reduction process to organize the data (Moustakas, 1994). I was able to search for participant data individually or group data to find commonalities. Using Excel, I color coded participants' statements individually. The sorting functionality of the program allowed me to identify shared experiences and identify which participants shared those experiences. This process was a useful approach (Patton, 2015) when identifying themes relating to college-support services, social capital, and any other accumulation of experiences FGCS have individually or collectively experienced.

Core Themes of the Experience

After horizontalization, I began to establish the initial themes identified in the data (Moustakas, 1994). I deliberately or inadvertently set aside information that was not essential to the study. Themes consisted of a composite of statements, commonalities, and accounts of

FGCS' lived experiences. I also compared the identified themes from one action of data collection to another, such as comparing focus-group interview themes to themes identified in one-on-one interviews, writing prompts, and observations. This process enabled me to verify accuracy and ensured that I clearly represented the data obtained across all data-collection sources (Patton, 2015).

Textural Descriptions of the Phenomenon

I built textual descriptions of the phenomenon after identifying the core themes. Textural description refers to the word-for-word composite experience of each study participant (Moustakas, 1994). Textural descriptions explain and articulate participants' points of view. These descriptions can also refer to the universal composite of individual descriptions as a group. It is important to view these composites individually to ensure each participant contributed equally to the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). This process allowed me to develop deeper meanings for FGCS' experiences.

Imaginative Variation of the Phenomenon

After building textual descriptions of the phenomenon, I built an imaginative variation of the phenomenon. Imaginative or structural variation refers to the process of viewing data from another perspective (Moustakas, 1994). For example, in this study, I viewed the identified themes from the participants' perspectives and from my perspective as a school administrator, community member, and faculty member. This process allowed me to expand my views on previously identified themes. I used imaginative variations to organize the meanings of FGCS' experiences. Structural themes allowed me to create vivid composite descriptions of the

phenomenon being studied. Lastly, I combined descriptions to form holistic descriptions of the lived experience of FGCCS' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Synthesis

To conclude, I synthesized and integrated the data from the questionnaires, interviews, narrative, and focus groups into the findings of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Composite descriptions integrate all the textural and structural descriptions from the analysis. Each meaningful statement was coded into clusters of experiences that give meaning to participants' experiences collectively to convey the heart of the research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Data collected using these methods helped me understand the phenomenon of the lived experiences of FGCCS. Data were kept in a securely locked file cabinet in my home. Interview and focus-group data was audio and video recorded, transcribed, and kept secure in the same manner. I analyzed all data following Moustakas' (1994) methodology.

Trustworthiness

The most foundational part of a research study is its trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is ensured by establishing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each standard is extremely important and safeguards that the study can be trusted, in addition to being significant to the body of work being studied.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings are reliable and accurately interprets participants' meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I ensured that the study is credible by conducting a thorough audit of the research process to reduce bias. Triangulation, member checks, and checking for evidence of saturation were three methods used to ensure credibility. Data

triangulation occurs when multiple data-collection methods are used to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of a study by crosschecking the data being collected (Creswell, 2013; Elo et al., 2014). Member checking is a qualitative technique used to improve the validity, accuracy, and credibility of a study. Member checking provides study participants a summary of the findings so participants have an opportunity to provide feedback (Creswell, 2013). Data saturation is the term used to indicate that the researcher has exhausted exploration of the phenomenon being studied and no new information is expected to enhance the findings of a study (Creswell, 2013).

I used triangulation, member checking, and evidence of saturation after completing the data analysis of participants' information. For member checking, I e-mailed a summary to the participants and allowed them 48 hours to provide feedback to my findings. Additionally, subcategories included narrative accuracy checks, theoretical validity, descriptive validity, and evaluative validity.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability refer to the extent that the results of the study are valid over time and conditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study ensured dependability by systematically documenting all the steps and descriptions of the study's procedures, along with detailing all changes in the procedure and explaining how these changes are expected to affect the outcome of the study. In doing so, I was able to account for changes in context that could affect outcomes or the ability to replicate the study (Merriam, 2009). I employed two approaches to ensure confirmability. First, I employed data audits or reflective journaling to ensure that the procedures and judgments made during the study had no distortion or bias (Moustakas, 1994). A data audit is a review of the data to assess its quality (Creswell, 2013) and reflective journaling is a technique used to express a researcher's analysis of an experience or concept they observed in

writing (Creswell, 2013). Second, using member checking, I contacted some participants to ensure the interpretation of my findings were in line with what the participants expressed (Merriam, 1997).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree that the research findings of the inquiry can transfer to other school sites, participants, or conditions (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured transferability for this study by employing thick and rich descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A thick and rich description is a detailed account of field experiences thoroughly placed into context (Holloway, 1997). As a result, I ensured a rich and thick description through providing a description of the phenomenon and findings through fieldwork and observation of FGCS, and by reporting on FGCS' experiences from their perspectives (Schwandt, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

Before the actual research, I sought permission from the IRB at Liberty University. All interviewed participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the study by signing the informed-consent form. An informed-consent form is a document that participants are required to sign before participating in a study to confirm their willingness to take part (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of the informed-consent form is to ensure participants are able to make informed decisions about their participation. I provided participants with an introductory letter that detailed the purpose of the study, the study risks, and other potential issues during the recruitment stage (King, Henderson, & Stein, 2005). I ensured that no participant was coerced and any decision to decline or exit the study was respected (Gall et al., 2015).

I ensured confidentiality and anonymity (Gall et al., 2015). Confidentiality means that any information that could lead to the identification of the participant is not made available to, or accessed by, any person apart from the people involved in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, to ensure confidentiality, I ensured that identifying information was excluded from the reports and published documents (Rid & Emanuel, 2014). Lastly, I achieved anonymity by ensuring the identity of participants in the one-on-one interviews remains unknown to other participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2015).

Above all, I ensured that I was the only person assessing relevant components, based on the research objectives and questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2015). I kept the evaluations simple and remain focused on the intentions of the study, ensuring data accrued only enough to answer the research questions (Dakubo, 2016). I cited and referenced all information borrowed from previous researchers and authors using APA format to avoid cases of plagiarism.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological method chapter is to highlight the method of inquiry used to provide an understanding of the fundamental opinions, reasons, and motivations regarding FGCCS experiences. I identified the site and participants of the study and provided an explanation of how I selected the site and study participants. Additionally, the chapter provided insight into the data-collection and analysis methods by highlighting Moustakas' (1994) designs. The chapter concluded by providing an outline of the procedures for strengthening trustworthiness and ethical considerations by detailing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of FGCS in community colleges in the Northeast region of the United States. This study aimed to uncover a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and the impact it has on the students who experience it. To gain insight into the experiences of the participants, the CQ that guided this inquiry is: What experiences do FGCCS share that have influenced their academic success or lack of success? The SQs that guide this transcendental phenomenological study are as follows:

- SQ1: How do FGCCS define success and how does this definition reflect their notion of success in college?
- SQ2: What protective factors do FGCCS perceive as promoting their academic and nonacademic success?
- SQ3: How have FGCCS' life experiences contributed to their understandings of success in college?
- SQ4: What shared services do FGCCS perceive as contributing to their success while transitioning to college, during their first semester at college, and when preparing to graduate from college?

Chapter 4 will present the results of the data analysis and allows the voices of the participants to come through in thick, rich, and detailed descriptions. Data analysis using phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994) shows the themes across the data collection methods used in the study: face-to-face interviews, narrative prompts, and one focus group

interview. The chapter concludes with the textural, structural, and composite descriptions of the phenomenon from the 15 participants who participated in the study.

Participants

A selection of 15 students participated in this study. All participants in the study were enrolled students at the research site and varied in their majors, educational backgrounds, race, age, ethnicity, and hometown. To gather information-rich cases during this study, I used purposeful selection from a conveniently available sample of participants. Additionally, I used criterion sampling to ensure that I only focused on the students who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018); specifically, I only selected students who were 18 years of age or older, the first in their family to attend college (Byrd & Macdonald, 2005; Manzoni & Streib, 2018; Tate et al., 2015), and who have studied for more than 1 year or attempted more than 24 credit hours at the research site. The demographic data of the participants can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4
Participant Demographic Data

	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	1:1 Interviews	Narrative	Focus Group
1	Rose	19	Asian	x	x	
2	Mike	24	Hispanic	x	x	
3	Jimmy	20	Hispanic	x	x	x
4	Sara	20	A/A	x	x	x
5	Daria	27	Caucasian	x	x	x
6	Stacey	20	A/A	x	x	x
7	Marc	19	A/A	x	x	
8	Becky	19	Asian	x	x	
9	Cynthia	25	A/A	x	x	x
10	Alessia	18	Other	x	x	
11	Nalani	19	Other	x	x	x
12	Reign	21	A/A	x	x	x
13	Joe	21	Asian	x	x	x
14	Murphy	21	Asian	x	x	
15	Billy	19	A/A	x	x	x

Procedurally, I started with posting flyers (see Appendix C) across campus to create an awareness of the study. I also emailed the flyer to colleagues with the hope that my colleagues could help me identify students who were eligible for the study. After 2 days, I had 18 inquiries about the study. I sent each interested student an email (see Appendix D) that requested their participation officially, or I personally met with the student to explain the timeline of the study and give them a details about where we would meet and how long the meetings would be. Sixteen students remained interested and those prospective research participants scheduled an appointment to meet with me to complete an information form (see Appendix E) to confirm their eligibility. The eligible participants were chosen for the study on a first-come, first-serve basis until I obtained the 15 participants needed for the study. I only needed 12 participants but decided to recruit 15 in case any participants withdrew. I also wanted the sample to be large enough to obtain data that could sufficiently describe the phenomenon under investigation and address the research questions. Each participant signed the participant consent form (see

Appendix F) before any data was collected. No participants withdrew from the study. The following is a description of each individual who participated in the study. Pseudonyms are used to ensure the participants' anonymity are not compromised.

Rose

Rose (pseudonym) is 19 years old and was born in Thailand (Asian). Rose migrated to the United States when she was 9 years old. Rose has two siblings: an older brother and sister. Rose is the youngest. Academically, Rose has a 2.87 GPA and is currently majoring in liberal arts and sciences and math. Rose plans to transfer to obtain her bachelor's degree right after she graduates with her associates. Rose's future career goal is to become a medical doctor. Rose currently works as a work-study student on campus and averages 11 hours a week. Rose often volunteers in the local hospital to gain experience in the health professions field. Rose values education because she was raised in a Thailand refugee camp and her dream has been "to come to America to obtain the American dream and be able to support my family."

Mike

Mike (pseudonym) is 24 years old and was born in America (African American). Mike is from Brooklyn, New York but "pretty much lived all around NYC" because his family moved often. He has an "eclectic" family: "It's very different, in the sense that I was adopted by my first cousin because my biological parents were born with mental disabilities; I don't know the actual diagnosis, but they were born with mental disabilities. So, I only lived with my mom until I was about like 5 and then my cousin got custody of us." Academically, Mike has a 3.48 GPA and is currently majoring in liberal arts and general studies. Mike plans to transfer to obtain his bachelor's degree and major in sociology right after he graduates with his associates. Mike's

future career goal changes every day. For Mike, thinking about the future is very difficult because of the everyday struggles he faces. During our interview, Mike stated that “It's a luxury almost to plan and a privilege to be able to kind of have that foresight and to be able to plan ahead and things like that. Most people are so consumed about [sic] surviving. Like I got [sic] to make it to tomorrow. You know what I'm saying? Sometimes, you know, just making it through the day has to be enough. It has to.” Mike currently works as a work-study student on campus tutoring and mentoring young adults; he averages roughly 11 hours a week. Mike is active in clubs and in the student association. Mike values education, and he believes the 6-year break he took from school before attending college allowed him to place some things into perspective. Because of the barriers Mike faces daily, he “always have [sic] that anxiety” and fear of failing so he tries to work hard to stay “one step ahead” to be successful.

Jimmy

Jimmy (pseudonym) is 20 years old and was born in the Dominican Republic (Hispanic). Jimmy migrated to the United States when he was 5 years old. Jimmy lived in Bronx, NY for 10 years with his family before moving to upstate New York. Jimmy has two siblings: an older brother and sister. Jimmy is the youngest. Academically, Jimmy has a 2.89 GPA and is currently majoring in business administration. Jimmy plans to transfer to obtain his bachelor's degree right after he graduates with his associates. Jimmy's future career goal is to become an engineer because “I see the beauty in everything.” Jimmy believes he has been given “a great life because of the support my family and siblings has [sic] given me; we are very family orientated [sic].” Jimmy currently works with his father in construction for 20 hours per week on average.

Sara

Sara (pseudonym) is 20 years old and was born in Sudan (African American). Sara migrated to the United States when she was 7 years old due to war in Sudan. Sara has 13 siblings. Sara's father had five wives. Sara stated that "It was very common for a man to have five wives in my culture." Sara remembers that "Growing up in Sudan was very difficult, especially during the war and there was no formal form of education." Academically, Sara has a 3.14 GPA and is currently majoring in nursing. Sara plans to transfer to obtain her bachelor's degree right after she graduates with her associates. Sara's future career goal is to become a traveling nurse, because "I want to help other individual who are less fortunate in other countries." Sara values education because she sees it as a way "to become successful and because with education I will be able to support my friends, family, and do great community service work."

Daria

Daria (pseudonym) is 27 years old and was born in the United States (Caucasian). Daria remembers that "I moved a lot as a child and attended different elementary schools." Daria has eleven siblings; she was the third one born in her family and has a seven-year gap from her brother and sister, who are twins. Daria is a returning adult student, and during our interview, she stated that "Returning back to school gave me life experiences that helped me to be better prepared and therefore more successful in college." Academically, Daria has a 3.10 GPA and is currently majoring in liberal arts and sciences and general studies. Daria plans to transfer to obtain her bachelor's degree right after she graduates with her associates. Daria plans to study psychology or philosophy. Daria's future career goal is to work in the field of alternative

medicine for mental health conditions and combine the fields of therapy, music, and meditation. Daria currently works two jobs and averages 30 hours a week.

Stacey

Stacey (pseudonym) is 20 years old and was born in the United States (African American). Stacey's "parents are from the Republic of The Gambia, which is a country in West Africa." Stacey has four siblings: two brothers, and two sisters; Stacey is the second oldest. Stacey was born in the Bronx, New York and moved to upstate New York at a young age. Academically, Stacey has a 2.56 GPA and is currently majoring in liberal arts and sciences and general studies. Stacey plans to transfer to obtain her bachelor's degree right after she graduates with her associates. Stacey's future career goal is to become a social worker, because "I want to help other individuals who are less fortunate." Stacey values education and decided to "start at a community college to gain perspective and a good foundation to transfer into a large four-year school." Stacey currently does not work; she focuses on her studies, actively participates in clubs and volunteers in the community: "These experiences will provide me transferable and leadership skills for the future."

Marc

Marc (pseudonym) is 19 years old and was born in the United States (African American). Marc has three siblings: two sisters and one brother; Marc is the third born. Marc was born in upstate New York and has lived there his whole life. Academically, Marc has a 2.96 GPA and is currently majoring in liberal arts and sciences. Marc plans to transfer to obtain his bachelor's degree right after he graduates with his associates. Marc's future career goal is to become an accountant. Marc recalls, "I always needed to work hard for what I wanted. This was instilled in

me at a young age by my parents.” Marc values education because he believes this will “enable me to have a successful future.” Marc currently works 17 hours a week and enjoys working out and playing basketball during his free time.

Becky

Becky (pseudonym) is 19 years old and was born in Thailand (Asian). Becky migrated to the United States when she was 4 years old after growing up in a Thailand refugee camp. Becky has five siblings; she is the six child and youngest. Becky stated that “I didn’t grow up in an emotionally supportive family because my parents were always working; working to support the family financially.” Academically, Becky has a 3.56 GPA and is currently majoring in business administration. Becky does not plan to transfer after she graduates with her associates degree. Becky’s future career goal is to own a few businesses, starting with a nail salon: “I obtained my cosmetology license while in high school and I am currently working in a nail salon, learning the business, in addition to acquiring dedicated clients for the future.” Becky currently works 40 hours a week on average. Becky values education and hard work and states that she had “a very difficult life.” Becky’s dream is to obtain “the American dream and be able to support my family in the future.”

Cynthia

Cynthia (pseudonym) is 25 years old and was born in a refugee camp in the Republic of Kenya, a country in Africa (African American). Cynthia migrated to the United States when she was 8 years old. Cynthia stated that “I don’t remember a lot about my childhood, back home, growing up.” Before moving to upstate New York, Cynthia lived in Ohio and Nebraska. Cynthia’s “family moved to upstate New York because my mother thought it was a better place

to raise a family.” Cynthia has twelve siblings: six sisters and six brothers. Cynthia is the second oldest. Academically, Cynthia has a 2.23 GPA and is currently majoring in liberal arts and sciences. Cynthia plans to transfer to obtain her bachelor’s degree after she graduates with her associates. Cynthia’s future career goal is to become a doctor. Cynthia wants to join a “medical volunteer program to help people abroad.” Currently, Cynthia works 40 hours a week on average.

Alessia

Alessia (pseudonym) is 18 years old and was born in Yemen (Other). Alessia spent one full year in the Magnet Bridge program, “where I was fortunate to spend my last year of high school at college, simultaneously receiving both my 12th grade credits and credits for my freshman year of college.” Alessia migrated to the United States when she was 2 years old. Alessia lived in Michigan before moving to upstate New York. Alessia has five siblings and she is the second oldest. Alessia is very religious, and because of this, she requested not to be recorded on video or audio. Academically, Alessia has a 3.69 GPA and her future career goal is to become a doctor. Alessia wants to be a pediatrician and “my family really supports this decision.” Currently, Alessia does work-study on campus and average 5 hours a week.

Nalani

Nalani (pseudonym) is 19 years old and was born Morocco, a country in North Africa (Other). Nalani migrated to the United States when she was 3 years old with her “mom, dad, and older sister, who is two years older than me.” Nalani is the youngest of two. Nalani’s “older sister is currently in college and wants to become a lawyer.” Academically, Nalani has a 2.60 GPA and is currently majoring in nutrition and dietetics. Nalani stated that “I remember school

being extremely hard for me, mainly because of my diabetes; I would always have to leave school or miss school completely and this would place a lot of stress on my family and I.” Nalani plans to transfer to obtain her bachelor’s degree right after she graduates with her associates degree. Nalani currently works 35 hours a week.

Reign

Reign (pseudonym) is 21 years old and was born in Republic of Kenya (African American). Reign migrated to the United States when she was 6 years old: “I remember my parents worked a lot and I was raised mostly by my older sister.” Reign is the youngest of eight children. When Reign moved to America, she lived in Utah and Kentucky before she moved to upstate, New York. Reign “remember experiencing snow for the first time because I moved to America in January.” Academically, Reign has a 2.77 GPA and is currently majoring in psychology. Reign stated that “this is not the first college I attended; I went to a four-year school first and flunked out because I hated it, in addition to the fact that it was so far from home.” Reign plans to transfer to obtain her bachelor’s degree right after she graduates with her associates. Reign currently works 40 hours a week.

Joe

Joe (pseudonym) is 21 years old and was born in Thailand (Asian). Joe migrated to the United States when he was 6 years old. Joe has five younger siblings; he is the oldest of six brothers. Joe states that he “remembers that when I was growing up, I had to stay in the house, clean, and take care of my younger brothers. I believe my parents had all the intention to keep me away from everything and everyone to mold me into being a perfect kid.” Academically, Joe has a 2.58 GPA and is currently majoring in mechatronics. Joe plans to transfer to obtain his

bachelor's degree right after he graduates with his associates: "My future career goal is to work with bionics." Joe "volunteers around the community and because I love to empower others like me. I want them to pursue the American dream, like I am." Currently, Joe is a resident assistant at the college and works a few hours a week with his cousin as a mechanic.

Murphy

Murphy (pseudonym) is 21 years old and was born in Thailand (Asian). Murphy migrated to the United States when he was 2 years old. Murphy has three siblings and he is the second oldest. Murphy stated that "My family and I lived in Texas for 4 years, but we moved back to upstate New York." Academically, Murphy has a 2.92 GPA and is currently majoring in liberal arts and general studies. Murphy plans to transfer to obtain his bachelor's degree right after he graduates with his associates: "My future career goal is to become an archeologist, travel the world, and explore excavation sites." Murphy "currently work 35 hours a week; I limited my hours from 40 plus hours because I wasn't getting enough sleep."

Billy

Billy (pseudonym) is 19 years old and was born in the United States (African American). Billy was "born in Harlem, New York and my family is from New Jersey and Connecticut." Billy has one brother and three sisters; Billy is the youngest. Academically, Billy has a 0.96 GPA and is currently majoring in criminal justice. Billy plans to transfer to obtain his bachelor's degree right after he graduates with his associates. Billy's future career goal is to become a coach or anything related to sports. Billy recalls being spoiled because he was the youngest child: "But as I get older, the spoiling is decreasing." Billy doesn't currently work; however, this semester,

he began to join clubs. The college experience has been empowering for Billy and he hopes that becoming more engaged at the college will help him receive better grades.

It is important to note that most of the students in the study are of international origin; however, based on the site location, the demographic makeup of the study participants is reflective of the migrant nature of the city and college. Demographically, participants match with empirical data found when preparing for this study. Procedurally, a convenience sample based on study criteria was conducted on a first-come, first-serve basis. Participants were selected based on the first-come, first-serve basis.

Results

The data collection process began with a one-on-one interview with each participant at a secure meeting room reserved at the site. I asked each participant to answer 24 open-ended interview questions. After the one-on-one interviews, the participants completed a writing prompt where they were able to express what academic, nonacademic, and personal advice they would provide to an incoming FGCS. All but two participants completed the writing prompt right after the one-on-one interviews. The two participants who elected to take the prompt home returned their responses within two days.

All 15 participants participated in the individual, one-on-one interviews and the narrative prompt. A focus group meeting was conducted at a secure meeting room reserved at the site. Nine participants participated in the scheduled focus group discussion where nine open-ended interview questions were asked to acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. All data inquiries focused on one of the primary research questions and four SQs

Theme Development

Theme development is a vital component when analyzing data collected in a qualitative inquiry. The transcripts from the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussion—as well as the individual participant writing prompts—provided a wealth of data for analysis. Throughout the data collection and data analysis process, I sought to bracket my personal thoughts and feelings by making notes that identified my possible prejudices. Bracketing allowed me to identify and remove my bias and it allowed me to openly listen to the participants' collective stories. I used the notes function on my iPhone while bracketing. My iPhone gave me the ability to organize my thoughts effectively after each interview, and while reading the interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and writing prompt answers.

I used Moustakas' (1994) process for phenomenological reduction to bracket my personal feelings before data analysis. As a college administrator, FGCS, and because this study was completed at the college where I am currently employed, I needed to set aside my preconceived notions and perspectives regarding FGCCS. Before, during, and after each one-on-one interview and focus group, I used the process of epoche to “refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary ways of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). I kept a journal of my thoughts and feelings and documented important information and questions to ask the participants. This allowed me to remain focused on the study and enabled me to remove as much personal bias regarding the barriers FGCCS face, their access to social capital, and their success or failure while at college.

The first method of data collection used during this study was open-ended, semi-structured interviews that provided meaningful, consistent analysis of the phenomenon and gave an in-depth look at the experiences of the participants. Each interview was recorded using video

and audio on my Apple iPhone 7 plus, with the exception of one student who requested not to be recorded. I used the same secure meeting room for each interview. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. Before each interview, I tested the recording device for functionality and sound. After each interview, I immediately uploaded the interview to my personal laptop and a USB flash drive. The laptop and USB flash drive were securely locked in my office or at my house when I was not conducting interviews. After transferring each interview to my laptop and USB flash drive, I deleted the interview from my iPhone for additional security. The responses to the one-to-one interviews were transcribed using Temi software, coded, and added to the data analysis.

The second method of data collection was a writing prompt. The writing prompts proved valuable in eliciting responses from the participants. Thirteen participants completed writing prompts after their one-to-one interviews. Two participants took the prompt home and returned their completed response within two days. It took each participant roughly 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete the prompt. This worked well because I reserved the secure meeting room for 2 hours for each interview because I anticipated that each participant would complete his or her prompt after our interview. The responses to the writing prompts were coded and added to the data analysis.

To conclude the research, I completed an open-ended focus-group interview with 9 out of the 15 participants from the original pool of research participants. I invited all 15 participants; however, only 9 participants were able to participate in the focus group interviews. The focus groups proved to be an effective way to gather a wide range of perspectives to begin establishing patterns and themes. I was pleased with the number of students who participated in the focus group. I recorded the interview using video and audio on my Apple iPhone 7 plus. After the

interview, I immediately uploaded the interview to my personal laptop and a USB flash drive. I deleted the interview from my iPhone after transferring the interview to my laptop and USB flash drive. The focus group interview was transcribed using Temi software, coded, and added to the data analysis.

I was able to immediately transcribe each interview and focus group with the help of various technologies. I was introduced to a software application called Temi while conducting research on how to effectively transcribe qualitative interviews. Temi is able to transcribe with an 89% accuracy. I recorded each interview and focus group clearly and tested Temi before conducting each session. I used Excel—a Microsoft application—to maintain my codes. Excel allowed me to color code participants' statements individually, and through the sorting functionality of the program, I was able to identify shared experiences and identify which participants shared those experiences. After horizontalization, I established meaningful clusters that created my initial themes. Additionally, I was able to set aside information that was not essential to the research. I compared identified themes from one action of data collection to another, such as comparing focus-group interview themes to themes identified in one-on-one interviews, writing prompts, and observations. Once I had my four themes and subsequent eight subthemes (see Table 5), I was able to create textural descriptions of the phenomenon. Using imaginative variation, I viewed the identified themes from the participants' perspectives and from the perspective of a school administrator, community member, and faculty member. This process allowed me to be able to expand my views on previously identified themes and make meanings of FGCS' experiences. Finally, I was able to synthesize all of my data into a coherent narrative representative of the inquiry.

The most foundational part of a research study is its trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is ensured by establishing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To ensure that this study is trustworthy, all 15 participants were sent an email transcript of their individual, one-on-one interviews and were instructed to modify or expand on their original answers if needed. I triangulated my findings across the multiple data-collection methods and enhanced the validity and trustworthiness by crosschecking the collected data. Furthermore, I systematically documented all the steps and descriptions of the study's procedures, detailed all changes in the procedure, and explained how these changes would affect the outcome of the study. Lastly, all 15 participants returned their interview transcripts without any additional comments, concerns, or questions.

Theme I: FGCCS' Shared Experiences

The first theme identified was the abundance of shared experiences between FGCCS, whether it was things that led to their academic success or failures. All 15 participants shared experiences from their living environments, employment, personal and professional relationships, and finances that played a significant role within their everyday lives or thoughts on their future goals. Participants described shared experiences across all three data collection methods that equaled to approximately 276 of the same experiences. All 15 participants described the feeling of college being a privilege and an honor despite having many struggles to remain in school and earn a college credential. During our one-on-one interview, Rose stated that it was "an honor to be able to attend school for free and become or choose whatever career I wanted. Most people don't have that choice, and because of it, I feel it's a privilege and an honor to be at college." During our focus group, Billy stated that "Nobody in my neighborhood attends

college so just graduating high school is an honor and being at college is a privilege that most don't experience."

Additionally, all 15 participants agreed that a college education still remains essential to obtaining prosperity and meeting future workforce demands. Nalani, Reign, Joe, Murphy, Rose, Sara, Stacey, and Becky all stated during their one-on-one interviews that it was important to them to achieve the "American dream." When I asked Reign what the American dream is, she stated that "In my mind, the American dream is having a job that pays enough. Enough to be able to own a house, a car, and enough income to take care of my family." Becky, the only participant who does not want to transfer to a four-year institution because her overall life goals focus on being an entrepreneur, also stated that it was important for her to get her associate degree "because it was part of obtaining the American dream."

Another major shared theme was the proximity of the college to the participant's home. This theme had both positive and negative impacts on the participants. Ultimately, participants wanted to be near the college because it helped them financially and with mobility, specifically regarding public transportation and the flexibility to walk to the college. Participants who were not in close proximity to the college faced major barriers that created challenges academically and made it difficult for the student to remain engaged in the co-curricular environment. Stacey, Becky, Jimmy, Nalani, Reign, Cynthia, and Mike, all stated it was imperative that they attended a college that was "near my home." Jimmy stated during our one-on-one interview that "Family is extremely important to me and being able to live at home and go to school is a priority to me and it provides a major support system that enables me to do well." Cynthia noted in her narrative prompt that she "believe it is imperative that you do not move away too far from the college, because it will create a major headache for you regarding transportation, especially

during bad weather.” During her one-on-one interview, Reign stated that “When I moved away too far for college, I failed everything. Now that I am closer, I am doing well.” Mike stated that proximity and transportation played a major role in coming to this particular college: “I knew the college well and it was only 5 minutes away from me, so close to me, so ‘okay, well, so why not?’”

Subtheme I: Academic success. Within the major umbrella of shared experiences, a subtheme was identified that focused on the promoters of academic success for FGCCS. All 15 participants admitted that FGCCS’ academic success is influenced by different factors within the learning institutions and the social and economic environment around them. FGCCS students depend on the faculty and advisor mentoring relationship to succeed in their studies. Marc stated during our one-one interview that “As a freshman, you want to try and meet new people...establish relationships with the administration and your advisors to be successful.”

All 15 participants indicated within their narrative prompts that the advice they would provide a FGCCS is to seek their faculty and or academic advisors. Murphy stated that “This individual should be among the immediate people FGCCS students should access, seek advice from, and maintain a proper connection with to gain academic success.” Joe stated that “The relationship maintained between students, faculty, and the education advisors offer a real strategy to prevent them from dropping out.” Sara stated that “Through academic advising, I was able to make better decisions, problem-solve, and goal set to ensure she stayed on track to graduate, all with her academic advisor.”

FGCCS feel isolated at school and need an inclusive living and learning environment that creates a sense of belonging and comfort. During our focus group interview, Jimmy stated that “It was the interactions between me and the faculty and staff that made me feel accepted at the

college. That was first time I thought this school was cool because I went to an engineering club meeting and saw that my teacher was the club advisor; she became a real person to me.”

FGCCS students normally struggle with subjects such as English and mathematics and will often need to take remedial or English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Due to the nature of their social and economic background, FGCCS need additional assistance when transitioning to college or need assistance in completing a General Education Degree (GED) before they can pursue a higher education degree. Mike depicted an example of the challenges FGCCS face during the transition to college. Mike expressed during our one-on-one interview that “I had got kicked out of my house, so I was working full time and I felt like I just needed to work at that time. And then I lost my job. So that was a whole other thing. I went through some really rough times after that, but I never really kind of got back into school. Like I went to alternative school and then it didn't work out. I didn't complete that.” Mike continued: “I didn't go get my GED. I signed out in 2012 I didn't get my GED until 2016 and that was only because I got a job and then they let me go because they realized I didn't have my GED. And 2 weeks later, I went back and got it.” Reign stated during our one-on-one interviews that “the most challenging part of transition to college was completing the remedial and ESL course work before I could take credit courses. It was discouraging but the college ESL instructors and learning common made it easier.”

FGCCS endure financial constraints that make it difficult for FGCCS to succeed in education. During our one-on-one interview, Billy stated that “Finance is always a major concern for me.” Sara, Stacey, Cynthia, Reign and Daria all expressed during our focus group that they received financial aid based on their financial hardship, and without it, they would not be able to attend school. During the three methods of data collection, it was very apparent that the awarding

of grants and scholarships from the government play an essential role in ensuring that FGCCS obtain access and are able to succeed in their education.

Jimmy stated within his writing prompt that “Students from families that don’t have income need counseling despite receiving financial aid.” Murphy stated in his writing prompt that “Financial aid requires a process, and students need guidance on filling out the forms, difference in aid awards, and issues on student loans.” During our one-on-one interview, Marc stated that “Financial aid information counseling remains vital for students and helps them to understand the financial issues surrounding them.” In her writing prompt, Nalani wrote that “Poor financial preparation before and after enrolling in colleges will let you know how to prepare financially.” Although many FGCCS have access to financial aid counseling, students still seem to feel that they have inadequate knowledge about the financial aid process, and this undermines their potential to receive grants, loans, and support.

Subtheme II: Barriers to success. Within the major umbrella of shared experiences, another subtheme that materialized focused on the barriers to success for FGCCS. FGCCS experience a variety of barriers that undermine their educational success. This phenomenological study demonstrated that most FGCCS endure education barriers such as negative influencers, financial management challenges, and procrastination. Most FGCS experience challenges in the psychological, financial, professional, and academic domains. Professional mentoring remains critical to students, but not all students inquire about these services. Some students had no links with professionals and did not engage in professional internships, which damaged their professionalism. All 15 participants expressed feeling like the college did not fully understand their unique life experiences and did not have a system in place that would allow the students to fully acclimate to the college at the beginning of the semester.

The negative influence from families and friends weakens FGCCS' potential academic success. Cynthia, Stacey, Daria, Sara, Nalani, and Reign all expressed during our focus group interviews that some family members were non-supportive. Cynthia stated during the focus group session that "My cousins are jealous because I didn't have kids young and dropped out of school." During our focus group interview, Reign stated that her sisters "look at me differently because I am not married." Billy stated that "My high school friends don't go to college and couldn't support me during difficult times, even if they wanted to; they wouldn't know how to help or what the struggle is like; they wonder what's the point of college if it's going to only place you in debt or place stress in your life. They just don't understand." During our one-on-one interview, Murphy stated that "Certain friends has led me to certain behaviors that hurts my chances of graduating and leads me to bad habits in school." During our one-on-one interview, Becky stated "I didn't grow up in like a supportive family because my parents focused more on working, which supported us financially, but they never encouraged me to go to college or anything like that, and they didn't know what the benefits of going to college or getting an education was."

FGCCS endure challenges in managing their finances, employment, and school. Twelve out of 15 participants stated that they were managing work and school on a daily basis. Becky, Cynthia, Nalani, Reign, Joe, and Murphy are currently working full-time while attending college. During our one-on-one interview, Mike stated that "There are times like right now, I don't have a dollar to my name, and you know what I'm saying? You just got to make it work and smile." During our one-on-one interview, Murphy stated that "When I first started the semester, I was working more than full-time and going to school full-time; I had to cut it down because I wasn't

getting enough sleep, but I needed the money.” During our one-on-one interview, Becky stated that “I work 40 hours a week. Three jobs. They're all separate.”

The need to master time management techniques were identified as being a vital tool within all three data collection methods. All 15 participants acknowledged in their writing prompt that mastering time management is a piece of important advice they would provide FGCCS. During her one-on-one interview, Rose stated that “Time management is one aspect that many students struggle to achieve in their daily lives.” During his one-on-one interview, Marc stated that “I think time management is probably top three in things FGCCS should learn while coming to college.” Most students mismanage their time in college. FGCS struggle with time management due to lack of guidance from their parents and peers. During her one-one interview, Stacey stated that “Time management is a skill, and with every skill, it either comes natural or you have to learn it; if you don’t have the right people around to teach it to you, then you are left trying to teach yourself or learn it from friends and family that don’t have the skill themselves.” Joe stated during the focus group that his biggest barrier when it comes to time management is procrastination: “Procrastination is my worst and best friend at times; it’s cool to procrastinate the moment that you’re hanging out or watching television, but trying to get the work done last minute is so overwhelming and it gives you a feeling of major anxiety.”

Theme II: Definition of Success

The second theme identified was the participants definition of success. Success of FGCCS is defined in several aspects, as indicated by the phenomenological study conducted. The success of FGCCS is embedded in the students’ family and mentors, and in the reality of enrolling in college and obtaining the students’ perception of the American dream. The family members of FGCCS have little knowledge of what occurs on campus and this lack of awareness

make FGCCS strive even harder to succeed even more to make their family and friends proud. The FGCCS who participated in the study belong to immigrant and low-income families that have struggled to ensure that the participant enrolled in college. These family struggles lead FGCCS to become resilient and strive to succeed in their education. All 15 participants shared multiples experiences that cultivated the creation of this theme. Participants describe their understanding of success across all three data collection methods that equaled to approximately 366 of the same experiences. All 15 participants described the feeling of college being a privilege and an honor that came with being a FGCS despite having many struggles to remain in school and earn a college credential. Students whose parents did not attend college often endure severe challenges with enrolling and graduating from college.

Subtheme I: Defining success. Most of the participants' families provided little resources and assistance while the FGCS tried to enroll in college. All 15 participants indicated during one or more of the data collection methods that the major motivation for pursuing a college degree was that their parents did not attend college. Alessia stated during her one-on-one interview that being a FGCS "acts as a motivator to her." Alessia went on to say that she works hard to overcome challenges and ensure that she can achieve success in her courses for her family." During his one-on-one interview, Jimmy stated that "I try my best to do well in school for my family." During her one-on-one interview, Nalani stated that "When I graduate college, it will transform my life, the lives of my family and it will last generations to come." The entry into college is the beginning of defining success for FGCS and it is perceived as a breakthrough to the devastated families that have struggled to succeed in life.

Learning without proper guidance and mentorship is challenging and can set students up for failure (Ortega, 2018). Some of the participants expressed that the lack of family modeling

hindered their ability to be successful because they had to learn everything about college on their own. Sara stated in her writing prompt that FGCCS should “ask for help as soon as possible; the trial and error method in college will become a challenge to you succeeding because of the numerous barriers you will encounter in the process.” In his writing prompt, Jimmy stated that FGCCS “should not get use to trying things on their own, because of fear of being embarrass. The whole point of college is building your independence, and college officials understand some of us are farther along than others and if you continue to fail on your own without help, you will only limit your ability to achieve success at school.”

Murphy stated during his one-on-one interview that for “FGCCS to succeed, it is important for them to find experienced and reliable role models who can guide them into building a sense of belonging and confidence.” Role models—whether they are faculty, staff or peer mentors—give students hope and motivate them to achieve their educational and life goals. Cynthia stated within her writing prompt that “FGCCS should identify a peer as a mentor. This peer will know the program, teachers to take, how to get inexpensive books, and be there for you, help you to remain on your game so that you can obtain your goals.” Jimmy stated during our focus group that “My mentor helped me to apply for college, get scholarships, and also acquire other financial assistance for books.” Connecting incoming college students with professional or peer mentors creates a positive environment for FGCS to achieve educational success. Mentoring relationships enable students to co-create an environment that allows them to acclimate while at college. Mentoring relationships also allow FGCCS to develop an idea of what success in college means to them.

The students who participated in the study expressed the importance of seeing other individuals who resemble them in the college community, whether by race, culture, gender, or

sexual orientation. The study demonstrated that most FGCCS felt happy and motivated to see a person who looked like them who they perceived to be successful. During her one-on-one interview, Reign stated that “I was extremely excited to see faculty, staff, and students that looked like me on campus.” Nalani stated during her one-on-one interview that “I enjoyed being able to join clubs that were specific to my religious belief, and to have advisors and other students believing in the same thing as me really made me feel successful.” During his one-on-one interview, Marc stated that “I get motivated when I come across successful people at the college that looks like me, and it makes me want to do better because I represent them, like they are representing me.”

Subtheme II: Measurement of success. Within the major umbrella of defining success, another subtheme that materialized focused on how FGCCS measure success within themselves. The study suggests that the measurement of success among FGCCS is based on self-efficacy, building a legacy, and mentoring other colleagues who need assistance. FGCCS develop immense learning aspirations that lead to educational success. During her one-on-one interview, Sara stated that “I am now in love with school and appreciate every opportunity to learn; it’s exciting.” The measurement of self-efficacy among FGCCS determines the areas that need to be reinforced for students to succeed. Billy stated during his one-on-one interview that “I wish I got involved earlier in school; I wasted so much time staying in my room and now that I have been getting involved in my classes and in student activities, I feel empowered to do better, to become as successful as the other people I have been meeting.” Self-efficacy greatly contributed to the success of the participants, and each student determines the preparation and zeal required to succeed in his or her education. The study results suggest that students with self-efficacy challenge themselves, resulting in the student performing well in his or her course work and co-

curricular activities. In his writing prompt, Joe stated that “FGCCS have to believe in his or her ability to do well; that’s the first mindset you must subscribe to. If you don’t believe you can do well, your fears will then become your biggest barrier you will have to overcome.”

Within this subtheme, breaking legacy of not obtaining a college degree was identified as one of the aspects that motivate FGCCS to succeed in their college education. The ability to graduate symbolizes a success milestone in life and it was reflected from all 15 participants as one of the most significant milestones to perceiving themselves as successful. Within the focused group, Nalani and Daria stated that “I will feel successful once I graduate, get a job, and become stable.” Reign stated that “Graduating college will be an incredible accomplishment, not only for myself, but my entire family and friends.” Succeeding in college is not only an accomplishment; it is also the means to breaking legacy in the family education lineage. Many FGCCS use the aspect of breaking legacy to measure their education success. Rose placed this idea into context during her one-on-one interview. She stated that once she graduates “I will be able to provide not only for my parents, but for my children, and my children’s children as a grandmother.”

FGCCS view becoming a mentor to their peers as a rite of passage. FGCCS understand the importance of mentorship and expressed that they want to help others in their pursuit of happiness and success after achieving success themselves. In his one-on-one interview, Jimmy stated that “It is important for me to help others get into college because I don’t know what I would have done myself if my mentors were not around to help me during the time I was applying to college.” During her one-on-one interview, Rose indicated that she enjoys mentoring other immigrant and low-income students because “I see myself when I see an international student struggling to pay for stuff or struggling to find out how college works. Nobody else understands their struggle, so it makes me feel extremely good to help them.” Becky stated in her

writing prompt that “Extending a helping hand to others is another great way to meet new people and gain a better understanding about new procedures or information about the college that you would have no idea about.” The FGCCS represented in this study agreed that being a mentor is beneficial and motivational for them; it provides them the determination to perform and sets standards that enable them to obtain their perceived success.

The barriers that hold FGCCS back are similar and remain a challenge across higher education. The anxiety and doubts of what will happen at college concerns some of the students and can dim their academic aspirations. FGCCS can take calculated risks to increase succeed in college. FGCCS value graduating from college and getting a job, but this does not occur without barriers. Students with passion and determination attain academic success despite the challenges; FGCCS’ resilience determines their college success. Although social, psychological, and financial factors are critical barriers for the FGCCS, the resilience among some students has led to college enrollment and graduation.

Theme III: Protective Factors

The third theme identified regards the protective factors that FGCCS found beneficial in their college journey. The FGCCS who participated identified a variety of resources, supports, and coping strategies that played a vital role in their success while at college. All 15 participants shared multiple experiences that cultivated the creation of this theme. Participants describe their understanding of the available protective factors across all three data collection methods, equaling to 631 of the same experiences. All 15 participants described the importance of academic and nonacademic factors that attributed to classifiable protective influences.

Subtheme I: Academic. All 15 participants identified tutoring as a required resource that can lead to college success. In our one-on-one interview, Billy stated “I wish I went to

tutoring. If I did, I would not have the GPA that I have now.” Billy also indicated in his writing prompt that “Going to the Learning Common should be the first thing you do when you get to college. Get familiar with the faculty and staff who work in there, so they know who you are when you come for tutoring help.” In their one-on-one interviews, Cynthia and Stacey stated that they “attend the tutoring center at least once a day.” During the focus group session, Jimmy stated that “My coach made me go to tutoring and it was great advice.” Sometimes FGCCS feel frustrated at school because they don’t quite understand the material being taught in lectures and need tutoring services to help them understand the material. Tutoring minimizes the anxiety and frustration that come with not knowing the lecture material. This ultimately builds the students’ self-esteem, confidence, and self-efficacy. During her one-one interview, Sara stated that “Tutoring is the reason I am confident in myself in school...I use to have really bad anxiety with math, but now, when I don’t understand a problem, I write it down and bring that exact problem to my tutor and they explain it to me from point A through Z.”

Having access to technology, the internet, and computer labs has become a vital component in the 21st century, and students rely on this technology to complete assignments. Murphy expressed in his one-on-one interview that he sometimes has difficulty completing assignments: “If the internet at home gets turned off, I have to organize myself to make sure I have time to get to campus when the labs are open. Between work and family life, it gets difficult.” In her one-on-one interview, Nalani stated that “It’s beneficial to me that the college has computers we can use during the day. We only have one computer at home, and it works out better that I am able to do my work here. I wish the printing didn’t cost so much.” Technology, internet, and access to computers labs have an extremely positive impact on the FGCCS who participated in the study. Rose provided advice in her writing prompt, stating that “The site has

really great computer labs that you can do your homework in and put study groups together.”

Studies have confirmed what the participants have expressed during this investigation; college students who often use college resources such as tutoring and computers have higher performance when compared to those who do not use college available resources (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Olson, 2014; Ortega, 2018).

One participant described his use of the college food pantry. The other 14 participants are well aware of the pantry and discussed how often they went to the pantry with high-need student colleagues. During our one-on-one interview, Joe stated that “At one point during my first semester, I literally would be in class hungry and couldn’t focus on what the professor was saying. The food pantry saved my life.” Joe continues to say that “I am a huge advocate for the pantry. I bring students there all the time; I go with them and tell them my past story because it’s nothing to be ashamed of. It’s life. I let other students know that I know your circumstance. First in your family to be here and now you can’t focus, let alone learn because you have nothing to eat.” Jimmy stated at our one-on-one interview that, “Fortunately for me, I am blessed to not be in such a hardship, but I gladly walk other students—most of which are FGCCS—to the pantry for food. They have jackets and other needed items like toiletries, too. The pantry is a life saver for those who need it and don’t have anyone else that can help them.” The availability of food pantries on campus ensures students get enough food and essential supplies. However, out of the study participants, only Joe uses the pantry himself.

All 15 participants describe a variety of resources, such as federal work-study financial aid, the office for adult learners, the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program, and student athlete advisors as locations or staff members who helped tether FGCS to the college. All 15 participants expressed that although their friends and family are supportive, a barrier still

exists because it is difficult to discuss certain issues, struggles, or barriers without confusion. All the participants agreed that having the ability to work and study on campus is an added benefit. Having certain offices that are second homes is beneficial because those staff and faculty become your second family; just like family, these staff members support you during hard times. During his one-on-one interview, Marc stated that “I really enjoy having a job on campus. They allow me to work and do my homework. If I ever have a problem about school or life even, I tell my supervisor about it and she helps me with the problem. That’s crazy, in a good way because all this happens while am still at work. It’s so convenient and it removes a lot of stress off my shoulders because I know nobody at home would have known how to help”

Subtheme II: Nonacademic. Within the larger theme of protective factors that impacted FGCCS, participants of the study describe nonacademic aspects that helped them promote academic excellence; specifically, how to cope with the social, emotional, and financial stressors of being at school. Everybody experiences stress, especially when encountering challenges; however, FGCS are particularly prone to stress. Managing your stressors as a student impacts your ability to learn, memorize, and succeed (Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin, 2019). The stressors of FGCCS are many, and participants shared their journey overcoming those stressors. All 15 participants described painful events that they learned from or are still recovering from. Mike, Daria, and Joe were homeless at one point during the years they were in college. Daria stated the following during her one-on-one interview:

When I first started college, it was like I had no identity, I had no voice, I felt very small, degraded and I felt like I wasn't respected at all by anyone in the house. So, I had to move like instantly. Without telling my sister, I just had to leave. I just felt if I had stayed there, I knew something bad was going to happen to me kind of thing. So, I left and I moved,

like without her being home, I just left, got an Uber and I was like basically homeless because I had nowhere to stay.

In their writing prompts, all 15 participants described how important it is for FGCCS entering college to continue to persevere. Mike wrote in his prompt response that “No matter what happens, don’t give up on your dreams. There will be hard times, but you have to believe in yourself and remember the reason why you are here.”

Participants in the study voiced how they endured challenges when managing their time due to financial constraints. Students struggled to balance the demands of working full-time, attending school, participating in extracurricular activities, and other family obligations. The most important obligations were work and school; financially, participants needed to work to pay for their living essentials while attending college. As previously noted, 12 out of 15 participants stated that they were managing work and school on a daily basis. Becky, Cynthia, Nalani, Reign, Joe, and Murphy are currently working full-time. Murphy stated that “At one point, I was working so much I couldn’t get any sleep. It was hurting my health and grades.” In his writing prompt, Billy gave advice: “If you can, try not to work too many long hours at your job. I see people trying to manage work and school and it’s impossible. Some people have to do both, but if you could go without, manage your budget first before picking up long hours. Coming to school itself is a full-time job. I don’t even have a job and I can’t manage my time right now.”

Daria, Joe, Mark, Mike, and Stacey articulated that transportation created major barriers for them. In her one-on-one interview, Stacey stated that “Timing causes major problems for me. I have class and long breaks. I couldn’t go home and come back because I don’t have transportation and don’t live on dorms. This creates major issues for me. I have to find ways to eat, rest, and study to keep me occupied. It’s extremely hard.” In her one-on-one interview, Daria

stated that “It’s hard to manage your time, because you have to plan work and school around transportation. If you run late for a bus, your whole day is thrown off.” Mike said during his one-on-one interview that “Being from New York City area makes you know something else; transportation here is garbage.”

Theme IV: Social Capital

The fourth theme identified was the participants’ available social capital. The FGCCS who participated identified networks of relationships that enabled them to be successful. Participants identified that poor access to social capital hindered their ability to acclimate because they lacked personal and professional access to those opportunities. All 15 participants shared multiple experiences that developed the creation of this theme. Participants discussed the social capital they could access and where they lacked access across all three data collection methods, equaling to 193 occurrences. All 15 participants described the importance of developing relationships with family members, friends, and college officials who could aid the participants in building networks to foster success.

Subtheme I: Supports from family and other supporters. Participants described experiencing challenging times because their family and friends provided little knowledge about the college process. Without guidance from family and friends, participants felt at a disadvantage in certain aspects, such as getting into and navigating through the college process. The participants expressed how they worked extra hard to ensure success and even then, still did not feel like they belonged on the college campus. Rose stated in her one-on-one interview that “I sometime feel like I am dreaming, and I get scared that someone is going to wake me up.” Cynthia stated in her one-on-one interview that “Depending on the class, or the room I am in, I have this strange feeling like I don’t belong here.”

The feeling of imposter syndrome was a consensus for all the participants. FGCCS should strengthen their relationships with mentors from the college—specifically faculty, staff and administration—to become more acclimated to the college environment and build a network of individuals to aid with obtaining success. Mike stated in his writing prompt that in their first year, FGCCS should “Make sure you get to know your professors, join a club, and volunteer as much as possible.” In her one-on-one interview, Nalani stated that:

I use to feel alone at the college before I started joining clubs. Now I am the president of one club and a member of other clubs. I don't feel alone anymore because I made a lot of friends and have faculty advisors that available to help with concerns I might have. It doesn't have to be about club. The advisors just want to be helpful and want me to be successful.

Students who participate in extracurricular activities meet campus stakeholders from all levels of the college. Being able to network with student peers, faculty, and staff strengthen a FGCCS's network and access to resources that will support them in being successful. Academic success within colleges depends on several aspects, and the more engaged you are on campus, the more you will understand how to advocate for yourself. In his one-on-one interview, Jimmy stated that “The best decision I made was to join the science technology entry program. It connected me to resources that I didn't even know existed. And now I am able to continue with that trend and advocate for everything I need to ensure I am successful in college.”

All 15 participants expressed that they experienced self-efficacy after being introduced to their first influential faculty or staff member. Alessia stated in her one-on-one interview that “Meeting my first relatable advisor is all I needed to feel comfortable to begin to explore the

college on my own. Now I know and have all the networks I need to navigate the campus on my own.” In his writing prompt, Billy suggested that FCGS should:

Get to know someone that works on campus. It’s my third semester and I am learning this now. If I met the people who have been helping me this semester, my first semester, I know I would have done better. My advice is to attach yourself with the first person you see on campus. They will help you. Ask for help, that’s what everyone is here for: to help you.

Subtheme II: Pivotal programs and services. All 15 participants expressed how faculty, staff, and administration are vital to FGCCS. Additionally, participants expanded on their admiration for some of the individuals who work at the college. They described some employees of the college as being supportive and having played a key role in ensuring the participants’ success. The main conduit for eliminating gaps between FGCCS and college employees are specialized programs on campus that tailor to individualized needs of diverse students. The transition from high school to college is a difficult journey for FGCCS. Alessia and Jimmy stated during their one-on-one interviews that they were only able to accomplish this transition with the support of their school guidance counselors and specialized opportunity programs that catered to their needs. During his one-on-one interview, Murphy stated that “Me and a lot of the students I know would not be here without the On Point for College program.” During the focus group interview, a variety of high school and college-sponsored programs were highlighted as change agents within the FGCCS community, such as the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, the Liberty Partnership Program, the Science and Technology Entry Program, and Upward Bound. Nalani stated during

her one-on-one interview that “The staff at these programs are like a second family to me; they know my father well and my family loves them.

Data suggest that the most critical time during a FGCCS college transition timeline is the summer after graduation until the end of their first semester of college. Phenomena such as summer melt and the lack of knowledge about college life during the first semester is a struggle for FGCCS. During their one-on-one interviews, Murphy and Rose expressed how difficult it was for them after graduating high school. Rose stated that “I was so excited to graduate high school and go to college. But I quickly realized I didn’t know the first step I needed to take. It’s like giving someone a car that never drove before and saying to them drive me here.”

Encouraging students to become engaged early in extracurricular activities, clubs, and tutoring will help them to adapt quickly and learn the college environment. Guiding them to engage in academic tutoring will promote student learning and build efficacy.

Table 5
Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

RQ Correlation	Occurrences	Codes
Theme I: FGCCS Shared Experiences		
Subtheme: Academic Success		
All	44	Faculty advisor mentoring relationship was extremely beneficial
All	25	Joining a student club Participating in extracurricular activities gave me a sense of belonging shared experiences helped with identity
All	30	Math and English specific resources/tutoring helped them get out of remedial classes
All	33	Receiving financial aid made FGCCS realize that they could pay for college
Subtheme: Barriers to Success		
All	35	Unique life experience prevented them from acclimating to the college environment Nobody seemed to understand their struggles
All	64	Students expressed a need to avoid negative influences, i.e. certain friends, family and behaviors
All	23	Financial management and employment were difficult to manage
All	22	Improving time-management skills Procrastination was a very big barrier to overcome
Theme II: Defining Success		
Subtheme: Definition of Success		
All	55	Family defined success Unique details about their families, and personal qualities they possessed (immigrants, low-income, first in family to attend college and my friends/family not having a rewarding job made them want to be successful)
All	21	Mentors Seeing other people that they can emulate made the students feel that they can obtain successful positions/it gave them a goal of the professionals they can become
All	44	Seeing mentors in the classroom or at a college event. They were not used to seeing people like them in successful roles
Subtheme: Measurement of Success		
All	99	Self-efficacy
All	68	Building a legacy once they graduate and breaking the generational curse
All	79	Being able to give and mentor others who were like them after they graduate
Theme III: Protective Factors (attributes such as skills, strengths, resources, supports, or coping strategies)		
Subtheme: Academic		
All	82	Tutoring services
All	73	Technology, internet, commuter labs access
All	45	College food pantries, food insecurities
All	33	Work study program or student assistance It helped save with transportation and it kept me away from home distractions
All	44	Programs that helped specialized groups (adult learners, athlete advisor and the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP) advisors)

RQ Correlation	Occurrences	Codes
Subtheme: Nonacademic		
All	42	Learning how to cope with stress
All	36	All the students had a sincere motivation to be successful
All	24	Perseverance was a reoccurring theme in their life based on family history
All	16	Learning how to time-manage and complete assignments on time. Learning how to use emails to contact instructors. Going to convocation to meet new people.
All	28	Stable transportation is very beneficial. Those that didn't have one struggled.
All	27	Family concerns. Babysitting for family or friends
All	31	Financial literacy
Theme IV: Social Capital (networks of relationships in society that enable individuals and groups to be successful)		
Subtheme: Support from family and other supporters		
All	29	Acclimating to college was difficult because of lack of knowledge from friends and family
All	44	Imposter complex
All	47	Extracurricular is the gateway
All	18	People who work here are really supportive and want you to succeed
Subtheme: Pivotal Programs and Services		
All	22	High school guidance counselors
All	18	Opportunity programs (NYS Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) and Trio Upward Bound program in high school)
All	15	Co-curricular activities and student engagement (Student activities, clubs, college student social media apps, and trips)

Research Question Responses

The research questions for the study addressed the gap that existed in the literature, specifically with the lived experiences of FGCCS. The CQ was focused on the influences that impact FGCCS' academic success or lack of success, and this question was elaborated on in the SQs. The following section includes descriptions of participant responses that answered the CQ and SQs in the study.

CQ1: What experiences do FGCCS share that have influenced their academic success or lack of success? While acquiring a college education greatly benefits FGCCS immediately after graduation and across their lifetime, FGCCS are underprivileged when it comes to considering, applying, and graduating from a higher learning institution. The major

disadvantages derive from a family background that has low expectations, a complacency culture, and a lack of routine academic preparation. This study confirms that FGCCS are less expected to enter and graduate college, less expected to choose majors from the STEM professions compared to their non-FGCS counterparts and are usually less prepared for college rigors than those whose parents have a college education. All 15 participants shared a variety of college experiences that either enabled or delayed their successful completion of school.

The FGCCS who participated in the study revealed that success in college must begin with both an intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as stated within the focus group by all 9 participants. During his one-on-one interview, Mike stated that “I am so hungry for success that I had to change my life inside and out to make sure I remain [sic] focus [sic] and goal driven during the hard and good times. Relaxing during either one can leave you complacent and deter you from your dreams.” Alessia stated at her one-on-one interview that “To be the medical professional I want to be, I have to find strength internally and let that strength guide me when studying get [sic] difficult. That’s how I can perform at a competitive level all the time because medical school entrance is competitive.”

Regardless of demographics, FGCCS’ dominant reason for failing is their fear of failure. All 15 participants expressed a high level of imposter syndrome that controlled their thoughts and created a fear of being in college and in classrooms that left them isolated due to lack of diversity. Jimmy stated in his on-on-one interview that “Before I started being so engaged on campus, I felt like I didn’t belong.” As previously mentioned, Rose stated in her one-on-one interview that “I sometime feel like I am dreaming, and I get scared that someone is going to wake me up.” The focus group interviews and writing prompts had a signature overlap that

encouraged students to get involve in clubs early to find likeminded and supportive peers to help build camaraderie.

FGCCS who persist and graduate with college degrees usually report positive results from their years in college, an aspect that is specifically true among students who incessantly access advising departments and career service departments, participate in extracurricular activities, secure internships, and shadow opportunities. Nalani recommended in her writing prompt that “All FGCCS should get involved the first week of classes. This will open a variety of different supports for you when times gets hard.” Unlike their more advantaged counterparts, FGCCS can withstand various internal and external pressures, and when given mentorship or other social capital, these students develop various strengths that enable them to be successful. FGCCS pull from experience reservoirs of necessity and structural problems and can persist regardless of social and emotional turmoil, financial hardships, transportation dilemmas, and environmental navigation. Cynthia stated that “The great thing about starting from nothing is that when times get hard, you already have the tools needed to deal with it. You come from the struggle.”

SQ1: How do FGCCS define success, and how does this definition reflect their notion of success in college? The FGCCS who participated in this study define success in three sequential ways: access and entering college, persisting and completing college, and obtaining employment to achieve the American dream. FGCCS are constantly in search of the American dream, and until they achieve that stability, it is hard for them to find purpose in any of the first two sequences. Regardless of their home environment, FGCCS receive little support from home while at college. Some even expressed repudiation, as if members of the family perceived the college-going individual as superior to other family members. After undergoing college life,

most participants reported feeling unfit in the college and also in their homes. Reign stated in her one-on-one interview that “Some of my family members discourage me because I choose to go to college and not just work and build a family.” In her one-on-one interview, Becky stated that:

I am glad I am in college but it’s also hard because of the expectations of my family.

They are sometime proud of me and sometimes I feel that they wish I was just working.

Until I earn my degree and could support myself and them, I don’t think they will ever truly fully understand why college is important.

Participants expressed that they felt successful and privileged while in college; however, FGCCS still have a sense of conflicting attitudes in terms of belonging, that drives cognitive dissonance. The majority of these students reported internalized self-dependence; yet, the students longed to belong in the college environment. Apart from being under-prepared academically compared to their peers, FGCS fear collegiate support resources and services; this leaves the participants in limbo until they learn to trust the college and their peers. Instead of glorifying the second sequence of their success, students continue to strive and reach the ultimate goal, which is employment. During our one-on-one interview, Jimmy admitted that:

I think I have the most supportive family in the world. But because my father is successful, he truly doesn’t understand what I am doing at school; I can’t express my struggles to him; when I do, he listens but ultimately, I can tell he really wants to just ask me why am I, wasting all my energy when I could just join the family business and help him grow that. In his mind, I can make more money there than by going to school

SQ2: What protective factors do FGCCS perceive as promoting their academic and nonacademic success? While academic and nonacademic success may be challenged by manifold risk factors including fear, psychological, social, and emotional preoccupied

attachments, FGCCS boast various protective factors such as academic and nonacademic self-efficacy, college supports, resilience, and most importantly, optimism. All 15 participants have articulated in one or more of the research instruments that they believe in their ability to succeed in college. In his one-on-one interviews, Billy stated that “I believe this will be my defining semester. It’s my third semester but I just got my shit together. I am determined, I am going to tutoring and my instructor’s office hours when I need help. I wish I could go back to my first semester.” Mark wrote in his writing prompt that “If at any time, you feel like you need support or an extra push, there’s counseling services that can help you, and tutoring is available at no cost to students.”

All 15 participants perceived that self-efficacy is a major protective factor for their success. The study participants expressed their focus on advancing their self-confidence, unlike their non-FGCS counterparts who are more focused on improving an earlier poor school record for a chance to transfer to a different institution. All of the students who attended the focus group interview reported that they wanted to graduate before transferring because they felt a sense of community at their current college. At the focused group that, Jimmy stated that “I like the fact that I will have two degrees by the time I am completed. It will make me more marketable.”

SQ3: How have FGCCS’ life experiences contributed to their understandings of success in college? All 15 study participants described how being in college gives FGCCS a certain level of perceived success without consideration of grades. Billy stated that “Just being here alone means I’ve obtain [sic] a certain amount of success.” Ample literature confirms the fact that FGCCS normally possess lower academic involvement and lower retention rates than their non-FGCS counterparts; therefore, attending college provides more success than expected by peers and family members. Furthermore, all 15 participants confirmed that their lives and

bandwidth recovery in regard to their social and emotional trauma throughout their life has a major influence on their perception of success in college. Reign expressed that “My childhood has been extremely difficult, and it plays a huge role in how I live my life and what I believe is success.” Although each participant identified different careers and long-term plans—ranging from engineering to a variety of helping professions—all 15 participants agreed that success in college is measured by the stability provides by the profession they can obtain afterwards. In essence, success in college is gauged by students’ employability and family stability after graduation.

The disparities associated with FGCCS life experiences affects FGCCS’ understanding of college success. The extent of this impact—either adversely or positively—cannot be gauged using this study because the participants’ college success is sequential with three significant milestones: access and entering college, persisting and completing college, and obtaining employment to achieve the “American dream,” as expressed by Becky, Cynthia, Joe, Murphy, Nalani, Reign, Rose, and Sara in their one-on-one interviews. It will be difficult to ascertain whether students believe they were successful in college until each participant can be surveyed once the student is in their chosen career field.

Furthermore, it is suggested that FGCCS experiences will have a substantial cognitive and non-cognitive implications (Pascarella et al, 2004). All 15 participants expressed that family cultural and social capital greatly influence their perceived success while in college and influence the choices they make regarding their GPA expectations. Family cultural and social capital expectations—compounded by student understanding and the expectations of a college education—are likely to be more modest among FGCCS. Sara stated the following in her one-on-one interview:

I accept the challenges and accomplishments of the day. It's hard to live in the future or to say I measure success by letter grades. I care about every class, but ultimately, I have so many things I have to balance between work, life, and school. I have come to realize I am very happy with a passing grade that is transferable. As long as I worked extremely hard for it. My main concern is to finish, build my resume, so I can be able to gain employment. My overall goal is employment.

SQ4: What shared services do FGCCS perceive as contributing to their success while transitioning to college, during their first semester at college, and when preparing to graduate from college? All 15 participants faced challenges while working to attain college success, ranging from the first to the last semester of college. Mike stated at his one-on-one interview that “I am graduating this semester, and it was such a rewarding but strenuous time. I am going to take the spring semester off before I start my four-year degree in the fall. I need a break.”

The participants expressed enjoying multiple shared services that promoted their success when in transition to college. Some of the key shared services include: increased college academic preparation in high school, provision of extra college financial aid within their college package, dual enrollment courses, and specialized programs (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, the Liberty Partnership Program, the Science and Technology Entry Program, and Upward Bound) and promotion of entry and reentry for young and working adults (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Jimmy and Sara originally planned to attend a technical school that would lead to a career rather than college; however, Jimmy expressed that “being part of a specialized program (STEP) allowed him to explore a variety of careers that really interested me. Without that exploration, I would have never explored college. Not only that, they helped me with all the paperwork needed to get into school.”

All 15 participants used the institutions' tutoring services, programs to aid with social and emotional needs, career pathways integration, and employment or transfer transition services. During their one-on-one interviews, Mike and Alessia shared that they used the learning center often. Both Mike and Alessia received tutoring and tutored themselves; this experience helped them develop transferable skills and social capital because they gained access to professional staff to use for references and mentorship opportunities. Alessia stated at her one-on-one interview that "I used the transfer center often to have them help me create a medical school road map. This was extremely beneficial because I know step-by-step what I need to do and that give me a sense of belonging and certainty." Marc stated that "I use my faculty office hours every chance I have a concern. In my opinion, it's better than an email because I get to get to know them."

Summary

Chapter 4 included detailed descriptions of the study participants, themes, and narratives that were identified through data analysis of the one-on-one interviews, writing prompts, and focus group interviews. The study had a total of 15 participants. The data analysis allowed the voices of the participants to come through in thick, rich, and detailed descriptions. Four themes were identified through the analysis: a) shared experiences, b) defining success, c) protective factors, and d) social factors. These themes address the CQ and subsequent SQs and provide a framework to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of FGCCS.

The results from the one-on-one interviews, writing prompts, and focus group confirmed the social-emotional, psychological, and financial barriers that systematically impede or enable the success of FGCCS. Quotes from the participants were presented to align with the appropriate

themes and support the responses to the research questions. The answers to the research questions were presented in a clear and succinct manner to summarize the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of FGCCS in the Northeast region of the United States. A group of 15 individuals participated in a study that lasted nearly 2 weeks. All the participants were interviewed one-on-one, each completed a writing prompt, and 9 out of 15 participants participated in the focus group interview. All of the one-on-one interviews were recorded and transcribed, except for one due to religious restrictions. The focus group was also recorded and transcribed. Moustakas' (1994) process for phenomenological reduction was used to analyze all of the data collected. Based on this analysis, four themes were identified and reviewed. Chapter 5 consists of five sections to conclude the study: a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings, the implications of the findings, an outline of the study delimitations and limitations, and my recommendations for future research into FGCCS.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of FGCCS' experiences in the Northeast region of the United States. A more insightful understanding of the barriers, accomplishments, and needs of FGCCS was developed using student perceptions and experiences through one-on-one interviews, writing prompts, and a focus group discussion. An analysis of the data led to the identification of five major themes: shared experiences, definition of success, protective factors, social capital, and pivotal programs and services. Answers to the original CQ and four SQs were addressed as the participants

thematically described their experiences. The following research questions guided this transcendental phenomenological study:

CQ1: What experiences do FGCCS share that have influenced their academic success or lack of success?

SQ1: How do FGCCS define success and how does this definition reflect their notion of success in college?

SQ2: What protective factors do FGCCS perceive as promoting their academic and nonacademic success?

SQ3: How have FGCCS' life experiences contributed to their understandings of success in college?

SQ4: What shared services do FGCCS perceive as contributing to their success while transitioning to college, during their first semester at college, and when preparing to graduate from college?

CQ

What experiences do FGCCS share that have influenced their academic success or lack of success? From the thematic data, all five themes contained participant experiences that addressed the influences on FGCCS' academic success or lack of success. The participants agreed that the success of FGCCS depends on several factors and that it is also up to the individual student to use the necessary resources to excel and succeed within higher education. Study participants concluded that the academic success of FGCCS depends on family background, faculty, and administration, among other factors. Successful FGCCS take advantage of resources such as tutoring services, mentors, and career advising to help realize their educational dream at college and beyond. Thriving in college as a FGCS remains challenging,

and unless students put forth extra effort and remain resilient, the chances of enrolling and graduating from college becomes minimal.

SQ 1

How do FGCCS define success and how does this definition reflect their notion of success in college? The four SQs addressed the themes, participants' own words, and writing responses. The FGCCS involved in the inquiry work extremely hard to excel in their academics. Despite challenges, the FGCCS in the study found ways to stay organized academically. Participants stated that balancing family responsibilities, work, and other accountabilities was their main stressor and created a huge barrier to their acclimation into the college environment. The participants stated that stress and other distractors led to the potential to fail. Time management remains vital and is a huge determinant to academic success. Poor time management leads to unattended courses and late assignments that eventually leads to failure.

SQ 2

What protective factors do FGCCS perceive as promoting their academic and nonacademic success? The lack of social and emotional support and the burden of financial constraints were heavily documented as being obstacles among the participants. The ability to receive or seek out financial, social, or other forms of support from family, friends, professionals, and well-wishers remains challenging. The participants expressed that it is difficult to manage problems independently and often leads to failure.

The participants identified mentorship as a key component that helped them obtain success. FGCCS are not scared to seek help when they understand where they come from and have set aspirations in life; however, that has not been the case among some of the participants.

The study participants who pursued their passions described achieving success in seeing their goals fulfilled. All the participants expressed how determination and persistence led to creating incredible opportunities among them and that resilience was the key change agent that led to achieving success academic, professionally, and personally.

SQ 3

How have FGCCS' life experiences contributed to their understandings of success in college? The participants described a variety of cultural and societal norms that contributed to their understandings of success while at college. The main point that participants expressed was the lack of knowledge they had about the college experience. This pivotal factor was identified among all 15 participants. The FGCCS in the study stated that they felt unprepared and unsuccessful, unlike their non-FGCS counterparts who had friends, parents, and family members who attended colleges and had information to share with their children to motivate them and help them navigate issues they encountered at college. In addition, students viewed the idea of leaving home and living in college dorms with mixed feelings. Leaving home presented a great opportunity and a feeling of being successful for the participants who wanted the freedom away from their family; however, it did not sound like a great idea for those with little experience or those who are extremely dependent on their family. This was especially true for individuals who identified as being from a close-knit family or those who had not experienced independence prior to attending college. Students in the study who identified as being low-income and or who identified as being an immigrant stated that attending college in general made them feel successful. Attending college has always been an American dream to these students and being on campus allowed them to realize that dream not only for themselves, but for their family. Finally, these students experienced a feeling of success with the opportunity to change their family

legacy by becoming more employable, and later being able to financially support themselves as well as friends and family members.

SQ 4

What shared services do FGCCS perceive as contributing to their success while transitioning to college, during their first semester at college, and when preparing to graduate from college? The participants indicated that they needed or should have sought out counseling and guidance on a variety of issues, such as social and psychological dilemmas that damaged their educational concentration. The idea of FGCCS students leaving their family behind to enroll in college remains extremely challenging. Homesickness and loneliness undermine the efforts made by the students to settle at the colleges and achieve academic access. In addition, participants who lived on campus expressed feeling as if they abandoned their family to pursue a college degree. In addition, participants from low-income families expressed feeling isolated and not fitting the social status of other college students. Participants admitted to using a variety of shared services to remove these barriers, such as student activities, the financial aid office, counseling services, career services, professors' office hours, mentorship programs, the college food pantry, and specialized groups such as the Collegiate Science Technology Entry Program, Completion Coaches, and the Returning Adult Office. The participants shared motivating factors that kept them focused on excelling in education despite the shared challenges and barriers. Due to the nature of their collective struggles, the participants aimed to build a legacy for their families and also become role models for future FGCCS.

Discussion

The findings of this study represent a pattern of responses and meanings identified through collection and analysis. Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) interactionalist model of student persistence, which expands on Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, is indicative of the framework used to study retention at community colleges and is the conceptual framework that guided this transcendental phenomenological investigation into the lives of FGCCS. It was important to compare the findings to existing theories to corroborate and validate the descriptions used to articulate the impediments and successes for the target group. The succeeding sections explain the relevancy of the theoretical and empirical foundation of information found in the literature review.

Theoretical Framework

The study focuses on several theoretical models such as Tinto's interactionalist (1975; 1987; 1993) theory of college, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement. Tinto's interactionalist theory focuses on student retention at school and evaluates different factors such as student characteristics, academic affairs, environment, and social integration at the institution. The principles of the model describe the processes the school uses to create equitable spaces and supports for students enrolled to ensure all students achieve their potential. Tinto's theory aims to eliminate unappealing environments; this is important because FGCCS tend to perceive that colleges value their non-FGCS counterparts. This notion creates division and uncertainty, in addition to leading to low-commitment and motivation among FGCCS. Tinto's model emphasizes that supportive social and educational communities will help all students obtain success.

This study contains several examples of participants' stories that support Tinto's theoretical perspective on retention of college students. The study also addresses several concepts that have closed achievement gaps for FGCCS. Past literature and the data from this study supports the idea that the success of FGCCS is determined by factors such as family background, the students' academic skill set, the students' ability to acclimate to the college environment, and the college's permeability for a diverse group of students. FGCS will feel safe when a college understands their needs and creates supportive environments for them. This enables the students to meet educational demands, pursue their aspirations, navigate through any challenges, and persist until graduation.

The study further confirms Tinto's theory by illustrating that the participants' transition to college was not easy. The college transition involves a process that the student and his or her parents are not familiar with, exemplifying the difficulties students face when integrating to college culture. This study contributes to Tinto's theory by sharing the importance of FGCCS having a proper sense of purpose for attending college. All study participants agreed that having a low level of commitment to their education and a lack of an understanding of the current pathway to their careers creates a major hurdle to obtaining their set educational goals. Efforts to improve the students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation remains vital in promoting student motivation, performance, and persistence in college. Tinto's model demonstrates that students' intentions and decisions before enrolling in college determines whether they will drop out. Ultimately, the institution determines the students' fate at school through the environment created by the faculty, staff, and administration.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports the idea that campuses need to apply an all-inclusive approach to integrate and retain FGCS. From this perspective, colleges must focus

on how FGCS participate in formal and informal exchanges and how these students make meaning from artifacts, tools, and social capital (Nasir & Hand, 2006). The major challenge the study participants' face that corroborate previous inquiries is the students' ability to adapt to the everchanging, fast-paced college environment and focus on education (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003). Vygotsky's model states that the cultural development of students occurs on social and individual levels. The relationship between FGCCS and the institution co-creates the environment needed for the individual student to succeed or achieve his or her goals.

The study confirmed Vygotsky's theory, highlighted participants' unique stories, and emphasized the importance of attending to each students' expressed needs above protocols that are not sensitive to the needs of FGCCS. The institutional experiences among students determine their likelihood to stay at school and graduate. Formal and informal aspects of institutional experiences affect the persistence and social interactions of the students. Student involvement in both academic and nonacademic activities depends on institution culture and characteristics, such as student to faculty ratio, faculty and staff diversity, and co-curricular programming. The involvement of students in the institutions' social and academic affairs remains critical to academic success. This study was able to extend Vygotsky's theory and further illustrate the importance of institutions being attentive to the social and emotional belonging of FGCCS. All study participants expressed how important it is for the college to cultivate opportunities for new students, especially for FGCCS who are trying to integrate into the college. These integration opportunities will promote FGCCS retention. Additionally, this study shed light on how FGCCS' positive experiences promote student integration, which will help increase retention rates. The study revealed that aspects such as student empowerment, social and emotional support, and

counseling make students comfortable and focused on both nonacademic and academic excellence.

The research shed light on the importance of social capital and the impact it has on FGCCS. FGCCS' parents and family members' lack of college understanding led to participants lacking knowledge regarding the college process and college assimilation. Participants discussed the barriers they faced along their journey and articulated how these barriers weakened their efficacy, college commitment, and their willingness and ability to remain at school. FGCCS' mentors provided participants with social capital and vital resources that created accessible opportunities and increased retention for those students. This confirmed the importance of social integration and confirmed that Vygotsky's theory is essential for the success of FGCCS. Additionally, Vygotsky states that integration helps students acclimate at the college and focus on education; therefore, it is up to the college administration to ensure systems are in place to eliminate systematic barriers for students irrespective of their social background, economic background, and ethnicity. Participants felt like part of the system and became motivated to learn once they perceived that the systemic barriers were eliminated (Swecker et al., 2013). Academic and social acclimations ruin the dreams and aspirations of students when the administration does not employ an inclusive social integration approach for the students.

Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement suggests that colleges can increase persistence of FGCCS by intentionally creating positive experiences for students in the cocurricular environment (Lewin, 1936; Walsh, 1973). Astin (1985; 1999) created five basic assumptions about involvement: a) involvement requires a physical and psychosocial commitment, b) involvement is constant, c) involvement can be qualitative and quantitative in nature, d) each student's development is relative to his or her formal and informal involvement at

the college, and e) academic performance correlates with student involvement. Vygotsky's theory remained applicable during this inquiry on FGCCS access, persistence, and graduation from college.

Several of the participants' stories support Astin's theoretical perspective; both the theory and participants emphasize that college involvement was useful in their acclimation to the college. The participants' unique stories confirmed that co-curricular programming ensures that all students have a strong level of engagement to the college, which increases the likelihood that FGCCS will persist and graduate. According to Astin's model, student involvement incorporates physical and psychological energy that students use to achieve academic success (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003). The study corroborated that the highly involved students often interact freely with their fellow students, faculty, staff and administrators; additionally, these students actively participate in student organizations, visit offices during class breaks, and find ways to spend time at the college. These characteristics coincide with Astin's involvement theory; it is the actions of the school that define student level of engagement, their behavior, and involvement at the school.

Student involvement varies—especially for FGCCS—and depends on the challenges students are facing at home, work, and with their families; nevertheless Astin's concepts of college involvement continues to encourage the college and its students to remain committed to engaging one another despite those challenges. The study results confirm that FGCCS have less than favorable backgrounds—such as financial constraints, social, and emotional barriers—that prevent students from adapting quickly to the college environment. When faculty, staff, and administration invest into building an open, inviting, engaging, and supportive environment, both the study and Astin's theory show that FGCCS will receive the support needed to fully integrate

into the college and become successful. Additionally, the study and Astin's theory both confirm that building a fully supportive environment must be a college-wide commitment to ensure that FGCCS achieve academic and nonacademic success (Means & Pyne, 2017; Pyne & Means, 2013; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Student involvement remains crucial to the college experience and minimizes college dropout rates among FGCCS. Lack of involvement isolates students and increases the number of students who drop out of school (Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993).

Empirical Framework

The three aforementioned theories demonstrate that it is essential for students to adapt to the college experience and remain at school to achieve academic success. This goal can be achieved through the efforts of individual students, faculty, and administration, as well as the students' families. The attitudes of students—as demonstrated by the Tinto's interactionalist (1975; 1987; 1993) theory—determines if the students will adapt quickly to the school environment. Current literature does not provide a framework that helps colleges mirror best practices in terms of increasing FGCCS' success. This section focuses on the relationship between the empirical literature reviewed earlier and information revealed in the data analysis of this study.

Academic success. Study findings confirm that academic integration positively impacts FGCCS' collegiate experience (Pascarella et al., 2004; Tinto, 1975; 1987; 1993). Currently, the success and failures of FGCCS receive much attention from education stakeholders and credible improvements are expected. The collected data corroborates that continuing generation peers have an advantage over FGCCS due to the education challenges that FGCCS encounter. The study indicated that FGCCS' academic success is influenced by different factors in the learning institutions, social environment, and economic environment. FGCCS depend on the faculty and

advisor mentoring relationship to succeed in their studies. The participants indicated that faculty and advisor mentoring programs were vital to building positive influences, which ultimately assisted in college retention. Conversely, participants who have struggled or are struggling academically did not have an identified relationship with the faculty or an advisor.

The faculty and academic advisors are among the immediate people FGCCS can access, seek advice from, and maintain a proper connection with to boost their academic success. The relationship maintained between students, faculty, and educational advisors offers an effective retention strategy to FGCCS and can prevent them from dropping out of college (Hébert, 2018). Based on the current research and previous empirical data, FGCCS retention efforts should focus on increasing attrition rates. Through academic advising, FGCCS have improved their decision-making skills, problem-solving abilities, and goal-setting techniques, leading to an increase in college retention and graduation rates. Most FGCCS rely on people outside their families for social capital, information, and advice. Colleges who understand this fact must invest in professional staff who are versed in nurturing and supporting FGCCS (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). The relationship between students and academic staff enables students to persist through challenges and persevere in school.

Social acclimating. Study findings contribute to previous literature through illustrating that social and emotional integration and peer relationships are important to FGCCS' success (Pascarella et al., 2004; Tinto 1975; 1987; 1993). Participants expressed a feeling of isolation while at school and conveyed the need to experience a more welcoming and social environment. This type of environment gives FGCCS a sense of belonging and ultimately makes them comfortable while at school. Participants demonstrated low resilience in completing studies due to poor moral, emotional, and social support. The ability of FGCCS to succeed in an unfamiliar

environment remains challenging (Tinto 1975; 1987; 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). It is easier to build FGCCS morale when the academic staff understands the potential of the students and creates a socializing environment to boost academic success (Evans, 2016). Interactions between FGCCS, their peers, and faculty allow FGCCS to integrate in school, which boosts students' chances of success. The marginalized status of FGCCS students makes it difficult for the students to adapt quickly; however, student motivation and persistence can increase through social support and emotional support (Astin, 1985; 1999).

College Efficacy. This study adds to previous literature by illustrating that FGCCS present lower levels of academic self-efficacy than their non-FGCS counterparts (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003). The participants in this study struggled in their transition to college, thus reflecting a lower level of academic preparation, lack of social capital, lack of resilience, and low levels of college preparedness. FGCCS normally struggle with subjects such as English and mathematics, and sometimes need to enroll in remedial classes. FGCCS require proper learning materials to succeed in education due to the nature of their social and economic background. Some FGCCS show weak performance in high school before joining college, making remedial assistance necessary after enrolling and attending college (Hébert, 2018). Math and English remedial classes help students boost their knowledge in learning; however, these remedial programs also place these students behind in credit accumulation and financial aid. College bridge programs, tutoring, federal and New York state programs such as Trio (Upward Bound, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), the Liberty Partnership, and the Science Technology Entry Program have improved the learning capacity of FGCCS without wasting the students' financial aid or placing them behind in obtaining college credit. It is necessary for FGCCS to adapt quickly while in the college to ensure college success,

and these bridge programs have proven effective for decades. FGCCS often give up if they experience failure in their first semester; these specialized programs engage students and improve their efficacy, making it easier for students to succeed in their education.

Financial literacy. Study participants repeatedly cited that access to literacy workshops, financial aid, and other college-sponsored scholarships and programs provided an opportunity for students to access, persist, and graduate college (Morton et al., 2018). FGCCS endure financial constraints that make it difficult for them to succeed in education. Often, FGCS' financial background is not adequate enough to sustain them throughout their educational journey. Many FGCS are afforded financial aid on tuition and student supplies, among other resources. The awarding of grants and scholarships from the government play an essential role in ensuring that FGCCS succeed in their education (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). It is essential for the students to seek financial assistance federally—as well as from private organizations and well-wishers—before enrolling in college.

The study also confirmed that students from low-income families need counseling despite the provision of financial aid. Based on the research and previous empirical data, FGCCS and their parents should be required to receive guidance on the financial aid process. The participants expressed numerous concerns or dissatisfaction on filling out financial forms, guidance on financial use, and issues concerning student loans. Adapting financial aid information counseling is vital for FGCS and helps students understand the financial issues surrounding them. Students' poor financial preparation before and after enrolling in college determines whether the student proceeds with his or her education. Although many FGCCS have access to financial aid counseling, failure to access counseling undermines students' potential to receive grants, loans, and other financial support.

This study confirms that FGCCS endure challenges in attaining employment and managing finances. College students are poor managers of money due to the misuse of funds given by the government and other private financial organizations (Schackmuth, 2012). The participants admitted that financial literacy among FGCCS would be extremely beneficial and would help students make sound decisions concerning the proper usage of finances. Previous literature confirms that most students manage finances poorly due to the influence of friends and circumstances in which students use the money. Most students misuse money with friends and later lack the funds to complete their education. FGCCS need appropriate financial education and counseling to boost their financial management abilities before enrolling in college.

Social capital. This phenomenological study demonstrated that FGCCS endure positive and negative experiences related to their parents and other supporters. This study advocated that parents and family members could be a great source of motivation for FGCCS. The findings suggest that FGCCS experience many challenges transitioning to college due to the lack of social capital (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004). Most of the participants experienced challenges in social, emotional, psychological, financial, professional, and academic domains. Professional counseling remains critical to the students, but not all students acquire the services. FGCS often lack contacts with professionals and do not engage in professional internships; this weakens their ability to network, which is vital part of professionalism. The data confirm that most FGCCS work in silos and do not want to seek professional services due to fear of being rejected. Participants feared that other people would not understand their struggles; this perception hinders the student's ability to seek help and professional services.

Learning without proper guidance is challenging and sometimes leads to failure in achieving set education goals (Ortega, 2018). Lack of family modeling among FGCCS negatively impacts students' ability to succeed in education, since learning independently makes it difficult to succeed in education. Study participants confirmed that the trial and error method does not work with college; it is challenging for FGCCS to succeed using this method because of the numerous barriers they encounter in the process. FGCCS experience failure when they are not directed or coordinated to solutions for the challenges they face, and this failure limits their sustained success at school.

The study confirmed that the most effective way for FGCCS to succeed in education is to find competent and reliable models who can guide them to build a sense of self-efficacy and confidence (D'Amico & Dika, 2013). These social capital agents give students hope and motivate them to achieve their set education and life goals. Peer mentors play an essential role by ensuring that FGCCS remain resilient until they achieve their set education goals (Ortega, 2018). Connecting incoming college students with peer or professional mentors helps students to co-create an inviting environment and achieve educational success. The mentoring relationship enables students to acclimate well at college. Mentors help FGCS overcome other systematic barriers such as social, emotional, and financial hardships.

This study suggests that FGCS' negative influences are often certain family members and peers; this weakens the students' potential academic success. Non-supportive families destabilize the educational dreams of FGCCS because the lack of support fails to provide students with a motivating and inviting environment. The participants indicated that family dynamics are different, and some parents provide little support to them. Additionally, peers can influence

students' decision; sometimes, FGCS become distracted by their peers and their focus on education diminishes (Ishitani, 2003).

It is easy for FGCCS to get influenced by their high school peers and experiences, and the company of certain peers leads to behaviors that damage education progress. Engagement in crime and delinquent behavior shatters the educational dreams of FGCS. Bad habits in school such as conflicting with tutors, neglecting assignments, and indiscipline weakens education success of FGCCS.

Implications

Students who are the first in their families to attend college are one of the fastest growing populations matriculating at college in the United States (Engle et al., 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Petty, 2014). Few studies have addressed the experiences that determine why FGCCS' have low academic achievement. During the study, participants revealed their aspiration to succeed at college. Students were willing to try new programs and services to help prepare for success. Participants understood that new programs and services require collaboration between the students and the college. Participants were willing to take responsibility for their own success and provided feedback about implementing projects that would help FGCCS navigate the college environment. Participants revealed both positive and negative aspects of being a FGCCS. The results of the inquiry provided rich descriptions that confirmed empirical research previously conducted on FGCS. This section discusses theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for educators, policy-makers, and other stakeholders in the educational community.

Theoretical Implications

The three theories that guided the study provide effective theoretical implications that are beneficial to college faculty, staff, administration, and students. Tinto's interactionalist (1975) theory of college-student departure shows that retention is promoted through intentional interactions between students and staff. Students adapt to the school quickly and attrition levels drop when students integrate socially, emotionally, and academically. Vygotsky's (1978) social-cultural theory insists that colleges have the responsibility to transform the perceptions, thoughts, and behavior of FGCCS. Positive interactions between people in different social contexts increase student knowledge and transform behavior. Positive relationships lead to lasting positive impacts. Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement demonstrates that students are more successful in college when students are more engaged; it is up to the administration to increase retention by ensuring that students are involved in academic and nonacademic activities. Students who are more engaged will experience more success in their educational journey.

Empirical Implications

This study confirms that FGCCS drop out when students do not acclimate well to campus. Policymakers and college administrators must understand that students come from different backgrounds, and the college has the responsibility to create a comfortable environment that is inclusive of all students. Instructors and parents must find ways to actively remove the barriers that cause FGCCS to drop out of school. The proceeding list provides some new initiatives that could positively impact student persistence and graduation rates.

Legislation. The transition from high school to college is difficult for FGCCS. In addition, FGCCS face a wide range of barriers that prevents them from persisting and graduating. As previously noted, FGCS are the fastest growing population enrolling to college,

but little is known about why these students are failing at a higher rate (Engle et al., 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Petty, 2014). It would be beneficial to create legislation or fund research studies that investigate FGCS' experiences and identify programs and services to ensure student success. A number of programs currently exist that successfully support both high school and college students. Some of these programs have existed for years, and FGCCS stakeholders should elect officials and vote to allocate more funding to these programs. Stakeholders should also vote to provide funding to increase efficiency of existing programming and ensure more FGCS and low-income students can focus on graduating and leveraging their degrees into financial growth for themselves and their families.

College environment. Students believe that several aspects can promote FGCS' academic success. The study participants identified that having safe spaces on campus, tutoring services, access to technology, work-study programs, and food pantries are essential aspects that promote academic success. FGCCS who participated in the study expressed feeling isolated on campus and stated that having a physical space dedicated to them and likeminded peers would be beneficial. It is easy for FGCCS to get lost in the privilege and uncertainties of a college campus because it is new to them and their family. University officials should create a physical space to support FGCCS in acclimating to college. This space should include knowledgeable staff that have an in-depth understanding of the socioeconomic disparities of FGCCS and who can provide adequate resources and social and emotional support to help students navigate campus and college life.

Tutoring remains one of the key pillars that help FGCCS achieve academic success. Tutoring strengthens students' academic abilities by building proper learning skills and building the confidence needed for students to complete their studies (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani,

2003). Tutoring boosts students' knowledge and skills in their studies and helps them adapt to the rigor of college assignments (Schackmuth, 2012). Colleges should ensure that tutoring services are well advertised and accessible during times that match student needs; FGCCS often work or have family obligations that only permit free time at night and on weekends.

Technology has become a vital component in the 21st century, and students rely on technology to improve their education (Means & Pyne, 2017; Pyne & Means, 2013; Quaye et al., 2015; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Access to technology has become one of the significant components that help students excel in their studies. The study demonstrated that FGCCS often do not have access to technology or internet access; providing free internet and laptops for students has shown significant improvement in student retention and persistence. Additionally, colleges should modernize technology labs. Students who use computers at school have high performance when compared to those who do not use computers.

The federal government spends \$1,000,000,000 per year subsidizing colleges and universities to provide jobs to students through the Federal Work-Study Program. Students are generally paid a market wage. For FGCCS, being able to work, study, and create relationships with offices on campus is a vital experience and a priceless opportunity. In addition, students obtain transferable skills and work experiences to place on their resume. Lastly, students obtain a variation of social capital by engaging with current staff and faculty in various offices. University officials should create a plan to create awareness of current work-study programs on campus and have staff available to assist students in applying to jobs, because some FGCCS do not know about these programs and will not know how to apply.

The basic needs approach is evident amongst FGCCS. Maslow's levels start with physical needs such as food. Food insecurity remains a challenge to most FGCCS, and often, their plight

is not addressed well. The data collected from the study demonstrated that FGCCS need college food pantries to ensure that students can remain at college and learn. Universities that do not invest in food pantries fail to meet the simplest and most important needs of the students. Most community colleges understand this, and it is easy for these colleges to meet the needs of low-income students who suffer from food insecurity (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003). The availability of food pantries ensures that students get enough food to focus on education.

Family integration. FGCCS families are often low-income and lack resources to provide financial assistance to their child upon college enrollment. Additionally, parents of FGCCS have no experience with college and cannot provide the necessary support or guide their child on the rigors of college (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003). University officials should find ways to integrate FGCCS parents into the college-going process. Hosting parent nights or initiatives such as free tax preparation or computer literacy classes will cultivate a trusting and vibrant relationship with the parents of FGCCS.

FGCCS who succeed in colleges are able to transform their lives, families, and obtain generational wealth for decades. The entry of FGCCS into colleges acts as a breakthrough for the devastated families that have struggled to succeed in life. Breaking legacy remains one of the aspects that motivate FGCCS to succeed in their college education. A moment that symbolizes a milestone in life remains significant to FGCCS. The plight of being the first person to graduate from college remains a significant milestone among FGCS (Ortega, 2018). College officials should find ways to highlight and publicize how to assist FGCCS obtain the American dream. This initiative would be well-received by FGCCS and their families in addition to providing the reassurance needed for FGCCS to succeed in college. This reassurance is important because FGCCS who enroll in college struggle socially, psychologically, and financially to ensure

success. Succeeding in education is not just an accomplishment for FGCCS; educational success breaks the legacy in the family education lineage. Many FGCCS use the aspect of breaking legacy to measure their education success.

Practical Implications

Finally, the study provides practical implications for the participants as well as the stakeholders of the school community. Students' voices are valid. Students have a vested interest in their success and should be informed participants in planning their futures. The proceeding list is based on the research and provides some new initiatives that could positively impact student persistence and graduation.

Early college programs. FGCCSs struggle to transition into college (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Schackmuth, 2012). High school programs that inform students and their families about the opportunities available to access or obtain college credit while still in high school can help prepare students and aid in their transition. Universities should create programs that collaborate with local high schools to create college access, demystify the financial aid process, and obtain college credit. Program participants can receive intrusive career exploration experiences through their middle and early high school years to assist them identify an educational pathway that is aligned with their career goals. Once an educational pathway is chosen, participants will follow a prescriptive series of college coursework to guarantee educational growth and progress towards a degree.

First year experience. The results of this inquiry overwhelming called for universities to assist incoming FGCCS in securing the skills needed to understand their role as a community college student (Dennis et al., 2005). FGCCS find the college journey overwhelming. First-year experience offices or programming can increase FGCCS' success in their first year of college.

First-year experience programs prepare FGCCS for academic success by helping students select career pathways, gain knowledge of how to study, gain access to vital campus and college resources, interact in a multicultural environment, and learn how to access and manage electronic information such as e-mail, Internet, and library databases (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003).

Guided Pathways. Guided Pathways creates clear maps for every program they offer. These maps are easily accessible on the Guided Pathways website so students can understand the following: what courses are necessary to complete a program or qualify for transfer, how long completion will take, and what opportunities for employment or further education will be available at the end of the program (Bailey et al., 2015). Four clear pillars have proven to help FGCCS students succeed at community colleges nationwide: helping students clarify and enter a program pathway, keeping students on a program path (both students and advisors can see students' plans mapped out through graduation), and ensuring that students are learning (Van Noy et al., 2016). Programs are designed around a coherent set of learning outcomes rather than as a collection of courses, and colleges can track student learning outcomes and work to improve teaching.

Extracurricular involvement. Student engagement and leadership initiatives are impactful for FGCCS (Means & Pyne, 2017; Pyne & Means, 2013; Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Campus clubs and activities offer FGCCS opportunities to cultivate strong relationships with peers, faculty club advisors, and administration. Student involvement links to persistence and ultimately graduation (Astin, 1984). FGCCS learn and develop personally when students are involved in the academic and social aspects of campus life.

Students affirm their connection to the college and psychologically commit to persisting and completing college through interactions in the college's social environment.

Professional development. FGCCSs require tailored assistance to be successful while at college (Means & Pyne, 2017). The college has a responsibility to remove barriers that would hinder the persistence and graduation of their students. The wide range of systematic barriers that FGCCS experience requires that professionals are not only emphatic to student needs, but truly understand how to create informed procedures and policies that will aid students in their continued success (Pyne & Means, 2013). Professional development improves colleges in the long run. Faculty and staff are the first line of defense in preventing attrition amongst FGCCS. Professional development helps staff and faculty engage FGCCS and ensure that the college has competent professionals who excel in all roles. Professional development should be an ongoing process that continues throughout the careers of faculty and staff.

Delimitations and Limitations

As with any research study, the site coordinator and I made several decisions that resulted in delimitations and limitations. The research process was seamless once all permissions were obtained and granted; however, certain factors impacted the results of the study. This section discusses the delimitation and limitations present in this qualitative research study.

Delimitations

The study involved several delimitations; however, I believed that these delimitations did not have negative impacts on the study. I used criterion sampling in participant selection. The study explored the experiences of FGCCS; therefore, each participant was a FGCCS. The participating students must have attempted at least 24 credit hours and be above 18 years of age.

This eliminated all FGCCS who had not at least attempted 24 credit hours and who were not over 18 years of age. In addition, this investigation was conducted in only one college. The demographics of the schools are delimited because the study focused on only one college location. It is possible that the experiences and perceptions of students from other colleges would yield different results. This study reflects the experiences of FGCCS at one location and this sample cannot be described as representing all FGCCS.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the small size of the sample. A larger sample size may have yielded different results. Additionally, students volunteered to participate in this study, which may have resulted in the sample being different than a randomly selected sample.

The second limitation of this study is that I am a FGCS. As a FGCS, I was very familiar with many of the experiences shared by the study participants, which could have influenced the analysis of the study's data. However, I do not believe that I influenced the analysis with my bias.

A final limitation is that the participants in this study could be considered successful FGCCS. The students were successful in persisting through at least one year of college, as all of the students have attempted a minimum of 24 credit hours and are currently still enrolled at the college. Therefore, the experiences shared in this sample of FGCCS may not be reflective of all FGCCS, particularly those who were not successful in their first year of college.

Recommendations for Future Research

The intent of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of FGCCS. The successful transition of FGCCS from high school to college and college to

graduation has been low due to persistent challenges from family, student, and college administrations. Results from this study have laid the groundwork for future research of FGCCS' success. The study participants noted the importance of mentors and other supporters who assisted them in applying to and continuing college. Future studies should explore the impact social capital verses parental impact has on the successes and failures of FGCCS. In addition, future studies should investigate whether involving parents, families, and other supporters of FGCCS on campus programming would support retention and graduation rates of FGCS.

Two of the study participants partook in a bridge program. Those participants enjoyed their experience and described how rewarding the program was. Future studies should compare the persistence rates of FGCCS who experience dual enrollment compared to FGCCS who have not.

Furthermore, several students expressed difficulty with taking online classes. Online courses seem ideal for FGCCS who have full-time jobs or other family obligations, but deciding to take online courses can positively or negatively impact FGCCS' success. Future studies should assess FGCCS' success or failure rate when taking online classes in their first year. In doing so, a greater understanding of FGCCS experiences can be obtained and the findings of this study can be confirmed.

Lastly, based on one of the limitations within the current study, a future research investigation should explore the lived experiences of those FGCCS who did not meet the criteria to participate in this inquiry. The study criteria, other than being a FGCCS required that the participants persisted through at least one academic year of college. Investigating FGCCS who did not meet the current study criteria would allow stakeholders to gain an understanding of the

lived experiences of students who did not persistence for at least an academic year and would provide vital information to assist with college retention efforts.

Summary

The goal of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of FGCCS. This study indicated that FGCCS have certain characteristics that influence their success in college, such as lack of parental support, inadequate information about financial aid, academic integration, social interaction with peers, classroom experiences, course load, and academic preparedness. These factors cause FGCCS to face challenges and impact their academic performance, retention, and graduation.

Despite these challenges, several factors contribute to the success of FGCCS. Programs that increase college preparedness are critical and develop channels for students to acquire the moral and financial support necessary for collegiate success. Motivation and engagement programs and promotion of early entry and reentry for young and working adults proved to increase retention rates of FGCCS. Additionally, learning-living programs have demonstrated a more effective social and academic college transition.

This inquiry confirms that when working with FGCS, it is more effective to have an abundance mindset rather than approaching the work with a deficit construct. Contrary to earlier educational beliefs, FGCS are as capable as their non-FGCS peers and can take on the same academic rigor as their non-FGCS peers when challenged. Validating FGCS' strengths is empowering; the positive reinforcement received in and out of the classroom from family, peers, faculty members, and staff will encourage FGCS to succeed. Higher education professionals and policy-makers should investigate this fast-growing cohort of college students and appreciate where FGCS have been, understand who these students wish to become, and assist students in

reaching their goals. Higher education professionals can build on the strengths of FGCS to ensure that each student will succeed and obtain his or her vision of the American dream.

Furthermore, another important finding during this study that is grounded in Vygotsky (1978) social-cultural theory is the discovery that colleges are responsible for transforming the perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors of FGCCS. Students complete higher education when they socially or academically integrate. Increasing programs, activities, and initiatives that allow FGCCS to feel a sense of belonging will allow students to prosper, grow, and secure the confidence needed to fight through cultural forces and historic obstacles.

FGCCS are also challenged with selecting their courses. One common misunderstanding that the participants shared is that online courses are easier. Many of the participants worked and had other family obligations, which led students to sign up for online courses. School officials should increase night, weekend, and online courses to ensure that FGCCS are provided with course options that work in their schedules.

This study has only begun to establish a firm understanding regarding FGCCS. Further studies must be conducted to increase the FGCCS knowledge base. Additionally, it would be beneficial for policy-makers to explore the differences in impediments among students with varying socioeconomics, religion, genders, and race. Above all, this study should encourage FGCS and other stakeholders to engage each other early on campus to strengthen FGCS sense of belonging, thereby helping FGCS graduate on time.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL AND RESEARCH REVIEW TEAM APPROVAL



October 8, 2019

IRB Exemption 3986.100819: A Transcendental Phenomenological Inquiry of First-Generation Community College Students' Experiences

Dear [REDACTED]

The [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if . . . the following criteria is met:

(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation;

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the [REDACTED] IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.


If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [REDACTED]


Sincerely,

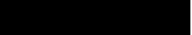

[REDACTED]

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

[REDACTED]



Institutional Research and Analysis


To: 
From: Research Review Team
Subject: Your research involving  Students

Date: 4-27-19

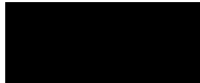
Dear 

The RRT has reviewed your *revised* research proposal. You are approved with the following condition:

The edits requested by the committee included a request—"For some students, questions about childhood environment, family life may be triggers—this should be noted as a potential risk on the informed consent form for students." Please add this modification to your consent form under "Risks", and you will have satisfied all conditions for approval, and will not need any further committee review.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call or email. Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



RRT Chair

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

As a graduate student in the School of Education at [REDACTED] I am conducting research on the lived experiences of first-generation community college students. My research project, titled, “A Transcendental Phenomenological Inquiry on First-Generation Community College Students’ Experiences,” focuses on understanding the lived experiences of first-generation community colleges students in the United States, specifically in the Northeast region of the United States.

I am hereby seeking your consent to conduct my research at [REDACTED]. In this study, first generation is defined as students whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor’s degree and students’ experience is defined as those experiences, including social capital and interactions that impact their academic achievement positively or negatively.

Participants will be asked to:

1. Respond to a confidential questionnaire that should take no more than 10 minutes.
2. Participate in a one-on-one interview that should last 2 hours. This interview will be audio and video recorded.
3. Participants will be asked to submit a written response to one open-ended prompt. The question will be given to the participant after their one-on-one interview. If the interview is conducted through video conference, after the interview the researcher will e-mail the prompt to the participant.
4. Participants will be invited to participate in a focus-group interview with other students in this study. If they choose to participate, the focus group should last about 2 hours. The focus-group session will be audio and video recorded.

All responses included in the written portion of this study will be confidential.

Participants will be presented an informed-consent form prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by e-mail to [REDACTED] indicating your approval.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C: FLYER

Are You A First-Generation College Student?

A Student whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor's degree.

Participate in this study to share your experiences at college.



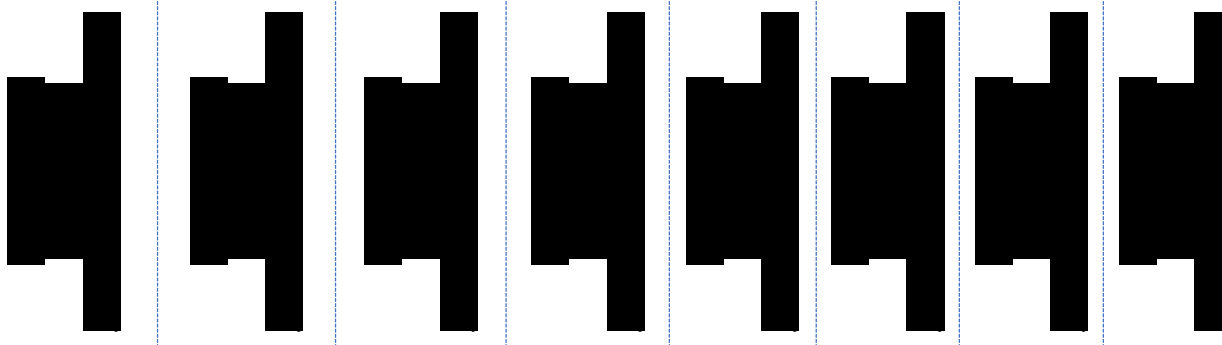
Participation

- Questioner
- Focus Group
- Interview
- Written Response

Contact



Grab my contact info & give me a call or email me for more information!



APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Student:

My name is [REDACTED] a doctoral candidate at [REDACTED] School of Education. I would like to invite you to consider participating in a research study to understand the experiences of first-generation students in community colleges in the Northeast region of the United States. This inquiry will develop additional understanding of impediments and promoters of success for these students, allowing policymakers to determine the best interventions to promote positive experiences and reduce impediments to the success of first-generation community college students. To participate in this research study, you must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Be 18 years of age
- 2) Be first in your family to attend college (first generation is defined as a student whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor's degree)
- 3) Have studied for more than 1 year at the college selected (24 attempted credits or more)
- 4) You will be asked to respond to a confidential questionnaire that should take no more than 10 minutes to confirm that you are eligible to participate.

If you are eligible to participate and agree to be in this study, I ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a one-on-one interview that should last 2 hours. This interview will be audio and video recorded.
2. Submit a written response to one open-ended prompt. The question will be given to you after your one-on-one interview. If the interview is conducted via a video conference, after the interview I will email the prompt to you. Participants will have up to 2 weeks to submit their response.
3. You will be invited to participate in a focus-group session with other students in this study. If you choose to participate, the focus-group session should last about 2 hours. Choosing to participate in the focus group means you understand and agree you will ensure the privacy and confidentiality of others who participate in this session. The session will be audio and video recorded. All responses included in the written portion of this study will be confidential.

I have attached an informed-consent document that provides more information about the study so you can make an informed decision.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study. If you choose to participate in this study, please respond by email [REDACTED] or you may call me at [REDACTED]. I will schedule a time to personally meet with you to have you fill out the questionnaire and schedule a time to conduct the one-on-one interview. You will be asked to sign and return the consent form at the time of the interview.

Sincerely

[REDACTED]
Doctoral student at [REDACTED]

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of first-generation students in community colleges in the Northeast region of the United States. This questionnaire intends to capture demographic information and confirm eligibility for your participation in this study.

Name (please print): _____

Number of credits attempted: _____

What is your gender?

_____Man _____Woman _____Self identify _____Refuse to identify

Are you a first-generation college student? First-generation is defined as students whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor's degree (Byrd, 2005)?

_____Yes _____No

Are you a second-year student and have you achieved more than 24 credits toward your current plan of study:

_____Yes _____No

Address: _____

Cell phone or best contact phone number : (_____) _____

Secondary email address: _____

Best days for participation in a questionnaire and focus group:

Best times for participation a questionnaire and focus group:

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM

A Transcendental Phenomenological Inquiry on First-Generation Community College Students' Experiences

School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study to understand the lived experiences of first-generation community college students in the Northeast region of the United States. You were selected because you are first in your family to attend college (First generation is defined as a student whose parents did not graduate from college with at least a bachelor's degree.) and have studied for more than 1 year at the college selected. I ask that you carefully read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

_____, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at _____ is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of first-generation students in community colleges in the Northeast region of the United States.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a one-on-one interview that should last 2 hours. This interview will be audio and video recorded.
2. Submit a written response to one open-ended prompt, which should take no more than half an hour to complete. The question will be given to you after the one-on-one interviews. If the interview was conducted via a video conference, after the interview I will email the prompt to you. Participants will have up to 2 weeks to submit their response.
3. You will be invited to participate in a focus-group session with other students in this study. If you choose to participate, the focus-group session should last about 2 hours. Choosing to participate in the focus group means you understand and agree you will ensure the privacy and confidentiality of others who participate in this session. The session will be audio and video recorded.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal.

- There's a potential risk of breach of confidentiality if the data is lost or stolen.
- For some students, questions about childhood environment and family life may be triggers of past traumatic events.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, the inquiry will develop additional understanding on impediments and promoters of success in these students, allowing policymakers to determine the best interventions to promote positive experiences and reduce impediments to the success of first-generation community college students.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Additionally, in any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. I will store research records securely and only I will have access to the records.

- Responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential. Questionnaires will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed 3 years after the completion of the study. Each participant will have an alias for the one-on-one interview to protect his/her identity. Printed transcripts of interviews will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed 3 years after the completion of the study.
- Information stored on my computer will only be accessed by me and the computer can only be unlocked with a password.
- Audio and video recordings will only be accessed by me. Recordings will not be used for educational purposes. The recordings will be erased 3 years after the completion of the study.
- Participation in a focus group will limit confidentiality because I cannot assure participants that other members of the group will maintain their confidentiality and privacy. By signing this consent form, I am agreeing not to repeat what is said in the focus group to others. This will ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of other participants are maintained.
- All responses included in the written portion of this study will be kept confidential.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact me at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus-group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus-group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is [REDACTED]. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me at [REDACTED]. You may also contact my faculty advisor, [REDACTED], at [REDACTED]. Questions or concerns about institutional approval should be directed to [REDACTED] Director of Institutional Research and Analysis, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than me, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, [REDACTED].

Please notify me if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX G: MAXIMUM NUMBER OF CANDIDATES NEEDED EMAIL

Dear Student,

Thank you for your interest in my transcendental phenomenological inquiry on first-generation community college students' experiences.

I especially appreciate the time and effort you put into submitting your interest in the application process.

However, I have been able to select the maximum number of candidates needed for the study on a first-come, first-served basis.

Once more, thank you for your interest and good luck in your future studies. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the sender.

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewee: _____ Time and Date of Interview: _____

Location: _____

Prior to participating in an interview, participants must sign the consent form. Before the interview starts, I will reiterate that the entire discussion will be recorded and then transcribed. ***I will remind participants of the purpose of the study.*** The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of first-generation community college students in the Northeast region of the United States.

Participant Interview Items:

1. Tell me about yourself in general. (Where were you born, where did you grow up, and how did that shape your worldview?)
2. Tell me about your family. (Do you have siblings, what did or do your parents do for a living, what was your family environment like, and how did that shape your worldview?)
3. Tell me about how your childhood and family life has impacted who you are today.
4. Tell me about your life growing up. (Tell me about your experiences as a child; talk to me about your experiences at school, with friends, etc.)
5. Tell me about your decision to go to college. (Encouragement from family, friends, and mentors to attend college)
6. Describe your experience in applying to college. (How many schools did you apply to? Talk to me about their response to your application.)
7. Describe your decision to attend this community college. (Affordability, convenience, etc.)
8. Describe your friends' and family's idea of what you do while at college. (Do they know your major, what are their expectations of you, and do they understand what college means to you, what college means to them?)
9. Describe your experiences while here. (With instructors, with friends, clubs, in relation to your personal goals in life)
10. Describe how connected you are to the college.
11. Describe the services you use at the college. (Tutoring, academic counseling, etc.)
12. Describe your expectations of attending college. (What is your purpose of attending?)
13. Describe some of the most challenging times you faced during college. (Personal, professional, or academic)
14. Describe your understanding of what it means to be successful at the community college. (What does college success mean to you?)
15. Describe your thoughts on failing college. (What does failure mean to you?)
16. Tell me about your goals for your future. (Career, family, etc.)
17. Talk to me about your goals and how they impact your choices today.
18. Tell me about the goals you think the college has for you. (What are the expectations put on you at the college by teachers, by administrators, by peers, etc.?)
19. Tell me about how you think others view your ability to reach these goals. (How does this impact you?)
20. Tell me about your plans after graduation from this college. (Do you plan to transfer, obtain employment, or take time off?)
21. How connected are you to the community at large? (Do you work; how often do you go out for personal enjoyment or work?)

22. What advice would you give to students entering their first year of college?
23. What do you wish you knew about college before you began your freshman year?
24. Please share an additional point about being a first-generation college student you would like me to know about, even if it is a perspective we have not previously discussed.

Follow-up questions will be asked and are dependent upon the responses of the participants.
End by thanking the participant for their time. Please remind the interviewee that their responses will remain confidential.

APPENDIX I: NARRATIVE WRITING PROMPT

Directions:

- Please answer this prompt to the best of your ability. If you need more space, please staple additional loose leaf paper to this narrative writing prompt.
1. What academic, nonacademic, and personal advice would you provide to an incoming first-generation student?

[illegible]

APPENDIX J: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The following are the main questions for students during the focus groups; the researcher will make ample use of follow-up questions depending on student responses. Those follow-up questions will be recorded, transcribed and inputted in the study.

Before the focus group starts, the researcher will reiterate that the entire discussion will be recorded and then transcribed. The *researcher will remind participants of the purpose of the study*. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of first generation community college students at the Northeastern region of the United States.

1. Please introduce yourselves, share your major.
2. What made you decide to attend college? And why did you decide to attend this college?
3. Talk about a time when you felt discouraged. How did you cope?
4. What was your greatest feeling of accomplishment in terms of academics?
5. When or did you ever learn who your advisor was? How did you learn of these?
6. When or did you ever learn about the support services here to support you in your academic and nonacademic needs? How did you learn of these?
7. What are your plans after college?
8. How successful would you say you are currently at this college? And how would your families and friends measure your progress?
9. Please share an additional point about being a first-generation college student you would like me to know about, even if it is a perspective we have not previously discussed.

APPENDIX K: PERMISSION TO PUBLISH

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 13, 2020 9:37 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: [External] RE: Permission to publish

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

Dear [REDACTED]

Many thanks for your request. We have no objection to your reprinting the flow chart from page 115 in *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* by Vincent Tinto in your dissertation to be published by the Liberty University Jerry Falwell Library in their institutional repository, provided you give proper credit and citation. If your dissertation becomes published elsewhere, please come back for further permission.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

--

[REDACTED]
Intellectual Property Associate
[REDACTED]