FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES

IN AN UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAM:

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

By

Joseph Benjamin Earp

Liberty University

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of first-generation college students (FGCSs) majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States. Through understanding FGCSs' experiences, university faculty and administrators can make informed decisions that can help this important sub-population of students. The self-determination theory (SDT) and the relationships motivation theory (SDT mini-theory) have guided this study exploring the central research question: How do FGCSs describe their lived experiences while majoring in music education? Sub-questions include (1) how do FGCSs majoring in music education describe challenges relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree, (2) how do FGCSs majoring in music education describe successes relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree, and (3) how do FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States describe their communication relating to self-determination with faculty, staff, and administration at the students' institution of study while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree? Criterion and purposeful sampling was used to select eight-12 participants. Data was collected through individual interviews, a focus group, and personal journals. The interview data was recorded using an audio device to provide accurate transcription. Data analysis was conducted using a transcendental phenomenological approach including the epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesizing producing themes to create implications and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: first-generation college student, self-determination, music education, experience

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my wife, Mary Beth, who has supported my educational endeavors over the years. I could not have accomplished this part of my educational journey without her unwavering love and support. I equally dedicate this document to my two sons, Jackson and Jasper. I hope my work serves as inspiration for them to never give up on their dreams.

Acknowledgments

This work has been an enlightening journey for me. My eyes have been opened to see the educational possibilities that accompany the journey through the doctoral programs at Liberty University. I am grateful to be supported by my wonderful family, including my wife's reading and review of so many of my papers through this process. I am blessed to have such an amazing spouse, Mary Beth, who has been my rock during all my challenges, successes, emotional breakdowns, frustrations, times of joy, and many hours dedicated to this doctoral program. I could not have done this without her love and support.

Words cannot express the amount of gratitude I have for the faculty and staff at Liberty University, who have provided guidance and challenged my perspective, and fostered new philosophies. I am especially grateful for Dr. Susan Quindag and Dr. Brian Stiffler, who have been amazing mentors through this process. Thank you both for your endless support.

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List of Abbreviations

First-Generation College Students (FGCS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Self-motivation, the desire to internally achieve certain needs, is a universal human attribute; college students are no exception.[1] Within this population are students known as first-generation college students (FGCSs). FGCSs represent a large portion of the student body at many colleges and universities.[2] Findings from the 2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study found that 24% of college students came from homes where neither parent had post-secondary experience, and 56% of the same college students had parents who had not completed a bachelor's degree.[3] Although FGCSs have self-motivation, they struggle with various issues when earning their degrees. The challenges and successes FGCSs experience can generate themes related to self-determination. The prior influence of family members, along with social interaction with classmates, professors, and administrators, can motivate the development of students' self-determination. Ryan and Deci have discussed the theoretical framework of the self-determination theory (SDT) by connecting the social environments to student motivation.[4] Consequently, FGCSs present a complex challenge to educational institutions, as supporting these students is equally challenging.

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[1] Dominic Otoo, Wahab A. Iddrisu, Justice A. Kessie, and Ernest Larbi, "Structural Model of Students' Interest and Self-Motivation to Learning Mathematics," *Educational Research International* 2018, no. 10 (December 2018): 1.

[2] "First-Generation College Students Demographic Characteristics and Postsecondary Enrollment," Fact Sheet, Center for First-Generation Student Success, accessed September 1, 2020, https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/FactSheet-01.pdf; "2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study," Study, National Center for Education Statistics, accessed January 2, 2019, https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018466.pdf.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (January 2000): 68.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview for this study, which explores the FGCSs' experiences concerning self-determination as music education majors at a small, private university in the southeastern United States. After a brief discussion of the background of the problem, the researcher discusses the situation to self. The problem, which is that FGCSs have unique needs regarding self-motivation and that their relationship needs are either ignored or are considered the same as those of other populations, is introduced within the theoretical framework of self-determination. The purpose statement and significance of the study follow the problem statement. The research questions are identified and explained, and the terms pertinent to the study are provided. A summary reviews the material discussed in this chapter.

Background

All humans, including FGCSs, have curiosity, energy, and the self-motivation to learn, which are innate, core attributes of all humans.[5] However, FGCSs face some specific issues involved in college; for example, they may not know how to develop these core attributes. Furthermore, they might not have the skills to communicate needs, such as asking questions or researching the answers to problems. Culturally, they could feel out of place. Previous research has shown that this population of students appears to need assistance both before and during college.[6]

To compound the issue, FGCSs majoring in music education face additional requirements that students in other majors do not. These include performance (and potentially a lack of performance skills) and time management (schedule), both of which increase the students' need

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[5] Ryan and Deci, 68.

[6] Melinda M. Gibbons, Alessandra Rhinehart, and Erin Hardin, "How First-Generation College Students Adjust to College," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 20, no. 4 (December 2016): 489.

to self-motivate. While pursuing a degree in music education, FGCSs must value positive social relationships, as these may propel self-determination as they combat the additional requirements faced, such as developing as a musician or participating in performing ensembles.[7]

It is possible for FGCSs to develop levels of self-motivation if college professors and administrators provide individualized, customized support. Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa have described the importance of shared experiences for students, such as being assisted by college faculty, which create an understanding based on community.[8] College faculty who build understanding of the SDT provide a platform to develop solutions, such as the way classes and curricula are structured. If the faculty, staff, and administration understand these attributes (curiosity, energy, and self-motivation) in music education, then programs can change and develop, leading to success. However, this research must be conducted to provide a source of information for these stakeholders on the importance of self-motivation for FGCSs majoring in music education. In this chapter, a summary of the historical, social, and theoretical background is intended to provide context for the research problem.

Historical

A population of FGCSs has existed since the creation of post-secondary education, but the definition of FGCSs has varied from study to study.[9] In 1947, President Truman presented a commission on higher education, referencing a divide regarding inequality among United States

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[7] Russell B. Gavin, "An Exploration of Factors Affecting Persistence to Degree Completion in an Undergraduate Music Education Program," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 26, no. 1 (October 2016): 43.

[8] Yeram Cheong, Mary Gauvain, and Julienne A. Palbusa, "Communication with Friends and the Academic Adjustment of First- and Non-First-Generation Students in the First Year of College," *Journal of College Student Retention* 1, no. 1 (March 2019): 1.

[9] Kevin A. Tate, William Caperton, Dakota Kaiser, Nathan T. Pruitt, Heather White, and Eric Hall, "An Exploration of First-Generation College Students' Career Development Beliefs and Experiences," *Journal of Career Development* 42, no. 4 (February 2015): 294.

citizens to include more than just "wealthy white men" as more jobs required a college degree.[10]

The report (1947) was one of the first precursors that led the United States federal government to

recognize inequalities such as race, gender, and income for college students. Access to higher

education is much easier in the present compared to the Truman era, which attempted to provide

opportunities to a broader population.[11]

Eventually, in 1964, the United States federal government established the TRIO (not an

acronym) programs, which included Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support

Services, to support low-income citizens seeking higher education, including FGCS and students

with disabilities in the United States.[12] The Higher Education Act (1965) recognized FGCSs as

children who were the first in their family to go to college or whose parents were unable to earn

a degree at a four-year college.[13] In 1979, Fuji A. Adachi, TRIO professional and student

advocate, adopted a formal definition of FGCSs as individuals in college who do not have a

parent who earned a bachelor's degree at a college or university.[14]

Cahalan et al. recorded a decline of FGCSs from 1980 to 2002.[15] In 2006, the Spellings

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[10] Julie A.Reuben, and Linda Perkins, "Introduction: Commemorating the Sixtieth Anniversary of the President's Commission Report, Higher Education for Democracy," *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (August 2007): 276.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Darren Ilett, "A Critical Review of LIS Literature on First-Generation Students," *Libraries and the Academy* 19, no. 1 (January 2019): 178.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Thai-Huy Nguyen, and Bach Mai Dolly Nguyen, "Is the "First-Generation Student" Term Useful for Understanding Inequality? The Role of Intersectionality in Illuminating the Implications of an Accepted – yet Unchallenged – Term," *Review of Research in Education* 42, no. 1 (April 2018): 147.

[15] Margaret W. Cahalan, Steven J. Ingels, Laura J. Burns, Michael Planty, and Bruce Daniel, "United States High School Sophomore: A Twenty-Two Year Comparison 1980-2002," *National Center for Education Statistics* (September 2006), https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006327.

Commission's report found that FGCSs' challenges were access, affordability, and the standard of instruction provided by universities, which involved little consideration of these students.[16] The number of FGCSs continued to decline from the early 2000s through 2012.[17] However, large numbers of these students are still enrolled throughout the United States.[18] Based on findings from the 2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (conducted every four years), 59% of FGCSs were also the first family member to go to college from parents lacking a bachelor's degree.[19]

Social

Knowing how FGCSs adjust, communicate, are influenced, and interact with others in the college environment is the first phase in developing resources and programs to support them in their progress toward degree attainment.[20] Beattie and Thiele have argued that the quality of student engagement is related to class size and may either benefit or hurt student learning; smaller classes allow FGCSs more opportunities to interact with their professors than larger class sizes.[21]

FGCSs' understanding of their social environment in college can be challenging because of their perspective on social interaction as a university student, and this can affect their

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[16] Ilett, 181.

[17] Paul Skomsvold, "Web Tables Profile of Undergraduate Students: 2011-12," *National Center for Education Statistics* (October 2014), https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2015167.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2020; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019.

[20] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin, 489.

[21] Irenee R. Beattie and Megan Thiele, "Connecting in Class? College Class Size and Inequality in Academic Social Capital," *The Journal of Higher Education* 87, no. 3 (May-June 2016): 358.

interaction with professors, administrators, and colleagues.[22] Furthermore, social understanding may be more difficult for FGCSs majoring in music education due to the complexity of the degree itself, which includes music and general education course requirements along with the addition of music performance elements that can exacerbate emotional exhaustion and even burnout.[23]

College administrators, faculty, and staff must understand adjustment, communication, influence, and the relationships of students' self-determination levels.[24] The experiences of FGCSs, including music majors, in class can help or hinder their progress. The possibility of college faculty and administrators understanding FGCSs' varying experiences is important to know the type of support that may lead to academic accomplishments.[25] Each college's department of student experiences can support social understanding for each FGCS in terms of content within subject matter for the students' academic courses.[26]

Fitzpatrick, Henninger, and Taylor have identified a connection between FGCSs and undergraduate music education programs through qualitative research concerning the access and retention of marginalized populations, arguing that important aids for this population include role

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[22] Alexander J. Rice, Alexander J. Colbow, Shane Gibbons, Charles Cederberg, Ethan Sahker, Williams M. Liu, and Kristin Wurster, "The Social Class Worldviews of First-Generation College Students," *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (June 2016): 415.

[23] Marilee L. Teasley and Erin M. Buchanan, "When Music Goes Up in Flames: The Impact of Advising on Music Major Burnout," *NACADA Journal* 36, no. 1 (June 2016): 43.

[24] Michael A. Jenkins-Guarnieri, Angela L. Vaughan, and Stephen L. Wright, "Development of a Self-Determination Measure for College Students," *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development* 48, no. 4 (March 2017): 281.

[25] Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa, 15.

[26] Milagros Castillo-Montoya, "Deepening Understanding of Prior Knowledge: What Diverse First-Generation College Students in the U. S. Can Teach Us," *Teaching in Higher Education* 22, no. 5 (July 2017): 587.

models and mentors.[27] Therefore, college faculty need to serve as cultural agents to FGCSs,

especially low-income students, as this increases the likelihood of shared achievement.[28] I

believe this social problem exists in universities and requires further research regarding FGCSs

majoring in music education.

Theoretical

Ryan and Deci have developed the self-determination theory (SDT) based on the premise

that each person has a level of self-motivation that results in success or failure based on internal

and external resources.[29] The SDT includes several mini-theories, including the relationships

motivation theory (RMT), which is based on high-quality social relationships between people.[30]

The RMT supports students' needs that may motivate high-quality social relationships between

colleagues and college faculty to personally expand knowledge (intrinsic) and attain an

undergraduate degree (extrinsic).[31] Self-determination explains FGCSs' understanding,

challenges, and successes while working toward majoring in music education concerning social

relationships between the student, faculty, staff, and administration. The theoretical framework

the SDT provides is based on a person's motivation, which social settings can inspire.[32] It is

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[27] Kate R. Fitzpatrick, Jacqueline C. Henninger, and Don M. Taylor, "Access and Retention of Marginalized Populations with Undergraduate Music Education Degree Programs," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 62, no. 2 (July 2014): 105.

[28] Alfred R. Schademan and Maris R. Thompson, "Are College Faculty and First-Generation Low-Income Students Ready for Each Other?" *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 18, no. 2 (May 2015): 194.

[29] Ryan and Deci, 68.

[30] Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "Autonomy and Need Satisfaction in Close Relationships: Relationships Motivation Theory," In *Human Motivation and Interpersonal Relationships,* edited by Netta Weinstein (New York: Springer, 2014), 53.

[31] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2017), 293.

[32] Ryan and Deci, 68.

important to understand how FGCSs manage adjustment to college, communication, influence,

challenges, and successes as they relate to their self-determination.[33]

Situation to Self

Near the end of my senior year of high school, I applied to and auditioned at a small,

private university to be a music education major. Auditioning for a college music department and

starting college was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life, as I am an FGCS. I had no

idea what I was "getting into" as I started my first year of a postsecondary education. Even

though I made friends during my undergraduate years, I felt alone most of the time. Often, I sat

in my classes wondering what the other students were thinking about me, if anything. I know I

experienced considerable anxiety concerning many elements of the college experience. Even

though I got along with people, I still felt awkwardly out of place most of the time. There are

elements I enjoyed, but for my entire undergraduate experience, I felt as though I was an

outsider.

Now that I have 14 years of experience teaching, my focus has shifted to helping others

preparing to be or who are currently FGCSs. Knowing the challenges and successes that I

experienced as an FGCS, I hope to understand the rigor faced by FGCSs who are currently

pursuing a degree in music education. I hope to add depth to the scholarly research concerning

FGCS, improve practice, and support current theories related to self-determination by promoting

strong communication, support, and experienced success for these students.

Even though I can identify elements from several worldviews, the transformative

paradigm seems to fit best. This paradigm centers around philosophical assumptions of social

justice and the forward movement of human rights, and I pursue inquiry based on reality and

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[33] Jenkins-Guarnieri, Vaughan, and Wright, 266.

knowledge.[34] Creswell and Poth have identified four philosophical assumptions as ontological,

epistemological, axiological, and methodological.[35] The ontological assumption allows me to

look at reality in many ways. The epistemological assumption allows me to create a closer

connection between myself and the research of this study. The axiological assumption describes

bias I may have toward this study. The methodological assumption allows me to employ a

research design, as this study is supported by logic.

A layer of depth is added to the study through the extended use of two assumptions.

Farias, Rudman, Magalhães, and Gastaldo have further explained the transformative framework

as epistemologically and methodologically challenging the social order.[36] The epistemological

assumption allows the researcher to be within proximity of the participants, while the

methodological assumption allows the researcher to shape the data collection and analysis

through his or her experiences.[37] Moustakas has highlighted the importance of common bonds

that define qualitative research, including value, wholeness, meaning, descriptions, formulating

questions, and viewing experiences.[38] I seek a means to change the lives of people in a positive

manner through promoting change to the institution of education itself.[39] I hope to give a voice to

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[34] Donna M. Mertens, and Pauline E. Ginsberg, "Deep in Ethical Waters: Transformative Perspectives for Qualitative Social Work Research," *Qualitative Social Work* 7, no. 4 (December 2008): 486; Donna M. Mertens, "What Comes First? The Paradigm or the Approach?" *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 6, no. 4 (October 2012): 255.

[35] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 19.

[36] Lisette Farias, Debbie Laliberte Rudman, Lilian Magalhães, and Denise Gastaldo, "Reclaiming the Potential of Transformative Scholarship to Enable Social Justice," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (June 2017): 1.

[37] Creswell and Poth, 20.

[38] Clark E. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 21.

[39] Creswell and Poth, 18.

the participants of my study with the goal of providing quality experiences for future FGCSs.[40]

Through a transformative worldview, my goal is to promote positive change to help others.

Problem Statement

The problem is that FGCSs have unique needs that involve academic and social

interaction with college classmates, professors, and administrators regarding self-motivation;

their relationship needs are either ignored or are considered the same as those of other

populations.[41] Faculty, staff, and administration misunderstand this sub-population of students

majoring in music education at a university. Ayalon and Mcdossi have argued that FGCSs are

overlooked in the classification of college students.[42] To promote student learning, college

faculty and administration must understand FGCSs; however, they may not always be aware of

the social and academic challenges this sub-population of students faces.[43] Furthermore, FGCSs

majoring in music education may experience differences with preparation, admission, and

retention in this degree program.[44]

Knowing how FGCSs adjust, communicate, are influenced, and interact with others in the

college environment is the first step in developing resources and programs to support them as

they pursue degrees.[45] These students may have problems because of a lack of social

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[40] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 93.

[41] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin, 488; Alina V. Katrevich and Mara S. Aruguete "Recognizing Challenges and Predicting Success in First-Generation University Students," *Journal of STEM Education: Innovations and Research* 18, no. 2 (April 2017): 40; Rice, Colbow, Gibbons, Cederberg, Sahker, Liu, and Wurster, 415; Jenkins-Guarnieri, Vaughan, and Wright, 266.

[42] Hanna Ayalon and Oded Mcdossi, "First-Generation College Students in an Expanded and Diversified Higher Education System: The Case of Israel," In *Socioeconomic Inequality in Israel* (Palgrave Macmillian: New York, 2016), 80.

[43] Katervich and Aruguete, 40.

[44] Fitzpatrick, Henninger, and Taylor, 105.

understanding involving communication with faculty, administrators, and colleagues.

Furthermore, music education FGCSs may have unique problems due to the added performance

expectations that accompany the degree. When considering majoring in music education, Hébert

has suggested that students from difficult backgrounds must have persistence.[46] FGCSs may face

greater challenges than peers in the undergraduate music education program.[47]

Unfortunately, research into FGCSs majoring in music education is extremely limited.

Faculty may not know how to work with FGCSs or even realize this population has needs

because of a lack of understanding or training. However, Cheong et al. have emphasized the

significance of college faculty understanding academic success and comprehending FGCS'

experiences.[48] It is important to understand FGCSs; if this problem is solved, university faculty,

staff, and administration may better understand FGCSs majoring in music education due to

phenomenological qualitative research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived

experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the

southeastern United States. At this stage of research, lived experiences are generally defined as

the participants' involvement in different settings within their undergraduate environment of

study. The theory guiding this study is the RMT, a mini-theory of the SDT that addresses

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[45] Jenkins-Guarnieri, Vaughan, and Wright, 275.

[46] Thomas P. Hébert, "An Examination of High-Achieving First-Generation College Students from Low-Income Backgrounds," *Gifted Child Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (January 2018): 97.

[47] Fitzpatrick, Henninger, and Taylor, 108.

[48] Cheong, Guavain, and Palbusa, 15.

intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being that support first-generation music education majors' needs.[49]

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is examined utilizing empirical, theoretical, and practical perspectives. The shared perspective of each of these forms of significance shapes this researcher's point of view. The hope is to create a shared awareness concerning FGCSs' self-determination in an undergraduate music education program at a university that faculty, staff, and administration can understand.

Empirical Significance

Unfortunately, limited investigation into FGCSs majoring in music education has been conducted; therefore, research is warranted.[50] The music education undergraduate program is quite demanding for any student seeking to complete it. In addition to general education requirements, it has content-specific requirements, including methods classes for elementary and secondary levels, music history, and music theory, along with the performance requirements, such as applied lessons, individual performances, small and large ensemble participation, class piano, and aural training. Furthermore, research applying the SDT to music education majors has been minimal. One such study by Evans and Booneville-Roussy on self-determined motivation for practice in university music students was one of the first SDT studies concerning music majors at the university level.[51] Even so, the Evans and Booneville-Roussy study did not

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[49] Deci and Ryan, 53; Ryan and Deci, 68.

[50] Gavin, 44; Hébert, 109; Jillian Ives and Milagros Castillo-Montoya, "First-generation college students as academic learners: A systematic review," *Review of Educational Research* 20, no. 10 (January 2020): 3.

[51] Paul Evans and Arielle Bonneville-Roussy, "Self-Determined Motivation for Practice in University Music Students," *Psychology of Music* 44, no. 5 (November 2015): 1095.

specifically focus on music education majors who are FGCSs. This lack of research results in a

gap in the literature, thus creating a need for research concerning this population.[52]

Theoretical Significance

Ryan and Deci's SDT is employed to frame the study. The SDT functions through

intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that support social development and well-being, which aid

humans' three basic needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Self-determination

continues to develop among music education FGCSs as they build relationships with faculty,

administration, and colleagues at the university. Students enter college with a certain level of

self-determination based on their individual background. If the university faculty, staff, and

administration understand this population and the RMT, they will know how to facilitate support

as the students navigate the music education major or perhaps any major. Understanding and

self-sufficiency are vital to support well-being as well as growth and development.[53] Utilizing

the RMT for this study should generate new perspectives concerning the SDT and the RMT and

add support for both.

Practical Significance

This study may provide awareness for various stakeholders such as college faculty, staff,

and administration connected to FGCSs majoring in music education to understand how this

population handles rigor with the application of self-determination. College leadership must

continue to understand the challenges of students from various backgrounds to develop retention

plans and support student success.[54] Ishitani has described the importance of FGCSs' interactions

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[52] Evans and Arielle Bonneville-Roussy, 1095.

[53] Ryan and Deci, 239.

[54] Christina Sadowski, Margaret Stewart, and Mika Pediaditis, "Pathway to Success: Using Students' Insights and Perspectives to Improve Retention and Success for University Students from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 22, no. 2 (August 2017): 158.

with students and professors to retain this population through periodic effects of academic and

social integration.[55] Furthermore, student interaction with faculty contributes to students' social

development.[56] FGCSs are likely to experience success if they are actively engaged in the

classroom and extracurricular activities.[57] Support systems can be generated for FGCSs majoring

in music education as faculty, staff, and administration gain an understanding of the rigor this

student type experiences. After this study is complete, its findings will be shared with university

faculty, staff, and administration, which will help institutions of higher education. The FGCSs'

experiences as music education majors in their social interactions with faculty, administrators,

and colleagues will demonstrate the importance of understanding this population in a college

setting and in terms of academic success.[58]

Research Questions

The research questions emerge from understanding the problem and purpose statements.

The phenomenological questions must be created in a clear and concrete manner and have social

meaning and personal significance.[59] The research for this study is developed based on a central

question and three sub-questions, which are as follows:

Central research question: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe their

experiences?

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[55] Terry T Ishitani, "First-Generation Student's Persistence at Four-Year Institutions," *College and University* 91, no. 3 (July 2016): 22.

[56] Vincent, Tinto, "Reflections on Student Persistence," *Student Success* 8, no. 2 (July 2017): 2.

[57] Cynthia Demetriou, Judith Meece, Deborah Eaker-Rich, and Candice Powell, "The Activities, Roles, and Relationships of Successful First-Generation College Students," *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 1 (January 2017): 20.

[58] Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa, 15.

[59] Moustakas, 60.

Based on experiences and activities the institution creates, high-impact practices are intended to increase student learning and engagement.[60] Shared experiences regarding challenges can bring together students on campus through a constructed sense of community.[61]

SQ 1: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe challenges concerning energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

FGCSs must work through social and academic challenges and should be supported by institutions' support programs.[62] The suggestion is made that universities make efforts to keep class sizes small, especially for underrepresented students and FGCSs, to reduce challenges.[63]

SQ 2: How do FGCS majoring in music education describe successes concerning energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

Hébert focuses on success based on high achievement levels among FGCSs,[64] arguing that, regardless of difficult backgrounds, FGCS did not give up, but instead persisted to earn their undergraduate degrees with a sense of being prepared for the future.[65] In addition, FGCSs may experience less success in college because the goals the institution establishes do not correspond to this type of student.[66]

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[60] Theresa Conefrey, "Supporting First-generation Students' Adjustment to College with High-Impact Practices," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 1, no. 1 (October 2018): 1.

[61] Cheong, Gauvain, Palbusa, 15.

[62] Katervich and Aruguete, 40.

[63] Beattie & Thiele, 332.

[64] Hébert, 96.

[65] Ibid., 98.

 SQ 3: How do FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States describe their communication relating to self-determination with faculty, staff, and administration at the students' institution of study while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

Katrevich and Aruguete have suggested that strengthening academic skills while improving social environments for FGCSs are important focus areas for institutions in higher education.[67] Cheong et al.'s qualitative study on first-year students' academic self-efficacy supported the importance of FGCSs' academic connectedness on campus.[68] Contributions to the academic success of FGCSs' experiences may come from a sense of belonging through academic engagement.[69]

Definitions

1. *Academic Rigor* – This term is based on the student perspective of academic workload, grading standards, level of difficulty, level of interest, and perceived relevance to future goals.[70]

2. *First-Generation College Student* – Students with parents or guardians who have no college or some college, or who do not have a four-year degree.[71]

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[66] Mikael Jury, Annique Smeding, Martine Court, and Celine Darnon, "When First-Generation Students Succeed at University: On the Link Between Social Class, Academic Performance, and Performance-Avoidance Goals," *Contemporary Educational Psychology,* 41, no. 1 (April 2015): 35.

[67] Katrevich and Aruguete, 42.

[68] Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa, 8.

[69] Ibid.

[70] John Draeger, Pixita Del Prado Hill, and Ronnie Mahler, "Developing a Student Conception of Academic Rigor," *Innovative Higher Education* 40, no. 3 (June, 2015): 215.

[71] Patrick M. Whitehead and Robert Wright, "Becoming a College Student: An Empirical Phenomenological Analysis of First-Generation College Students," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 41, no. 10 (October 2017): 639.

3. *Music Education Major* – A broad track in higher education for those pursuing a career in teaching music that is usually accompanied with a specialization track in instrumental, choral, or general music.[72]

4. *Persistence* – The quality that allows a person to continue working toward a goal despite challenges.[73]

5. *Relationships-Motivation Theory* – A mini-theory of the SDT that defines high-quality relationships between people as being built from individuals satisfying the three needs of the SDT.[74]

6. *Self-Determination Theory* – An approach to human motivation and personality using a person's psychological needs, which are competence (mastering a task), autonomy (experiencing a sense of belonging), and relatedness (control of personal behaviors and goals).[75]

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the study, which examines FGCSs' self-determination in an undergraduate music education program. The problem is that FGCSs have unique needs regarding self-motivation, and their relationship needs are either ignored or are considered the same as those of other populations. The faculty, staff, and administration of universities do not understand the sub-population of students majoring in music education. FGCSs represent a large portion of many colleges and universities.[76] The lived experiences based

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[72] Christa R. Kuebel, "Preparedness of Instrumental Music Majors Teaching Elementary General Music," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 67, no. 3 (October 2019): 304.

[73] Tinto, 1.

[74] Deci and Ryan, 293.

[75] Deci and Ryan, 3; Ryan and Deci, 68.

on self-determination of this student type at a small, private university in the southeastern United States will form a description to establish the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study. The introduction of the SDT and RMT provide a framework to build this study concerning FGCSs majoring in music education. FGCSs' experiences were provided to demonstrate a personal history, thus connecting the researcher to the study. Research questions and definitions were identified. The intent of this study is to understand the experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education that pertain to self-determination to add depth to scholarly research concerning FGCSs, improve practice, and support current theories relating to self-determination.

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[76] Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2020; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A detailed review of the research was conducted to identify studies that generate understanding of first-generation college students (FGCSs), especially about the lack of support for those planning to major in music education. This chapter offers an overview of the current literature. The first section consists of a discussion of the selected theories and makes connections to the topic while constructing a theoretical framework. A synthesis of the related literature is developed in the second section; it considers FGCSs' experiences involving self-determination, especially those that focus on prior knowledge, self-care, self-exploration, academic skill, self-efficacy, reduced barriers, racism, classism, use of resources, personal choices, student engagement, and social interaction. After, the experiences of the challenges FGCSs face are discussed, including academic, social, class size, remedial course, academic warning, and persistence challenges. After reviewing the challenges of FGCSs, the focus shifts to their successes, including support systems, academic achievement, academic self-efficacy, retention, lifestyle, collaboration, decision making, social interactions, and coping skills. Subsequently, literature is reviewed regarding FGCSs' communication as it relates to self-determination, including awareness about academic self-efficacy, transitioning to college, communication quality, emotional support, cultural agents, shared achievement, student and faculty relationships, comfort level in the college environment, advisor accessibility, and dissatisfaction with student support offices. The final section reviews literature pertaining to the connections of FGCS to the music education degree, including social connections, participant insecurity, lack of preparedness, and assistance during the college application and admissions process. Upon reviewing the literature, a gap emerges that creates a need for focused study.

Theoretical Framework

The research process for this qualitative study is supported by a theoretical framework that allows the researcher to build upon the previous observations of the founding theorists. Ryan and Deci have discussed the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (SDT) describing it as intrinsic motivation that social environments can either help or hinder.[1] This literature review evaluates how FGCSs' college experiences, challenges, successes, and communication with college faculty, staff, and administration relate to the SDT's foundation of self-determination. Ryan and Deci have defined SDT as "an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods while employing an organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans' evolved inner resources."[2] Self-determination denotes FGCSs' experiences, challenges, successes, and communication along with establishing connections to this student type and the music education degree.

Influenced by the Baconian tradition, SDT employs similar empirical methods and uses manipulated social contextual variables for examination. Sir Francis Bacon developed the Baconian method (1620) as a means of investigation. Objectivity is essential to understanding Baconian perception.[3] This tradition's contributions to the SDT's constructs are skill, understanding, and self-sufficiency. Skill connects to motivation and the interactions individuals

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[1] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1(January 2000): 68.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Martin Carrier, "Values and Objectivity in Science: Value-Ladenness, Pluralism and the Epistemic Attitude," *Science & Education* 22, no. 10 (June 2013): 2550.

can have within their environment.[4] Understanding and self-sufficiency are vital to support well-being, as are growth and development.[5]

Persistence can be directly connected to self-determination. Ishitani made connections between academic and social integration and persistence over a certain period based on a student's performance and development in a college environment.[6] FGCSs' lack of persistence after the first year of school relates to their self-determination level.[7] Furthermore, a noticeable deficiency of persistence from low-income students makes it difficult to evaluate determination.[8]

Tinto continuously made connections between student persistence and retention.[9] An important aspect of the Tinto model (1975) is student persistence evaluated in terms of students' academic and social integration. The theory that motivation is connected to students' self-efficacy, fitting in, and course load relate persistence to the SDT. Consequently, student interaction with faculty, staff, and administrators all contribute to their academic and social development.[10] Each of these institutional stakeholders must consider how their social interaction with students contributes to the growth of the students' social capital level. Jensen and Jetten have defined social capital as the level of access to resources a person possesses based on the

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[4] James Sinclair, James, Katherine W. Bromley, Karrie A. Shogren, Christopher Murray, Deanne K. Unruh, and Beth A. Harn, "An Analysis of Motivation in Three Self-Determination Curricula," *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals* 40, no. 3 (August 2017): 175.

[5] Ryan and Deci, 68.

[6] Terry T. Ishitani, "First-Generation Student's Persistence at Four-Year Institutions," *College and University* 91, no. 3 (July 2016): 24.

[7] Ibid., 25.

[8] Sherell D. Wilson, "At Issue: Lack of Persistence in College and the High-Achieving, Low-Income Student: A Review of the Literature," *The Community College Enterprise* 22, no. 2 (October 2016): 42.

[9] Vincent Tinto, "Reflections on Student Persistence," *Student Success* 8, no. 2 (July 2017): 1.

[10] Ibid., 2; Dorthe Hoj Jensen and Jolanda Jetten, "Bridging and Bonding Interactions in Higher Education: Social Capital, and Students' Academic and Professional Identity Formation," *Front Psychol* 6, no. 1 (February 2015). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00126.

quality of involvement within that organization.[11] Therefore, administrators in higher education must evaluate the academic structure of the institution, as students' social capital can fluctuate based on the setup of this environment.[12]

The SDT theory goes beyond the importance of Tinto's work on integration and persistence and covers a larger framework of motivation and personality. Ryan and Deci discussed a person's need for growth and development to support self-motivation.[13] Marshik, Ashton, and Algina have provided further support for the SDT framework by generating research related to student support in academic settings.[14] Teacher interaction can affect students' psychological needs when considering autonomy, competence, and relatedness.[15] Each of these psychological needs contributes to an individual's intrinsic motivation.[16] Motivation consists of energy, direction, and persistence.[17]

The SDT and the value placed on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can support cognitive and social development.[18] Ryan and Deci have discussed the importance of learning and

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[11] Jensen and Jetten.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ryan and Deci, 70.

[14] Tesia Marshik, Patricia T. Ashton, and James Algina, "Teachers' and Students' Need for Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness as Predictors of Students' Achievement," *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal* 20, no. 1 (March 2017): 39.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Dong Ju, Li Ma, Run Ren, and Yichi Zhang, "Empowered to Break the Silence: Applying Self-Determination Theory to Employ Silence," *Front Psychol* 10, no. 1 (Fall 2019). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00485.

[17] Ryan and Deci, 70.

[18] Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "Facilitating Optimal Motivation and Psychological Well-Being Across Life's Domains," *Canadian Psychology* 49, no. 1 (February 2008): 14; Gina Riley, "The Role of Self-Determination Theory and Cognitive Evaluation Theory in Home Education," *Cogent Education* 3, no. 1 (December 2016): 1.

creativity when considering the effects of intrinsic motivation and human leaning.[19] Likewise, consideration must be given to extrinsic motivation that would be driven by environmental and social influences.[20]

FGCSs must understand the importance of personal motivation and determination based on the understanding, self-sufficiency, and skill that represent the foundation of SDT.[21] Ryan and Deci have stated, "The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated."[22] The relationships motivation theory (RMT) further clarifies the needs of FGCSs majoring in music education. The RMT employs the three needs of the SDT, which are competence (mastering a task), relatedness (experiencing a sense of belonging), and autonomy (control of personal behaviors and goals), and it focuses on the quality of relationships built between people.[23] Deci and Ryan have articulated several additional understandings of relationship motivation, noting that not all relationships are of a high quality; support from both parties in the relationship can improve its quality; a person focused solely on control lowers the relationship quality; and building trust and reliability increases the positive nature of the relationship.[24]

The SDT, including the RMT, is a theoretical framework that offers insight into the level of self-determination of FGCSs majoring in music education. At the same time, Kyndt et al. have

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[19] Ryan and Deci, 71.

[20] Riley, 1.

[21] Eric Anthony Kollar, "Self-Determination Theory: Exploring Factors of Academic Persistence Among First-Generation College Students" (EdD diss., University of West Florida, 2016), 3.

[22] Ryan and Deci, 68.

[23] Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "Autonomy and Need Satisfaction in Close Relationships: Relationships Motivation Theory," In *Human Motivation and Interpersonal Relationships,* edited by Netta Weinstein (New York: Springer, 2014), 53.

[24] Ibid.

found that motivation can propel self-determination depending on how a student controls his or her actions.[25] For example, in a qualitative study, Mitchall and Jaeger have examined student cases with the stratified purposeful sampling method.[26] The participants were first-generation, low-income, between the age of 18 and 24, started college immediately after high school, attended a four-year college as an undergraduate, were not involved with a college preparation program, and came from a high school with low resources. Students' parents provided the main motivation for independence, and parents were also the strongest inspiration regarding the choice to go to college.[27] The parents and family of the participants planning to attend college generated negative and positive influences. In contrast to the belief that FGCSs and their families do not have the tools for success, Mitchall and Jaeger have found that the families did provide support to the student attending college, even without understanding the college environment and regardless of their educational background.[28] Although Mitchall and Jaeger have found that families did provide support without understanding the college environment, FGCSs majoring in music education may have problems handling the unique academic rigor associated with the chosen degree in addition to the general education degree requirements at their institution.[29] Competence, relatedness, and autonomy, core needs of the SDT, will be employed by the RMT to build an understanding of the quality of relationships between FGCSs majoring in music

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[25] Eva Kyndt, Liesje Coertjens, Tin van Daal, Vincent Donche, David Gijbels, and Peter Van Petegem, "The Development of Students' Motivation in the Transition From Secondary to Higher Education: A Longitudinal Study," *Learning and Individual Differences* 39, no. 1 (April 2015): 114.

[26] Allison M. Mitchall and Audrey J. Jaeger. "Parental Influences on Low-Income, First-Generation Students' Motivation on the Path to College." *The Journal of Higher Education* 89, no. 4 (July 2018): 582.

[27] Mitchall and Jaeger, 582.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Mitchall and Jaeger, 583.

education and college faculty and administrators to guide and inform this study. Furthermore, the quality of relationships will contribute to the understanding of the purpose of this study, which is to describe the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States.

Related Literature

Previous research indicates that FGCSs appear to need assistance both before and during college.[30] FGCSs can build an understanding of shared experiences and the challenges similar students face.[31] A survey of literature on FGCSs' experiences, challenges, successes, communication relating to self-determination, and connections as a music education major is necessary to develop an initial portrait of these students.

Experiences of First-Generation College Students

The experiences of FGCSs begin with their awareness and understanding of the undergraduate setting at institutions of higher education, and educators must realize the level of diversity among them. Castillo-Montoya has investigated two undergraduate classes that contained FGCSs to demonstrate their levels of diversity.[32] Castillo-Montoya has used data analysis to identify three findings: awareness and understanding of the makeup of the FGCSs' sociopolitical prior knowledge through discussion topics, the variation in awareness and understanding within each FGCS, and the influence of prior knowledge based on student

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[30] Melinda M. Gibbons, Alessandra Rhinehart, and Erin Hardin, "How First-Generation College Students Adjust to College," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 20, no. 4 (December 2016): 488.

[31] Yeram Cheong, Mary Gauvain, and Julienne A. Palbusa, "Communication with Friends and the Academic Adjustment of First- and Non-First-Generation Students in the First Year of College," *Journal of College Student Retention* 1, no. 1 (March 2019): 1.

[32] Milagros Castillo-Montoya, "Deepening Understanding of Prior Knowledge: What Diverse First-Generation College Students in the U. S. Can Teach Us," *Teaching in Higher Education* 22, no. 5 (July 2017): 587.

experience as related to the academic content within the subject-matter.[33] Furthermore, FGCSs'

academic learning can be further supported by understanding the prior knowledge of their

college professors.[34] Therefore, prior knowledge can be described for each first-generation

college student. Professors can modify instruction based on each student's awareness and prior

knowledge, which will then reconstruct proper achievement goals.

Gibbons et al. have analyzed experience in relation to FGCSs' adjustment to college.[35]

Much of the emphasis of research related to FGCS concerns how this student type advances

through school.[36] Gibbons et al. interviewed FGCSs and found two major themes: preparing

oneself for change and preparing early for college.[37] Two pre-college barriers FGCSs face are a

lack of social capital related to enrolling in college and poor-quality schooling experiences; these

make the transition to college more difficult.[38] Often, FGCSs are viewed as possessing

inequalities and as facing many challenges, as their parents do not have a college degree.[39]

Gemmel has conducted a phenomenological study to explore the experiences of FGCSs

from low-income homes in their sophomore year of post-secondary education.[40] Gemmel found

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[33] Castillo-Montoya, 587.

[34] Peter J. Collier and David L. Morgan, "Is That Paper Really Due Today?: Differences in First-Generation and Traditional College Students' Understandings of Faculty Expectations," *Higher Education* 55, no. 4 (May 2008): 425.

[35] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Erin Hardin, 488.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Erik M. Hines, Joseph N. Cooper, and Michael Corral, "Overcoming the Odds: First-Generation Black and Latino Male Collegians' Perspectives on Pre-College Barriers and Facilitators," *Journal for Multicultural Education* 13, no. 1 (April 2019): 51.

[39] Tara Ann Gemmel, "Transition to College for Low-Income First-Generation College Students" (EdD diss., Fordham University, 2017), 1; Tabitha G. Wilbur and Vincent J. Roscigno, "First-Generation Disadvantages and College Enrollment/Competition," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 1.

[40] Gemmel, 1.

several themes, including maturity and personal responsibility, minimizing distractions, personal

motivation and determination, use of school resources, the power of peers, family support,

involvement, time management, and finding people who are supportive.[41] These key themes

were found to be present both at the end of the participants' freshman year of college and during

the transition to college.[42] Therefore, FGCSs must not be labeled as students with shortfalls, as

many thrive in the post-secondary setting; their college of choice must instead support them as

they progress through their post-secondary coursework.[43] College administrators can create an

inviting learning environment for FGCSs if they focus on fostering experiences for these

students that contribute to their success.

The Gibbons et al. study found that FGCSs had a strong feeling of not being connected

to others, such as family and friends, which was a barrier they had to overcome.[44] Furthermore,

Gibbons et al. found that participants needed awareness of self-care and self-exploration, which

assisted them in adapting to the college environment.[45] The study also notes the challenge of

adjusting to the college environment as FGCSs navigated the process. FGCSs experienced the

start of college as a completely new environment.[46] Therefore, an inviting college environment

lends itself to a positive student adjustment, as those who are new to the institution feel a sense

of inclusion.[47] In a related study, Katrevich and Aruguete have suggested that higher education

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[41] Gemmel, 111.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Gemmel, 112; Tina Wildhagen, "Not Your Typical Student: The Social Construction of the "First-Generation" College Student," *Qualitative Sociology* 38, no. 3 (June 2015): 285.

[44] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin, 488.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin, 488.

institutions focus on improvements in the experiences of FGCSs by developing programs to strengthen these students' academic skill sets while also creating outlets to improve their social skills.[48] Adjustment to college can be met with pre-college programs the higher education institution designs to facilitate a smoother transition and reduce the number of barriers FGCSs face.

High-impact practices are a way for 21st-century learners to be prepared for their career following the successful completion of undergraduate study.[49] Confrey has analyzed the college adjustment of FGCSs who employ high-impact practices.[50] Gavin has noted the unpredictability of confidence and stress if a degree plan includes faculty comparing peers, evaluating students, and displaying student skill level publicly.[51] Based on the experiences and activities the institution creates, high-impact practices are intended to increase student learning and engagement.[52] This researcher found three notable outcomes of high-impact practices: developing self-efficacy, stronger expectations of outcomes, and reduced barriers.[53] Institutions of higher education can provide strong opportunities for FGCSs through high-impact practices.

Means and Pyne conducted a case study that evaluated the college environment based on

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[47] Shannon M. Williams and Joseph R. Ferrari, "Identification Among First-Generation Citizen Students and First-Generation College Students: An Exploration of School Sense of Community," *Journal of Community Psychology* 43, no. 3 (April 2015): 377.

[48] Alina V. Katrevich and Mara S. Aruguete, "Recognizing Challenges and Predicting Success in First-Generation University Students," *Journal of STEM Education: Innovations and Research* 18, no. 2 (April 2017): 40.

[49] Sarah Randall Johnson and Frances King Stage, "Academic Engagement and Student Success: Do High-Impact Practices Mean Higher Graduation Rates?" *The Journal of Higher Education,* 89, no. 5 (April 2018): 753.

[50] Theresa Conefrey, "Supporting First-generation Students' Adjustment to College with High-Impact Practices," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 1, no. 1 (October 2018): 1.

[51] Russell B. Gavin, "An Exploration of Factors Affecting Persistence to Degree Completion in an Undergraduate Music Education Program," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 26, no. 1 (October 2016): 43.

[52] Conefrey, 1.

[53] Ibid.

students' feelings of support and belonging to the institution.[54] They found a difference between

FGCSs and continuing-generation college students (i.e., those whose parents attended a four-year

college) regarding persistence, and it could produce forms of oppression within their college

environment.[55] College students attending the same school can have differing experiences both

academically and socially, which can contribute to diligence toward study, thus impacting

FGCS' sense of support and belonging to the college.[56]

Unfortunately, FGCSs continuously face the barriers of racism and classism in college.[57]

Means and Pyne have suggested that institutions of higher education establish and develop

strong support programs for FGCSs, drawing attention to their not fitting in socially within the

college environment and continuously evaluating equity among FGCS compared to the rest of

the student population within the institution.[58] Colleges must "live up" to the material advertised

about college life being equitable to all students through high-impact educational practices, as

FGCSs enter the environment with uncertainty.[59] Many FGCSs begin their college career with

insecurities, and these create more challenges than many other students face. College students'

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[54] Darris R. Means and Kimberly B. Pyne, "Finding My Way: Perceptions of Institutional Support and Belonging in Low-Income, First-Generation, First-Year College Students," *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 6 (September 2017): 907.

[55] Means and Pyne, 908; Catherine Gewertz, "College Graduation; Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States," *Education Week* 35, no. 29 (April 2016): 5.

[56] Christina Ciocca Eller and Thomas A. DiPrete, "The Paradox of Persistence: Explaining the Black-White Gap in Bachelor's Degree Completion," *American Sociological Review* 83, no. 6 (November 2018): 1171.

[57] Jessica C. Harris and Chris Linder, "The Racialized Experiences of Students of Color in Higher Education and Student Affairs Graduate Preparation Programs," *Journal of College Student Development* 59, no. 2 (March-April 2018): 141; Means and Pyne, 908.

[58] Means and Pyne, 908.

[59] Kimberly B. Pyne and Darris R. Means, "Underrepresented and In/Visible: A Hispanic First-Generation Student's Narratives of College," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 6, no. 3 (September 2013): 186; Allison Taylor, Lorin Yochim, and Milosh Raykov, "Service-Learning and First-Generation University Students: A Conceptual Exploration of the Literature," *Journal of Experiential Education* 42, no. 4 (July 2019): 349.

fears of misunderstanding, judgement, and ridicule based on who they are can strongly affect

their level of participation.[60]

FGCSs' lack of understanding regarding networking in comparison to continuing-

generation students, who equally deal with a low socio-economic lifestyle based on wealth,

influence, and status, must be recognized by institutions of higher education as students facing

major disadvantages during the post-secondary education experience.[61] Martin has raised

awareness of experiences through a qualitative study that evaluates the social class of FGCS

from low-income families in their college environment.[62] Martin focused on time, energy, and

resources FGCSs utilized in higher education and identified three themes in the findings:

students' time at work, time outside the classroom, and their money as factors detracting from

time, energy, and utilized resources.[63] All three of these themes were connected to the social

class worldview of each FGCS and generated networking disadvantages for FGCS.[64] Social class

can influence networking among college students, as FGCSs might not have developed

networking skills to utilize resources to the fullest potential.[65] Therefore, college faculty, staff,

and administrators must work together, providing FGCSs opportunities within their degree

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[60] Michele Eliason and Ruby Turalba, "Recognizing Oppression: College Students' Perceptions of Identity and its Impact on Class Participation," *The Review of Higher Education* 42, no. 3 (Spring 2019): 1257.

[61] Mehmet Sukru Bellibas, "Who are the Most Disadvantaged? Factors with the Achievement of Students with Low Socio-Economic Backgrounds," *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice* 16, no. 2 (April 2016): 691; Georgianna L. Martin, "Always in My Face: An Exploration of Social Class Consciousness, Salience, and Values," *Journal of College Student Development* 56, no. 5 (July 2015): 471.

[62] Martin, 471.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., 472.

[65] Roxanne Venus Moschetti and Cynthia Hudley, "Social Capital and Academic Motivation Among First-Generation Community College Students," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 39, no. 3 (August 2014): 235.

program to build an understanding of time and money management.

Equal opportunity can be difficult to define due to the varying circumstances and complications of each FGCS.[66] Papadakis has conducted a case study concerning FGCSs as Ivy League undergraduates, focusing on academic and social experiences to form recommendations to support students.[67] Creating diversity within the college's student body continues to be a goal of Ivy League schools to demonstrate equal opportunity and academic excellence as opposed to solely maintaining privilege based on wealth and background.[68] Family separation to live on campus and social integration generate barriers regarding equal opportunity between first- and continuing-generation students, which in turn generates disparity among differing social classes.[69] Papadakis has argued that FGCSs' participation in student engagement programs was a valuable resource that assisted with the transition to the college setting.[70] Institutions of higher education must realize the value of engagement and support programs for FGCS and understand that each student is different, which requires these programs to be customized to fit each individual FGCS's needs.[71] College administrators must continue to evaluate support programs for FGCSs to determine if the programs are effective or if modifications are necessary to provide

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[66] Thai-Huy Nguyen and Bach Mai Dolly Nguyen, "Is the "First-Generation Student" Term Useful for Understanding Inequality? The Role of Intersectionality in Illuminating the Implications of an Accepted – yet Unchallenged – Term," *Review of Research in Education* 42, no. 1 (April 2018): 146.

[67] Maria Papadakis, "Experiences of First-Generation Students at One Ivy League Campus" (EdD diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 2017), 1.

[68] Allan Ornstein, "Wealth, Legacy, and College Admission," *Society* 56, no. 4 (August 2019): 335; Papadakis, 1.

[69] Papadakis, 2.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Sherida Gholston, "Exploring First-Generation Students' Perceptions of the Student Support Services Program at a Southeastern Community College: A Single Case Study" (EdD diss., Northcentral University, 2018), 1; Papadakis, 2.

equal opportunity.

In a similar study of the social class of FGCS, Rice et al. evaluated social class worldviews, which consisted of students' beliefs, attitudes, and values of social class through a qualitative lens.[72] If FGCSs can build an understanding of social groups along with the expectations that accompany them, then college faculty, staff, and administrators can support the development of their social class identity.[73] According to the researchers, social class messages, social class-related events, the effects of social class on relationships, social class structure and permeability, social class-related values, external expressions of social class, and first-generation issues are all areas in which FGCSs may lack experience.[74] The researchers found that, regardless of the social class level of FGCSs prior to starting college, their social class worldviews could be interrupted.[75] Social interaction can be challenging for FGCSs, as they may feel they do not fit in with the rest of the student body and cannot create friendships or build shared experiences; thus, college faculty and staff must encourage FGCSs to build an understanding of social class worldviews and be willing to guide students beyond course material and school policies to help FGCSs develop knowledge and security involving social interaction. Student satisfaction concerning academics, life, and the institution of study are directly connected to social class and the well-being of FGCSs.[76]

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[72] Alexander J. Rice, Alexander J. Colbow, Shane Gibbons, Charles Cederberg, Ethan Sahker, Williams M. Liu, and Kristin Wurster, "The Social Class Worldviews of First-Generation College Students," *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (June 2016): 415.

[73] Sarah D. Hermann and Michael E. W. Varnum, "Utilizing Social Class Bicultural Identity Integration to Improve Outcomes for First-Generation College Students," *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* 4, no. 2 (June 2018): 165; Rice, Colbow, Gibbons, Cederberg, Sahker, Liu, and Wurster, 415.

[74] Rice, Colbow, Gibbons, Cederburg, Sahker, Liu, and Wurster, 415.

[75] Ibid.

Challenges of First-Generation College Students

FGCSs can find it challenging to relate to the college they attend when compared to continuing-education students, forming a social-class achievement gap that leads to lower academic achievement.[77] A study by Katrevich and Aruguete has analyzed this persistence in the challenges FGCSs face and in foreseeing these students' success.[78] Katrevich and Aruguete found that FGCS experienced academic and social integration with little support from faculty, and that work and family responsibilities often disrupted academic progress, which suggested an achievement gap between FGCSs and continuing-generation college students.[79] Therefore, FGCS must be provided with proper support through advising programs and financial assistance to generate a better understanding of the time and commitment necessary to experience success within undergraduate study.[80] Additionally, FGCSs' academic and social challenges must be met with intervention programs that colleges and universities design to continue to narrow the achievement gap of this population compared to the rest of the student body.[81] Institutions of

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[76] Martin, 471; Rice, Colbow, Gibbons, Cederburg, Sahker, Liu, and Wurster, 415; Blake A. Allan, Patton O. Garriott, and Chesleigh N. Keene. "Outcomes of Social Class and Classism in First- and Continuing Generation College Students." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 63, no. 4 (July 2016): 487.

[77] Jenny Veldman, Loes Meeussen, and Colette van Laar, "A Social Identity Perspective on the Social-Class Achievement Gap: Academic and Social Adjustment in the Transition to University," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 22, no. 3 (April 2019): 403.

[78] Katrevich and Aruguete, 40.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Katrevice and Aruguete, 41; Katherine Mangan, "The Challenge of the First-Generation Student: Colleges Amp Up Efforts to Retain Them, but Hurdles Remain," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 61, no. 36 (May 2015): 4.

[81] Katrevich and Aruguete, 41; Connie R. Wibrowski, Wendy K. Matthews, and Anastasia Kitsantas. "The Role of a Skills Learning Support Program on First-Generation College Students' Self-Regulation, Motivation, and Academic Achievement: A Longitudinal Study." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 19, no. 3 (February 2016): 317.

higher education can make meaningful educational opportunities for FGCSs with meaningful intervention programs.

FGCSs face a major challenge developing social capital, which can greatly impede students' level of success and engagement if not properly nurtured through connections made on campus.[82] Beattie and Thiele have argued that the quality of student engagement is linked to class size and either benefits or hurts student learning; larger class sizes weaken academic dialogue between the student and teacher.[83] This dialogue was defined as academic social capital. The Beattie and Thiele found that large-scale increase in class sizes at a university reduced the amount of social capital and that minorities such as African American, Latino, and FGCSs were affected the most by class size.[84] Therefore, Beattie and Thiele have suggested that universities make efforts to keep class sizes small, especially for minority students and FGCSs.[85] College faculty, staff, and administrators may help students who lack connections with the institution by identifying and helping FGCS reach academic goals.[86] Additionally, smaller class sizes in universities create a stronger learning environment for students and allow more interaction between each student and the teacher, in addition to the teacher being able to focus more on each student. Furthermore, advisers should be aware of the benefits of small class sizes for FGCSs and make appropriate schedule suggestions for this population of students.

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[82] Sarah E. O. Schwartz, Stella S. Kanchewa, Jean E. Rhodes, Grace Gowdy, Abigial M. Stark, John Paul Horn, McKenna Parnes, and Renee Spencer, "I'm Having a Little Struggle With This, Can You Help Me Out?: Examining Impacts and Processes of a Social Capital Intervention for First-Generation College Students," *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 61, no. 1 (March 2018): 166.

[83] Irenee R. Beattie and Megan Thiele, "Connecting in Class? College Class Size and Inequality in Academic Social Capital," *The Journal of Higher Education* 87, no. 3 (May-June 2016): 332.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 333.

[86] Moschetti and Korstejens, 235.

Boatman and Long have argued that many students are underprepared when starting

college, and remedial coursework is necessary for almost half of first-year students beginning

their postsecondary experience.[87] Reed has performed a qualitative study based on the challenges

FGCSs encountered in remedial college courses and evaluated how they successfully graduated

college after taking them.[88] Reed found four themes in the data analysis of the remedial college

course study: students welcoming academic support, students' appreciation for qualified

teachers, students' gratefulness for family support, and students' realization of their satisfaction

with support services within the remedial classes provided.[89] Consequently, FGCSs who

overcome the challenge of taking remedial courses appear to experience greater success than

those who do not, as these courses help students establish support systems and build

relationships that accompany their persistence in earning an undergraduate degree.[90] College

faculty, staff, and administrators can be proactive by evaluating and identifying FGCS who will

benefit from remedial or transitional courses.

Students with lower grades are less likely to complete a college degree program, as their

student generation status can influence their academic self-efficacy.[91] Mogilevskaya's

quantitative study explores whether FGCSs persist after receiving an academic warning during

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[87] Angela Boatman and Bridget Terry Long, "Does Remediation Work for all Students? How the Effects of Postsecondary Remedial and Developmental Courses Vary by Level of Academic Preparation," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 40, no. 1 (July 2017): 29.

[88] LaChristy Reed, "Overcoming Challenges: First Generation College Students Who Begin in Remedial Courses and went on to Graduate" (PhD diss., Capella University, 2017), 1.

[89] Ibid., 52.

[90] Desiree Polk-Bland, "Student Demographics, Remedial Reading Course Completion, and Community College Success and Completion" (PhD diss., Capella University, 2018), 1; Reed, 52.

[91] Lamont D. Simmons, Laura C. Taylor, Kenya Anderson, and Susan L. Neely-Barnes, "Comparative Experiences of First- and Continuing- Generation Social Work Students." *Journal of Social Work Education* 54, no. 3 (July 2018): 480; John M. Trussel, and Lisa Burke-Smalley, "Demography and Student Success: Early Warning Tools Drive Intervention," *Journal of Education for Business* 93, no. 8 (November 2018): 363.

their first semester of classes at the undergraduate level.[92] Mogilevskaya found that FGCSs were more at risk than continuing-generation college students in this scenario.[93] Therefore, continued research on FGCSs, persistence, and academic standing must be conducted to continue to address the needs of this population, bring awareness, and support them toward degree completion.[94] While a student's grade point average may improve during the semester following an academic warning or probation, the student is more at risk of losing persistence toward graduation and is more likely to need an intervention from college personnel before it is too late.[95] Colleges and universities currently have numerous support programs in place for students who receive an academic warning or probation, but the institution must prioritize the level and quality of interaction between college personnel and the student to maintain a sense of belonging.

Successes of First-Generation College Students

First-generation and low-income students experience higher levels of success based on the interaction with the students' college faculty and staff, especially if the student did not receive proper support from parents.[96] McCurdy has conducted a qualitative study on FGCSs' success factors between 1980 and the present.[97] FGCSs face challenges and successes, as

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[92] Inna Mogilevskaya, "First-Generation College Students: Academic Persistence After Academic Warning" (PhD diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2019), 1.

[93] Mogilevskaya, 99.

[94] Ripsime Karaguezian Bledsoe, "Facing Academic Dismissal: An Adaptive Organizational Approach Preparing all Students for Success," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 42 no. 7 (August 2018): 550; Mogilevskaya, 99.

[95] Trussel and Burke-Smalley, 363.

[96] Denise Deutschlander, "Enhancing Engagement with Faculty and Staff to Facilitate Student Success: An Evaluation of a Parent Intervention," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, no. 3 (May 2019): 239.

[97] Kimberly Jo McCurdy, "A Qualitative Exploratory Study of Success Factors for First-Generation College Students, 1980 to the Present" (PhD diss., Robert Morris University, 2018), 1.

McCurdy's study mentions, with the idea that anyone who wishes to can pursue higher education.[98] McCurdy discusses college cost, insufficient school counseling, not belonging, and feeling unprepared as themes the participants identified as obstacles.[99] Each identified barrier can also be translated into a success factor, such as having the desire to go to college, finding resources to pay for college, seeking out mentors, adjusting to campus, finding a major that is pleasurable, and demonstrating self-efficacy.[100] Based on the participant interviews, McCurdy's study found that mentorship and self-efficacy factors had the strongest influence.[101] Consequently, academic self-efficacy is a critical area for FGCSs to experience success, as continuing-generation college students tend to experience higher levels of academic self-efficacy.[102] McCurdy has also stressed the need to analyze FGCS who did not experience success.[103] These students might not understand certain obstacles in the college setting while working toward success if they are based on cultural differences.[104] FGCSs' backgrounds can be considered a strength regarding self-motivation if properly utilized.[105] Therefore, FGCSs can transform challenges into success with the proper support and desire to thrive.

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[98] McCurdy, 1.

[99] Ibid., 2.

[100] Ibid.

[101] McCurdy, 109.

[102] Debra Ann Metcalf and Karl Kilian Konrad Wiener, "Academic Self-Efficacy in a Twenty-First-Century Australian University: Strategies for First-Generation Students," *Higher Education Research & Development* 37, no. 7 (November 2018): 1472; McCurdy, 109.

[103] McCurdy, 109.

[104] Rebecca Covarrubias, Ibette Valle, Giselle Laiduc, and Margarita Azmitia, "You Never Become Fully Independent: Family Roles and Independence in First-Generation College Students," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 34, no. 4 (August 2018): 381.

[105] Nicole M. Stephens, Sarah S. M. Townsend, MarYam G. Hamedani, Mesmin Destin, and Vida Manzo, "A Difference-Education Intervention Equips First-Generation College Students to Thrive in the Face of Stressful College Situations," *Psychological Science* 26, no. 10 (August 2015): 1556.

FGCS frequently face earning lower grades than continuing-generation college students because they experience less time to prepare assignments and have less interaction with professors concerning coursework than other students.[106] FGCSs' perceptions of their academic experiences help identify whether their enrollment and engagement in an academic success and retention program are worthwhile.[107] The Schelbe et al. study identified several participant perceptions, including support, expectations, preparation, and resources, and each factor was important to the participants' academic success and retention.[108] FGCSs should have various forms of support throughout the duration of their undergraduate experience as needs change, such as transitional guidance when starting college and guidance concerning job exploration as the student nears graduation.[109] Schelbe et al. have suggested that college leaders provide a more customized support system for FGCSs, as their needs continue to change throughout the journey, from transitioning to college through graduation.[110] Consequently, customized support systems could increase the success and retention of FGCSs.[111] Therefore, preparedness to begin post-secondary education, in addition to support throughout the process, requires higher education leaders to go beyond traditional practices to discover creative ways to support students who may

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[106] Katrevich and Aruguete, 43.

[107] Jessica D. Osborne, Richard Parlier, and Talisha Adams, "Assessing Impact of Academic Interventions Through Student Perceptions of Academic Success," *The Learning Assistance Review* 24, no. 1 (March 2019): 9; Lisa Schelbe, Martin Swanbrow Becker, Carmella Spinelli, and Denesha McCray, "First Generation College Students' Perceptions of an Academic Retention Program," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 19, no. 5 (December 2019): 61.

[108] Schelbe, Becker, Spinelli, and McCray, 61.

[109] Raquel M. Rall, "Forgotten Students in a Transitional Summer: Low-Income Racial/Ethnic Minority Students Experience the Summer Melt," *The Journal of Negro Education* 85, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 462; Schelbe, Becker, Spinelli, and McCray, 62.

[110] Schelbe, Becker, Spinelli, and McCray, 62.

[111] Ibid.

be underprepared or not know how to complete the journey through a traditional four-year degree program.[112]

High achievement levels among FGCSs can be connected to academic and social integration, both of which are critical during the first year of college, with social integration being significant through the third year of college.[113] Hébert has investigated students from low-income backgrounds who were also FGCSs and who experienced high levels of achievement.[114] Primary and secondary educators who supported FGCSs emotionally created benefits for them.[115] Continuing into post-secondary education, students who connected with an individual faculty mentor who invested time in getting to know the student crafted a support system that propelled the student's academic success.[116] Hébert has argued that, regardless of difficult backgrounds, FGCSs did not give up but instead persisted and earned their undergraduate degrees with a sense of preparedness for the future.[117] Therefore, FGCSs can utilize challenges to serve as motivation that promotes higher achievement levels. Additionally, student support programs, campus mentor relationships, support from family, and financial support are areas of evaluation to generate student benefits.[118] Accordingly, colleges must understand the importance

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[112] Dawna Wilson and Kimberly M. Lowry, "One Goal, Two Institutions: How a Community College and 4-Year University Partner to Bridge Student College Readiness Gaps," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 41, no. 4 (November 2016): 267.

[113] Ishitani, 22.

[114] Thomas P. Hébert, "An Examination of High-Achieving First-Generation College Students from Low-Income Backgrounds," *Gifted Child Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (January 2018): 96.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Hébert, 96

[117] Ibid., 108.

[118] Hébert, 109; Daniel Tillapaugh and Kyle McAuliffe, "The Experiences of High-Achieving First-Generation College Men from Rural Maine," *College Student Affairs Journal* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 83.

of various support systems for FGCSs as well as the benefits of developing wider connections among each of these systems, thus creating stronger collaboration to better serve students.[119]

Continuing-generation students demonstrate higher levels of academic success and experience lower levels of dropout than FGCSs.[120] Similarly, students who fit in at an institution are more likely to be connected to their background and social class.[121] With the goal of preventing poor academic performance, Jury et al. have evaluated FGCSs' level of commitment using the students' social class and academic accomplishment to predict performance avoidance.[122] Jury et al. found that continuing-generation students did not develop as many performance-avoidance goals as FGCSs.[123] The findings support a direct relationship between performance-avoidance goals and a student's social class, as high social class was potentially a predictor of fewer performance-avoidance goals.[124] Even as FGCSs can experience strong academic achievements, their performance-avoidance goals might increase rather than decrease.[125] Continuing-generation students tend to exhibit stronger commitment toward educational goals than FGCSs, while FGCSs exhibit more commitment to their postsecondary

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[119] Erica Irlbeck, Shylo Adams, Cindy Akers, Scott Burris, and Stephanie Jones, "First Generation College Students: Motivations and Support Systems," *Journal of Agricultural Education* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 154; Tillapaugh and McAuliffe, 83.

[120] Andri Burger and Luzelle Naude. "Success in Higher Education: Differences Between First- and Continuous-Generation Students." *Social Psychology of Education* 22, no. 1 (November 2019): 1059.

[121] Allan, Garriott, and Keene, 487; Mikael Jury, Annique Smeding, Martine Court, and Celine Darnon, "When First-Generation Students Succeed at University: On the Link Between Social Class, Academic Performance, and Performance-Avoidance Goals," *Contemporary Educational Psychology,* 41, no. 1 (April 2015): 25.

[122] Jury, Smeding, Court, and Darnon, 25.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Burger and Naude, 1059; Jury, Smeding, Court, and Darnon, 25.

institution and accompanying activities than continuing-generation students.[126] Jury et al. have

theorized that FGCSs experience less success in college because the goals the institution

establishes are not designed to accommodate them.[127] Therefore, an established set of goals

colleges develop for FGCS could yield different results.

Much of the research concerning FGCSs has concentrated on barriers instead of how this

population persists and succeeds throughout the undergraduate experience by utilizing the

surrounding resources.[128] Furthermore, FGCS are a continuously growing population within

post-secondary education, and they are less likely to experience success compared to continuing-

generation college students.[129] Evans has conducted a qualitative phenomenological study

concerning FGCSs' academic and nonacademic success based on their lived experiences and

found that academic integration, social integration, academic self-efficacy, and family support

contribute to success for FGCSs.[130] Social capital, academic preparedness, financial resources,

and family support are challenge areas for FGCS based on their transition to college through

lived experiences.[131] Evans has suggested that institutions of higher education should continue to

offer and develop transition programs for FGCSs as they move from high school to college and

continue them throughout their college career, as they add additional resources and promote

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[126] Burger and Naude, 1059; Jury, Smeding, Court, and Darnon, 25.

[127] Jury, Smeding, Court, and Darnon, 31.

[128] Daniel J. Almeida, Andrew M. Byrne, Rachel M. Smith, and Saul Ruiz, "How Relevant is Grit? The Importance of Social Capital in First-Generation College Students' Academic Success," *Journal of College Student Retention; Research, Theory & Practice* 0, no. 0 (June 2019): 1; Tillapaugh and McAuliffe, 83.

[129] Rebecca Margrete Evans, "A Qualitative Exploration of First-Generation Student Experiences at a Rural Community College" (PhD diss., Old Dominion University, 2016), 1; Thomas J. Eveland, "Developmental Ecology of First-Generation College Students: Exploring the Relationship Between Environmental Support and Academic Performance" (PhD diss., Ohio University, 2016), 1.

[130] Evans, 1; Eveland, 1.

[131] Eveland, 2.

success.[132] Therefore, as an additional resource, transition programs for FGCSs promote stronger success among students. FGCSs are hopeful that the successes they experience will outweigh challenges when considering academic and non-academic experiences in college, and that they will create the opportunity for a better lifestyle.[133] College faculty, staff, and administrators must present themselves as meaningful leaders of students to increase the students' confidence and motivation level.[134] Furthermore, effective leadership from college faculty, staff, and administrators can inspire students to persist through these challenges even though academic results may not greatly change.[135]

FGCSs can experience stress when transitioning from high school to college due to a lack of preparedness or support while navigating the college environment.[136] Ricks has performed a qualitative phenomenological study exploring the transitions of FGCSs based on their strengths, support systems, and coping skills and found that, to experience success, students must overcome challenges related to deciding to go to college, social involvement, and coping skills, in addition to the stress that accompanies each.[137] Consequently, high school and college counselors and advisors must work with FGCSs and provide support that will increase their confidence

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[132] Evans., 96.

[133] Evans, 97; Cheryl J. Williams, "First-Generation Community College Students and Their Sense of Place: An Opportunity to Succeed; An Opportunity to Belong" (PhD diss., Iowa State University, 2017), 1.

[134] Kais Gannouni and Lovanirina Ramboarison-Lalo, "Leadership and Students' Academic Success: Mediating Effects of Self-Efficacy and Self-Determination," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 21, no. 1 (January 2018): 66.

[135] Gannouni and Ramboarison-Lalo, 66.

[136] Casandra Elena Harper, Hao Zhu, and Judy Marquez Kiyama, "Parents and Families of First-Generation College Students Experience Their Own College Transition," *The Journal of Higher Education* 91, no. 4 (August 2019): 540; Jonathan Ryan Ricks, "First-Generation College Student Success in Higher Education" (PhD diss., North Carolina State University, 2016), 1.

[137] Ricks, 146.

regarding decision-making, transitions, and social interactions, as well as coping skills to succeed in higher education.[138]

Communication Relating to Self-Determination

Communication for FGCSs can be accompanied by anxiety, uncertainty, and stress, with each contributing to students' self-determination level.[139] FGCSs' interactions and thoughts concerning several different groups of stakeholders, including friends, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators, can influence students' sense of belonging and level of self-determination.

FGCSs' academic success can be supported by experiences in college based on social support from others.[140] Cheong et al. have studied first-year students' academic self-efficacy compared to effective communication between students and their friends on campus.[141] These researchers suggest that stronger academic self-efficacy is the product of frequent communication between friends on campus and first-year college students, formed through the apparent relationship they formed with the institution.[142] Consequently, post-secondary institutions should promote working in peer teams to reinforce frequent communication. Cheong et al. mention a higher bond with schools for FGCSs compared to non-first-generation students.[143] While FGCSs may be more comfortable with the relationship formed with the

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[138] Xan Arch and Isaac Gilman, "First Principles: Designing Services for First-Generation Students," *College & Research Libraries* 80, no. 7 (November 2019): 996; Ricks, 146.

[139] Angela Gist-Mackey, Marissa L. Wiley, and Joseph Erba, "You're Doing Great. Keep Doing What You're Doing: Socially Supportive Communication During First-Generation College Students' Socialization," *Communication Education* 67, no. 1 (November 2017): 52.

[140] Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa, 1.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid., 15.

institution, developing relationships with peers may be more challenging and stressful.[144]

Therefore, college administrators must identify students transitioning to college to allow

academic advancement through the development of transition programs that support an inviting

student atmosphere.[145] Additionally, colleges must develop transition programs for students with

consideration given to the development and support of peer relationships. Therefore, colleges

must work to create opportunities for students to experience varying levels of social interaction

on campus, which would foster social development among students as peers.[146]

Communication between FGCSs and parents on college-related topics can be a challenge,

as the parents do not have a college background or understand what is expected of a student

working toward an undergraduate degree.[147] Palbusa and Gauvain have found that first-

generation and non-first-generation students' levels of parent interaction were the same;

however, non-first-generation students gained more insight from conversations with their parents

and experienced a higher quality of conversation than FGCSs.[148] FGCSs lack of shared college

experiences reduces the quality of the content they discussed. FGCSs tend to use parents more

[144] Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa, 15; Simmons, Taylor, Anderson, and Neely-Barnes, 480.

[145] Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa, 16; Adrianna Kezar and Joseph A. Kitchen, "Supporting First-Generation, Low-Income, and Underrepresented Students' Transitions to College Through Comprehensive and Integrated Programs," *American Behavioral Scientist* 64, no. 3 (March 2020): 223.

[146] Gist-Mackey, Wiley, and Erba, 52.

[147] Amy C. Wilkins, "New in Class: First-Generation Students and the Unseen Costs of College: First-Generation College Students are Different from Other Students in Many Ways, but Especially Because Their Parents and Other Family Members Do Not Have Experience Navigating College and Its Expectations," *Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi* 98, no. 3 (September 2018): 14.

[148] Julienne Palbusa and Mary Gauvain, "Parent-Student Communication About College and Freshman Grades in First-Generation and Non-First-Generation Students," *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 1 (January 2017): 107.

for emotional support compared to non-first-generation students, who receive more helpful college advice.[149]

The critical role that college faculty, staff, and administrators play for students requires academic leaders to properly support all their students, regardless of the level of academic preparedness.[150] In a qualitative study, Schademan and Thompson created a framework of college preparedness and cultural agents for students and faculty.[151] Schademan and Thompson divided faculty into those who view college preparedness based solely on academia and those who view college preparedness based on multiple factors, including culture, language, and social skills.[152] Those in the former group experienced much higher frustration and were likely to change their teaching practice, while the other faculty were more flexible and creative.[153] Therefore, college faculty should consider keeping an open mind in relation to students' academic preparedness, as they come from various high school settings with varying levels of achievement. Schademan and Thompson have stressed the need for faculty to serve as cultural agents to first-generation, low-income students, as this increases the likelihood of shared achievement.[154] FGCSs have a stronger need for quality communication with college faculty,

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[149] Palbusa and Mary Gauvain, 1.

[150] Chris R. Glass, Peggy Gesing, Angela Hales, A., and Cong Cong, "Faculty as Bridges to Co-Curricular Engagement and Community for First-Generation International Students," *Studies in Higher Education* 42, no. 5 (May 2017): 895.

[151] Alfred R. Schademan and Maris R. Thompson, "Are College Faculty and First-Generation Low-Income Students Ready for Each Other?" *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 18, no. 2 (May 2015): 194.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Schademan and Thompson, 194.

[154] Ibid.

staff, and administrators due to the likelihood of inadequate academic preparedness, along with

the lack of parental social support concerning experience in the college setting.

Quality communication between FGCSs and faculty strengthens the experience

academically, which also increases students' satisfaction and persistence levels.[155] In a

qualitative case study that employed the experiences of FGCSs and faculty to detail their

relationships with each other, Valdez has highlighted faculty who were proactive in building

relationships with students.[156] These faculty members believed that creating strong relationships

with students would increase student self-efficacy through shared experiences. Consequently,

college faculty, staff, and administrators should go beyond content delivery and course

completion and aim to truly cultivate well-rounded students who are capable of success in the

professional world. Deeper relationships between FGCSs and faculty could increase student

retention and success rates.[157]

Continuing-generation students feel as though they can communicate with faculty as

equals, while FGCSs are not initially as comfortable with this level of communication; it may

take several months of living in the college environment.[158] A qualitative study by Hutchison

examines students' perceptions of faculty based on the impact of first-generation status.[159]

Hutchison has suggested that FGCSs have a greater fear of interacting with professors than

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[155] Deutschlander, 239; Tinto, 1.

[156] Ricardo Valdez, "Relationships between First Generation College Students and Faculty: A Case Study of a Small Rural Private University" (EdD diss., University of Washington, 2016), 1.

[157] Valdez, 1; Matthew K. Vetter, Laurie A. Schreiner, and Brian Jaworski, "Faculty Attitudes and Behaviors That Contribute to Thriving in First-Year Students of Color," *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 9.

[158] Michol Hutchison, "Influence of First Generation Status on Students' Perceptions of Faculty," *College Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (February 2017): 1.

[159] Ibid.

continuing-generation students, who did not demonstrate this intimidation level.[160] Lack of time

continues to be an issue for FGCSs, as they may need to manage family and work

responsibilities in addition to their commitments as a college student.[161] Therefore, fear coupled

with a lack of time creates a strong barrier for FGCSs to overcome. FGCSs' comfort level within

their college environment, including with professors, allows these students to positively increase

communication levels with higher education faculty, staff, and administrators, which would also

strengthen student retention levels.[162]

Advisor accessibility, communication, and relationships with college students are based

on how well the advisor can interact with the students, including consideration of the insecurity

FGCSs feel toward advisors.[163] Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad's qualitative study of

student perceptions of college advisors has identified four main themes from the data analysis:

students struggled to differentiate between high school guidance counselors and college advisors,

advisor communication was perceived as both positive and negative student depending on the

advisor-student interaction, students desired an academic relationship with the advisor, and

advisor accessibility varied.[164] Consequently, college personnel must realize that FGCSs'

perceptions of college faculty, staff, and administrators may define the level of communication

in the college setting.

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[160] Hutchison, 18.

[161] Ibid.; Means and Pyne, 907.

[162] Hutchison, 18; Whitnee Danielle Boyd, "I'm First: Building a Pathway to Thriving for First-Generation College Students." (EdD diss., Texas Christian University, 2017), 1.

[163] Tracey A. Glaessgen, Cynthia J. MacGregor, Jeffrey H. D. Cornelius-White, Robert S. Hornberger, and Denise M. Baumann, "First-Generation Students with Undecided Majors: A Qualitative Study of University Reacculturation," *NACADA Journal* 38, no. 1 (July 2018): 22; Ruth V. Walker, Alexandra I. Zelin, Carolyn Behrman, and Rachel Strnad, "Qualitative Analysis of Student Perceptions: Some Advisors Care. Some Don't," *NACADA Journal* 37, no. 2 (January 2017): 44.

[164] Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad, 45.

Colleges and universities have invested time and effort into developing and providing resources for FGCSs.[165] Quality resources the college provides can increase students' satisfaction with resource levels along with academic and social confidence. Chambers' qualitative study concerns FGCSs' level of satisfaction concerning tutoring, campus housing, financial aid, and career planning at a liberal arts institution in the southeast United States.[166] Chambers discovered several major themes from the student interviews, such as satisfaction and dissatisfaction with college services.[167] The participants described dissatisfaction due to the lack of loan information for financial aid and maintenance issues in housing.[168] Student dissatisfaction due to a lack of quality in support services offices generates potential retention issues, which should inspire college administrators to make sure all support offices are properly trained and understand the institution's vision.[169] Student services are critical to colleges' support for students and to the institution's retention levels.[170] As FGCSs work with various student support offices, each must also understand that this student type likely comes from a background with little to no experience with or knowledge of the function of student support offices. Therefore, college personnel within

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[165] Grace Hwang Lynch, "First in the Family: Scholarships, Peer Support, and Resources for First-Generation College Students," *School of Library Journal* 64, no. 13 (Winter 2018): 24.

[166] Sabrina Chambers, "Minority First-Generation Students' Satisfaction with Services at a Liberal Arts University in the Southeast United States" (PhD diss., Northcentral University, 2017), 1.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid., 145; Angelica M. Tello and Marlise R. Lonn, "The Role of High School and College Counselors in Supporting the Psychosocial and Emotional Needs of Latinx First-Generation College Students," *The Professional Counselor* 7, no. 4 (December 2017): 349.

[170] Chambers, 146; Bryant Q. Nall, "The Effects of a Student Support Services Program on First-Generation and Low-Income Student Retention" (EdD diss., Trevecca Nazarene University, 2017), 1.

these offices must proactively identify and work closely with FGCSs to increase students'

confidence and understanding of these offices.

First-Generation College Students' Connections to the Music Education Degree

Research connecting FGCSs to the music education degree is limited. Ives and Castillo-

Montoya have found an abundance of literature on the challenges and barriers FGCS face, but

clarity of knowing these students based on how they learn has not been a major area of focus in

the research.[171] Exploring this topic further would include exploring FGCSs as learners within a

specific degree program.

As a vehicle to produce confident and academically prepared students, social

collaboration among undergraduate music education majors may be a vehicle for FGCSs to

persist and complete their undergraduate degree.[172] Gavin's qualitative study analyzes the

persistence of undergraduate music education majors as influenced by various factors, including

high school grade point average, college grade point average, standardized test scores, and jury

grades.[173] Gavin's study found that it was important to maintain FGCSs' social connections

throughout the degree track, as students experienced decreased confidence during early stages

of the degree program, coupled with high levels of stress due to the expansive and difficult

nature of an undergraduate music education track.[174] This degree program contains many

challenges for FGCSs due to the added element of individual and ensemble performance, in

addition to completing required music, education, and general degree courses. Gavin has

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[171] Jillian Ives and Milagros Castillo-Montoya, "First-generation college students as academic learners: A systematic review," *Review of Educational Research* 20, no. 10 (January 2020): 1.

[172] Gavin, 43; Kristin Harney, "The Value of Collaborative Research Before Independent Research in Undergraduate Music Education," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 26, no. 3 (June 2017): 65; Hébert, 98.

[173] Gavin, 43.

[174] Ibid.

stressed the need for students to pursue a music education degree while also building strong

social networks.[175] Additionally, undergraduate instrumental music students may have many

social and emotional barriers connected to managing time and being overcommitted.[176]

Therefore, FGCSs may feel they do not belong socially, which prompts the need for soft skills

involving leadership, teamwork, and socialization to build stronger social connections.[177]

Study success (i.e., a student's level of academic preparedness) is directly connected to

academic success based on students' understanding of techniques and strategies that support

study and test-taking.[178] Study success within college music departments has not been

thoroughly researched. Mennen and Klink have investigated study success within music

departments that created a platform to predict students' success level based on study habits.[179]

Various factors presented limitations in this study, such as the curriculum design and demand,

admittance standards for new students, and faculty expectations within the music department.[180]

Mennen and Klink found a positive correlation between successful completion of credit hours

for students in the first year compared to following years, supporting the need for study success

among music majors.[181] Mennen and Klink have stressed that music departments must identify

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[175] Gavin, 43.

[176] Scott N. Edgar, "Music and the Social and Emotional Challenges of Undergraduate Instrumental Music Students," *Update: Application of Research in Music Education* 37, no. 3 (June, 2019): 46.

[177] Sarah Andreas, "Effects of the Decline in Social Capital on College Graduates' Soft Skills," *Industry and Higher Education* 32, no. 1 (January 2018): 47; Eleni Oikonomidoy, "College Academic Identities Situated in Interlocking Contextual Blocks," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 39, no. 4 (July 2018): 536.

[178] Victor Villarreal and Anna Martinez, "Assessing Study Skills in College Students: A Review of Three Measures," *Journal of College Student Development* 59, no. 5 (September-October 2018): 629.

[179] Josien Mennen and Marcel van der Klink, "Is the First-Year Predictive for Study Success in Subsequent Years? Findings From an Academy of Music," *Music Education Research* 19, no. 3 (July 2017): 339.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid.

students' lack of preparedness early in the first year to offer this student type additional resources to promote success and retention.[182] Consequently, professors can modify instruction based on an understanding of each student's awareness and prior knowledge.[183]

The interconnected nature of academic preparedness and retention is apparent regardless of the undergraduate degree program; thus, academic integration is necessary for FGCSs to be part of student support programs as they transition from high school to college.[184] Fitzpatrick, Henninger, and Taylor have qualitatively studied the access and retention of marginalized populations involved in undergraduate music education programs and found that FGCSs may experience equal access to college and its related experiences, but they do not have the same pre-college support systems in place as continuing-education students possess.[185] Therefore, FGCSs must have a customized pre-college support system based on their individual needs. Additionally, faculty and staff in college music departments must be active agents in this support system for FGCSs majoring in music education so that music faculty advisors can coordinate their efforts with other support programs across campus. FGCSs must be met with assistance during the application and admissions stage of college to determine the best course of action for offering support during their entire undergraduate experience.[186]

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[182] Mennen and Klink, 339.

[183] Castillo-Montoya, 587.

[184] Katrevich and Aruguete, 40; Anna Manzoni and Jessi Streib, "The Equalizing Power of a College Degree for First-Generation College Students: Disparities Across Institutions, Majors, and Achievement Levels," *Research in Higher Education* 60, no. 5 (August 2019): 577.

[185] Kate R. Fitzpatrick, Jacqueline C. Henninger, and Don M. Taylor, "Access and Retention of Marginalized Populations with Undergraduate Music Education Degree Programs," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 62, no. 2 (July 2014): 105.

[186] Fitzpatrick, Henninger, and Taylor, 106; Lena Rubio, Candi Mireles, Quinlan Jones, Melody Mayse, "Identifying Issues Surrounding First Generation Students," *American Journal of Undergraduate Research* 14, no. 1 (April 2017): 5.

Summary

Ryan and Deci's SDT is the framework for this study, and self-determination is defined as the utilization of traditional empirical methods approached by human motivation and personality supporting the evolution of personal resources produced by people through intrinsic and extrinsic action.[187] The SDT brings attention to a person's independence, experience, and understanding regarding their psychological needs and is foundational for research concerning human purpose and health.[188] The SDT was determined to be in line with FGCSs' experiences, integration, and persistence relating to the undergraduate college experiences as described in the literature.

A mini-theory of Ryan and Deci's SDT further focuses the theoretical framework; the RMT concerns the quality of relationships built between people.[189] The foundation of the RMT is the needs of the SDT, which are competence, relatedness, and autonomy. A deeper understanding of the needs of FGCSs majoring in music education can be formed through the RMT.

FGCS represent a large portion of many colleges and universities, and understanding them is vital to promoting student learning and generating higher value for the higher education

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[187] Ryan and Deci, 68.

[188] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2017), 293; Minmin Tang, Dahua Wang, and Alain Guerrien, "A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis on Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction, Motivation, and Well-Being in Later Life: Contributions of Self-Determination Theory," *PsyCh Journal* 9, no. 1 (February 2020): 5.

[189] Deci and Ryan, 2014, 53.

institution.[190] Learning how to better serve FGCSs is an investment without an easy solution.[191] Knowing how this population handles experiences, encounters challenges and successes, and communicates with others in the college environment is the first step in developing resources and programs to support them along their growth toward degree attainment.

FGCSs' experiences can be customized to each student based on prior knowledge.[192] Adjustment to college can be supported by self-care and self-exploration.[193] College programs can focus on strengthening academic skills and creating outlets for FGCSs' social skill development.[194] Numerous findings within the related literature identify social capital as a reoccurring barrier for FGCS, and colleges must provide proper support to help overcome this deficiency. Developing self-efficacy, creating stronger expectations of outcomes, and reducing barriers can improve FGCSs' experiences.[195] Another way to do so is to develop high-impact practices to increase these students' comfort level with entering college.[196] A frequent, major disadvantage of FGCSs in the college environment is a low socio-economic lifestyle.[197] This barrier creates issues with commitment and time management, as students must maintain employment while working on an undergraduate degree. Colleges and universities must

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[190] Dong Suhua, "The Effects of First-Generation Status on Student Engagement and Outcomes at Liberal Arts Colleges," *Journal of College Student Development* 60, no. 1 (January-February 2019): 17.Janeen Antonelli, Sarah Jolly Jones, Andrea Burridge Backsheider, and Jacqueline Hawkins, "Understanding the Self-Regulated Learning Characteristics of First-Generation College Students," *Journal of College Student Development* 61, no. 1 (January-Februrary 2020): 67.

[191] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin, 488.

[192] Castillo-Montoya, 587.

[193] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin, 488.

[194] Katrevich and Aruguete, 40.

[195] Confrey, 1.

[196] Pyne and Means, 186; Taylor, Yochim, and Raykov, 349.

[197] Bellibas, 691; Martin, 471.

continually invest in customized support systems for FGCSs rather than creating generic programs that are not tailored to fit everyone's needs.[198] Understanding the needs of FGCSs' social class worldviews can help institutions develop programs to build shared experiences between students and faculty.[199]

The challenges of FGCSs provide insight into the barriers these students must overcome as undergraduates.[200] Colleges and universities must continue to design programs that focus on FGCSs' academic and social challenges.[201] Class size is another challenge, with larger class size reducing social capital for students.[202] FGCS not involved in remedial support programs often find overcoming challenges to be much harder than it is for students involved in these programs.[203] One challenge for FGCSs is receiving an academic warning, which places them at a higher risk for failure.[204] Academic warnings can reduce students' commitment to academic achievement and decrease their motivation to persist toward degree completion. Colleges must continually address challenges regarding academic standing to strengthen support for FGCSs.[205]

Social equity for FGCSs is important to support their success, and it contributes to other areas of success, as well.[206] A custom support system by faculty mentors can help FGCSs

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[198] Gemmel, 112; Gholston, 92; Papadakis, 127; Wildhagen, 285.

[199] Martin, 471; Rice, Colbow, Gibbons, Cederberg, Sahker, Liu, and Wurster, 415.

[200] Pei-Wen Ma and Munyi Shea, "First-Generation College Students' Perceived Barriers and Career Outcome Expectations: Exploring Contextual and Cognitive Factors," *Journal of Career Development* 20, no. 10 (February 2019): 1.

[201] Katrevich and Aruguete, 41; Wibrowski, Matthews, and Kitsantas, 317.

[202] Beattie and Thiele, 332.

[203] Polk-Bland, 105; Reed, 64.

[204] Mogilevkaya, 99.

[205] Bledsoe, 550; Mogilevkaya, 99.

develop a sense of preparedness by persisting to earn an undergraduate degree. FGCSs can

achieve greater levels of success at institutions with established performance goals that

demonstrate support.[207] Institutions of higher education can maintain expectations, provided

proper student support is in place to meet each student's unique needs. FGCSs' proper utilization

of mentors and self-efficacy can lead to success in college.[208] FGCSs with greater successes over

the challenges they face can experience a better lifestyle, and meaningful collaboration among

student support programs, campus mentor relationships, support from family, and financial

support can positively influence their success.[209] Additional support to produce confident

decision-making, transitions, social interactions, and coping skills also increases FGCSs' level of

success.[210]

Communication relating to FGCSs' self-determination must form a bridge between

students, faculty, staff, and administrators to assist with the challenging transition to college.[211]

Transition programs must be a focus area to support FGCSs transitioning to college and their

academic advancement.[212] As such programs are developed, they must also be maintained and

evaluated to remain at the forefront of an ever-changing educational environment.

Communication quality can be linked to FGCSs' grade point averages, with continuing-

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[206]Leigh S. McCallen and Helen L. Johnson, "The Role of Institutional Agents in Promoting Higher Education Success Among First-Generation College Students at a Public Urban University," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (September 2019). http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000143.

[207] Jury, Smeding, Court, and Darnon, 25.

[208] McCurdy, 109.

[209] Evans, 97; Williams, 1; Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, and Jones, 154; Tillapaugh and McAuliffe, 83.

[210] Arch and Gilman, 996; Ricks, 146.

[211] Gist-Mackey, Wiley, and Erba, 52.

[212] Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa, 1; Kezar and Kitchen, 223.

education students producing higher-quality conversations.[213] Faculty communication with

FGCSs can be increased if faculty serve as cultural agents, increasing the likelihood of shared

achievement.[214] FGCSs' retention and success rates can be increased by deeper relationships

with college faculty.[215] FGCSs' retention can also be increased by improving their college

environment comfort level.[216] The interactions between advisors and FGCSs regarding

accessibility, communication, and relationships connects to FGCS' feelings of insecurity

regarding these college staff members.[217] College personnel must demonstrate a strong

commitment to FGCSs and build relationships between the two groups. College support offices

must be properly trained to reduce the amount of dissatisfaction FGCSs experience.[218] Well-

organized and educated college support offices can translate into stronger understanding and

confidence among FGCSs, improving the overall communication.

Music education students consider their degree rigorous, as it may feel like a double

major in music and education.[219] Additional challenges for all music education undergraduates,

beyond the class work, projects, tests, and studying, include practice on primary and secondary

instruments, performances for various ensembles and recitals, and concert attendance as a

spectator. Students with difficult backgrounds must find ways to persist to be prepared for the

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[213] Palbusa and Gauvain, 107.

[214] Schademan and Thompson, 194.

[215] Valdez, 1; Vetter, Schreiner, and Jaworski, 9.

[216] Hutchison, 18; Boyd, 1.

[217] Glaessegen, MacGregor, Cornelius-White, Hornberger, and Baumann, 22; Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad, 44.

[218] Chambers, 101; Tello and Lonn, 349.

[219] Gavin, 43.

future.[220] Music faculty and staff must identify FGCSs who lack preparedness to increase their chances of success and retention by providing additional resources.[221] Fitzpatrick et al. have suggested that "students from traditionally marginalized populations may have experiences with the process of preparation for, admission to, and retention within music education degree programs that differ in substantial ways from their peers."[222]

There is a gap in the literature: while much research can be found about FGCSs, few studies have addressed FGCSs who plan to major in music education. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States. Given the lack of extant research, this study is warranted and will provide necessary information concerning FGCSs' experiences related to self-determination.

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[220] Hébert, 108.

[221] Mennen and Klink, 348.

[222] Fitzpatrick, Henninger, and Taylor, 123.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived

experiences of first-generation college students (FGCSs) majoring in music education at a small,

private university in the southeastern United States. This information may be disseminated to

university faculty, staff, and administration, which will provide the potential to help schools of

higher education. This chapter provides an overview of the research methods for this study, and

it gives the rationale for the design, as well as a site description and participant selection. The

methods for data collection and analysis are presented, as are the actions to ensure that the study

is ethical and trustworthy.

Design

Human experiences, behavior, and relationships are the fundamental elements social

science researchers seek to understand, and qualitative research is a means of interpreting

participants in a natural setting.[1] Moustakas has developed a practical guide to transcendental

phenomenology for researchers to build understanding of phenomenological research, as many

people seek to understand human experience.[2] In qualitative studies, phenomenology seeks to

describe participants' lived experiences, looking for commonalities that emerge based on a

phenomenon.[3] A phenomenon is built upon something that is seen to form potential meanings,

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[1] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 75; Clark E. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 26.

[2] Moustakas, 26.

[3] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 183; Moustakas, 26.

which develop the core of the experience through consciousness.[4] Using the transcendental lens allows the phenomena to be viewed as it is seen.[5]

The transcendental phenomenological approach fits the topic of this study and can provide informative research concerning this population. This method of research will describe the phenomenon, self-evidence, and awareness based on the participants' individual experiences, resulting in common themes based on their daily interactions with university faculty, staff, and administration.[6] The data for this study, which includes the personal experiences of the participants in this environment, is organized by bracketing, which helps identify the phenomenon.[7]

Research Questions

Central research question: How do FGCSs describe their lived experiences while majoring in music education?

SQ 1: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe challenges concerning energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

SQ 2: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe successes concerning energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

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[4] Moustakas, 27.

[5] Creswell and Poth, 78; Moustakas, 45.

[6] Stephanie Sheehan, "A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Transcendental Phenomenology Through the Lived Experiences of Biblical Leaders," *Emerging Leadership Journeys* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 10.

[7] Creswell and Poth, 78.

SQ 3: How do FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States describe their communication relating to self-determination with faculty and peers while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

Site

The study is conducted at Dreamy University (DU, pseudonym), a small, private institution of higher education located in the southeastern United States. DU has been selected based on family financial income level (55% of undergraduate students receive Federal Pell Grants) and because it is a small, private university in the southeastern United States with an undergraduate enrollment of 2,375 students.[8] The undergraduate degree program at DU is traditionally completed in four years.

The site has a diverse student population. Demographic information is gathered using information reported by the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) public reports for the institution. A predictable range was built using the NCES from the 2018 public report.[9] Students' ethnic diversity consists of 43% African American and 44% Caucasian students, with the remaining 13% being Hispanic/Latino, Non-Resident Foreign Students, and other. The undergraduate student gender breakdown is 56% female and 44% male. All the students are at least 18 years old. The site may vary by up to 5% concerning each demographic.

The study participants include students from this institution's department of music. The music department has both instrumental and vocal undergraduate music majors and minors. There are two different degree options: Bachelor of Arts in Music and Bachelor of Arts in Music

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[8] National Center for Education Statistics, "2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study," Study. Accessed January 2, 2019. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018466.pdf.

[9] National Center for Education Statistics. "2018 College Reports." College Navigator. Accessed January 2, 2019. https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/.

Education. There is also a jazz concentration and minor in music. The Bachelor of Arts in Music

Education at DU includes a combination of courses in music education, education (department of

education), music history, music theory, aural skills, instrument techniques, and performance.

This degree prepares students for multiple career options, including teaching choral,

instrumental, and general music for grades from kindergarten through high school.

Participants

The participants for this study were selected using both criterion and purposeful sample

techniques. Participants had to meet the necessary criteria while possessing powerful experiences

with the phenomenon. Creswell and Poth have suggested a common phenomenon as the central

point of an individual's experience.[10] The common phenomenon of the participants in this study

is identifying as an FGCS majoring in music education and being at least 18 years old. The study

focused on eight to 12 participants. Creswell has suggested using at least five participants, while

Morse recommends a minimum of six.[11] However, the sample size is related to reaching

saturation within the study to gather data to adequately detail the phenomenon.[12] Participants'

generation status and age were determined by self-reporting through an online survey regarding

their demographics (see Appendix E). Tate et al. have noted that FGCSs' parents lack of a

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[10] Creswell and Poth, 78.

[11] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998), 118; Janice M. Morse, "Designing Funded Qualitative Research," In *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd Ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 222.

[12] Creswell and Creswell, 186.

bachelor's degree is the basis for defining this population.[13] Each participant received a $25 Amazon gift card upon completion of the study as a reward for their participation.[14]

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Procedures

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The procedures section is an organized, disciplined, and systematic outline of the steps necessary to conduct the study.[15] Procedures include securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, eliciting participants for the study, gathering data, and recording procedures. Prior to data collection, approval was sought from DU (see Appendix B and Appendix C) and Liberty University (see Appendix A).

Securing IRB Approval

IRB approval was sought at Liberty University (see Appendix A), as was approval from DU. Steps were taken to secure this approval, including completing the IRB application for Liberty University after successfully completing the proposal defense, sending the completed IRB application to this researcher's assigned dissertation chair, waiting for dissertation chair approval to submit the IRB application using Cayuse IRB, and waiting for requested revisions from the IRB. The procedure was done to secure an IRB approval to protect against human rights violations.[16] Proper steps were taken with DU to secure approval based on the institution's requirements (see Appendix B and Appendix C).

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[13] Kevin A. Tate, William Caperton, Dakota Kaiser, Nathan T. Pruitt, Heather White, and Eric Hall. "An Exploration of First-Generation College Students' Career Development Beliefs and Experiences." *Journal of Career Development* 42, no. 4 (February 2015): 294.

[14] Creswell and Creswell, 94.

[15] Moustakas, 33.

[16] Creswell and Creswell, 91-92.

Eliciting Participants for the Study

As mentioned above, eight to 12 participants are needed to perform this qualitative research.[17] First, approval from DU to conduct the study on their campus had to be gained, followed by contacting the music department chair of the institution to request that information about the study be shared with music education majors. Accordingly, a flyer that described the purpose, participant requirements, and compensation was sent to the chair to share with music education majors (see Appendix D). If at least eight participants were not gathered after two weeks, an additional recruitment email detailing the purpose, participant requirements, and compensation would have been sent to the DU music department chair, who would then share it with music education majors. Compensation in the form of an Amazon gift card was provided to all participants upon completing the study to reward them for their time.[18]

Gathering Data

Data was gathered from FGCSs majoring in music education from DU over the period of 30 days. DU was considered because it is a small, private university in the southeastern United States with a day school undergraduate enrollment of 2,375, and it is within an hour's drive of the researcher. Qualitative data was collected from the participants through interviews, a focus group, and personal journals.[19] Following IRB and site approval, participants were provided consent forms explaining the details of the study, along with background information, procedures, risks, confidentiality, the voluntary nature of the study, how to withdraw from it, and contact information (see Appendix F). Protocols were developed for the interview and focus

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[17] Creswell, 118; Morse, 222.

[18] Creswell and Creswell, 94.

[19] Ibid., 190-198.

group data collection (see Appendix G & H). Each individual interview (45 minutes) was conducted in a neutral setting that the participants selected on the DU campus. The focus group interview (90 minutes) with the participants was conducted in a neutral setting on the DU campus that the group suggested near the end of the 30-day study period. Each participant completed a personal journal during the study, as well (see Appendix I).

Recording Procedures

To facilitate data analysis, several different recording procedures were developed. Audio recording (utilizing a digital recorder) was employed to record the exact responses of each participant during the individual, face-to-face interviews and focus group. The audio files of each interview and the focus group allow an accurate, thorough transcription of each interaction.[20] Each participant kept electronic personal journals to record thoughts outside of classes, individual interviews, and the focus group (see Appendix I).

The Researcher's Role

The researcher's background directly relates to FGCSs majoring in music education. I was an FGCS who received an undergraduate degree in music education, and I have a strong understanding of what is expected and must be done to successfully complete the undergraduate music education experience. I am also aware of the challenges, struggles, and frustrations that are a major part of the journey. Tate et al. have noted that many FGCSs pursuing higher education in the United States come from various backgrounds.[21] While there are differences in FGCSs' situations, common themes emerge and can provide stronger awareness of the self-

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[20] Creswell and Poth, 17.

[21] Tate, Caperton, Kaiser, Pruitt, White, and Hall, 294.

determination level of FGCSs majoring in music education. As the study focuses on this group of

FGCSs, no data was collected from the faculty or staff of the participants' institution.

Given my experience as an FGCS majoring in music education, I must bracket my

knowledge to eliminate bias.[22] In order to do so effectively and to present unbiased data

collection and data analysis, I provide answers to the same interview questions (see Appendix G)

as the participants.[23]

Data Collection

Three different methods are employed to collect data: individual interviews with each

participant, a focus group, and personal journals.[24] Before participating in each of these methods,

each participant had to review and sign a consent form.[25]

Interviews

Each participant completed a 45-minute interview that allowed a thorough description of

each of the questions. A predetermined sequence of questions using the same wording was used

to minimize bias.[26] Creswell and Creswell have noted that qualitative interviews should consist

of open-ended questions to produce participants' thoughts on the topics presented.[27] The

participant consent form highlighted the study's purpose, the interview procedure, and the

possibility of stopping the interview at any time.[28] Each interview was conducted in either a face-

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[22] Creswell and Poth, 81-82.

[23] Ibid., 163-164.

[24] Ibid., 185-187; Moustakas, 33-36.

[25] Creswell and Creswell, 92.

[26] Meredith D. Gall, Joyce P. Gall, and Walter R. Borg, *Educational Research: An Introduction* (8th ed.) (New York: Pearson, 2006), 228-230.

[27] Creswell and Creswell, 188-189.

[28] Ibid.

to-face or virtual setting in a neutral location the participants selected, and the audio was recorded and later transcribed for data analysis using a computer program.[29] The interview setting had to allow the participant to feel relaxed and comfortable to encourage a depth of response to the questions.[30] A brief social conversation took place prior to each interview to discuss the meaning of self-determination, including the idea of relationship motivation and the purpose of the study, to provide each participant a sense of awareness.[31] The following interview questions were developed and were utilized for participant data collection:

1. Where you are from?

2. What is your current progress toward degree completion?

3. Do you live on campus or commute?

4. How do you feel about your transition from high school to college, including emotions and level of preparedness?

5. How does your involvement in student activities beyond course requirements affect you?

6. How do you describe challenges relating to your current academic standing?

7. How do you describe successes regarding your current academic standing?

8. How do you describe challenges based on influences from others?

9. How do you describe successes based on influences from others?

10. How do you handle challenges such as not knowing the answer to material presented in class?

11. How do you handle the success of knowing the answer to material presented in class?

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[29] Creswell and Creswell, 190-198.

[30] Moustakas, 57-58.

[31] Ibid.

12. How do you describe your communication with college faculty, staff, and administrators during time spent as an undergraduate music education major?

13. How do you describe any support systems that have formed based on your interactions with college faculty, staff, and administrators?

14. Why do you keep working toward completion of this degree?

15. What are some other factors from your experience that may help future first-generation college students function in the music education program?

Questions one through four allow me to understand each participant's background.[32] The goal of questions one and two is to allow the participant to build a comfort level with the researcher.[33] Connections to these questions can be made to the findings in Ricks's study, which included student challenges based on deciding to go to college, social involvement, and coping skills to experience success in college.[34] Each of these questions sets the stage for the remainder of the interview.

Questions five through 11 examine FGCSs majoring in music education in terms of academic standing, influences from others, and level of academic preparedness in comparison to the challenges and successes surrounding self-determination. Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa have found that FGCSs who form relationships with peers, even though doing so can be challenging and stressful, can build their social interaction on campus, fostering an environment

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[32] Gall, Gall, and Borg, 244.

[33] Ibid., 245; Moustakas, 62-65.

[34] Jonathan Ryan Ricks, "First-Generation College Student Success in Higher Education" (PhD diss., North Carolina State University, 2016), 122.

to increase their level of academic success.[35] Each question provides a deeper understanding of the participants.

Questions 12 and 13 explore how interaction and support systems may affect the self-determination of FGCSs majoring in music education as they work with college faculty, staff, and administrators. Schademan and Thompson have found that FGCSs must have quality communication with college, faculty, and staff, but also that this population was not prepared for this level of social interaction.[36] Questions 10 and 11 provide an understanding of how the participants' relationships with college faculty, staff, and administration provide motivation.

Question 14 evaluates these students' level of persistence. Gavin has found that musical confidence, stress levels relating to the music education degree, the importance of field experiences, and the critical nature of peer support during tough times affected persistence.[37]

Question 15, which is open ended, allows each participant to further elaborate on important topics relating to the FGCSs' music education major experience. An opportunity for participants to add information to help future students might result in more data that will support prior interview questions or add additional support for themes that emerge in the interview.[38]

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[35] Yeram Cheong, Mary Gauvain, and Julienne A. Palbusa, "Communication with Friends and the Academic Adjustment of First- and Non-First-Generation Students in the First Year of College," *Journal of College Student Retention* 1, no. 1 (March 2019): 1.

[36] Alfred R. Schademan and Maris R. Thompson, "Are College Faculty and First-Generation Low-Income Students Ready for Each Other?" *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 18, no. 2 (May 2015): 194.

[37] Russell B. Gavin, "An Exploration of Factors Affecting Persistence to Degree Completion in an Undergraduate Music Education Program," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 26, no. 1 (October 2016): 43.

[38] Creswell and Creswell, 93-94; Gall, Gall, and Borg, 244.

Focus Group

Field notes on participants' behavior and activities at the research site are essential for qualitative observation and allow this researcher to remember participant interactions.[39] In qualitative research, a focus group allows discussion among a group of individuals to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest among them.[40] Themes may emerge based on the participants' interaction in a focus group setting, the atmosphere of the group, the motivation to be an active participant, and interaction with others (see Appendix H).

A focus group of eight to 12 participants helped select a common area that would allow privacy and uninterrupted discussion at their institution of study to serve as the meeting location. Each of the two meetings consisted of an introduction, group questions, and a conclusion; 10 minutes were allotted for the introduction, 10 minutes for each of the questions, and 10 minutes for the conclusion, for a total of 90 minutes to complete the focus group.[41] The focus group questions (see Appendix H) were utilized to allow participants to share their ideas and perceptions in a setting that was comfortable for data collection.

1. The foundation of the self-determination theory is driven by the way an individual makes decisions concerning their basic needs.[42] What are your thoughts about self-determination?

2. What are some examples of self-determination?

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[39] Creswell and Creswell, 186-187.

[40] Gall, Gall, and Borg, 244; Albine Mosser and Irene Korstjens, "Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 3: Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis," *European Journal of General Practice* 24, no. 1 (December 2018): 9.

[41] Mosser and Korstjens, 9.

[42] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1(January 2000): 68.

3. How would you describe the relationship of self-determination to challenges you have experienced?

4. How would you describe the relationship of self-determination to successes you have experienced?

5. What is your understanding of support programs offered by the university?

6. What student support programs have you utilized as an undergraduate?

7. What recommendations do you have for other first-generation college students majoring in music education relating to communicating with faculty, staff, and administration?

Question one concerns participants' thoughts about self-determination and follows the presentation of the SDT. Intrinsic motivation is formed by students who elect to be engaged in activities, which is a driving force of self-determination.[43]

To further demonstrate participants' understanding of self-determination, question two asks them to provide examples of self-determination. FGCSs must view coursework positively and understand the benefits that accompany each assigned task.[44]

Questions three and four seek to discover how the participants connect self-determination concerning energy (emotional and social strength of participant), direction, persistence, and equifinality to challenges and successes they experience. As the students discuss connections to challenges and successes, possible links to competence, relatedness, and autonomy may emerge based on their contributions and actions.[45]

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[43] Zachary W. Goldman, Alan K. Goodboy, and Keith Weber, "College Students' Psychological Needs and Intrinsic Motivation to Learn: An Examination of Self-Determination," *Communication Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (March 2017): 167-191; Ryan and Deci, 68.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Goldman, Alan K. Goodboy, and Keith Weber, 68.

Questions five and six concern participants' views of the support programs offered and those they utilize. Participants' description of these programs clarifies their motivation as it relates to relationships.

Question seven asks participants to discuss recommendations they have for other FGCSs majoring in music education that relate to communication with faculty, staff, and administration. The goal of question seven is to reveal the quality of relationships the participants have formed to meet their own basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.[46]

Personal Journals

Each participant was asked to keep a personal journal over the course of the 30-day study period and record three to five events in at least a paragraph; each was to involve a major challenge and/or success that affected their self-determination level during undergraduate study as a music education major. Each participant was given a personal journal template with prompts for each entry, along with an established due date as the day of the participants' focus group interview (See Appendix H). Personal journals are considered qualitative documents that directly connect to each participant.[47] The rationale for collecting personal journals is that the participants had an outlet to discuss their experiences as FGCSs majoring in music education that may occur outside of the focus group or interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of important participant statements generated themes but had to follow organized stages to support a qualitative design.[48] The researcher transcribed data to ensure

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[46] Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "Autonomy and Need Satisfaction in Close Relationships: Relationships Motivation Theory." In *Human Motivation and Interpersonal Relationships,* edited by Netta Weinstein, 53-73 (New York: Springer, 2014), 53.

[47] Creswell and Creswell, 189-190.

[48] Creswell and Poth, 17.

accuracy. Credibility was achieved by allowing the participants to verify the data after it was

analyzed. Transcendental phenomenological analysis utilizes four main stages: the epoché,

phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesizing.[49]

Epoché

This researcher's personal history and preconceived ideas were removed after self-

reflection.[50] Many interpretations of the data were met with a renewed perspective when it was

reviewed, thus avoiding bias.[51] Past experiences and bias were documented in the epoché by

bracketing, that is, suspending personal judgment concerning how participants are viewed.[52] This

researcher answered the same interview questions the participants were asked to bracket personal

experiences.[53]

Phenomenological Reduction

Prior to phenomenological reduction, this researcher read the transcripts several times

and created memos in the participants' transcript margins to facilitate reduction.[54] Data reduction

was performed to extract the strongest points the participants made to form textual descriptions

that produced themes related to self-determination and relationship motivation.[55] Portions of data

were analyzed using three forms of codes: expected, surprising, and unusual categories.[56] The

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[49] Moustakas, 120-121.

[50] Moustakas, 22.

[51] Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 151;
Philip Adu, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Coding* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 9.

[52] Creswell and Poth, 49-53.

[53] Ibid., 52; Moustakas, 33-34.

[54] Creswell and Poth, 52-53.

[55] Moustakas, 90-97.

[56] Creswell and Creswell, 193-198.

major statements were based on the study's purpose and research questions.[57] Groupings of similar participant experiences were organized together based on the extracted significant statements; textural descriptions were used to learn what the participants experienced based on phenomenological reduction.[58] A primary statement was selected from each of the groups to develop themes, which were categorized to create structural descriptions and provide insight into the conditions surrounding the experience.[59]

Imaginative Variation

Finding the theme that best fit for discovering possible relationships between themes was done by creating several interpretations of the data involving imaginative variation of the participants' responses.[60] Each theme was examined for possible connections concerning participant experience; next, meanings were created as the themes were brought together.[61] Participant response was supported by the meanings through the creation of structural descriptions to learn how the participants experienced the phenomenon of lived experiences, with the goal of understanding the conditions surrounding experience that will be the strongest representation of the participants.[62]

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[57] Moustakas, 90-97.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Creswell and Poth, 52-53; Moustakas, 90-97.

[60] Moustakas, 97-100.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Creswell and Poth, 52-53.

Meaning Synthesizing

The structural descriptions were organized with the textual descriptions to produce the essence of participants' experiences.[63] The goal was to discover hidden meaning, the context of that meaning, and the way it was applied.[64] The hidden meaning of the experience was then compared with the related data so that participants' thoughts were properly represented.[65] It was necessary to be ready to potentially reevaluate the hidden meaning of the participants' experience.[66]

All data was analyzed using NVivo, a computer software program that facilitates qualitative research. NVivo allowed this researcher to examine data to perceive relationships through analysis and discover statement groups. Data collected through participants' individual interviews, focus groups, and personal journals were used to triangulate the data. Equal value was given to each participant's statements on the topic through horizonalization.[67] Horizonalization is a process to understand data by reducing the number of words and substituting them with similar ones to allow each statement to have equal value.[68] NVivo was then used to create a cluster analysis of the similar words. Coding meanings were formed through common themes that emerged from the participants' statements after horizonalization,

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[63] Moustakas, 58.

[64] Creswell and Creswell, 190-198.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Creswell and Poth, 79; Moustakas, 95-96.

[68] Ibid.

thus producing textural and structural descriptions.[69] Finally, the phenomenon's essence was

formed through a synthesized description of the participants' lived experiences.[70]

Trustworthiness

This researcher's trustworthiness refers to the true value, applicability, consistency, and

neutrality of this qualitative study.[71] This researcher hopes trustworthiness is achieved through

the quality of the study. Several methods were utilized to support credibility, dependability,

confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility is demonstrated through the participants' thoughts, followed by staying true to

the data presented.[72] The triangulation of data from the interviews, focus groups, and personal

journals through the themes also contributes to the credibility of this study.[73] Member-checks

were utilized by providing participants with portions of the final product that include the major

themes; this helped determine the accuracy of the reported information.[74]

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[69] Moustakas, 118.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Laura Krefting, "Rigor in Qualitative Research: The Assessment of Trustworthiness," *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy* 45, no. 3 (March 1991): 214.

[72] Diane G. Cope, "Methods and Meanings: Credibility and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research." *Oncology Nursing Forum* 41, no. 1 (January 2014): 89.

[73] Creswell and Poth, 205.

[74] Creswell and Creswell, 189-190.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability means demonstrating that the results of this study are reliable and can be replicated.[75] As this research demonstrates neutrality, the participants' data is the focal point.[76] Personal bias in the research is defined and produced through a self-reflection, which allows the readers to experience an open and honest narrative.[77] An external auditor with no familiarity with the research or topic provided an objective assessment of the study to determine its accuracy and whether the data is supported by the researcher's findings, interpretations, and conclusions. [78] Dependability and confirmability can also be addressed through rich, thick descriptions of themes and member checks of the findings and interpretations.

Transferability

The intention of this study is to provide a rich, thick description of self-determination among FGCSs majoring in music education. Transferability refers to the context of the findings beyond this study.[79] A thorough description provides detailed findings which provide detail for readers, thus allowing the results to feel realistic.[80] Readers can use the details of this study to make decisions concerning the applicability of its results to their experiences.

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[75] Linda Amankwaa, "Creating Protocols for Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 121.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Creswell and Creswell, 207-208.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Amankwaa, 121.

[80] Creswell and Creswell, 209.

Ethical Considerations

Liberty University had to grant IRB approval, and DU had to grant site permission before the study was conducted.[81] Several other ethical considerations were observed, including site and participant permission and the site not having an interest in the study's outcome.[82] The purpose of the study was shared with participants, participants were not pressured to sign consent forms, and the researcher and participants caused minimal to no disruption for the site.[83] The participants were treated fairly and with respect; the researcher employed no deception or manipulation, and the participants did not feel used, as each was provided a reward for their contributions.[84] The goal of providing the participants a gift card was to increase research participation. No harmful information was collected, and data was secured on a password-protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet, where it was stored for five years after completion of the study.[85] Upon the conclusion of the storage period, all data will be destroyed by shredding and professionally disposing of printed documents and erasing digital documents from storage devices.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the methods for this transcendental phenomenological study about FGCSs' experiences as music education majors at a small, private university in the southeastern United States. A primary research question and three sub-questions relating to FGCSs majoring in music education frame the design. To protect the actual name of

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[81] Creswell and Creswell, 91-92.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 93-94.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 189-190.

the site, DU was identified as a pseudonym. The eight to 12 participants desired for this study

were found using a criterion sample technique. Procedures were identified concerning securing

IRB approval and site permission, eliciting participants for the study, gathering data, and

understanding recording procedures to facilitate data analysis. To eliminate bias toward the

study, the researcher's role was identified. Three different methods were employed to collect

data: interviews, a focus group, and personal journals.[86] Data analysis was conducted by

employing four main stages, which Moustakas has identified as the epoché, phenomenological

reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesizing.[87] Trustworthiness is supported by

building an understanding of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.[88]

Ethical considerations have been noted and were adhered to during the duration of the study.[89]

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[86] Creswell and Creswell, 190-198.

[87] Moustakas, 33-36.

[88] Amankwaa, 121; Cope, 89; Creswell and Creswell, 198-199.

[89] Creswell and Creswell, 89-90.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of first-generation college students (FGCSs) majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States. This information may be shared with university faculty, staff, and administration in order to help schools of higher education with services for these students. Chapter three detailed the procedure and sequence for data collection and analysis, which was to occur over a period of 30 days or less. The findings based on the procedure and sequence of data collection are reported in this chapter.

This chapter provides a description of each participant, who are assigned pseudonyms. Themes emerged and provided answers to this study's research questions. Data analysis produced four themes:

1. Understanding Experiences

2. Understanding Challenges

3. Understanding Successes

4. Development of Communication

Each theme answers the research questions of this transcendental phenomenological study through social meaning and personal significance.[1] These primary research questions are as follows:

Central research question: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe their experiences?

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[1] Clark E. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 60.

SQ 1: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe challenges concerning energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

SQ 2: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe successes concerning energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

SQ 3: How do FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States describe their communication relating to self-determination with faculty, staff, and administration at the students' institution of study while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from Dreamy University (DU), a small, private institution of higher education located in the southeastern United States. DU was selected based on family financial income level (55% of undergraduate students receive Federal Pell Grants), its general profile, and because of its undergraduate enrollment of 2,375 students.[2] The undergraduate degree program at DU is traditionally completed in four years.

Nine participants were recruited to complete all portions of the study, which included an individual interview, group interview, and personal journal. One participant failed to complete the study and was eliminated; however, the remaining eight participants completed all three study requirements. Seven of the eight participants live on campus, while one lives at home. Two participants are female, while the remaining six are male. One participant is a junior, three are sophomores, and five are freshmen. All eight identify as an FGCS majoring in music education.

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[2] National Center for Education Statistics, "2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study," Study. Accessed January 2, 2019. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018466.pdf.

Regardless of grammatical errors, all quotes from the participants remain true to their responses given during the interviews and journals. Pseudonyms are assigned in a realistic and culturally relevant manner, utilizing randomly assigned names to protect the participants' confidentiality.

Sally

Sally is a junior at DU and lives on campus as an out-of-state student. She identifies as an FGCS majoring in music education at DU. Sally felt prepared for her transition to college and being a music education major thanks to her high school teachers. She mentioned not living at home her last six months of high school, which provided a level of independence prior to starting college.

Jack

Jack is a sophomore at DU and lives at home as an in-state student commuting to campus. He identifies as an FGCS majoring in music education at DU. Jack feels college is easier for him than high school due to the flexibility of the college schedule. He said that high school did prepare him for college.

Paul

Paul is a sophomore at DU and lives on campus as an in-state student. He identifies as an FGCS majoring in music education at DU. Paul felt high school helped him be prepared for college emotionally, but not academically.

Mike

Mike is a freshman at DU and lives on campus as an in-state student. He identifies as an FGCS majoring in music education at DU. Mike feels college is more challenging than high school due to the independence of a college setting compared to a structured bell schedule of

high school. He expressed concern at having to quickly shift mindsets from being a high school student to a young adult in the college setting.

Leo

Leo is a freshman at DU and lives on campus as an out-of-state student. He identifies as an FGCS majoring in music education at DU. Leo feels the transition from high school to college was rough because he did not know how to handle the freedom at first; now, he seems to have a better sense of his newly found freedom as a college student.

John

John is a freshman at DU and lives on campus as an out-of-state student. He identifies as an FGCS majoring in music education at DU. John found the transition from high school to college scary, as he is the first in his family to go to college. He mentioned not having anyone in his family to ask about college.

Darla

Darla is a sophomore at DU and lives on campus as an out-of-state student. She identifies as an FGCS majoring in music education at DU. Darla found the transition from high school to college difficult for her because college was an unfamiliar educational setting. She said that the transition from high school to college was stressful.

Jeff

Jeff is a freshman at DU and lives on campus as an out-of-state student. He identifies as an FGCS majoring in music education at DU. Jeff feels the transition from high school to college was hard for him, but he thought his friends and DU staff have helped him develop a level of comfort in the college setting.

Results

Human experiences, behavior, and relationships are the fundamental elements social science researchers seek to understand, and qualitative research is a means of interpreting participants in a natural setting.[3] Moustakas has developed a practical guide to transcendental phenomenology for researchers to build an understanding of phenomenological research, as many people seek to understand human experience.[4] Phenomenology in qualitative study aims to describe participants' lived experiences to identify commonalities that emerge based on the phenomenon.[5] A phenomenon is built upon something that is seen to form potential meanings, which will develop the core of the experience through consciousness.[6] Using the transcendental lens allows the phenomena to be viewed as it is seen.[7]

The transcendental phenomenological approach fits the topic of understanding the experiences faced by FGCSs pursuing a degree in music education and provides informative research concerning this population. This method of research produces the phenomenon, self-evidence, and awareness based on the participants' individual experiences; common themes form based on their daily interactions with university faculty, staff, and administration.[8] Gathering

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[3] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 75; Clark E. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 26.

[4] Moustakas, 26.

[5] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 183; Moustakas, 26.

[6] Moustakas, 27.

[7] Creswell and Poth, 78; Moustakas, 45.

[8] Stephanie Sheehan, "A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Transcendental Phenomenology Through the Lived Experiences of Biblical Leaders," *Emerging Leadership Journeys* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 10.

data from the participants' personal experiences in this environment was assisted by bracketing, which helped to identify the phenomenon.[9]

Data Analysis

As I was aware of the experiences faced by FGCSs majoring in music education, I bracketed those that related to myself to eliminate any bias.[10] In order to effectively bracket my lived experiences as an FGCS who majored in music education, and to present an unbiased data collection and data analysis, I provided answers to the same interview questions (see Appendix G) as the participants.[11] This data allows a deeper connection to form between the researcher and participants regarding being a FGCS majoring in music education. During the process of data analysis, both similarities and differences emerged between this researcher and the participants. Similarities included lacking effective communication skills and truly understanding the difference between challenges, successes, and support as an FGCS majoring in music education. A critical difference between the researcher and participants is the overall drive and desire to earn a degree in music education. I believe understanding these comparisons allows me to maintain an unbiased perspective of the data the participants provided.

Data analysis of important participant statements generated themes and followed organized stages to support a qualitative design.[12] The researcher performed data transcription to ensure transcription accuracy. Credibility was achieved by allowing the participants to verify the

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[9] Creswell and Poth, 78.

[10] Ibid., 81-82.

[11] Ibid., 163-164.

[12] Creswell and Poth, 17.

data after it was analyzed. Transcendental phenomenological analysis utilizes four main stages:

the epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesizing.[13]

Epoché

This researcher's personal history and preconceived ideas were removed by utilizing self-

reflection.[14] Many interpretations of the data were met with a renewed perspective when the data

was reviewed, thus excluding bias.[15] Past experiences and bias are documented in the epoché

(see Appendix J) through bracketing; personal judgment concerning how the participant was

viewed was suspended during the analysis of participant experiences.[16] This researcher answered

the same interview questions as the participants to bracket personal experiences (see Appendix

J).[17]

Phenomenological Reduction

Prior to phenomenological reduction, this researcher read the transcripts several times

and formed memos in the transcript margins to facilitate reduction.[18] Data reduction was

performed to extract the strongest points the participants made to form textual descriptions that

produce themes relating to self-determination and relationship motivation.[19] Portions of data

were analyzed using three forms of code categories: expected, surprising, and unusual.[20] The

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[13] Moustakas, 120-121.

[14] Ibid., 22.

[15] Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 151; Philip Adu, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Coding* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 9.

[16] Creswell and Poth, 49-53.

[17] Ibid., 52; Moustakas, 33-34.

[18] Ibid., 52-53.

[19] Moustakas, 90-97.

[20] Creswell and Creswell, 193-198.

major statements were selected considering the study's purpose and research questions.[21] Similar

participant experiences were grouped together based on the significant statements extracted

through textural descriptions to learn what the participants experienced based on

phenomenological reduction.[22] A primary statement was selected from each of the groups to

develop themes, which were categorized to create structural descriptions and provide insight into

the conditions surrounding the experience.[23]

Utilizing NVivo, the researcher combined similar codes into code categories. If the code

only related to one or two participants, it was not used. Once the phenomenological reduction

was completed, the code categories were aligned with the researcher's sub-questions. The three

sub-questions and the code categories are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Interviews, Focus Group, and Journal Code Reduction

Sub-Question	Code Categories
SQ 1: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe challenges concerning energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?	• Personal • Coursework • Professors
SQ 2: How do FGCSs majoring in music education describe successes concerning energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality relating to self-determination while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?	• Personal • Beyond academics • Attributes success to support from others

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[21] Moustakas, 90-97.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Creswell and Poth, 52-53; Moustakas, 90-97.

SQ 3: How do FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States describe their communication relating to self-determination with faculty, staff, and administration at the students' institution of study while attempting to complete an undergraduate degree?

- Within the music department
- With professors
- Good communication
- Poor communication

Theme Development

It was important to understand the amount of each participant's college experience to make connections to the emerging themes. The study includes eight participants. Four (Jeff, John, Leo, and Mike) are freshmen, three (Darla, Jack, and Paul) are sophomores, and one (Sally) is a junior. After phenomenological reduction, the researcher utilized imaginative variation to discover themes.

During data analysis, discovering the theme that was the best fit for finding possible relationships between themes of the participants' responses was done through the creation of several interpretations of the data involving imaginative variation.[24] Each theme was examined to search for possible connections concerning participant experience, followed by the creation of meanings as the themes were brought together.[25] Participant experience was supported by the meanings of responses through the creation of structural descriptions to learn how the participants experience the phenomenon of lived experiences to understand the conditions surrounding the experience that is the strongest representation of the participants.[26] Four main themes and nine sub-themes were produced through this method: (1) understanding experiences, (2) understanding challenges, (3) understanding successes, and (4) the development of communication. The main themes each include two or three sub-themes, as displayed in Table 2.

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[24] Moustakas, 97-100.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Creswell and Poth, 52-53.

Table 2

Main Themes and Sub-Themes of Lived Experiences of FGCS Music Education Majors

Themes	Sub-Theme
Understanding Experiences	• Time Management • Determination • Support from Others
Understanding Challenges	• Understanding Professors • Completing Assignments
Understanding Successes	• Understanding Professors • Support from Others
Development of Communication	• Asking Questions • Preparedness for College

Understanding Experiences

The experiences of FGCSs begin with their awareness and understanding of the undergraduate setting at institutions of higher education, and educators must realize the level of diversity among FGCSs. Student experiences emerged through individual interviews, the focus group interview, and personal journals. Juniors and sophomores shared more personal experiences compared to freshmen. Through these shared experiences, three sub-themes emerged: time management, determination, and support from others.

Time management. Each sub-theme is easy to understand when thinking about the overall college experience. However, participants expressed concern at having no time in their schedules due to the need to properly complete the weekly assignments, requirements, and duties of a college student. They feel the general education classes in combination with music classes, individual music lessons, and ensemble participation make it difficult to balance their weekly workload. Sally recalled, "I feel like I have no time like ever, I have a lot of classes and ensembles that are required by course requirements" (Interview, November 13, 2020). Jack

added to this feeling by stating, "Really take advantage of your time and not waste it playing video games" (Interview, November 13, 2020). Each participant expressed remarks similar to those of Sally and Jack regarding lack of time or managing time as an undergraduate music education major at DU.

   Determination. This sub-theme, while relevant to each participant, took on different meanings. The participants with more years of experience expressed a deeper understanding of determination compared those with less experience. Sally provided an example of determination:

   School can really kill your self-determination and self-motivation. Honestly, especially

   when you're in classes and it feels like your professors aren't willing to with you or

   you're having a rough time trying to balance school and work. (Interview, November 13,

   2020)

Jack added to Sally's insight concerning determination with a different take on the meaning of determination.

   Ok, I think it takes a lot of self-determination to do what you're supposed to do because

   you have to study and practice instead of doing other things that might be more fun, like.

   I don't know, just playing games or procrastinating or anything like that, you have to be

   determined. (Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

The freshmen participants did not express as much clarity in their understanding of determination. Mike shared an example of determination: "Find a way to talk to them in a kind of way because they're always so busy" (Interview, November 14, 2020). Leo shared a weaker example of determination and mentioned, "Going out and instead, like doing extra stuff, instead of staying in and doing my work" (Interview, November 14, 2020). All participants shared their

understanding of determination in their own way, with sophomores and the junior participants providing details through their responses.

      Support from others. This sub-theme includes participant responses that offer insight to college students understanding the importance of support systems. Similarities in participants' responses demonstrate that their understanding of support from others grew over time. Mike, a freshman participant, described an experience concerning support:

> It took me awhile to ask him for support and everything, asking for help for my recital. It took me a while to ask him, but I feel like they need to help students. I mean of course, they have a schedule, but I think they kind of need to find another way where they can help students kind of. (Interview, November 14, 2020)

Leo, a freshman participant, detailed his experience with support systems.

> I really haven't experienced any support systems or things with the university yet because I kind of just deal with stuff on my own. But, students are helpful, too, because they talk to people about the problems. (Interview, November 14, 2020)

Sally, a junior participant, described her understanding of support:

> So, I feel like our school offers quite a bit on the academic side as far as, like, support and helping students succeed. We also have success coaches who can help coach you through your classes, stuff like that. (Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

Each participant provided thoughts on support with varying levels of detail depending on their year in college.

Understanding Challenges

FGCSs can find it challenging to relate to the college they attend in comparison with continuing education students, forming a social-class achievement gap that leads to lower academic achievement.[27] Through data analysis, the results suggest that participants deepen their understanding of lived experiences as they gain more experience as a college student. A similar relationship holds true regarding participants' understanding of challenges. Two sub-themes emerged regarding this theme: understanding professors and completing assignments.

Understanding professors. This sub-theme produced similar results for each participant; their understanding of general education professors' commitment to students seemed to be comparable. Their responses demonstrate a lack of confidence in the effort professors made.

The participants produced several responses regarding understanding professors who create barriers. Paul mentioned, "Some challenges I face concerning professors includes professors' favoritism in class towards athletes" (Personal Journal, November 16, 2020). Leo added, "Some of my gen. ed. professors never answer emails on time" (Personal Journal, November 16, 2020). The remaining participants used words such as "emotional" and "stressful" when discussing the challenges of understanding professors.

Completing assignments. Responses from all the participants in this study uncovered challenges involving this sub-theme. Paul mentioned, "They don't really give you a lot of time to be actually studying for other classes sometimes" (Interview, November 14, 2020). John stated, "Some professors here will not explain the assignments well enough to where you can complete

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[27] Jenny Veldman, Loes Meeussen, and Colette van Laar, "A Social Identity Perspective on the Social-Class Achievement Gap: Academic and Social Adjustment in the Transition to University," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 22, no. 3 (April 2019): 403.

them" (Personal Journal, November 16, 2020). Adding depth to the idea of completing

assignments, Sally described her experience of completing assignments as a junior in college:

> The teacher can give you homework and say that this is an assignment due tomorrow.
>
> This is for a grade. But, if you don't make yourself do it, it's not going to be done.
>
> (Interview, November 13, 2020)

Understanding Successes

First-generation and low-income students experience higher levels of academic success

based on the interaction with college faculty and staff, especially if the student did not receive

proper support from parents.[28] Each participant provided a basic understanding of success in

their responses. Data analysis revealed that understanding successes has two sub-themes:

understanding professors and support from others. A level of interconnectedness is present in the

themes the participants produced, since both sub-themes already emerged in other themes in this

study.

Understanding professors. Even though this sub-theme produced "participant results"

as a sub-theme of "understanding challenges," it extends beyond the general education

professors' commitment to the students and includes professors within the music department at

DU. Most participants indicated a positive response to professors within the music department.

Jack provided an example of experiencing success with professors:

> My teacher also will be understanding if I do not practice one instrument as much that
>
> week because I had more important stuff on the other instrument. For example, I had an
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> oboe recital coming up, and my saxophone teacher was understanding when I told him I

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[28] Denise Deutschlander, "Enhancing Engagement with Faculty and Staff to Facilitate Student Success: An Evaluation of a Parent Intervention," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, no. 3 (May 2019): 239.

could not practice all of my études because I had to prepare more for my recital.

(Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

During the individual interview, Jack expressed how important it was for him to have this level of support from his music professors. As a sophomore at DU, he feels confident working with his music professors because of positive interactions, such as the one mentioned above. Darla provided an equally supportive response about one of her music professors:

The only challenge I had was having a hard time understanding instructions for a

midterm online, but I emailed my music professor, and she gave me the exact steps to

take it and also gave me an extension to turn it in. (Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Another insightful response came from Mike regarding understanding professors:

So, sometimes I will admit I will not get the assignment, so I will ask the professor and if

I still don't get it, I go back to my notes and ask, "What do I not understand?" So, I try to

figure it out, and if worst comes to worst, I email my teacher. But that is what they are

there for, to help us succeed. (Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

The confidence Jack, Darla, and Mike exhibited regarding their success with understanding professors provides a platform for each of these participants to build upon each year.

Support from others. All the participants shared experiences about the sub-theme of success. The depth of their experiences increased with their grade level. Freshmen participant experiences were limited, while those for sophomore and junior participants were more detailed. John, a freshman participant, viewed support as a vehicle to give and receive help. John stated, "If there's someone I see struggling in class, I'll ask them if they need any help, and if they do, I'll help" (Interview, November 14, 2020). Jack, a sophomore participant, provided a detailed response regarding support from others:

There's like people in the band that will help me with stuff, like especially musical stuff

like that. Rather, just help me be like, hey, whenever you do this, you want to do, like get

softer, get louder, speed up and slow down to make it better. (Interview, November 13,

2020)

Sally, a junior participant, responded with more depth than the other participants:

I'm very grateful for all of the people who have helped me though everything, whether

it's been in music or outside of music. I've had people within my major who will help me

with things outside of my major. And it's very wonderful, is very loving, and I'm so

grateful for it. (Interview, November 13, 2020)

The confidence level of answering questions on successful support from others increased among

sophomores and the junior participant compared to the freshmen participants.

Development of Communication

For FGCSs, communication can be accompanied by anxiety, uncertainty, and stress, with

each contributing to students' self-determination level.[29] FGCSs' interactions and thoughts

concerning several different groups of stakeholders, including friends, parents, faculty, staff, and

administrators in the college setting, can influence students' sense of belonging and support their

level of self-determination. Data analysis produced two sub-themes for the development of

communication: asking questions and preparedness for college.

Asking questions. Many participants emphasized the importance of asking questions or

asking for help in some manner. The depth of the response increased with the level of college

experience. Jeff, a freshman participant, responded by saying, "I ask for help from either the

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[29] Angela Gist-Mackey, Marissa L. Wiley, and Joseph Erba, "You're Doing Great. Keep Doing What You're Doing: Socially Supportive Communication During First-Generation College Students' Socialization," *Communication Education* 67, no. 1 (November 2017): 52.

teacher or from somebody in the class" (Interview, November 14, 2020). Darla, a sophomore

participant, provided a detailed response concerning asking questions:

> I normally ask the professor for help and get their opinion on what to do to help get the
>
> answer or help pass the class, and if the professor can't help, I'll go to another student.
>
> (Interview, November 14, 2020)

Sally, a junior participant, responded in more depth regarding communication:

> So, like the faculty within the music department I feel great communication. If
>
> something's going on with me. If I'm sick, if I'm struggling with something, I can easily
>
> message a few of them. I can bring things to their office to ask for help. (Interview,
>
> November 13, 2020)

Preparedness for college. The data analysis that produced this sub-theme demonstrates

an overall lack of preparedness for college from most of the participants. Seven of the eight

participants demonstrated a lack of preparedness for college through their responses. Paul shared

his thoughts on being prepared for college: "Emotionally, I think they prepared me well in high

school, probably not the education level that I needed in high school to come to college"

(Interview, November 13, 2020). Darla also described her preparedness for college:

> And transitioning from high school to college for me was a little rough start because I
>
> wasn't used to the new environment and the new teachers. And my emotions were very
>
> stressed overall. (Interview, November 14, 2020)

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Research Question Responses

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The narrative answers to each of the research questions provide additional support for the

themes developed in the previous section. A sample of participant responses is provided for each

research question. This section is organized into three areas: individual interview, focus group, and personal journals.

Individual Interview

The first three individual interview questions are omitted from this section, as question one asks where they are from, question two asks their current progress toward degree completion, and question three asks if they live on campus or commute. Each of these questions was previously analyzed in this chapter.

How do you feel about your transition from high school to college, including emotions and level of preparedness?

> And transitioning from high school to college for me was a little rough start because I wasn't used to the new environment and the new teachers. And my emotions were very stressed out. (Darla, Interview, November 14, 2020)

> In the beginning it was hard, but through the help of the staff here and my friends that I've made a transition well during the midterms and got into the flow. (Jeff, Interview, November 14, 2020)

> It was rough at first because of my freedom. I didn't know how to use it, but now that I've kind of gotten used to it, everything's easier now. (Leo, Interview, November 14, 2020)

How does your involvement in student activities beyond course requirements affect you?

> Overall, I think they affect me by helping on time management. (Darla, Interview, November 14, 2020)

I don't really do anything beyond course requirements. Like, I did jazz band last semester

and jazz band was really fun and I really enjoyed it, but we didn't really get to do all of it

because of COVID-19 and stuff, so. (Jack, Interview, November 13, 2020)

How do you describe challenges relating to your current academic standing?

They don't really give you a lot of time to be actually studying for other classes

sometimes. (Paul, Interview, November 13, 2020)

For the most part, I think my own fault. Yeah. A lot of challenges this year have been

brought up because of Covid, but I mean, that's not that hard to just figure out. You've

just got to go with the flow and deal with it. I think most of my challenges were my own

doing. (Sally, Interview, November 13, 2020)

How do you describe successes regarding your current academic standing?

My successes would be that I'm doing a lot better with keeping up with work and turning

it in compared to what I was doing previous last year. (Darla, Interview, November 14,

2020)

Some of the professors really help out, especially in the music department. (Paul,

Interview, November 13, 2020)

How do you describe challenges based on influences from others?

Definitely going out and, like, doing extra stuff, instead of staying in to get my work

done. It's kind of a challenge and I find myself doing that more than staying inside and

getting my work done. (Leo, Interview, November 14, 2020)

Going into classes unprepared, sometimes, especially in music classes where my degree

is, and it's just hard to get better when we're kind of dragging along. (Paul, Interview,

November 13, 2020)

How do you describe successes based on influences from others?

> That honestly goes both ways, we sometimes, my friends and I, go out and don't do schoolwork, we just hang out and chill. Sometimes we go out and we get our school work done first, and then we go and do whatever else we're going to do. (Leo, Interview, November 14, 2020)

> There's like people in the band that will help me with stuff, like especially musical stuff like that. Rather, just help me be like, hey, whenever you do this, you want to do, like get softer, get louder, speed up and slow down to make it better. (Jack, Interview, November 13, 2020)

How do you handle challenges such as not knowing the answer to material presented in class?

> If I don't know something that's in the class, then I'll research it and figure out what I need to know about it. (Paul, Interview, November 13, 2020)

> I normally ask the professor for help and get their opinion on what to do to help get the answer or help pass the class, and if the professor can't help, I'll go to another student. (Darla, Interview, November 14, 2020)

How do you handle the success of knowing the answer to material presented in class?

> If there's someone I see struggling in class, I'll ask them if they need any help, and if they do, I'll help. (John, Interview, November 14, 2020)

> I use those times when I know the material to, like, further understand the material sometimes, like get a better grasp on it than I did before. (Sally, Interview, November 13, 2020)

How do you describe your communication with college faculty, staff, and administrators during time spent as an undergraduate music education major?

Communication with everybody is really top key and important because I was not doing

that previously. (Darla, Interview, November 14, 2020)

Communication. Well, it is kind of hard to talk to them one on one because they're so

busy, but basically I try to schedule appointments if I have questions. But if it's really

important, I try to go to their office. And if they're not in their office, I email them, say

hey, can you meet up at this time? Because I have an important question. It was about

class or something. (Mike, Interview, November 14, 2020)

So, like the faculty within the music department I feel great communication. If

something's going on with me. If I'm sick, if I'm struggling with something, I can easily

message a few of them. I can bring things to their office to ask for help. (Sally, Interview,

November 13, 2020)

How do you describe any support systems that have formed based on your interactions with

college faculty, staff, and administrators?

The support system is really good. It's just kind of hard to like, find a way to talk to them

in a kind of way, because they're always so busy. (Mike, Interview, November 14, 2020)

I'm very grateful for all of the people who have helped me though everything, whether

it's been in music or outside of music. I've had people within my major who will help me

with things outside of my major. And it's very wonderful, is very loving, and I'm so

grateful for it. (Sally, Interview, November 13, 2020)

Why do you keep working toward completion of this degree?

I enjoy music. I want to teach it and help bring it more into light, because music is

dwindling so far. (Jeff, Interview, November 14, 2020)

Because it's something that I think I can do my best at and hopefully I can continue what

I was taught along down through the years. (Paul, Interview, November 13, 2020)

What are some other factors from your experience that may help future first-generation college

students' function in the music education program?

Always speak up to a teacher if you're having trouble because I know I didn't do that in

the past, and now speaking up and asking for help is really what's making me pass all my

classes and finding time to get in the practice room. (Darla, Interview, November 14,

2020)

Don't be afraid to talk to upperclassmen, always make friends with everybody, and

because you never know who you might be with in the future. (John, Interview,

November 14, 2020)

Focus Group

The foundation of the SDT is driven by the way an individual makes decisions concerning their

basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). What are your thoughts about self-determination?

I think it relates closely to self-motivation, right, self-determination, determination,

you're doing things based off what you need, right? So you're motivating yourself to do

things. So to me, it sounds a lot like needing to motivate yourself to do your things.

Honestly, I do not have a lot of that. I need to motivate myself more. (Sally, Focus

Group, November 16, 2020)

I think the key for self-determination is motivation. If you don't have motivation, then

you can't even get started on what you got to do. So, you can't be determined on

anything without motivation. (Paul, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

What are some examples of self-determination?

Waking up in the morning and going to class, making yourself get up and go to class sounds simple, sounds like something you should be doing. But, I mean, we're in college right now. It's up to you to make yourself go. So you've got to motivate yourself to get up and go to class. You have to be determined to go to class and do your work. (Sally, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

Ok, I think it takes a lot of self-determination to do what you're supposed to do because you have to study and practice instead of doing other things that might be more fun, like. I don't know, just playing games or procrastinating or anything like that, you have to be determined to do that. (Jack, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

How would you describe the relationship of self-determination to challenges you have experienced?

Like, I am not very motivated or determined to do much, so it always makes me wind up to do my homework at like 2 a.m. in the morning, which kind of sucks. (Jack, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

A personal experience I had was in high school. I did try, but I didn't try as much as I did in college because, since I want to do music education and these music classes have been hard, but the teachers that I have given me the homework, but of course they can't do it for me. And I want this degree bad. So, I have to motivate myself and determine myself to get the homework done because it's a struggle right now. But, in the end, I want the job I look forward to doing. (Mike, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

How would you describe the relationship of self-determination to successes you have experienced?

There was one time, I think in high school, I thought of dropping out, but my teacher told me that I need to find something that I love doing. And, of course, when I take music. I was like, OK, I can either quit high school and get a job or do music. Basically, I was able to graduate high school and then I asked myself, I'm like, OK, and so of course I was like, yes. So, I determined myself to push myself through high school because it was very, very stressful. (Mike, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

Sixth through eighth grade playing music, I couldn't grasp the concept of how to play a trumpet at all. I never really had a set middle school director. They were always swapping out. So, a lot of the information I needed was always moving away from where I could get it. So, I had to practice and practice really hard. My freshman year, because that's when I started to realize that I was really bad. And I think for my opinion that my practice paid off. And now I think I'm decent, well-rounded player. (Paul, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

What is your understanding of support programs offered by the university?

So, I feel like our school offers quite a bit on the academic side as far as, like, support and helping students succeed. We also have success coaches who can help coach you through your classes, stuff like that. (Sally, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

Another thing I found that helps around the campus is the counseling center. I've been going there since last year to get mental help. And honestly, going to them every now and then has really helped me get all my stuff done because it puts me in the right mental state to get my work done and make sure I'm on the right track to graduate instead of going backwards and not able to come back another year. (Darla, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

I really haven't experienced any support systems or things with the university yet because I kind of just deal with stuff on my own. But students are helpful, too, because they just help out about the problems. (Leo, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

What student support programs have you utilized as an undergraduate?

I'm a junior. I have been going to the counseling center every year since my freshman year here, and they are absolutely wonderful people. They are willing to listen, talk to you. They offer coping mechanisms if that's what you need. They just offer a variety of materials to help you with whatever it is that you're going through at the time. And then I have gotten tutoring from the tutoring center and I have also done the tutoring and I have tutored students. And that's really helpful because it feels like it's a really, like, low-pressure zone. So, it's really nice to go down there and, like, sit with somebody who doesn't make you feel dumb for not understanding a subject. That's really nice to do. (Sally, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

I use the tutoring service and I go to tutoring classes with one of the upperclassmen music majors, and he helps me understand whatever I signed up for work related to music. (Jeff, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

What recommendations do you have for other first-generation college students majoring in music education relating to communicating with faculty, staff, and administration?

Don't be scared to ask a question in class. Like, if you don't understand something, don't sit there and just think to yourself, it's OK. It's going to be OK. I'll figure it out later. Like, music is not easy, especially like theory and aural skills. It's hard, but it's very doable. As long as you ask the questions that you need to ask. Like, don't be ashamed to

ask a question about something if you don't understand. (Sally, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

Ok, so don't be scared of upperclassmen, like, they can help you out a lot because they've already been in the class. That's what I've learned personally. And also it's like if you need a book, you can ask them because they just had the class. You can just buy the book off them. And that's another helpful thing. So, yeah, just talk to your upperclassmen. If you can have like a group to study with when you first get here, find friends. They're helpful. Very helpful. (John, Focus Group, November 16, 2020)

Personal Journals

Describe a challenge or success concerning communication with a professor.

Some challenges I face concerning professors includes professors' favoritism in class towards athletes. (Paul, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Some of my gen. ed. professors never answer emails on time. (Leo, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Some professors here will not explain the assignments well enough to where you can complete them. (Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Describe a challenge or success concerning communication with a college advisor.

My current advisor is wonderful. He checks in on me about my classes and makes sure I am on track. Whenever I had a question, he answers it quickly, whether it be in person, or over an email. My advisor has also helped me create a plan dealing with my classes I need to retake and is helping me schedule them for the summer so I can graduate on time. (Sally, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

College advisors are usually the first people to let you know about your grades, usually quicker than you can the professors. (Paul, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020).

I find communicating with my advisor very successful because without my advisor I would have no idea on what classes to take, because I had a very hard freshman year and ended up getting behind on my classes, so it was just very helpful to have him help me get on track to pass and help earn my degree. (Darla, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Describe a challenge or success concerning communication with a college administrator.

Second semester my sophomore year attending DU, the school had decided to move all of my classes online due to Corona. During this time it was spring break, and I was in Washington state visiting my father. The week after break, I had an eight-week course that was suppose to start. During spring break, the teacher had assigned us a two-page paper, and it was due the day we returned from break. I emailed my teacher and explained I did not have access to my laptop or my school supplies due to me being in Washington, and I asked if we could make some sort of compromise because I wouldn't have time to type a two-page paper when I returned from Washington. My teacher never responded to that email or the three emails that followed it. The other three emails were about my test and book that I could not access with the link she provided. My teacher didn't email me back until a week later, when I asked my advisor to remove me from the class. I failed the class and I blame my teacher. She was unwilling to communicate with me and help me. (Sally, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

College administrators are usually very quick to help and respond to any questions they know of. (Paul, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Communicating with a college administrator is very successful to me because without communicating with them I would not know how much I would need for loans or how much anything would cost for me. (Darla, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Describe a challenge or success concerning understanding an assignment for a college class.

The only challenge I had was having a hard time understanding instructions for a midterm online, but I emailed my music professor and she gave me the exact steps to take it and also gave me an extension to turn it in. (Darla, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

So, sometimes I will admit I will not get the assignment, so I will ask the professor and if I still don't get it, I go back to my notes and ask, "What do I not understand?" So, I try to figure it out, and if worst comes to worst, I email my teacher. But that is what they are there for, to help us succeed. (Mike, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Describe a challenge or success concerning applied music lessons.

My teacher also will be understanding if I do not practice one instrument as much that week because I had more important stud on the other instrument. For example, I had an oboe recital coming up, and my saxophone teacher was understanding when I told him I could not practice all of my études because I had to prepare more for my recital. (Jack, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

The challenges in my applied lesson are that he doesn't wanna accept my personal learning ways. If I try to explain something he will be like, my way is better. (John, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Applied lessons are not lenient and can cause stress and anxiety when there shouldn't be. (Paul, Personal Journal, November 16, 2020)

Summary

FGCSs at a small, private university in the southeast United states described their lived experiences as music education majors. This transcendental phenomenological study consists of eight participants: one junior, three sophomores, and five freshmen. Two participants are female, and six are male.

Three different forms of data collection—individual interviews, a focus group, and personal journals—help triangulate the data. The individual interviews and focus group were digitally recorded for transcription accuracy, while the personal journals were submitted by electronic response. All individual interviews and the focus group used Zoom, a digital meeting application, allowing the participants to be in a comfortable location to share their experiences.

Each of the participants was described based on the first three questions from the individual interview. The results were constructed using the practical guide Moustakas developed on using transcendental phenomenology to allow researchers to understand human resources. Gathering data included the personal experiences of the participants in this environment was organized by bracketing into themes, which helped identify the phenomenon.[30]

As I was aware of the experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education, I bracketed those that related to me to eliminate any bias.[31] This researcher's personal history and preconceived ideas were removed by utilizing self-reflection.[32] Prior to phenomenological reduction, this researcher read the transcripts several times and created memos in the transcript

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[30] Creswell and Poth, 78.

[31] Ibid., 81-82.

[32] Moustakas, 22.

margins to facilitate reduction.[33] Utilizing NVivo, the researcher combined similar codes into code categories based on the primary research question and three sub-questions.

Understanding each participant's level of college experience is important to make connections to the emerging themes. The four themes from the data analysis are understanding experiences, understanding challenges, understanding successes, and the development of communication. Each theme produced several sub-themes. Understanding experiences produced time management, determination, and support from others, while understanding challenges led to understanding professors and completing assignments. Understanding successes included the sub-themes understanding professors and support from others, and the development of communication produced those of asking questions and preparedness for college.

Following the description of each theme and sub-theme, which the related participant responses supported, the responses to the research questions are presented from the individual interviews, focus group, and personal journals. Participants used these three response areas to share their lived experiences and produced a series of responses for analysis, which led to the themes and sub-themes. The most important findings in the results include the fact that participants' responses containing more details as number of years of college experience increase, and four themes emerged to answer this study's research questions.

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[33] Moustakas, 52-53.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of the final chapter is to present a brief summary of the study, purpose, and procedures. The findings are discussed and related to prior research. Further, limitations of the study are stated to help guide the direction of future research. The chapter concludes with implications this study may have for first-generation college students (FGCSs) majoring in music education. A thesis summary is provided for further clarification.

Summary of Study

This study examines FGCSs' self-determination in an undergraduate music education program. The problem is that FGCS have unique needs regarding self-motivation, and relationship needs are either ignored or are considered the same as those of other populations. The faculty, staff, and administration of a university do not understand the sub-population of students majoring in music education. FGCSs represent a large portion of many colleges and universities.[1] The lived experiences based on the self-determination of this student type at a small, private university in the southeastern United States form a description that establishes the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study. The self-determination theory (SDT) and relationships motivation theory (RMT) (SDT mini-theory) provide a framework to build this study on FGCSs majoring in music education, whose experiences demonstrate a personal history that connects the researcher to the study. Research questions were identified. The intent of this study is to understand the experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education as they pertain to self-determination to add depth to scholarly research concerning FGCSs, improve practice, and support current theories related to self-determination.

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[1] Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2020; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019.

Summary of Purpose

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States. Lived experiences are generally defined as the participants' involvement in different settings within their undergraduate environment of study. The theory guiding this study is the RMT, which is a mini-theory of the SDT; it addresses intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being, which support first-generation music education majors' needs.[2]

Summary of Procedure

A primary research question and three sub-questions related to FGCSs majoring in music education frame the design. To protect the actual name of the site, DU was identified as a pseudonym. The eight participants in this study were identified using a criterion sample technique. Procedures were discussed concerning securing IRB approval and site permission, eliciting participants for the study, gathering data, and understanding recording procedures to facilitate data analysis. To eliminate bias, the researcher's role was identified. Three different methods were employed to collect data: interviews, a focus group, and personal journals.[3] Data analysis was conducted through four main stages Moustakas has identified as the epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesizing.[4] Trustworthiness

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[2] Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "Autonomy and Need Satisfaction in Close Relationships: Relationships Motivation Theory," In *Human Motivation and Interpersonal Relationships,* edited by Netta Weinstein (New York: Springer, 2014), 53; Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (January 2000): 68.

[3] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 190-198.

[4] Clark E. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 33-36.

is supported by building an understanding of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.[5] Ethical considerations have been noted and were adhered to throughout the study.[6]

Summary of Findings and Prior Research

This transcendental phenomenological study consists of eight participants: one junior, three sophomores, and five freshmen. Two participants were female, and six were male. Three different forms of data collection, individual interviews, a focus group, and personal journals, helped triangulate the data. The individual interviews and focus group were digitally recorded for transcription accuracy, while the personal journals were submitted electronically. All individual interviews and the focus group used Zoom, a digital meeting application, allowing the participants to be in a comfortable location to share their experiences.

Each participant was described based on the first three questions from the individual interview. The results were constructed using the practical guide developed in Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology for researchers, which allows an understanding of human resources. Gathering data included the personal experiences of the participants in this environment was organized by bracketing their responses, which helped identify the phenomenon.[7]

As I was aware of the experiences faced by FGCSs majoring in music education, I bracketed my own to eliminate any bias.[8] This researcher's personal history and preconceived

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[5] Linda Amankwaa, "Creating Protocols for Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 121; Diane G. Cope, "Methods and Meanings: Credibility and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research." *Oncology Nursing Forum* 41, no. 1 (January 2014): 89; Creswell and Creswell, 198-199.

[6] Creswell and Creswell, 89-90.

[7] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 78.

ideas were removed after self-reflection.[9] Prior to phenomenological reduction, this researcher

read the transcripts several times and created memos in the transcript margins to facilitate

reduction.[10] Utilizing NVivo, the researcher combined similar codes into code categories based

on the primary research question and three sub-questions.

Understanding each participant's level of college experience was important to make

connections to the emerging themes. The four themes the data analysis produced were

understanding experiences, understanding challenges, understanding successes, and the

development of communication. Each theme produced several sub-themes. Understanding

experiences included time management, determination, and support from others. Next,

understanding challenges resulted in two sub-themes, understanding professors and completing

assignments. Understanding successes included understanding professors and support from

others, while the development of communication was further divided into asking questions and

preparedness for college.

Following the description of these themes and sub-themes, which participant responses

supported, the research question responses were presented for the individual interviews, focus

group, and personal journals. Participants used these three response areas to share their lived

experiences; they produced a series of responses for analysis and produced the themes and sub-

themes.

A gap in the literature is present. While much research can be found about FGCSs, few

studies concern FGCSs who are planning to major in music education. The purpose of this

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[8] Creswell and Poth, 81-82.

[9] Clark E. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 22.

[10] Ibid., 52-53.

transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education at a small, private university in the southeastern United States. Given the lack of research focused on FGCSs planning to earn a degree in music education, this study is warranted and provides necessary information concerning FGCSs' experiences related to self-determination.

Limitations

Regardless of efforts to avoid limitations, this study has some. Limitations include restricting the study to one research site, limiting it to a private university, limiting it to a small university, the location of the research site, and participants' secondary education. Each limitation could produce different results.

While limiting the study to one research site provides research data regarding FGCSs majoring in music education for that site, results may vary at other institutions or if multiple institutions were included in the study. Limiting the research to one site was done mainly for convenience and control of the criterion sample of participants.

Expanding the research beyond a private university to consider public universities could add depth and diversity to this study. Participants' academic, financial, and personal backgrounds could vary at public compared to private universities. A public institution may produce variations of participants because of differences in participants' backgrounds.

The size of the undergraduate class is another limitation to consider. DU is a small, private university in the southeastern United States, and its size offers a limited number of music education majors to recruit for this study. A larger institution would mean a larger participant pool, allowing more data for collection and analysis.

Another limitation is the location of the research site. Located in the southeastern United States, DU produced results that could vary greatly from those of a university located in another part of the county. As the participants were located within a geographic area near the research site, differences in secondary educational experiences before beginning the educational journey at DU could result in increased variation.

The quality of participants' secondary educational background is another limitation. Although all participants were in the same geographical region, their secondary educational experiences could vary greatly based on the quality of the secondary level of study. The variance in secondary educational experience could produce different themes within this study because the participants' lived experiences differed during their secondary study years.

A final limitation to note is that few studies on FGCSs majoring in music education existed when this study was conducted. This is thus an early study of this topic, and the findings should be considered preliminary. Additional qualitative research is necessary to validate the results. Replication of this study is needed to fully understand the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study is possibly the only investigation of lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education, a subject that needs to be studied further. Considering the procedures, findings, and limitations of this study, a key recommendation for future study is continued research on the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education. Initially, this study should be replicated to compare the themes, experiences, challenges, successes, and development of communication with those found in another study. Further comparison of this initial study's sub-themes—time management, determination, support from others, understanding professors,

completing assignments, asking questions, and preparedness for college—is needed with those of a replicated study.

Another study could use multiple sites that are similar in size and demographics, but in different geographical locations. Using multiple sites could increase the number of participants, which increases the depth of data collection and produces more culturally diversity, economic backgrounds, and lived experiences for this sub-population of students. In addition, using multiple sites with more participants could allow the researcher to focus on specific grade levels compared to this current study, which did not designate year of study a criterion for participation.

An additional study derived from these limitations could compare FGCSs majoring in music education at private universities with those in public universities. The differences in such a comparison could include the participants' academic, financial, and personal backgrounds. The potential differences between public and private universities could produce different themes.

The size of the institution could be a justification for another study. University size could create opportunities that were not possible in this study due to the small size of DU. Larger institutions could increase the participant pool, allowing the researcher to add more criteria when accepting participants for the study. An increased participant pool could increase the amount of data collected, thus increasing its dependability.

One final recommendation for future study could be based on the participants' secondary educational experience. The researcher could use multiple research sites within university settings, adding a criterion to the participant sampling regarding secondary educational experience. This criterion could be based on the size of the secondary institution or participants' high school grade point average.

Implications for Practice

Based on limitations, caution should be used when interpreting the findings from this study, whose preliminary outcomes have implications for FGCSs majoring in music education and for college faculty, staff, and administrators. Each of these stakeholders can evaluate their understanding of the experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education regarding time management, determination, and support from others.

Ryan and Deci's SDT was employed to frame the study. The SDT is formed through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; these support social development and well-being, which aid humans' three basic needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Self-determination will continue to develop among music education FGCSs as they build relationships with faculty, administration, and colleagues at the university through motivation. A connection can form between students' social environments and their personal motivation implying their level of self-determination increases with each year of experience gained in college. [11] Participants shared examples of self-determination in their responses. A sophomore participant discussed her determination level regarding academic success after learning about the financial fallout from reduced scholarships after not making good grades in her freshman level courses. Another upperclassman participant demonstrated self-determination through learning to seek out help from her professors.

Evaluating the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education can produce awareness of the challenges or success of this sub-population of college students, which creates a greater appreciation of this student type's understanding of professors, assignment completion,

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[11] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (January 2000): 68.

and support from others. Development of communication was one of the first variables that I noticed these FGCSs needed. Several participants mentioned benefits and problems that occurred because of communication. Cheong, Gauvain, and Palbusa formed a qualitative study related to first year students' academic self-efficacy compared to effective communication between students and their friends on campus.[12] These researchers suggested stronger academic self-efficacy was the product of frequent communication between friends on campus and first-year college students, formed through the apparent relationship to the institution.[13] Consequently, working in peer teams should be promoted by the post-secondary institution to reinforce frequent communication. College faculty, staff, and administration need to be aware of what is appropriate and inappropriate communication to properly facilitate relationships with FGCS. While FGCS may be comfortable with the relationship formed with the institution, developing relationships with others on campus may be more challenging and stressful.[14]

Participants mentioned the importance of communication with college professors, with some participants experiencing success, while others expressed challenges, such as professors not responding in a timely manner or being too busy to interact with students. Another ramification is that this sub-population of students needs to develop communication skills. Quality communication between FGCS and faculty strengthens the experience academically, which also increases students' satisfaction and persistence level.[15] Valdez mentioned faculty

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[12] Yeram Cheong, Mary Gauvain, and Julienne A. Palbusa, "Communication with Friends and the Academic Adjustment of First- and Non-First-Generation Students in the First Year of College," *Journal of College Student Retention* 1, no. 1 (March 2019): 1.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid, 15; Lamont D. Simmons, Laura C. Taylor, Kenya Anderson, and Susan L. Neely-Barnes, "Comparative Experiences of First- and Continuing- Generation Social Work Students." *Journal of Social Work Education* 54, no. 3 (July 2018): 480.

being proactive when building relationships with students.[16] These faculty members believed the creation of strong relationships with students would increase student self-efficacy through shared experiences. Many of the participants emphasized the importance of asking questions for help, but they lacked clarity when describing how to do so.

Self-determination becomes an issue if the student is not determined to increase their communication efforts to combat challenges presented by themselves and their professors. Communication for FGCS can be accompanied by anxiety, uncertainty, and stress, with each contributing to students' self-determination level.[17] Several participants mentioned anxiety and stress when communicating with others on their college campus. One participant mentioned stress and anxiety being brought on by a professor's actions. FGCSs' interactions and thoughts concerning several different groups of stakeholders, ranging from friends, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators in the college setting can influence students' sense of belonging, thus supporting their level of self-determination helping the student develop communication skills.

Stakeholders, including the FGCSs majoring in music education, along with college faculty, staff, and administrators, can work to form specialized support groups that focus on this type of student's lived experiences, challenges, successes, and the development of communication. While the college does currently have counseling services, there is not a support group specifically designed for FGCSs or music education majors. Counseling services do

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[15] Denise Deutschlander, "Enhancing Engagement with Faculty and Staff to Facilitate Student Success: An Evaluation of a Parent Intervention," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, no. 3 (May 2019): 239; Vincent, Tinto, "Reflections on Student Persistence," *Student Success* 8, no. 2 (July 2017): 1.

[16] Ricardo Valdez, "Relationships between First Generation College Students and Faculty: A Case Study of a Small Rural Private University" (EdD diss., University of Washington, 2016), 1.

[17] Angela Gist-Mackey, Marissa L. Wiley, and Joseph Erba, "You're Doing Great. Keep Doing What You're Doing: Socially Supportive Communication During First-Generation College Students' Socialization," *Communication Education* 67, no. 1 (November 2017): 52.

provide help for all students but lack the necessary advisement needed for students majoring in music education unless the advisor has a background in music. Scheduling errors and improper advisement regarding music courses can be direct disadvantages of the advisor not having a music background.

Specialized support groups can extend beyond generic programs the college designs to support FGCSs and help specifically with challenges this sub-population faces. The advantages to having a specialized support group for FGCSs majoring in music education include having faculty with a music background that can help these students develop self-determination through communication, time management, and understanding concerning progressing as a music major. Music faculty have the most contact and influence on this sub-population of students. A disadvantage utilizing a specialized support group for FGCSs majoring in music education might be members of the music faculty not understanding the difference between the need for the student to become a music educator opposed to a professional musician. While it is important for music education majors to develop strong performance skills, the need for them to be a performance professional is not necessary. Sometimes the best music educators are not the best performers. This disadvantage could be improved upon through regular meetings and professional development sessions for the specialized support group, bringing clarity for the music department's desired outcome of the music education majors.

Most participants mentioned lived experiences regarding time management. A major disadvantage for FGCSs in the college environment is often a low socio-economic lifestyle.[18]

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[18] Mehmet Sukru Bellibas, "Who are the Most Disadvantaged? Factors with the Achievement of Students with Low Socio-Economic Backgrounds," *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice* 16, no. 2 (April 2016): 691; Georgianna L. Martin, "Always in My Face: An Exploration of Social Class Consciousness, Salience, and Values," *Journal of College Student Development* 56, no. 5 (July 2015): 471.

This barrier creates issues with their commitment and time management when having to balance general education courses with additional music major requirements. A specialized support group for FGCSs majoring in music education can support student challenges with time management by helping them build their daily schedules to properly include coursework, homework, ensemble rehearsals, and instrument practice. The support group can work with this sub-population of students to build daily schedules for the students to navigate their general education classes, music classes, applied lessons, and performance ensembles, thus bridging the gaps of understanding in all stakeholders.

The participants in this study mentioned support from others, but many lacked an understanding of how to best utilize such support. Examples of students obtaining support gained from professors include getting help with assignments or knowing how to ask for help with their assigned repertoire from applied instructors or ensemble conductors. The junior and sophomore participants shared more lived experiences regarding support from others than the freshmen participants. One freshman participant mentioned not needing to rely on support from professors but from friends, instead. A support group could build this student's understanding of the added benefit of seeking support from professors. This finding concerning the freshmen participant suggests the critical need to interact with this sub-population of students early on in their college experience.

Based on participant responses, this researcher learned they depend on their friends for support. The performing ensembles within the music program must be developed to be a support group. Utilizing performing ensembles as support groups provide an outlet for students to rely on their friends who participate in those ensembles. The conductors for these ensembles must be part of the specialized support group's effort for helping FGCSs majoring in music education.

Many students find familiarity and security within college performing ensembles as they experienced performing ensembles in high school. Therefore, the college performing ensemble can serve as a bridge between the professor and FGCSs majoring in music education through the friends of this sub-population of students participating in those ensembles.

Academic preparedness for college is another challenge this sub-population of students faced and in which they must be supported. Many participants said that the first part of their freshman year of college was difficult, as they transitioned from high school to college. The addition of music courses, applied lessons and practice, and ensemble rehearsals added to this challenge. One participant stated that applied lessons caused stress and anxiety. Through a formed set of goals established by the music faculty, the specialized support group could support such students by working with them to reduce stress and anxiety and communicate with their applied instructor on the issue. The support group can share established goals and form personal goals to support both the student and applied instructor, thus increasing the opportunity for shared success for the student and instructor. These support groups are equally important for all stakeholders to understand lived experiences regarding challenges, successes, and communication of this sub-population of students.

Research understanding the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education has not been properly investigated, which is a limitation. The uniqueness of the experiences faced by this sub-population of students should be a met with a call to action among music educators and researchers. They must understand our current challenge is not to weed these students out of our programs through their personal failure, but instead support them through building their self-determination by helping them to understand their lived experiences.

Thesis Summary

It is important to understand that FGCSs have unique needs involving academic and

social interaction with college classmates, professors, and administrators regarding self-

motivation; their relationship needs are either ignored or are considered the same as those of

other populations.[19] The faculty, staff, and administration do not understand this sub-population

of students majoring in music education. Ayalon and Mcdossi have argued that FGCSs have

been overlooked when considering the classification of college students.[20] College faculty and

administrations must understand FGCS to promote student learning; however, they may not

always be aware of the social and academic challenges these students face.[21] Furthermore,

FGCSs majoring in music education may experience differences with preparation, admission,

and retention in this degree program.[22] The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological

study is to describe the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education at a small,

private university in the southeastern United States. Lived experiences are generally defined as

the participants' involvement in different settings within their undergraduate environment of

study. The results indicate the need for FGCSs majoring in music education and other supportive

stakeholders, including college faculty, staff, and administrators, to evaluate this sub-population

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[19] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin, 488; Alina V. Katrevich and Mara S. Aruguete "Recognizing Challenges and Predicting Success in First-Generation University Students," *Journal of STEM Education: Innovations and Research* 18, no. 2 (April 2017): 40; Rice, Colbow, Gibbons, Cederberg, Sahker, Liu, and Wurster, 415; Jenkins-Guarnieri, Vaughan, and Wright, 266.

[20] Hanna Ayalon and Oded Mcdossi, "First-Generation College Students in an Expanded and Diversified Higher Education System: The Case of Israel," In *Socioeconomic Inequality in Israel* (Palgrave Macmillian: New York, 2016), 80.

[21] Alina V. Katrevich and Mara S. Aruguete "Recognizing Challenges and Predicting Success in First-Generation University Students," *Journal of STEM Education: Innovations and Research* 18, no. 2 (April 2017): 40, 40.

[22] Kate R. Fitzpatrick, Jacqueline C. Henninger, and Don M. Taylor, "Access and Retention of Marginalized Populations with Undergraduate Music Education Degree Programs," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 62, no. 2 (July 2014): 105.

of students' lived experiences, understanding their challenges and successes, and assess their development of communication in the college setting. Detailed data analysis has shown that a focus on the participants' understanding of time management, determination, support from others, understanding professors, completing assignments, asking questions, and preparedness for college are important to properly support the lived experiences of this sub-population. Additional research is necessary to replicate these preliminary findings. However, the findings from this study suggest the importance of understanding the lived experiences of FGCSs majoring in music education for all stakeholders to provide specialized support and have a significant impact on their growth and development as future music educators.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 11, 2020

Joseph Earp
Brian Stiffler

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-169 FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN AN UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAM: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Joseph Earp, Brian Stiffler:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 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 the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

Category 2.(iii). 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 at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: Research Site Permission Request and Approval

Re: [EXTERNAL]Re: [External] RE: [EXTERNAL]Research Site Permission Request - Joseph Earp

Earp, Joseph <jearp1@liberty.edu>
Wed 9/16/2020 12:34 PM
To:

- Chip Hill <chill@limestone.edu>

Dr. Hill,

Thanks for the response and approval. Yes. It is purely voluntary on the student's part.

Once I receive IRB approval from Liberty, I have a flyer that I can share with you to share with students.

I really appreciate your support on this project.

Sincerely,
Joe

Joseph Earp

RE: [EXTERNAL]Re: [External] RE: [EXTERNAL]Research Site Permission Request - Joseph Earp

Chip Hill <chill@limestone.edu>
Wed 9/16/2020 12:27 PM
To:

- Earp, Joseph <jearp1@liberty.edu>

Joe,
This all looks doable. I hope enough of our students qualify for your research. And I trust that this is purely voluntary on the students' part.

If I can be of any assistance in spreading the word to the students (an email or mentioning it in seminar…), please let me know.

Good luck!

Harry "Chip" Hill, DMA
Dept. of Music Coordinator
Professor of Music
chill@limestone.edu

864.488.4507 (Office)
864.838.2501 (Mobile)

Re: [External] RE: [EXTERNAL]Research Site Permission Request - Joseph Earp

Earp, Joseph <jearp1@liberty.edu>
Wed 9/16/2020 11:31 AM
To:

- Chip Hill <chill@limestone.edu>

Dr. Hill,

Thank you for your response and interest.

Students would be involved in the following:
1. Complete survey to determine their eligibility to be a study participant (Duration is no more than 10 minutes).
2. Participate in an individual interview approximately 45 minutes in length. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.
3. Participate (if selected) in a focus group that will last no longer than 90 minutes in length. The focus group discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed.
4. Complete a journal logging experiences outside of the individual interview and focus group that may contribute to the study. (5 responses total - one paragraph or less per response)

The individual interviews and the focus group interview would be scheduled based on the student's availability.

Total interview and survey time would not exceed 2 hours and 10 minutes for the students. The personal journal response depends on how long it takes for them to briefly answer each of the five questions.

My anticipated start window would be early October and could be completed as little as a week or as much as a month depending on scheduling individual interviews based on students' availability.
Students would be awarded a $25 Amazon gift card from me for their participation.

Please let me know if you have any other questions.

Sincerely,
Joe

External] RE: [EXTERNAL]Research Site Permission Request - Joseph Earp

Chip Hill <chill@limestone.edu>

Wed 9/16/2020 11:21 AM
To:

- Earp, Joseph <jearp1@liberty.edu>

Good morning Joe,

Your research sounds interesting and certainly could prove beneficial for Limestone and other similar institutions. How much time would you see the students investing in this study and when would you predict their involvement to be completed?

Thanks,

Harry "Chip" Hill, DMA
Dept. of Music Coordinator
Professor of Music
chill@limestone.edu
864.488.4507 (Office)
864.838.2501 (Mobile)

Research Site Permission Request - Joseph Earp

Earp, Joseph <jearp1@liberty.edu>
Wed 9/16/2020 11:02 AM
To:

- chill@limestone.edu <chill@limestone.edu>

Dr. Hill,

I am currently in the research phase of a study I am conducting pertaining to first-generation college students majoring in music education. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of first-generation college students majoring in music education at a small private university in the southeastern United States. Participants will be asked to take part in an interview, a focus group, and complete a personal journal with three to five responses that are only one paragraph in length based on provided prompts relating to lived experiences in the college setting. Participants will receive a gift card to Amazon for their participation.

Limestone University is the ideal site to conduct this study based on student demographics reported in the most recent college report posted publicly by the National Center for Education Statistics.

I am requesting your permission as music department chair at Limestone University to recruit music education majors to participate in my study once IRB approval has been granted by

Liberty University. I hope the results of my study will provide college faculty and administration additional understanding of social and academic challenges faced by this sub-population of students.

I would be glad to answer any questions you have regarding this study. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Joseph Earp

Doctoral Candidate – School of Music
Liberty University – Lynchburg, Virginia
Jearp1@liberty.edu
864-300-3528

APPENDIX C: Research Site IRB APPROVAL

Bonnie Wright
Mon 10/5/2020 10:37 AM

To:

- Joseph Earp

To: Joseph Earp

From: Bonnie Wright, Ph.D.
          IRB Chair
          Professor of Psychology

Re: Approval of Research

Dear Joseph,

Your research protocol, " First-Generation College Students' Lived Experiences in an Undergraduate Music Education Program: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study" has been approved by the Limestone University IRB for 2020-2021.

Please be sure to contact me if you have any questions.

BW

APPENDIX D: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

Lived Experiences Study

- 1. Are you at least 18 years old?

- 2. Have your parents completed a degree program at a four-year college?

- 3. Are you a music education major?

If your answer was yes to question one, no to question two, and yes to question three, you may be eligible to participate in a research study concerning self-determination.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of first-generation college students (FGCS) majoring in music education at a small private university in the southeastern United States. Participants will be asked to take part in an interview (45 minutes), a focus group (90 minutes), and complete a personal journal (15 minutes per response) with three to five responses that are only one paragraph in length based on provided prompts relating to lived experiences in the college setting. You will have the opportunity to read the transcribed data from your interview and focus group contributions to ensure accuracy. Completion time may vary. Participants will receive a $25 gift card to Amazon for their participation. Your name and other identifying information will be collected as part of your participation, but this information will remain confidential.

First-generation college students majoring in music education are eligible to participate.

The study is being conducted at Limestone University
1115 College Drive
Gaffney, SC 29340

To participate, please contact Joseph Earp at (864) 300-3528 or jearp1@liberty.edu for more information and to complete a screening survey.

After expressing interest in the study, you will receive a screening survey by email. If you meet the criteria of the screening survey, you will be emailed a consent form to sign and either send back by email or bring with you to the interview. The researcher will work with you to schedule your interview. The consent form contains additional information about the research.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

APPENDIX E: Participant Screening Survey

Participant Screening Survey

Participant Name (First and Last): _____

Participant Email Address: _____

Participant Phone Number: _____

Are you 18 years of age or older? _____

Have either of your parents attended a four-year post-secondary institution earning a bachelor's

degree? _____

Are you currently a music education major at your institution of study? _____

APPENDIX F: Informed Consent

Consent

Title of the Project: First-Generation College Students' Lived Experiences in an Undergraduate Music Education Program: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Joseph Earp, Doctoral Candidate – School of Music, Liberty University
Faculty Sponsor: Brian Stiffler, School of Music, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding lived experiences of first-generation college students at small private colleges in the southeastern United States. You were selected as a possible participant because you are enrolled at the research site as a music education major and have identified yourself as a first-generation college student of at least 18 years of age. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences of first-generation college students (FGCS) majoring in music education. The study will be conducted at a small private university in the southeastern United States.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete the following:

2. Participate in an individual interview approximately 45 minutes in length. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

3. Participate in a focus group that will last no longer than 90 minutes in length. The focus group discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed.

4. Complete 3-5 journal prompts about your lived experiences at college. Each prompt will take 15 minutes to complete. Please return these journal prompts at the time of the focus group.

5. You will have the opportunity to read the transcribed data from your interview and focus group contributions to ensure accuracy. Completion time may vary.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the potential to inform universities about the impacts of experience based on support from various stakeholders to first-generation college students. This further understanding may result in changing or creating practices to help first-generation college students who experience lack of support by various stakeholders.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation
- Electronic data will be stored on a computer secured by a password and hard copy data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and may be used in future presentations. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, and hard copy records will be shredded and burned.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a computer secured by password for five years and then erased. Only the researcher and a professional transcriptionist will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Once the study has concluded, each participant who completes all aspects of the study will receive a gift card to Amazon in the amount of $25.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher serves as the athletic band director at Limestone University. This study will seek participants at the researcher's institution of employment, but students will not be required to participate in the study based on any involvement with the researcher. Furthermore, the study focuses only on the student's music education and general education experiences, and participants will not be asked any information relating to the researcher's employed position as part of the study.

This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Limestone University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number 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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Joseph Earp. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 864-300-3528 and/or jearp1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Brian Stiffler, at bstiffler@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

_____   _____
Printed Subject Name   Signature & Date

APPENDIX G: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

1. Where you are from?

2. What is your current progress toward degree completion?

3. Do you live on campus or commute?

4. How do you feel about your transition from high school to college, including emotions and level of preparedness?

5. How does your involvement in student activities beyond course requirements affect you?

6. How do you describe challenges relating to your current academic standing?

7. How do you describe successes regarding your current academic standing?

8. How do you describe challenges based on influences from others?

9. How do you describe successes based on influences from others?

10. How do you handle challenges such as not knowing the answer to material presented in class?

11. How do you handle the success of knowing the answer to material presented in class?

12. How do you describe your communication with college faculty, staff, and administrators during time spent as an undergraduate music education major?

13. How do you describe any support systems that have formed based on your interactions with college faculty, staff, and administrators?

14. Why do you keep working toward completion of this degree?

15. What are some other factors from your experience that may help future first-generation college students function in the music education program?

APPENDIX H: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. The foundation of the self-determination theory is driven by the way an individual makes decisions concerning their basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). What are your thoughts about self-determination?

2. What are some examples of self-determination?

3. How would you describe the relationship of self-determination to challenges you have experienced?

4. How would you describe the relationship of self-determination to successes you have experienced?

5. What is your understanding of support programs offered by the university?

6. What student support programs have you utilized as an undergraduate?

7. What recommendations do you have for other first-generation college students majoring in music education relating to communicating with faculty, staff, and administration?

APPENDIX I: Personal Journal Instructions for Participants

Personal Journal for Participants

Name (First and Last): _____

Please complete three to five journal entries using the prompts below involving major challenges and/or success during undergraduate study as a music education major. Each response should only be one paragraph long. The entries must be turned in when you attend the focus group meeting.

Prompt 1: Describe a challenge or success concerning communication with a professor.	
Prompt 2: Describe a challenge or success concerning communication with a college advisor.	
Prompt 3: Describe a challenge or success concerning communication with a college administrator.	
Prompt 4: Describe a challenge or success concerning understanding an assignment for a college class.	
Prompt 5: Describe a challenge or success concerning applied music lessons.	

APPENDIX J: Epoché

Researcher's Answers to Interview Questions

1. Where you are from?

   I am from Lenoir, North Carolina

2. What is your current progress toward degree completion?

   My undergraduate degree in music education has been earned.

3. Do you live on campus or commute?

   During my undergraduate years I lived in an apartment and commuted to campus.

4. How do you feel about your transition from high school to college, including emotions

   and level of preparedness?

   I struggled at first. I had no idea what I was getting myself into when going to college being the first in my family to go to college. I was honestly scared and nervous but determined most of my spent as undergraduate. Deep down I knew I wanted to be a high school band director, and nothing was going to get in my way.

5. How does your involvement in student activities beyond course requirements affect you?

   I did find comfort in participating in student activities beyond course requirements. One of the most comforting activities was participation in a newly formed drumline for school basketball games. This activity allowed me to make closer connections to people that would become my friends.

6. How do you describe challenges relating to your current academic standing?

   Thinking back about my academic experiences as an undergraduate, most of my grades were good. One of my biggest challenges was not knowing how to effectively communicate with my professors. Even simple things as how to properly format a formal email were beyond my understanding. It was not until my junior year in college, a music professor informed me of the low quality of writing in the email I had sent him. This moment in time opened my eyes to my weaknesses in properly communicating with people in a professional manner.

7. How do you describe successes regarding your current academic standing?

   My grades were good as an undergraduate. My regret was not taking the time to fully develop and build understanding of certain areas within course content. This was

especially true for the general education portion of my undergraduate degree. I think I understood the need to pass classes and requirements but failed to understand the need to successfully master content for some of those classes.

8. How do you describe challenges based on influences from others?

   I did not really have issues with being influenced by others. My tunnel vision to complete the undergraduate degree to later become a high school band director fueled my desire and self-determination not allowing any obstacles to get in my way.

9. How do you describe successes based on influences from others?

   I am grateful for the influences and wisdom shared with me by my professors. At the time, I did not truly understand how people such as professors influenced my success. This is something I discovered several years following the completion of my degree program. At the time I did not truly understand the depth of challenges or successes.

10. How do you handle challenges such as not knowing the answer to material presented in

    class?

    Not knowing the answers to material presented in class fueled my overall insecurity as a first-generation college student. Adding to this insecurity was the thought of not knowing who I could speak with to help me with these issues. Later in my undergraduate journey, I learned to start increasing my communication with instructors. Communication regarding academic assistance was a struggle for me during my first couple of years as a college student.

11. How do you handle the success of knowing the answer to material presented in class?

    At the time, I felt good when I knew the answer, but still had a level of insecurity many times not knowing the many different paths to discovering the correct answer.

12. How do you describe your communication with college faculty, staff, and administrators

    during time spent as an undergraduate music education major?

    As mentioned earlier, communication was difficult for me, especially during my first couple years as a college student. I did not know how to send a formal email with correct formatting, I did not truly understand the importance or need for scheduling individual meetings with my professors about course material, and I did not know how to ask some questions to receive the best help from those around me.

13. How do you describe any support systems that have formed based on your interactions

    with college faculty, staff, and administrators?

During my undergraduate years, I did not fully understand the meaning of a support system. I would hear people talk about support systems but did not know how to develop or use one. Later in my undergraduate degree I did begin to ask more questions and formed a simple support system. If I would have understood the need for this type of system earlier in my college experience, I think I would have been a much stronger student.

14. Why do you keep working toward completion of this degree?

During my entire time spent as an undergraduate, I knew I was going to be a high school band director, and nothing was going to get in my way. I viewed my undergraduate experience as a checklist to get to the career path I desired at the time. I knew I needed a degree in music education along with a teaching certificate to achieve this professional goal.

15. What are some other factors from your experience that may help future first-generation college students function in the music education program?

Overall, my lack of truly understanding what challenges and successes were along with not knowing how to effectively communicate with my instructors made my undergraduate progression difficult. If I could go back, I would work to develop a better support system to help me navigate these basic issues that hindered my overall undergraduate experience.

<div align="center">Researcher's Answer to Focus Group Questions</div>

1. The foundation of the self-determination theory is driven by the way an individual makes decisions concerning their basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). What are your thoughts about self-determination?

At the time, I did not truly know what self-determination was as an undergraduate. Looking back, I did exhibit self-determination throughout my undergraduate degree. I was not going to give up.

2. What are some examples of self-determination?

I would have struggled to answer this question as an undergraduate. At the time, I would have probably answered that me never giving up on my dream to be a high school band director was an example of self-determination.

3. How would you describe the relationship of self-determination to challenges you have experienced?

At the time, not really understanding self-determination or challenges as a first-generation college student, my answer would have been narrow minded focusing on grades over content mastery.

4. How would you describe the relationship of self-determination to successes you have

   experienced?

   At the time I would have compared the successful completion of the degree program to self-determination. Earlier in my undergraduate degree I would have compared the successful completion of classes to self-determination. My focus at the time would have been checking boxes toward degree competition.

5. What is your understanding of support programs offered by the university?

   At the time, my understanding of support programs would have been limited. I know support programs existed but did not realize those programs were for me and that I should have been taking advantage of those programs.

6. What student support programs have you utilized as an undergraduate?

   None.

7. What recommendations do you have for other first-generation college students majoring

   in music education relating to communicating with faculty, staff, and administration?

   I would say ask questions and learn how to properly communicate with faculty, staff, and administration. So many issues can be resolved or never occur with proper communication.