

Faculty and Staff's Perceptions of First Generation College Students

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A majority of the research focusing on the academic success and persistence of first generation students concentrates on students, and not the faculty, staff, and administrators who support, encourage, and guide them. Through qualitative research, this study sought to determine: how do faculty and staff support first generation students to motivate them to academic success and persistence/completion; what do faculty and staff identify as their most influential attitudes, behaviors, and/or contributions to helping first generation students succeed and persist; and what type of lens do faculty and staff use when motivating first generation students? The study involved the comprehensive examination of interview data from 10 faculty and staff participants at a small college, Brick University (pseudonym). Through an in-depth analysis, the study found that faculty and staff influenced academic success through validation and self-disclosure of experiences, as well as connection, communication, and support of this population to encourage academic success and persistence. Additionally, the research found that faculty and staff used generation neutral, asset-based, and combination asset-based and deficit lenses in their efforts to support first generation students. Furthermore, first generation faculty and staff described behaviors and actions to encourage greater academic success and persistence for first generation students than continuing generation students due to their ability to identify with the population.

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Dedication

The world is full of strong, inspiring women whose dedication and passion impact those around them. I was raised by four of these women – four women who empowered, influenced, and encouraged me become a better version of myself: my mother, Nancy Garcia; my aunt, Harriett White; my maternal grandmother, Ellen Grim; and my paternal grandmother, Gertie White. This dissertation is dedicated to the single mother who raised me, the aunt who loves me as her own, and the two grandmothers who taught me about generosity, strength, and the importance of education (and who I lost during my dissertation phase) as I would not be here without their sacrifice and love.

Preface

First, I would like to thank Dr. Linda DeAngelo, my dissertation advisor. Your constant encouragement was vital in making this research and dissertation a reality. Your endless advice, feedback, and review of my chapters and research resulted in improved versions of my work. You have taught me how to be a practitioner scholar. Without your encouragement and guidance, I would not have finished my dissertation. Thank you for making my dream of becoming a doctor come true. And to Dr. Lori Delale-O'Connor and Dr. Kevin Snider, thank you for your tremendous support and encouragement. You have my sincere appreciation and gratitude for your participation on my dissertation committee and contributions (lots of reading and recommendations!) throughout this process.

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Saving the best and most important for last, I need to thank my wonderful husband, Tony, and my amazing son, Grant. Tony, you have always encouraged me to continue with my education and you make me feel like I can accomplish anything. Thank you for being my support and pushing me to be a better student. I will forever be the lucky one in our relationship (and since it's in print, I win that argument!). And to Grant, you were born during my doctoral journey and your father's pursuit of his master's degree, so you will not remember the late nights and early mornings as we completed assignments and held you while you slept or our sleep-deprived and confused looks as we tried to adjust to life with a newborn – but know that everything we did was for you. You are

the best thing that has ever happened to your father and I, and I thank you for the kisses, cuddles, giggles, and dance parties that encouraged me to continue on my path.

1.0 Introduction

Throughout the United States, institutions of higher education have focused on increasing the enrollment of students. Since 2000, undergraduate enrollment in post-secondary institutions has increased 30 percent, and it is projected to increase an additional 14 percent by 2026, for a total of 19.3 million students (Undergraduate Enrollment, 2017). The financial and social benefits of a rise in educational attainment are “externalities, that is, benefits that spill over to others, including future generations” (McMahon, 2009, p. 181). From an equity viewpoint, “education provides a mechanism for individuals to improve their standard of living, possibly reduce inequalities between selected groups of individuals and mitigate the effects of family background” (Toutkoushian, Stollberg, & Slaton, 2015, p. 3). As the enrollment of students continues to increase, it is vital to ensure that once enrolled in an institution, students complete their degree. An effective beginning to addressing retention is to look at students’ academic success and persistence in higher education.

Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) define academic or student success as “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance” (p. 5). Similarly, York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) determined academic success encompasses nine definitional categories: academic achievement; academic self-concept; acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies; attainment of learning objectives; career success; engagement; perception of learning environment; persistence and retention; and satisfaction. For this research, academic success will focus on the category of academic achievement, specifically cumulative grade point average (GPA), and academic

eligibility within an institution. In addition, within the field of higher education, the concepts of persistence and retention are used interchangeably. Although the terminology differs, the research dictates persistence and retention do not have agreed upon definitions. Retention has been classified as an institutional measure of success or completion, while persistence is a student measure of success (Hagedorn, 2005). Per the National Student Clearinghouse (2014), persistence relates to students who return to any college or university for an additional year, while retention correlates with the number of students who reenroll in their institution. The Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) (2017) describes retention rate as the:

... measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. For all other institutions this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall.

IPEDS does not provide a definition for persistence, but Ruffalo Noel-Levitz (2015) classifies persistence as the enrollment of a cohort compared to the enrollment of the previous year, typically measured on the first day after the add/drop deadline. In conjunction with Hagedorn's (2015) description of persistence and retention, this paper will use the term persistence to convey the term to term enrollment for students in higher education.

Academic success and persistence lead to degree completion. An average of 59 percent of college students complete their undergraduate degree within a six year period (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2017). When focusing on first generation students, the statistics shift. DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, and Tran (2011) found that 64 percent of continuing generation

students graduated in six years compared to 50 percent of first generation students. First generation students account for one-third of enrolled college students, but only 27 percent will earn their undergraduate degree within four years of entering college (Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, 2018). The national data highlights that issues of attrition are not affecting one college or university or even one population of students; it is a systemic issue impacting the field of higher education. Institutional change is needed to transform the college-going and college-completing experiences of first generation students. Because of this, it is important to focus on the faculty, staff, and administrators who lead institutional change and their awareness and support of the first generation student experience.

1.1 Problem Area

While issues affecting academic success and persistence can impact differing populations, first generation students are beset by challenges influencing their educational attainment. Four levels of parental educational attainment define first generation college students:

“(1) parent(s) have at most a high school degree; (2) parent(s) have at most started (but not completed) an associate’s degree; (3) parent(s) have at most completed an associate’s degree; and (4) parent(s) have at most started (but not completed) a bachelor’s degree” (Toutkoushian, Stollberg, & Slaton, 2015, p. 12).

Thirty-four percent of undergraduate students were first in their families to enroll in college in 2011, and an additional 28 percent had parents with some college experience, but not a bachelor’s degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). First generation students are 14 percent less likely to graduate from college in six years than continuing generation students

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Minoritized students are more likely than their White counterparts to be first generation and/or low-income. Forty-two percent of Black students and 48 percent of Latinx students are first generation compared 28 percent of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). These statistics highlight the need for focused care regarding the academic success and retention of this population.

First generation students deserve significant attention on college campuses. Students who are first in their family to attend college differ from continuing generation students. The path towards completion for first generation students is detailed in academic success and persistence literature, but information beyond anecdotal solutions are lacking. The research focusing on the academic success and persistence of first generation students emphasizes three trends: the barriers to success, the prevalence of minoritized students within these populations, and the importance of institutional support and responsibility.

1.1.1 Barriers to Success

An at-risk student is an individual student or group of students “who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014, “At-risk”). According to Horton (2015), status as a first generation student represents a critical risk factor which impacts success in higher education. First generation students have a higher likelihood of confronting academic, cultural, emotional, and financial difficulties due to their parents’ inability to assist with college (Housel, 2012), and face more obstacles to completing their education than continuing generation students (Costello, Ballin, Diamond, & Gao, 2018).

Voung, Beown-Welty, and Tracz (2010) researched the effect of self-efficacy, or an

individual's perceived ability in performing required tasks to achieve specific goals (Bandura, 1997), on first generation college sophomores. Voung et al. (2010) found that self-efficacy is positively correlated with GPA and persistence; the "perception college sophomore students have about their capabilities influences their academic performance and persistence" (p. 60), and empowers them to maintain a positive GPA and graduate. While self-efficacy beliefs impact GPA and persistence, first generation students had lower previous term GPAs and overall GPAs than continuing generation sophomore students (Voung et al., 2010), highlighting an additional barrier for success. Strayhorn (2006) found that "precollege factors have a significant and positive effect on cumulative GPA" (p. 98). Admission test scores, such as ACT and SAT scores, and major were related to college GPA, highlighting the importance of "academic preparation for college" (p. 98). Completing remedial math and English courses relates to lesser academic success (Crisp, 2010; Strayhorn, 2006). Considering first generation students are less likely to be academically prepared for college, and are more likely to attend lower performing high schools and take less rigorous courses (Harrell & Forney, 2003; Martinez, et al., 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004), they are more likely to be enrolled in remedial classes (Strayhorn, 2006; Terenzini, et al., 1996).

First generation students are "among the least likely to be retained through degree completion" (Thayer, 2000, p. 1) and are disproportionately low-income (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) compared the factors of fall to fall (specifically first-to-second year) persistence for first generation and continuing generation students. Low income, first generation students are more likely to not persist than first generation students with higher incomes, stressing that "lower income first generation students are not only disadvantaged by their parents' lack of experience with and information about college, but also by other social and economic characteristics that constrain their educational opportunities" (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005,

p. 418). Additionally, Engle and Tinto (2008) noted low income, first generation students are four times more likely to not complete college than high income, continuing generation students. Somers, Woodhouse, and Cofer (2004) investigated the persistence of first generation students compared to continuing generation students. First generation students were less likely to persist if they were enrolled part-time, lived off campus, or were early in their undergraduate career; had accumulated debt due to their education; and were not interested in completing a bachelor's degree (Somers et al., 2004). Linking with previous literature, the researchers found that low-income students are less likely to persist in higher education.

More than 25 percent of first generation college students do not enroll in their sophomore year, and “89 percent fail to graduate within six years” (Paul, 2012). The transition to college is especially challenging due to the new landscape and lack of knowledge regarding college culture. First generation students are required to learn the information taught in their classes as well as their role in academia. Additionally, the vocabulary of higher education – office hours, registrar, and bursar – could be foreign to this population. The academic success and persistence of first generation students is important because nearly 35 percent entering freshmen are classified as a first generation college student (Paul, 2012).

1.1.2 Race and Ethnicity

First generation students are disproportionately minoritized and low-income (Choy, 2001). Black and Latinx students are beset by challenges that impact their educational attainment at higher education institutions in the United States, and low-income and minoritized first generation students are less likely to persist than their peers (Somers et al., 2004). Most research focusing on the academic, social, and psychological outcomes for minoritized students, particularly Black

students, compare students' experiences at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Allen, 1992; Cokley, 2000; Davis, 1994; Greer, 2008). Focusing solely on predominately White institutions, campuses whose "prevailing norms, values, and practices cater mostly to white students" (Chang, 2002, pg. 3), studies show academic achievement and persistence for minoritized students is a challenge. In the search for interventions and strategies focused on positively affecting Black and Latinx students' academic performance in PWIs, it is important to understand the problems minoritized students face in higher education, as well as examine the issues impacting students' achievement at PWIs.

Academic achievement and persistence for minoritized students is influenced by personal factors connected to individual students, as well as the characteristics of the college or university (Allen, 1992). Motivation and academic self-concept (thoughts pertaining to academic ability compared to others) influence Black and Latinx's academic performance in higher education (Cokley, 2000; Fleming, 2012; Griffin, 2006). High achieving minoritized students report happiness with their college choice and campus diversity, academic success in high school, and high expectations and aspirations for their undergraduate career (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1994; Griffin, 2006). Furthermore, academic, cultural, and social integration plays an important role in academic performance and achievement in higher education; minoritized students connected with academic and social life in colleges and university systems demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement (Davis, 1994). Cerezo and Chang (2013) found cultural congruity, "perceptions that students' personal and cultural values fit with the prevailing values of the university" (p. 74), and connections to ethnic minority peers among Latino students was a positive predictor of college GPA. Additionally, the authors' results suggest that cultural congruity and in-group connections is a stronger predictor of college GPA than "high school GPA and social adjustment to college"

(Cerezo and Chang, 2013, p. 79), emphasizing the importance of cultural influences in understanding the higher education performance of Latino students. Regarding Black students, significant increases in academic achievement and motivation at the time of graduation were reported for students with connections to ethnic minority peers (Levin, Van Laar, and Foote, 2006). Keels (2013) researched the racial/ethnic gaps in college grades and graduation rates of first year students at predominately White institutions and determined White and Asian students tout advantages related to academic success and persistence, including non-first generation status, high school GPA, and number of AP courses completed (Keels, 2013). Black students reported the lowest college grades (3.0), Latinx students had a minimally higher GPA (3.1), and White and Asian students reported the highest college grades (3.3) (Keels, 2013). Degree attainment percentages highlight the achievement gaps influencing minoritized students; "92 percent of White students, 90 percent of Asian students, 86 percent of Latino students, and 80 percent of Black students obtained their degree in 6 years" (Keels, 2013, p. 313). Proactive management to college responsibilities, motivation and effort, and effective study habits influence the academic performance of minoritized students (Fleming, 2012), but a student's academic achievement is dependent on more than individual characteristics.

Institutional recognition and support, such as programing focused on access, retention, and achievement, contributes to Black and Latinx students' academic performance (Baker, 2013; Brooks, Jones, and Burt, 2013; Fleming, 2012; Pan, Guo, Alikonis, and Bai, 2008). Brooks et al. (2013) found that Black male participants enrolled in a retention program developed stronger relationships with peer mentors, increased university academic acculturation and GPA, and "improved social integration until the university community" (p. 217). Furthermore, the authors found that the institution-organized opportunity to "establish and maintain a sense of community"

(p. 218) unified the participants, highlighting the importance of connections to ethnic minority peers in higher education. Similarly, support from faculty is important for the success of Black and Latinx students (Allen, 1992; Cokley, 2000; Fleming, 2012). Conversely, Baker (2013) discovered the type of “in-campus personal support that is most important for the academic success of African American and Latino college students is that which they receive from faculty, particularly African American and Latino faculty” (p.646). Lastly, Allen (1992) found campus racial composition is an important aspect of academic performance. “The closer the match of the racial composition of the students’ home community of that of their college environment, the more positive their academic achievement” (Davis, 1994, p. 628), emphasizing the importance of diversity and community in higher education. Essentially, the academic achievement of Black and Latinx students is influenced similarly by the student’s individual characteristics and their educational environment.

1.1.3 Institutional Impact and Responsibility

Per Fleming (2012), the institutional policies, programs, and practices associated with student success are: the attitudes and beliefs of faculty and staff, a positive racial climate, the ability to receive financial aid and scholarships, engaging with faculty and their research, access to enrichment opportunities, and institutional support for the underprepared. Colleges and universities actively focus on the enrollment, academic success, and retention of students, however, the accomplishment of a higher education degree is “replete with various financial, social, emotional, and psychological challenges” (Greer, 2008, p. 60). As the academic success and persistence of first generation students continues to be a struggle (First Generation Foundation, 2013), universities must implement strategies to increase their student success. The size, or number

of students, of a college campus impacts the academic success and persistence of first generation students. Smaller institutions offer additional opportunities to interact with faculty, which is linked to increased academic success and persistence (Allen, 1992; Cokley, 2000; Fleming, 2012, Voung et al., 2010). But, smaller campuses can provide limited academic support services, academic course offerings, and opportunities for social interaction (Voung et al., 2010), and limited academic and social opportunities are associated with decreased persistence and graduation rates (University of California, Office of the President, 1994).

Not all first generation students will be prepared for the academic, individual, and social requirements of college; structured programing is important in the promotion of “positive academic experiences” (Thayer, 2000, p. 5). Pre-college and continual orientation, advising, and support services are connected to encouraging results with first generation and low-income students (Kramer and Associates, 2003; Muraskin and Wilner, 2004; and Tinto, 2004). According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2005), 87 percent of first-year students who participated in a college orientation program participated in more educational opportunities, felt more supported on campus, and were more satisfied with their overall college experience. Furthermore, advising is most effective when integrated into academic support services and in consideration of the needs of diverse populations of students (Kramer and Associates, 2003). Advising is positively associated with persistence and retention for first generation students when the advising is tailored to that population (Tinto, 2004). Structured programing and advising designed to assist first generation students enables an institution to contribute to their students’ achievement, and it is the responsibility of the institution to ensure this population is successful.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Most research assumes that persistence and retention for first generation students is due to background characteristics or situational insufficiencies. Admittedly, first generation students face hurdles in completing their education, but a deficit perspective assumes challenges with academic success and persistence are the result of being less academically prepared, lacking in self-efficacy, trials associated with dual identities, the requirement of remedial coursework, or the inability to contact parents for assistance. First generation students are more than their demographics attributes. An asset based perspective “celebrates the unique strengths of these students and encourages them to use their talents to enhance their college experience” (Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, 2018). This perspective validates the experiences of first generation students and recognizes their intrinsic strengths and abilities. Developing an asset based approach requires a cultural shift within higher education, but it is important to enabling first generation students to see themselves as successful (Whitley et al., 2018).

Efforts to improve student experiences and outcomes must include “leadership from and intensive engagement with faculty and staff” (Harrill, Lawton, and Fabianke, 2015). Inside and outside of the classroom, through support services and formal and informal teaching, students develop the knowledge and skills to succeed in colleges and universities. Academic and social integration are important factors towards success in college, and faculty and staff are vital to this. Previous research has shown first generation students do not graduate at the same rate as continuing generation students for a multitude of reasons (DeAngelo et al., 2011; NCES, 2017) . Additionally, research demonstrates how students believe faculty and staff impact or hinder their academic success and persistence (Collier & Morgan, 2007; Polson and Jurich, 1981; Smerglia & Bouchet, 1999). A gap in the literature is knowledge and understanding of how faculty and staff

support first generation students and how the actions of campus personnel motivate first generation students' academic success and persistence. With focus faculty and staff, the research seeks to determine how these individuals' support and guide first generation students toward academic success and persistence.

1.3 Purpose of the Dissertation in Practice

The purpose of this dissertation in practice was to learn more about the support and motivation provided to first generation students by faculty and staff and their understanding and recognition of their role in student success. Research highlights the importance of faculty and staff to the academic success and persistence of students (Fleming, 2012), but seldom looks at the issue from the perspective of campus personnel. Through semi-structured interviews with faculty and staff, the study will aid in clarifying how campus personnel view the impact they have on the academic success and persistence of first generation students. First generation students can have intersecting identities due to race or ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, or income level; these dual identities shape their personal and college experiences, as well as how institutions support them. This study focuses on first generation students regardless of demographics or background to ensure generational identity is the priority. Ideally, the research will provide campus personnel with strategies that support degree attainment for first generation students.

This dissertation of practice enabled the exploration of the perceptions of faculty and staff at a small, public institution as they support first generation students towards academic success and degree completion. Additionally, this research appeals to diverse stakeholders who have an

interest in the success of first generation students, as well as the attitudes and behaviors of faculty and staff. These stakeholders include higher education institutions who enroll first generation students, campus leaders focusing on academic success and persistence, faculty and staff who interact and lead first generation students, first generation students themselves, and the families of first generation students. Institutions of higher education, campus leadership, and faculty and staff would have the most interest in this research due to the importance of student success and retention for accreditation standards and government funding (Sousa, 2015), as well as for the benefit of the students they serve.

1.4 Summary

As the enrollment of students in higher education continues to increase, additional focus and efforts are needed to ensure students are being retained. The research focusing on the academic success and persistence of first generation students focuses on three areas: the barriers to success, the prevalence of minoritized students within these populations, and the importance of institutional support and responsibility. A significant gap in the research is understanding the views of faculty and staff as they work toward the success of first generation students. The attitudes and beliefs of faculty and staff, engaging with faculty and their research, access to enrichment opportunities, and institutional support are important for student success (Fleming, 2012). Understanding the perceptions of faculty and staff at a single institution can help other higher education professionals to recognize the best ways to support first generation students seeking academic success and persistence.

2.0 Literature Review

Chapter one provided a brief overview of the first generation student experience in higher education, as well as suggestions on how to increase this populations' academic success and persistence in college. An in-depth review of available literature, in combination with a decade of professional experience within the field of higher education, connects the importance of faculty and staff to the academic and social integration of students to campus and in return, their academic success and persistence.

The purpose of this literature review is to obtain a deeper understanding of the impact faculty and staff have on first generation students; how campus personnel view their influence on the students they assist; and the factors relating to the lenses of campus personnel. The focus of this inquiry is faculty and staff as this study attempts to understand their perceptions and understanding of first generation students, classified as students who are first in their family to attend a four-year college or university. Due to limited research from the point of view of faculty and staff, research on the college-going experiences and outcomes from a student perspective will be reviewed. The end of the chapter will provide an overview of transformational leadership theory which will serve as the theoretical framework used to guide the research and understanding of the effect of faculty and staff on first generation students' academic success and completion. The review of literature will provide a comprehensive understanding of the research that addresses the impact faculty, administrators, and professional staff have on students' collegiate experience, including their academic success and persistence, and, most importantly, the first generation student experience.

2.1 Influence of Faculty and Staff on Student Outcomes

Tinto's (1975) original interactionalist model of student departure theorizes students who academically and socially integrate into the campus community increase their connection and commitment to the institution – and have a higher likelihood of continuing through graduation. Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2004) revised Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model with an increased focus on the factors that influence social integration and posited that a substantial influence on the social integration of students is their perceptions of the institution's commitment to their welfare. Each interaction with faculty, administrators, and professional staff influences students' perceptions of the institution's commitment to student welfare (Braxton et al., 2004). Positive interactions with campus personnel lead to increased confidence in the institution as an organization (Bean & Eaton, 2000), which increases students' belief in their ability to succeed in higher education and to integrate on campus (Braxton et al., 2004). Increased integration creates a positive effect on academic success and persistence; the boosted social capital impacts students' commitment to the institution and an increased probability of persistence (Braxton et al., 2004).

Positive student outcomes, such as academic success and persistence, are linked with campus personnel and student interactions. Research has highlighted the importance of faculty and staff, or institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), on students' success (Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Fleming, 2012; Jacobi, 1991) .

2.1.1 Types of Faculty- and Staff-Student Interaction

Interaction between campus personnel and students is a vital aspect of the college experience. Faculty-student interactions can be formal or informal, direct instruction or outside of

the classroom, with both playing a critical roles in students' success (Jacobi, 1991). Cox and Orehovec (2007) researched faculty and student interaction outside of the classroom and found that interactions occurred within five types: disengagement, incidental contact, functional instruction, personal interaction, and mentoring. Mentorship and personal interaction, the most infrequent types of contact, require a personal and professional relationship to be developed between faculty and student. Based on the similar interests of the individuals, these relationships are built and cultivated. As a result, trust and respect is forged with the faculty and students being able to learn from each other. Incidental contact, polite greetings or waving hello, and functional interaction, such as a student asking a professor a question about an assignment, occur more frequently. These types of interaction enable students to briefly connect with faculty, highlighting their availability, and if needed, knowledge and guidance. Disengagement, the most frequent type of interaction, is defined as a lack of interaction outside of the classroom. Although interaction was encouraged between faculty and staff, Cox and Orehovec (2007) found that faculty and students "appeared to be oblivious to each other" (p. 351) outside of the classroom. Faculty did not attend college functions or events, and if they did, students and faculty chose not to directly interact with each other. Cox and Orehovec's (2007) research "suggests that virtually every type of interaction between faculty members and students can have positive effects" (p. 359), as long as the interaction occurs.

Administrators, staff, and administrative support assistants play important roles for college students. Institutional agents possess and transmit knowledge; serve as gatekeepers; advocate and intervene on students' behalf; function as role models; provide emotional and moral support; and offer valuable feedback, advice, and guidance to students (Tovar, 2015). Campus personnel have a high degree of human, cultural, and social capital, and use their expertise to assist students

navigating the complicated processes of higher education, which students – especially first generation students – do not understand (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Research shows interactions with faculty, administrators, and staff are important to helping students succeed (Tovar, 2015), and do not have to be academic to provide value (Cox & Orehovec, 2007).

2.1.2 Faculty- and Staff-Student Interaction in Practice

The actions, attitudes, and behaviors of faculty and staff are important to encouraging and motivating students to persist. Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell (2011) asked successful, high-risk (classified as first generation, low income, or students of color at predominately White institutions) college students to identify campus personnel who had the most influence on their ability to persist. Many connections were deemed as important and influential; the “supportive” and “caring” interactions between students and faculty or staff ranged from casual, formal, in class, outside of class, frequent interactions, and infrequent connections (Schreiner et al, 2001, p. 326). Based on student responses, 54 members of campus personnel (70 percent faculty and 30 percent staff) were interviewed. The interviews of faculty and staff focused on their insights into the behaviors they engaged students with. Schreiner et al. (2001) found that faculty and staff were genuine and authentic when interacting with students and stressed the importance of making a difference. Furthermore, the research highlighted differences in how faculty and staff described their impact and behaviors (Schreiner et al., 2001). Faculty discussed being “enthusiastic about teaching, challenging and supporting students, ... recognizing they did not fit the typical faculty mold ... [and] ... described themselves as ‘energetic, enthusiastic, or passionate’” (Schreiner et al., 2001, p. 330). Staff members highlighted the “supportive” and “encouraging” contributions of

their efforts. Additionally, students emphasized how staff members helped them, cared about them, talked to them, knew them by name, and encouraged them (Schreiner et al., 2001).

Interactions between faculty and students are expected, but all types of interactions are not equally beneficial to students (Eli & Bowen, 2002). Valdez (2016) conducted a qualitative study to determine how relationships between faculty and first generation college students are cultivated. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, document analysis, and field notes. Six faculty and ten first generation students at a small, rural university participated in the research. Faculty highlighted the importance of contractual, or casual, interactions in hallways and cafeterias. For first generation students, connections made in informal environments occurred more than with formal opportunities, such as office hours. Faculty found communications with first generation students were “more spontaneous”; “they may never use my office hours, but they’ll text or email, or walk with me after class to ask follow up questions” (Valdez, 2016, p. 110). Additionally, student success caused faculty to feel satisfaction regarding their efforts. Faculty discussed feeling prideful, emotional, fulfilled, and excited at seeing students “world expand ... [and] blossom” (Valdez, 2016, p. 122).

2.1.2.1 Advising

Academic advising offers a guaranteed opportunity for students and faculty or staff to interact while providing guidance and support. Dillon and Fisher (2000) investigated faculty advisors’ perceptions of faculty-student interactions. Fifty participants completed a survey questionnaire pertaining to demographics and eight Likert-scale and eight open-ended questions on advising. Additionally, a limited number of participants were invited to participate in a focus group. Seventy-eight percent of the participants addressed factors that contribute to positive and successful advisor-student interactions including preparation by both the advisor and student for

the session; advisor knowledge; time commitment for advising; and the “courtesy, kindness, and friendliness between advisors and students” (Dillon & Fisher, 2000, p. 18). A component of a successful student-advisor relationship is “the advisee thinks of [the advisor and themselves] as a team” (Dillon & Fisher, 2000, p. 18), highlighting the importance of a strong relationship between students and faculty. Furthermore, Dillon and Fisher (2000) asked faculty advisors to list the characteristics they thought students were interested in an academic advising relationship. Faculty believed students wanted advisors who were knowledgeable about requirements, provided course and degree guidance, and were caring and easily accessible (Dillon & Fisher, 2000). The results from the study emphasize the importance of faculty attitudes and behaviors, as well as institutional knowledge, to the advising process.

Possessing institutional knowledge is central to the guidance of students, and faculty and staff agree that academic advisors should provide a myriad of services to students (McAnulty, O’Connor, and Sklare, 1987). Faculty recognize academic planning is a vital aspect of academic advising, but believe career and personal issues are not the responsibility of academic advisors (Creeden, 1990). In contrast, Smerglia and Bouchet’s (1999) research stresses the importance of faculty advisors in a multitude of roles in higher education. The research sought to understand student and faculty expectations of academic advising. With focus on faculty, 26 members completed a questionnaire focused on teaching and academic advising experiences, as well as a modified version of the Guinn and Mitchell’s (1986) Advising Role and Responsibility Inventory. The researchers found that 96 percent of faculty participants believed advisors should be able and willing to provide information and refer students to campus resources for assistance (Smerglia & Bouchet, 1999). In addition, faculty felt advisors hold responsibility for communicating students’ needs to the institution (84 percent), assisting students with providing information about job

markets (84.6 percent), and developing decision-making skills (56 percent) (Smerglia & Bouchet, 1999). Smerglia and Bouchet's (1999) results show that although there was differentiation in level of responsibility for specific tasks between the student and faculty participants, faculty recognized the impact advisors have on students and their educational journey. Faculty and advisors willingness to support students through academic advising and the different iterations of the process provides needed direction through the complicated field of higher education.

Staff members address a broad range of student needs and recognize the uniqueness of each student and their experiences (Schmitt & Duggan, 2011). Schmitt & Duggan (2011) researched support staff members interactions with undergraduate students in an effort to increase academic success and persistence at a community college. Interviews, observations, and focus groups were used to examine 14 administrative support members' interactions with students and their personal thoughts regarding their exchanges and impact. The researchers found that classified staff "(a) address[ed] a broad range of student needs, (b) recognize[d] students have personal barriers that hinder achieving their academic goals, (c) contribute[d] to the educational process, (d) deal[t] with institutional barriers that impede their work with students, and (e) experience[d] personal satisfaction as a result of student interactions" (Schmitt & Duggan, 2011, p. 183). Classified staff demonstrate how to navigate technology and reference materials, as well as explain policies, procedures, and campus and college jargon. In their interviews, Schmitt and Duggan (2007) found that staff members wanted students to "... feel they have gotten an answer" (p. 184) to any issue or quandary. Staff members attitudes and behaviors were focused on the support of helping students achieve their goals, immediately, such as the answer to a question or solving a quick technical issue, or long term, like graduation (Schmitt & Duggan, 2011). Understanding the

complexities of higher education enables faculty and staff to support students attempting to succeed in an unknown environment

Similarly, Waife (2018) explored the institutional interventions used to support low-income students towards degree completion. Through individual interviews with staff members and students from low-income backgrounds, as well as a review of institutional documents, Waife (2018) found significant impact from institutional supported interventions and professional initiated interventions. Professional initiated interventions, or actions surpassing job requirements, included advocating for additional resources, using money or free time to assist students, and providing encouragement to connect with others, highlight the efforts above and beyond daily responsibilities staff members use to help students persist (Waife, 2018). Bridge programs, functions of the financial aid office, development of a retention committee and early alert system, and targeted recruitment efforts were classified as institutional initiated interventions, or interventions included in responsibilities of an office (Waife, 2018). These efforts, determined as impactful for low-income students' persistence, emphasized institutional efforts and solutions for handling challenges related to low-income students' degree completion. Institutional initiated interventions and professional initiated interventions would not be possible without the support of the staff members who oversee them, highlighting the contributions of staff are necessary to aiding students in achieving their educational goals.

Knowing the importance of advising to the success of students, Novak (2017) assessed the impact of academic advising for undecided students at a community college. Through implemented strategies, the research focused on increasing undecided students' interaction with the advising program and improving the quality of those interactions to increase student success. The mixed-methods design and analysis supports that the intervention was successful; advisors

made changes to their advising strategies and practices throughout the intervention to improve connectivity to undecided students (Novak, 2017). “Personalized communication with clear expectations” (p. 119) impacted student engagement, and throughout the study, advisors contact with students became increasingly targeted and specific, connecting with aspects of intrusive advising (Novak, 2017). Advisors connected more with their advisees during the intervention resulting in an increase in retention, maintenance of GPA, and course completion (Novak, 2017). Additionally, advisors changed their methods of interacting with students outside of the research intervention; day-to-day work transformed as a result of the learning and development occurring throughout the pilot. The intervention resulted in a preemptive form of academic advising, with advisors connecting with students in proactive ways, leading to changed advisor practices and increased student communication (Novak, 2017).

2.1.2.2 Missed Opportunities

Faculty and staff are essential to the success of students in higher education, but disconnects between campus personnel and students do exist. Success in college is more than showing academic ability. Students must “master the college student role in order to understand instructors’ expectations and apply their academic skills effectively” (Collier & Morgan, 2007, p. 425). Collier & Morgan (2007) researched the connection between faculty members’ expectations and first generation or continuing generation students’ understanding of their expectations. Collier & Morgan (2007) found faculty were frustrated at students’ difficulties with understanding or meeting their expectations. Faculty’s difficulties with students related to challenges with workload and priorities, explicitness of expectations and assignments, and issues related to communication and problem solving. Students’ issues in these categories included discounting the importance of the faculty member’s words, misunderstanding what the professor wanted, time management

conflicts, and understanding the college process and jargon (Collier & Morgan, 2007). Increased communication is vital to increase the likelihood of student success, but Collier and Morgan (2007) found discord in who should be initiating the communication. First generation and continuing generation students expressed faculty members should be more explicit with their requirements despite faculty's insistence their instructions were clear (Collier & Morgan, 2007). In addition, first generation students wanted more detail than continuing generation students for assignments and tests and instructions on being successful in class, such as note taking and formatting for papers (Collier & Morgan, 2007). While faculty's behaviors supported students' success in college courses, gaps existed between faculty expectations and student needs, especially with first generation students (Collier & Morgan, 2007). For the behaviors of faculty to have an increased impact on academic success and persistence, additional efforts need to be made to connect faculty expectations to student needs.

Non-classroom interactions between faculty and students are uncommon (Chang, 2005). Cox et al. (2010) researched the personal, institutional, and pedagogical factors that impact the frequency and type of interactions faculty have with students outside of the classroom. After analyzing questionnaire data from 2,845 faculty at 45 campuses, it was determined that faculty have more frequent casual interactions with students, such as greeting each other in a hallway or discussing non-academic topics, than discussing academic issues or topics related to the student's future career (Cox et al., 2010). Purposeful interactions are important to student success, but few faculty reported regular and frequent connect with students outside of the classroom. Cox et al. (2010) found that male faculty, White faculty, and full-time faculty engaged in casual conversations more frequently than their counterparts. Humanities faculty and faculty who are professionals in other fields engaged in more casual conversations than those in the sciences; non-

tenure track faculty reported more frequent substantive interactions than tenure track faculty (Cox et al., 2010). Additionally, all faculty engaged in casual interactions with students twice as often as substantive (Cox et al., 2010). Interactions outside of the classroom are linked to student success and Cox et al. (2010) found a deficit in the connectivity between faculty and students.

2.2 Students' Perspective of Faculty and Staff Influence on Student Outcomes

Due to the limited research available on the impact of faculty and staff with campus personnel as the object of inquiry, it is important to view their efforts on academic success and persistence from the student perspective. Available research shows that the impact of faculty and staff on student success focuses on experiences in higher education institutions and outcomes, such as academic success and persistence.

2.2.1 Experiences

2.2.1.1 Institutional Offices and Programming

Institutions provide differing types of support for first generation students. Targeted programming offers first generation students the ability to connect to faculty and staff for increased opportunities for success and degree completion. Schwartz et al. (2018) explored the impact of a social capital intervention for first generation students. Participants were undergraduate students participating in a summer bridge program at a public, urban, commuter campus. The intervention, run in conjunction to a bridge program, focused on empowering first generation students through the development of skills and confidence to connect with individuals on campus. Workshops

highlighted social capital, mentorship, and networking to reach academic goals; challenges to networking, such as prejudice and racism, and how to handle denial and unavailability; creating visual representation of support networks; professional role-playing; mock interviews; and discussing ways to maintain support from off-campus resources and how to build on-campus support.

The intervention group reported better relationships with instructors, increased intention to recruit support, increased network orientation or usefulness of seeking support, and decreased help-seeking avoidance. The qualitative interview process found that all participants in the intervention reported positive relationships with faculty, highlighting instructors worked to ensure their success. Additionally, students described continuing close relationships with staff members introduced to them through the program and how these individuals assisted in building connections across the campus. Students recognized the importance of developing relationships to promote academic success. The intervention enabled students to connect with campus personnel who provided them with guidance and support, including “help choosing classes, understanding course content, navigating the university environment, and managing their stress related to being in college” (Schwartz et al., 2018, p. 174). First generation students were provided with opportunities to reach out to professors for guidance, use and learn about campus resources, and connect to mentors, which delivered additional support for academic success and persistence while adapting to the new landscape of higher education.

In addition, Colton, Connor, Shultz, and Easter (1999) evaluated a federally funded TRIO program focused on serving first generation, low-income, learning or physically disabled, or academically underprepared students. Five important components were included in the programming: academic advising, freshman colloquium, student mentorship, academic skills

training, and social support activities. Students were required to meet with their advisor at least eight times throughout the year to discuss “academic, social, and emotional issues, as well as . . . proper educational behaviors, college adjustment/mental health, major/career decision, student development, and/or course selection” (Colton et al., 1999, p. 151). A longitudinal comprehensive evaluation was conducted to determine the program’s impact on persistence through an examination of demographic information, programming satisfaction, grades and grade point averages, and retention rates. Students who participated reported higher retention rates than their peers. Additionally, students recognized counselors as being knowledgeable and showing “respect, interest, and concern with them as individuals” (Colton et al., 1999, p. 154).

As mentioned earlier, academic advising is critical to academic success. Polson and Jurich (1981) explored the impact of advising skills on the effectiveness of a departmental advising center. A Likert-scale questionnaire was used to determine students’ views of the helpfulness of the advising center. The overall effectiveness of the advising center was rated as high; students reported being more confident and understanding of the requirements of their program (Polson and Jurich, 1981). Additionally, interpersonal aspects of advising were found to be most important. An advisor’s behavior, such as showing care, and attitude, including emotions of concern and friendliness, were key for satisfaction with advising (Polson and Jurich, 1981). The importance of interpersonal connection between advisors and advisees was evident in the traits students regarded the advisors as “often” or “almost always” displaying: friendliness, sincerity, respect, warmth, and concern (Polson and Jurich, 1981). Advising has many different iterations within the field of higher education, but Polson and Jurich’s (1981) research connects the formal, developmental process of advising to the need to build supportive relationships on campus.

Furthermore, validating first generation students’ college experience can improve degree

completion (Davis, 2012). To build awareness of student experiences, King, Griffith, and Murphy (2017) used a story-sharing program where faculty and staff shared their experiences of being first generation, lower or middle class, or low-income college students. The program authenticated students of similar backgrounds experiences at the institution. Participants felt validated in their experiences and that they were “not alone” (King et al., 2017, p. 11). Story-sharing normalizes the experience first generation, working class, or financially insecure students experience on college campuses (King et al., 2017). The comparable experiences between faculty and staff built social capital, and increased social integration can increase student success. Conversely, Richardson and Skinner (1992) interviewed minoritized baccalaureate recipients on their experiences during their undergraduate career and found many interviewees recalled incidents where faculty held low expectations for minorities, leading to treatment of disrespect in the classroom. Research has proven that social capital can negate the effects of non-supportive campus personnel (Schwartz et al., 2018), but the difference in experiences highlights the variation of involvements and opportunities within a higher education environment – making the need to tailor efforts by specialized population vital.

2.2.1.2 Engagement

Forming connections between campus personnel and students provides opportunities for increased impact and success. Via information and resources about transferring and campus engagement, Marquez (2017) explored the impact staff assistants, financial aid advisors, outreach specialists, counselors, and admissions and records staff have on the social capital of low income, first generation Latinx students of Mexican descent. Through interviews with 14 community college students of Mexican descent, Marquez (2017) found that staff played a significant role in assisting low-income, first generation students succeed. Staff members shared personal stories to

create a welcoming environment and supplied students with a wealth of information regarding their academic decisions; provided students with detailed information about next steps and communications about the resources available to them, including tutoring services; and guided students through complicated processes, like financial aid and academic renewal. Staff members supported students with their questions about “careers, internships, scholarships, college trips, publishing, jobs, transfer information, cover letters, borrowing computers, printing, and programs” (Marquez, 2017, p. 89) to ensure students were able to understand and complete specific requirements. Students reported that staff members encouraged their persistence and involvement in activities, increasing their social capital at the institution.

Komaraju, Musulkin, and Bhattachar (2010) investigated the impact of eight aspects of faculty-student interaction: respect, guidance, approachability, caring, interactions outside of class, connectivity, accessibility, and negative experiences. Through the 40-item Student-Professor Interaction Scale, the researchers sought to determine the effects of faculty-student interaction and its impact on students’ self-confidence, motivation, and achievement. It was determined students who perceive faculty as approachable, respectful, and assessable were more confident in their academic skills and being motivated to succeed (Komaraju et al., 2010). Additionally, students who are able to connect with instructors informally were more likely to find enjoyment in the learning process and understand how their education was preparing them for their future career (Komaraju et al., 2010). Conversely, a deficit of connection is related to a lack of motivation in the classroom. Students who believed their instructors were not interested in their well-being report feeling discouraged and indifferent (Komaraju et al., 2010).

Relationships with faculty and staff build social capital at institutions of higher education, enabling students to access the knowledge and experience of these professionals. Irlbeck, Adams,

Akers, Burris, and Jones (2014) explored the motivations and support systems for first generation students in an effort to determine their “academic, social, and professional needs” (p. 157). To obtain a deeper understanding of how first generation students perceive their college experience, a small sample of students participated in semi-structured interviews. Irlbeck et al. (2014) found that supportive faculty and staff encouraged academic success for first generation students, and students connected with campus personnel for support regarding academics or school-related issues.

Martin, Miller, and Simmons (2014) investigated the social capital of engineering students based on their generational status. A qualitative survey was used to identify the individuals and resources engineering students connected with at two points in time: prior to declaring a major in engineering and at the time of the study. After declaring a major in engineering, faculty and staff are important resources for first generation and continuing generation students (Martin et al., 2014). First generation students connect with academic advisors and other staff personnel for assistance with career related inquiries, while continuing generation students reached out to faculty for similar information and guidance (Martin et al., 2014). Continuing generation students relied on their parents for connections and networking opportunities to the professional within the field of engineering, and first generation students reached out to faculty for introductions to engineering professionals (Martin et al., 2014). First generation students, while they lack aspects of social capital provided by their parents, used the connections of campus personnel to advance their social networks.

2.2.2 Outcomes

2.2.2.1 Academic Success

Interaction with faculty is a strong predictor of student learning (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Using the College Student Experiences Questionnaire, Kuh & Hu (2001) researched the impact of student-faculty interactions. Kuh & Hu (2001) found that student-faculty interaction can impact the amount of educational effort students apply to a course, influencing the level of academic success. The research highlighted that the most frequent contact with faculty was general, such as asking for information about a course, with minimal informal or casual contact with faculty (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Using the same methodology, Lundberg & Schreiner (2004) researched the effects of faculty-student interactions as predictor for learning. The predictors for learning, or student motivations, differed by race and ethnicity. Hispanic and African American students work harder due to instructor feedback, while White students have a higher rate of working harder due to meeting faculty expectations (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004).

Jamelske (2008) measured the impact of a first year experience (FYE) program on student GPA and retention. The program was designed to strengthen students' connection to the university by providing additional opportunities to connect with current students, as well as encourage academic and social connection to faculty in and outside of the classroom. Using survey data from students, faculty, and administrators to measure the impact of the FYE program, the researchers found that the end of year GPAs for FYE students was higher than non-FYE students (Jamelske, 2008). Conversely, the study detailed no positive findings for retention (Jamelske, 2008). Additionally, Micari and Pazos (2012) examined the impact of the student-faculty relationship in a challenging course, organic chemistry. Using a Likert-scale questionnaire, the researchers

assessed students' opinions of their relationships with faculty, course confidence, and sense of belonging in the field of science. A positive student-faculty relationship – student looking up to the faculty member, felt comfortable approaching the professor with questions, and felt respected by the faculty member – resulted in a higher final grade and confidence in their ability to succeed in the course (Micari & Pazos, 2012). While numerous factors impact academic success and persistence, interaction with faculty is touted as a vital aspect.

2.2.2.2 Persistence

As the population of first generation students enrolled in higher education continues to grow, it is important to understand faculty and staff's impact on persistence. Using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey (Wine et al., 2002), Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) compared the determinants of first-to-second year persistence for first generation and continuing generation undergraduate students at four-year institutions. The research underlined important differences between the educational experiences and influences of first generation and continuing generation students. First generation students who considered faculty prestige when enrolling in an institution were more likely to persist than those who did not consider the caliber of faculty, but this was not true for continuing generation students (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). These findings suggest that first generation students find more importance in school environments connected with their goals of completing college. Similarly, first generation students valued participation and involvement in academic activities rather than social ones, highlighting increased connections to faculty can positively impact persistence (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Furthermore, persistence was enhanced for first generation students attending larger institutions emphasizing more resources, such as support programs and human capital, impact persistence positively .

Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) analyzed college persistence and the impact of informal contact between students and faculty. Using a previous data set by the researchers, the study reanalyzed information from 528 students enrolled at Syracuse University. A follow-up instrument was used to determine the quantity of interactions students had with faculty to: obtain information related to coursework or programs, discuss career related issues, receive assistance with personal problems, consider intellectual or course-related issues, discuss a campus related issue, or socialize informally. Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) found that the frequency of informal contact with faculty and retention had a positive relationship. The six different types of faculty and student interactions had positive effects on retention, but the impact of intellectual and course-related exchanges stresses the importance of faculty interactions supporting and continuing learning outside of the classroom. In addition, Iverson, Pascarella, and Terenzini (1984) researched the influence of informal student-faculty interaction and its effect on commuter students. Using a recursive model, the researchers looked at interactions classified as academic, social, or total contact. Similar to Pascarella and Terenzini (1979), faculty-student contacts focused on academics impacted post-freshman year goals. This result only applied to White students, suggesting that students of color in the study could have less academic informal conversations with faculty (Iverson et al., 1984).

Involvement with support programming encourages retention (Fike & Fike, 2008). Fike and Fike (2008) investigated the predictors of fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall persistence for 9,200 first year community college students over a four year time period. Student Support Services, a federally funded program focused on increasing persistence and retention for first generation, low-income, or students with disabilities, requires students to meet consistently with an advisor, complete grade checks, and develop a plan for academic success. In the study, involvement in the

program resulted in positive prediction of fall-to-spring persistence. Looking at the predictors of retention related to generational status, Fike and Fike (2008) determined parents having some form of college education is a predictor for fall-to-fall retention; also, fathers having some college was a positive predictor for fall-to-spring retention. Furthermore, as previously stated, a barrier for success for first generation students is lack or need for developmental coursework. Developmental coursework and programming is an important contribution to persistence and retention (Fike & Fike, 2008). Connecting to the importance of an educational baseline, passing developmental reading course and/or a developmental mathematics course was a strong predictor of retention (Fike & Fike, 2008).

Engagement between students and campus personnel is important in efforts of persistence and retention (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). Swecker et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between the quantity of meetings with an academic advisor and academic success and retention for first generation students. A thorough review of historical data and the academic advisor electronic tracking system enabled the researchers to track the behaviors of 363 first generation students. The study found for each meeting with an academic advisor the odds of retention increased by 13 percent. While the number of academic advising sessions attended by first generation students increased persistence, only 83 of the 363 first generation students who were retained remained in good academic standing a year later (Swecker et al., 2013) – indicating additional support would be beneficial to ensure academic success.

Campbell and Campbell (1997) researched the effects of a faculty-student mentorship program on academic success and retention. In an effort to create social capital and assist students in degree completion, mentors and mentees were encourage to meet regularly throughout the school year and participate in activities and luncheons sponsored by the program. Compared to a

control group of non-mentored students, by the end of the first semester, mentored students reported higher GPAs (2.45 vs. 2.29) and a lower attrition rate (14.5 percent vs. 26.3 percent). In addition, mentored students completed more credits per term (9.33 vs. 8.49); completing less than one additional credit per term appears to be nominal, but throughout an undergraduate career could mean a noteworthy increase to the amount of units completed. For mentored students, frequency of contact was positively related to academic success; mentored students who met with their advisor more often reported higher grade point averages and units completed (Campbell and Campbell, 1997).

2.3 Types of Lenses and Cognitive Frameworks

Generation neutral frameworks ignore the effect background and experiences have on students' academic performance (Milner, 2010). As faculty and staff treat all students equally, they overlook how first generation students experience college differently than continuing generation students. With a generation neutral lens, campus personnel disregard effective practices in supporting specialized populations, resulting in missed opportunities to encourage academic success and develop the potential of first generation students (Milner, 2010). Essentially, this framework does not account for the needs of first generation students.

An asset-based lens enables faculty and staff to recognize and develop the talents first generation students possess prior to entering college. The focus on students' inherent skills builds the confidence and motivation required for academic success and persistence in college (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). An asset-based lens "shifts the focus from problems to possibilities" (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005, p. 22). Garrison and Gardner (2012) investigated the assets three

first generation students brought to higher education through one-on-one interviews. In the study, the students' assets fit into four distinct themes impacted by their lived experiences: proactivity, goal-directed, optimism, and reflexivity (Garrison & Gardner, 2012). Thirteen contributing strengths supported asset development: resourcefulness, strategic thinking, self-reliance, practical realism, flexibility, persistence, positivity, hopefulness, self-confidence, insightfulness, compassion, gratitude, and balance (Garrison & Gardner, 2012). Highlighting aspects of resourcefulness, positivity, and self-confidence provides more encouragement than solely addressing insufficiencies, such as barriers to success, marginalized status, and lack of resources.

Most research focusing on the academic success and persistence of first generation students highlights challenges. By concentrating on the barriers to success, intersectionality with minoritized and low-income populations, and lack of institutional ability to support first generation students, this population is perceived as having “character flaws or inherent shortcomings” (Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, 2018, p. 7). The negative narrative is representative of a deficit-based lens. With concern for meeting students' needs and recognizing necessity of remedial education, campus personnel focus on areas of deficit (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Concentrating on gaps or inadequacies with students is discouraging, and can cause limited academic success and attrition. Faculty and staff believe “unequal outcomes are a problem without a solution” (p. 102) or believe unequitable achievement is expected due to the students' background characteristics (Bensimon, 2005), or generational status. A deficit framework is not an appropriate foundation for interventions and strategies focused on success, and students whose academic identity starts with deficiencies are at a disadvantage (White, 2016). Additionally, faculty and staff can be classified as combination asset- and deficit-minded, educators who utilize aspects of strength- and deficit-based thinking. These individuals understand the importance of

first generation students on a college campus, but believe students' limited academic success is due to the students' inadequacies (Bensimon, 2005). Within combination frameworks, faculty and staff focus on the academic success and persistence of first generation students by blending aspects of positive and negative-based thinking and support, limiting their effectiveness with this population.

Within the field of higher education, a shift needs to occur to highlight the strengths of first generation students and empower them to succeed and persist. "Grit, ambition, a track record of beating the odds, and fresh viewpoints that enhance the broader academic community" (Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, 2018, p. 26) are positive qualities first generation students possess. Shifting to an asset-based lens, where students abilities are highlighted and encouraged, enables students to build their confidence, decrease help-seeking avoidance, and increase awareness of the innate tools they possess to excel in the rigid structure of higher education.

2.4 Summary

The perceptions of faculty and staff on the academic success and persistence of first generation students does not have a high level of academic scholarship. The most glaring absence being research on the influence of higher education administrators and professionals on students' college success and completion. In limiting the student population to first generation students, the available research is sparser. It is important to recognize the aspect human capital plays in the educational experience of college students. The comprehensive review of literature revealed the positive impact of faculty and staff on first generation students' academic success and persistence in higher education. The lack of literature addressing the impact of administrators and professional

staff is perplexing considering a student's college experience typically begins with an interaction between a student, or their parent, and a staff member. Staff are vital to institutional success (Skolits & Graybeal, 2007), but the research available on their impact is limited. In spite of this gap, the literature review has framed the support faculty and staff provide students and their actions in encouraging academic success and persistence.

Additionally, research has shown the use of generation neutral, combination, and deficit based framing is not productive for the encouragement of first generation students. A shift to an asset based framework is needed, but requires a culture change throughout the field of higher education.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study will use the transformational model of leadership as a theoretical framework to understand how campus personnel support academic success and degree attainment for first generation students. Not all students are motivated by the same desires, needs, and goals (Martin, 2009). Transformational leadership from campus personnel is associated with increasing students' motivation and knowledge (Balwant, 2016; Mawn, 2012), and these increases can translate to improved academic success and retention.

According to Bass & Riggio (2008), transformational leaders "are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity" (p. 3). The transformational model of leadership provides a framework for faculty and staff to aid student growth by "... empowering [students] and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization" (Bass &

Riggio, 2008, p. 3). In a higher education setting, focusing on the student and faculty/staff relationship, transformational leaders motivate students to grow and develop educational success and independence, paying attention to students' individual needs and personal development (Bass & Riggio, 2008).

Transformational leaders focus on the goal of achieving desired results through the implementation of one or more of four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2008). Idealized influence highlights a transformational leaders' status as a role model; as someone who is "admired, respected, and trusted" (Bass & Riggio, 2008, p. 6). Leaders' behaviors and the followers' belief that they possess admirable qualities, like determination and persistence, are vital to idealized influence. Transformational leaders' actions motivate and encourage followers' behaviors and commitment; inspirational motivation enables transformational leaders to provide a shared vision of success between the leader and followers. Intellectual stimulation is the process of transformational leaders stimulating "their followers" efforts to be innovative and creative by "questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways" (Bass & Riggio, 2008, p. 7). Followers are included in the creative and supportive process of addressing problems and finding solutions. Additionally, transformational leaders focus on the individual follower's needs for development by acting as a mentor. Individualized consideration enables the follower's support to be tailored to their needs and differences; the leader listens effectively and monitors the follower's progress towards success. When the components are implemented effectively, followers respond by feeling admiration, loyalty, respect, and trust, in addition to being willing to put forth increased effort (Burkus, 2010). Transformational leadership requires the inspiration of followers to commit to a shared goal, challenging them to be inventive problem

solvers, and increasing their personal development through mentorship and support (Bass & Riggio, 2008).

2.6 Application to Research

This study aims to provide credibility to the impact faculty and staff have on the academic success and persistence of first generation students. Because of this, it is essential to look at the leadership campus personnel provide this population. Transformational leadership theory addresses the empowering and reassuring natures of faculty and staff in their efforts to encourage and support first generation students. The framework highlights the efforts of influence, motivation, stimulation, and personalized support faculty and staff use when working with students on their degree attainment. Transformational leadership provides a theoretical framework that embraces a leaders' ability to empower people to achieve exceptional results. Campus personnel possess the ability to be transformational leaders to students. Faculty and staff inspire students to succeed and thrive within a higher education setting by exerting "intentional influence over students to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships" (Balwant, [2016](#), p. 21). Analyzing the perceptions of faculty and staff through a transformational leadership lens as they steer students through their undergraduate degree can provide additional understanding of campus personnel's impact on student success.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

Focusing on faculty and staff, this study sought to determine how these individuals' support and guide first generation students during their undergraduate career. The structure of support provided to first generation students, as well as faculty and staff lenses and beliefs, was investigated at Brick University. Engaging in this research provided a deeper understanding of how faculty and staff influence the academic success of first generation students, specifically at a small college campus.

The following questions were used to guide the qualitative research:

1. How do faculty and staff support first generation students to motivate them to academic success and persistence/completion?
2. What do faculty and staff identify as their most influential attitudes, behaviors, and/or contributions to helping first generation students succeed and persist?
3. What type of lens do faculty and staff use when motivating first generation students?

3.2 Research Site

The practice-related setting for the inquiry is a small, public institution that is part of a larger system of state-related institutions; the University enrolls 600 to 700 students in associate or baccalaureate degrees. Although the campus describes itself as rural due to the surrounding

farmlands, the county is considered mostly urban with a rural population of 25.36 percent (American Fact Finder, 2010). The local area boasts a high percentage of educational attainment through high school at 88.5 percent, but the population with a bachelor degree or higher is 16.7 percent (American Fact Finder, 2010). This particular site was chosen due to the small campus size, increasing number of first generation students enrolling at the institution, and impact the population has on campus enrollment and community.

Brick University (BU; a pseudonym) is in a city with a poverty rate of 21 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) and is located close to 20 miles outside of the nearest city center. BU has a faculty to student ratio of 16 to 1 and offers academic advising, career support, financial aid counseling, and success coaching, but formal programming for first generation students is not available. Of the total population, 47 percent of enrolled students at BU are classified as first generation (Brick University Report, 2018). Although students of color are more likely to be first generation students than continuing generation students (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2017), the locale of the university impacts this statistic. Brick University is located in an area classified as 81 percent White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and the university's population is 86 percent White (Brick University Fact Book, 2017). Additionally, BU's retention rates are consistently below the average for the larger state-related system, but the third year retention rates highlight a steep decline of more than 25 percent below the system's average (Brick University Fact Book, 2017). Fifty percent of students enrolled in fall 2016 continued through the fall 2017 term with 14 percent enrolling at another campus in the system, 21 percent leaving enrolling at another institution or leaving higher education, and 16 percent graduating (Brick University Fact Book, 2017); these numbers are similar to other branches campuses in the system. Comparable data comparing first generation students to their continuing generation peers is not available. The

setting informs and constrains the problem in the same way; with a high population of first generation students, in a rural locale, the information gathered can be plentiful, but limiting.

3.3 Rationale

Qualitative research is used to provide an “in-depth description of a specific program, practice, or setting” (Mertens, 2015, p. 236). A qualitative design allows researchers to “understand how people interpret their experience, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). The use of a qualitative design enables the researcher to gain ample understanding of the resources available to first generation students, as well as the attitudes and behaviors of faculty and staff in their support of first generation students at Brick University. Furthermore, with qualitative research, the “research is the primary instrument of data collection” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). The goal for this inquiry is to gain an in depth understanding of a specific phenomenon and the qualitative process allows for the research to be responsive and adaptable, the material to be clarified and summarized, confirmation with the participants for trustworthiness, and additional inquiry into unique responses (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative methods is preferred for researchers who possess a constructivist or interpretive viewpoint (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Constructivists believe that reality is “socially constructed” (Mertens, 2015, p. 16), and researchers should attempt to recognize the world from the viewpoint of the study participants (Schwandt, 2000) because multiple interpretations of a single event can exist (Merriam, 2009). With the goal of discovering how key faculty and staff promote the success of first generation students and the intricacies of campus

personnel at Brick University in relation to this student population, a qualitative design enables the research to be grounded in the viewpoint of the individual participants. This study used a semi-structured interview procedure. The semi-structured interview reflects a “more personal, interactive mode of data collection” (Mertens, 2015, p. 19) highlighting the need for direct interaction between the researcher and study participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A key component of the constructivist viewpoint is the belief that “people ... construct their understanding of the external world”; because of this, it is not possible for the researcher to remove all aspects of “bias or expectations” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 16). My past experiences impact my view of the world and my personal lens. I recognize my reality is impacted by my life experiences, which is consistent with the constructivist view and the basis for this study.

Most research on the experiences of first generation college students focus on the students themselves and not the individuals who encourage and support them; very little is known about the impact of staff on the success of first generation college students. This study provided the opportunity to learn more about the support available for first generation college students and the attitudes and behaviors connected with the academic success and persistence of first generation students. Qualitative research determines how meaning is determined, how people rationalize their lives, and their experiences.

3.4 Participants

Academic success and persistence is overseen by multiple offices at Brick University. The departments of Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs are jointly responsible for the administration and implementation of services for students. Administrative

leaders, faculty, and staff possess differing thoughts and ideals regarding academic success and retention, and are connected to the instruction, guidance, motivation, and success of students on campus. Specific individuals within the departments of Academic Affairs, Enrollment Services, and Students Affairs, as well as select faculty, were contacted to participate in the study with a goal of eight to ten participants. The one-on-one interviewees have direct contact with a multitude of students, at least a year of experience at Brick University, and were chosen through an intentional sampling process, which included recommendations from the Director of Academic Affairs to recruit faculty.

Table 1 Participant Chart

Gender Neutral Pseudonym	Role on Campus	Generational Status	Lens
Alex	Staff	First Generation	Asset-based lens
Bailey	Faculty	First Generation	Asset-based lens
Blake	Faculty	First Generation	Asset-based lens
Cameron	Faculty	Continuing Generation	Generation neutral lens
Casey	Faculty	First Generation	Combination asset and deficit-based lens
Jaimie	Staff	First Generation	Asset-based lens
Keegan	Faculty	Continuing Generation	Combination asset and deficit-based lens
Phoenix	Staff	First Generation	Combination asset and deficit-based lens
Scout	Faculty	Continuing Generation	Generation neutral lens
Skylar	Staff	First Generation	Generation neutral lens

3.5 Data Collection

Study participants were invited through a two-step email process. The initial email, sent by the Chancellor of the institution, included an announcement the research being conducted and

encouraging those who were invited to agree to serve (see Appendix A). The second email, sent by me, was a formal invitation requesting individual faculty and staff members' participation in the study and offering to provide more information about the goals of the research if requested (see Appendix B). Participants completed a pre-interview questionnaire focused on their individual responsibilities and interactions with first generation students. Interviews took place in the faculty or staff members' office or if the participant did not have an office, a conference room on the campus, to ensure privacy. Additionally, each participant was provided a gender-neutral pseudonym to mask their identity and consideration was used in choosing quotes to promote anonymity.

The semi-structured interview process, which lasted approximately one hour, enabled the participants to speak openly about their perceptions of how first generation students succeed and of the attitudes and behaviors with which they connect with students. The semi-structured interview encouraged "the interviewee to answer at length and in vivid detail" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 31). Also, the semi-structured interview protocol allowed for follow-up and clarifying questions to be asked (Trochim, 2006); these questions were asked as needed.

Questions were tailored to gain details about how faculty and staff support and encourage the success and persistence of first generation students at the campus, as well as the interviewees' personal view of how they connect with first generation students. Three types of interview questions were asked, structured according to Rubin and Rubin's (2012) interview protocol of main, probing, and follow-up questions. Prior to the formal interview, participants were asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire. The pre-interview questionnaire allowed the researcher to learn more about the participant, their role at Brick University, and connection to first generation students prior to the interview. The questions focused on the individual's description of their

responsibilities, level of interaction with first generation students, types of support they provided to first generation students, and if they are/were a first generation college student. During the interview, the first set of questions focused on the intentional policies, practices, and procedures at the institution that support first generation students in their desire to continue. The second set of questions were personalized to each participant - how they described themselves and their interactions with first generation students; what they believed is their influence to help students be academically successful and persist; the advice they would give other faculty and staff on supporting first generation students; and what they thought the institution could do to assist first generation students to academic success and persistence. The main questions were tied closely to the three research questions to guide the participants through the semi-structured interview process, learn about their experiences and interactions with first generation students, and ensure the research questions were answered (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Probes are additional “questions, comments, or gestures” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 118) outside of the formal interview questions, and was used in the interview process promote and continue the conversation or clarify. Additionally, the use of probes helped to determine “bias or slant” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 118).

Interview data resulted in over 6 hours of recorded audio from the participants, with each interview ranging from 24 to 70 minutes in length. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each interview was recorded via my personal cellular device and stored in a secure University of Pittsburgh online Box file to maintain confidentiality. Prior to analysis and coding, the interviews were transcribed via professional transcription software.

3.6 Data Analysis

Analysis morphs the data from interviews into “clear and convincing answers to [the] research question” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 190). The initial step to the analysis process was transcribing and summarizing each interview; a written copy of the interview provides ease when searching for details and information, helps validate the results, and removes aspects of bias (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As such, first, the interviews were transcribed, summarized, and detailed notes were taken on each transcript. The thorough summary highlighted insights the participant provided (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), including the main points discussed, the gender-neutral pseudonym, the setting and length of the interview, why the participant was included in the study (with all identifying details removed) (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and contained details about important ideas, concepts, and verbiage (Bazeley, 2013) from their interview. Additionally, the summary and subsequent notes provided an initial review to the data, which allowed emerging themes to be identified before the coding process (Thomas, 2018), an important second step to this research process.

Coding is a construct used to decipher or explain the data (Vogt, Vogt, Gardner, & Haefele, 2014; Saldana, 2016), and is a process that occurred repeatedly to “further manage, filter, highlight, and focus the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory” (Saldana, 2016, p. 9). Recognizing and identifying ideas, events, and instances in the data is the next vital step to the coding process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The raw data was analyzed through initial or open coding; initial coding enables the researcher to reflect on the data and begin an individualized coding process (Saldana, 2016, p. 115). Additionally, *in vivo* coding, or the use of words or phrases found in the transcription, was used to give authenticity to the participants’ words (Saldana, 2016).

Furthermore, a combination of a meticulous line by line coding process, referring to as splitting, and combining extending sections of the interview data, known as lumping, was used when reviewing the data to provide categorization and careful scrutiny of the information (Saldana, 2016).

Coding is an integrative process and as the data unfolded, the type of coding used evolved. Determining the participants' lenses resulted in multiple coding cycles to ensure an accurate representation of the data. As a greater understanding of the frameworks was developed, participants' categorization, or assigned lenses, changed. Appropriate classification was defined through thorough analysis of the data. Once the coding process was completed, as themes emerged from the data, they were classified as findings in the study. Additionally, the data was analyzed in a consistent format to ensure consistency and reliability.

3.7 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research includes profound interest and involvement with the research area, but with enough distance to accurately observe and record phenomena without bias (Lincoln, 2009). Most of the research involving first generation students focuses on the student and not the individuals who work for their betterment. Because of this, as well as my role as a staff member in an institution of higher education, I am aware of the need to accurately represent the voices of faculty and staff.

Peer debriefing was used to aid in the credibility of the research. Colleagues from my doctoral program and my advisor reviewed transcriptions or summaries, reports, and overall

methodology to enhance credibility and ensure validity; it was vital that the researcher's thoughts or interpretations did not overshadow the study participants.

3.8 Reflexivity

Colleges and universities actively focus on the enrollment and persistence of students, however, the accomplishment of a higher education degree is “replete with various financial, social, emotional, and psychological challenges” (Greer, 2008, p. 60). As a first generation, low income, minoritized college student, I am a member of multiple “at-risk” communities on a college campus. My undergraduate career offered me a wealth of opportunities – education at a university ranked among the world's best, access to a myriad of internships and organizations, and a stunning ocean view from my dormitory – but lacked the aspects I needed the most: support and guidance. I struggled to find my place amidst a bounty of students who were not required to work 20 to 40 hours a week to fund their learning, were inherently more prepared for the rigor of a college education, and possessed the knowledge of how to navigate through barriers of access. The lack of support and mentorship I received is evident in my limited success during my undergraduate career; with my non-existent knowledge of higher education and the barriers to first generation, low income students of color, I was unable to recognize the additional aspect my education was lacking. While I experienced educational and personal struggles throughout my undergraduate career, because of my family's encouragement (and probable intimidation and judgement), withdrawing from college was not considered.

Like continuing generation college students, first generation students have the desire to succeed in higher education and obtain a degree - it's why they chose to apply to college. But, I

recognize many students do not receive the same type of support from family while struggling through challenging classes, financial hardships, barriers of access, and an unwelcome campus culture or climate. My goal in engaging in this research was to learn how faculty and staff support first generation college students; I am seeking out the resources and support my college education lacked.

As an enrollment services professional, I have aided a myriad of students and families through the college application process and the complexities of financial aid. My master's degree in marriage and family therapy, while not directly related to the field of education, enhances my ability to be a supportive influence for students in need. My diverse education is an asset to the students I support; most of my interactions with students, other than providing information, involve aspects of therapeutic counseling – creating a supportive environment, being empathetic to students' struggles, and developing a plan to discover a solution that fits their needs. First generation students possess an increased level of ambition to embrace a new and foreign experience. These students are excited about college and the range of possibilities available after graduation, but additional support and encouragement is needed for academic success and persistence, which is why this research is vital. The relationship between researcher and the participants assists in focusing the analysis (Marvasti, 2014), and as an individual with a connection to the campus, I am in a rare position of possessing a previously established working relationship with the interviewees. My connection to the campus is useful due to the importance of rapport during a qualitative research process (Rubin & Rubin, 2014).

3.9 Researcher Role

I acknowledge the possibility of a preexisting professional relationship with potential participants in the study. An important aspect to qualitative inquiry is the relationship between the researcher and the study participants (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014), and being staff member at an institution similar to Brick University provides me with additional insight to the workings of faculty and staff on a small campus. In addition to accomplishing my research goals, it is my hope that the professional relationship between myself and the study participants will continue to build throughout the process.

3.9.1.1 Reciprocity

The research will be shared with Brick University to highlight the efforts and attitudes that support first generation students to academic success and persistence. An executive summary will be prepared of the study's significant findings and shared with the larger campus community. Furthermore, it is the researcher's desire to present the findings at a regional conference.

3.9.1.2 Researcher's Epistemology

The researcher's epistemology aligns with a constructivist paradigm. A constructivist paradigm follows the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed by the researcher and researchers should try to understand the lived experiences of the participants (Schwandt, 2000). Additionally, constructivism "emphasizes that research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them" (Mertens, 2015, p. 17). By rejecting the idea of an objective reality, constructivist researchers attempt to understand "multiple social constructions of meaning

and knowledge” (Mertens, 2015, p. 18). I believe that knowledge is socially constructed; it is created and developed by individuals and their numerous experiences and interactions.

The purpose of the research is to gain an increased understanding of the types of support provided, as well as the lenses, attitudes, and beliefs faculty and staff believe influence the academic success, persistence, and motivation of first generation students at Brick University. Since, due to the researcher’s epistemology, the study is rooted in constructivism; the findings will provide awareness and guidance for those interested in supporting first generation students’ academic success and persistence.

3.10 Limitations

This study will be conducted at a single institution with a student population of 600 to 700 students. The results of this study cannot be generalized to all higher education institutions. The findings maybe applicable to other “rural”, small, public colleges, but might not apply to larger institutions, as well as private or community colleges.

Furthermore, the researcher is a first generation college student. Assumptions from the data analysis could be influenced by my personal experiences. Additionally, the researcher was a low-income undergraduate student and is a student of color; my lens constitutes a combination of the three demographics. Member checks and peer debriefing will be used to ensure trustworthy findings develop from the analysis of the raw data.

4.0 Results

The structure of support provided to first generation students, as well as faculty and staff lenses and beliefs, was researched at Brick University. Engaging in this research provided a deeper understanding of how faculty and staff believe they influence the academic success of first generation students at a small college campus.

Through the research process, two major areas emerged: personally focused support for first generation students and general support for first generation students. Within each area, themes were identified through the analysis of the interviews. The themes were validation, self-disclosure, connection and communication in the area of personally focused support for first generation students and support in the area of general support for first generation students. These areas and themes assisted in determining how faculty and staff support, encourage, and contribute to the academic success and persistence of first generation college students.

4.1 Personally Focused Support for First Generation Students

As faculty and staff members at a small college, each participant had different, although similar, types of interactions with students.

4.1.1 Connection

Relationships, or a connection, between faculty and staff is important to academic success and persistence of first generation college students. Through aspects of approachability and friendliness, personal relationships, and investing in students, campus personnel at Brick University believe they impact the academic success and persistence of first generation students. Faculty and staff characterized themselves with different personality types, attitudes, and strengths. University support personnel described themselves as caring, friendly, and advocates, while teaching faculty mostly described themselves as passionate and enthusiastic. Underneath the different descriptors was a desire to connect with students to encourage success and learning.

4.1.1.1 Generation Neutral Relationships

Generation neutral participants in the study referenced their ability to be welcoming and friendly to students at Brick University. When discussing their desire to be open and build connections with students, the small campus size aided in their ability to connect. Cameron, a non-first generation faculty member who oversees an academic support service at Brick University, stressed the importance of “being friendly” to connect with all students:

You can make such an impact just by being friendly ... That's what I'm going for. Approachable ... hopefully knowledgeable, but approachable has always been my goal, so that they can just feel like they can come ask me. I mean, there's academic anxiety in general of course, but within [their area], [their area] anxiety is a thing that practically everyone has. It's been studied. So, our goal is always just to be friendly enough that people would feel comfortable asking for help.

Cameron recognized the anxiety that accompanied their academic support service, due to being confusing and overwhelming. Throughout the interview, Cameron reiterated their efforts to maintain the comfortability of the physical space of their academic support area to ensure it is “welcoming” to all students, while ensuring they are accessible and “friendly” to reduce aspects of anxiety. As a faculty member, Cameron does not have access to students’ generational status. Cameron stated they did not see first generation students as “being a separate population”, ascribing to a neutral perspective that views student’s background and experiences as separate from academic performance and understanding (Milner, H. R, 2010). Instead, Cameron highlighted their work and actions for all students, and did not address any differing behaviors that would be used for any specialized population. It is important for students to seek assistance from Cameron’s academic support area, and for this, Cameron believed being “friendly” and “approachable” provided all students with a positive connection.

Skylar, a first generation staff member who oversees a support service critical to persistence and retention, made a conscious effort to be friendly and interact with all students as they moved throughout the campus.

With us having a small campus, I personally know a lot of students, and a lot of the times because the student has come in to see me, I'll see them in the hall. "Hey, are you good?" Even if I can't remember their name, I know their face, and I think that makes the student feel welcomed. It's like, "Oh, that lady knows me, and the professor knows me." I think having that sense of feeling included, I think, helps the student more.

As noted by Skylar, connecting with students is important to their ability to connect and feel included on a college campus. Additionally, they maintained their office to be a welcoming space to ease the tension that comes with discussions of their support area. Recognizing the

challenges associated with their support area, like Cameron, Skylar ensured that the physical space of their office was comfortable and provided the opportunity for “icebreakers” to “release the tension [students] might have”. Unlike faculty, Skylar’s responsibilities provided them with access to students’ generational status; information they did not use to prepare for meetings with students and their families, linking to their generation neutral perspective. Instead, if the student or family provided the information, which Skylar believed happened frequently in their role, they would “get a little more in depth and more in detail”. Regardless of generational status, Skylar strived to be “helpful” in their interactions with all students and maintained an “open door” policy to provide consistent and timely support.

Scout, a non-first generation faculty member in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field, discussed their efforts to impact academic success and persistence through undergraduate research and the personal relationships developed through the process. As a non-first generation student, Scout does not have personal experience relevant to connecting with first generation students. Scout does not employ differing behaviors when connecting to these students, using a neutral perspective in their work. In their description of first generation students as a population, Scout used asset verbiage to describe first generation students as most coming from families with “good work ethics”, and explained if faculty are explicit, first generation students will meet their expectations. Additionally, Scout believed connecting with students early in their freshman year, “before they are inundated with a lot of activities and requests for things”, is important to first generation student success. For this reason, Scout attempts to involve all students in research opportunities early in their undergraduate careers.

4.1.1.2 Asset Based Relationships

Blake, a first generation faculty member in a liberal arts field, pointed to faculty relationships, and the connections built between faculty and students, having the greatest impact on first generation student success. Referencing the prevalence of research on the positive impact of faculty and first generation student relationships, Blake believed developing relationships with this population was important, specifically “personal relationships”. Blake discussed their pride at a first generation student who overcame academic challenges, lack of familial support, and homelessness to graduate from Brick University after developing a personal relationship and connecting them to numerous resources:

... he graduated and I'm as proud of him graduating, and graduating the way he did, of anything I've ever done here because I want to say that, I'm not saying that I'm the one who did this, I'm not saying without that intervention he wouldn't have graduated from college, but what I know is that with that intervention he was able to succeed as a student.

Blake’s investment in their student contributed to their academic success and persistence at Brick University, and they indicated that the experience had a significant impact not only on the student, but on them as well. Highlighting their asset-based perspective, Blake understood their connection and outreach was helpful to the student, but it was the students’ efforts and determination that enabled them to succeed. Blake’s investment in first generation students at Brick University is related to their collegiate experience, including individuals who supported them throughout their undergraduate and graduate careers. Blake spoke at length about the encouragement they received from faculty throughout their undergraduate and graduate degrees, and they highlighted they “owe every one of [their] students” for the support they received while enrolled in college. Blake’s undergraduate experience included struggling “with a lot of things that

I had no idea I was going to struggle with.” Because of their personal struggles, and the efforts of supportive individuals, Blake invested in first generation students’ academic success. Believing first generation students “face a very unique set of struggles that many universities are not prepared to provide support for”, Blake assumed all their students were first generation, intelligent, and hardworking. Blake has determined it is their responsibility to “teach them not just my subject, but it’s to teach them how to be good [Brick University] students”.

Alex, a first generation staff member in student affairs, discussed how professional relationships with students can transform into a personal connection focused on reliability, care, and respect.

I have had relationships that are professional, but become more personal as you interact with the student over and over again. Where I know that the students have said to me, "Without our contact, I may not have stayed." "I still remember you, [Alex], from the first week I came into your office and we talked and I knew that I could rely on you." So those are the times when you just think, thank God I have this job, and I'm so glad that I was able to do something to help that student. That made a difference for them.

Connecting with students is a vital part of what Alex does. Recognizing that “everybody’s personal experiences help shape who they are and what they do”, Alex’s status as a first generation student assists in their ability empathize, connect with, and be a supportive influence to this population. Alex does not see first generation students as *different* from continuing generation students; they do not appreciate that terminology. Alex does not want to label this population, connecting to the idea that a label of first generation could have a negative connotation, but would like to identify them to assist with their “basic needs” related to higher education, which they do

see as distinctive. Alex voiced the importance of identification of first generation students to assist in the understanding of university culture and expectations.

One way Alex's role supported first generation students was by determining the best way to support this population and their parents, and encouraging conversations and discussions in their functional area about the "characteristics of first generation college students and how they might be impacted" by the services and programs provided. Seeing empathy as a strength to their work with first generation students, Alex believed "you can only emphasize if you feel like you've walked in that person's shoes in some way", highlighting how their ability to develop personal relationships with first generation students is intrinsically connected to their status as one. Interestingly, given their definition of their ability to empathize as a strength, although Alex was able to access generational status, they did not do so prior to meeting with students. The onus of disclosure of generational status was on the student, limiting Alex's ability to connect with this population based on shared experiences.

Jaime, a first generation staff member who oversees an academic support service, has daily and consistent one on one interaction with students through supervision and mentorship, academic coaching, and specialized support services. Jaime's goal was to "provide out of classroom academic support and mentorship that will help students better understand their college environment and better understand what it takes to succeed in college". Although, Jaime provided support that benefits all students, they recognized many of the students they "support and supervise are first generation college students". Jaime stressed that caring for students is important, but "just caring isn't enough". The personal relationships and connections Jaime developed with students was about "empowering" them and being an advocate on their behalf.

I really do care. I care, but I also recognize that just caring isn't enough. ... I feel like I really do try to think [if] what I'm doing with someone, is it helpful to them? And I've tried to get better at empowering people and really thinking, like, in each situation, "What can I do to give that student the most control and most agency over the situation?"

Jaime's experience as a first generation college student "shape[d] how they interact with every student" as they attempted to make "very few assumptions about what they may know about college and what they know to be successful". Through an asset mindset, Jaime thought "positively" about first generation students, understanding that enrolling in college could "change an entire family's trajectory". As a first generation college student, Jaime had a "personal connection" with this population, and worked towards engaging first generation students in "conversations and creat[ing] that sense of connectiveness" at a commuter campus.

4.1.1.3 Combination Asset and Deficit Based Relationships

Faculty and staff who utilized combination asset and deficit-based lenses expressed positivity at the need for success for first generation students at Brick University, but attributed students' lack of academic success and persistence to student centered deficits – aligning with Bensimon's (2005) views that campus personal can possess dual frameworks. Casey, a first generation faculty member in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field, addressed the "seven stages of grief" when, their personal connection and investment in a first generation college student did not result in persistence.

It's like the seven stages of grief ... Like confusion, denial, anger, frustration ... I tried every single trick in the book to try to get that kid on track. I tried tough love. I resorted to tough love after I tried walking her down to [the campus mental health counselor]. I tried walking her down to the [advising and tutoring center]. I tried emailing her constantly like,

"Your assignment is due." I tried holding her hand. I tried meeting her at love and being like, "Okay, it's okay. We're going to work this out." I finally resorted to tough love, because she would come in here and cry.

As noted by Casey, connecting with students is important for faculty, although one cannot ensure a positive result. Casey discussed their frustration, anger, and disappointment when the student left Brick University. Through connecting the student to resources, providing reminders for assignments, and partnering with the student in their educational endeavors, Casey developed a personal connection with the student and hoped they would be retained. Casey's positionality and desire to invest in first generation students is directly related to their personal experience in college and the "connection that [they] had with [their] professors". Casey remembered having four professors who supported them through a multitude of ways, specifically mentioning invitations to their house for dinner and opportunities to babysit and housesit. Casey said, "I think from that I actually really learned that teaching is not just about being in the classroom". Based on their experience being a first generation student, Casey attempted to replicate the support they received in college to help their students succeed. Casey's description of their college experience included not being prepared for the rigor and being unmotivated in high school, and this verbiage is replicated in their descriptions of first generation students at Brick University. Using deficit language when discussing their asset based perspective, and in ways, describing their own challenges with starting college, Casey described first generation students as unprepared, saying their high school education did not prepare them for college and they "lack a precedence at home for academia".

Keegan, a non-first generation faculty member in a field unrelated to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, noted their willingness to connect with students on their level,

including providing their personal cell phone number and texting with students. Additionally, they highlighted their ability to reach out and build personal relationships to encourage academic success and the accomplishment of goals. In speaking about their behaviors and relationship with a first generation student, Keegan said:

I'm very personable. I think I'm pretty friendly. I can get along with the students. I enjoy that the students feel comfortable to come and talk to me. I don't know about other faculty, but the students have my cell phone number so they can text me. Just like ... example, I have this student he is a very, very good student; very, very good student. Then when something happen[ed], I can see from how his performance in class, whether it's a paper or his work getting delayed or the quality of his work, is not as I expected. So I called him ... and asked him what happened. We talked for over an hour ... I feel like maybe the students feel comfortable talking to me like that and I have to give them advice and encourage them ...

Keegan's personal efforts focused on being a "good example" of motivation, "determination", and "life-long learning" to connect with students and impact first generation student success. Keegan feels "fulfill[ed]" by their ability to educate students and believed that faculty have the greatest impact on first generation student success.

Keegan used both an asset and deficit-based lens in their work with first generation students. Connecting to their combination lens and consideration of first generation students background and experiences, Keegan stressed the importance of trying to "understand [where] they are coming from" as they encouraged them towards academic success and persistence. As Keegan interacts with students through formal classroom instruction and advising, they believed they had a positive relationship with most of their students in and outside of the classroom.

Additionally, Keegan has “a commitment” to educate their students on “social, life, and professional skills” needed after graduation and as a “civic person” of society. In discussing first generation students, Keegan said it is not “fair” to generalize the population. Keegan described some of their first generation students as “quite unprepared”; Keegan said first generation students faced challenges with the integration of subject matter and analytical questions and were “resistant” to change. Keegan also stated the campus had “really good resources and [faculty does] a good job in promoting this to the students”, but first generation students did not “take advantage of those as much”, connecting to a deficit perspective of the populations’ lack of action. In building connections with all students, Keegan attempted to understand and connect with students on a personal level, the level that enabled students to “feel comfortable to come and talk to [them]”.

Expanding on the aspects of developing a strong personal relationship with students, Phoenix, a first generation staff member responsible for an academic support service, discussed how they “connect with students on caring level”. In discussing their relationships or interactions with all students, Phoenix said:

I think the students that I advise, and I know the ones that work with me because they'll even come to me instead of their advisor, and just say, "Oh, you're just like another [parent] to me." So, I think I connect with them on that. Maybe it is on that parent/advisor kind of someone who cares about them level.

Connecting with and building strong personal relationships with students allowed Phoenix to provide guidance and support through informal advising. Phoenix’s personal experience as a first generation college student included a lack of familial support, and in their efforts to connect with students, they became a parent-like figure, being the familial resource for others they lacked. In describing first generation students, Phoenix assumed they might have “a little less support from

home”, due to their parents’ lack of understanding of collegiate life and need additional support through advising. With reflection on how first generation students differ from continuing generation students, Phoenix provided an example of a first generation student who had “absolutely no family support”; addressing how the student said Phoenix was the first person to ask how their collegiate coursework was going that semester. Phoenix’s words, actions, and behaviors provided the student with support they were not receiving from home, but also contributed to Phoenix’s generalized thought of first generation students experiencing a lack of familial support – similar to Phoenix’s personal experience.

4.1.2 Communication

Communication between faculty and students or staff and students is important to increasing persistence. Additionally, active listening builds strong relationships (Mulvania, 2019) and is vital to building connections between faculty, staff, and students. Faculty and staff discussed the importance of initiating contact and listening when communicating with students.

4.1.2.1 Generation Neutral Relationships

Skylar, a first generation staff member, interacted with prospective and current students to inform and educate them on their specific area of student support service. Communication is a central part of their job responsibilities and Skylar provided phone, in-person, or electronic support to assist students and families. The services were provided to all students, but Skylar found it “most beneficial for first generation families” who were new to collegiate requirements and terminology. Connecting to their generation neutral approach, although Skylar believed first generation students need “more assistance” in their specific support area, Skylar “treats all of [their] families the same”

– without acknowledgment of their generational status unless disclosed by the student or parent. Regardless of generational status, Skylar believed staff and faculty need to initiate contact with all students about opportunities to provide additional support and assistance, but it is the students' responsibility to respond to the communication or opportunity.

Scout, a non-first generation faculty member in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field, recognized Brick University enrolled a “fair number of first generation students”, but did not know who these students were unless the student disclosed, like all faculty participants. Their position interacts with students through formal classroom instruction, undergraduate research projects, and advising. Scout believed first generation college students were “not very aware of the possibilities for mentorship and available services on campus”. To support all students, Scout encouraged students to seek support in the form of tutoring or health services and highlighted the value of engaging in research. Scout initiated contact with students to encourage them to participate in research, an effort they view as a persistence and retention tool. Scout discussed how they “suggest” the possibility of research:

I sort of suggest it, or ask them, or "Have you ever thought about this, maybe doing a project or something like that?" They do sometimes get interested. One of the things that I do is, in some of my lab classes, I have experiments that kind of lead up to little research projects where we like to kind of pique their interest a little bit.

Understanding that high school and college experiences are different, Scout started a conversation, or communicated, about research to “pique” the interest of their students. Additionally, Scout formatted classroom assignments to expose students to specific types of research experiences, and hopefully, have students become interested in the opportunity. This effort is used with all students as Scout casts a “wide net” to attract a variety of students to

participate in research. Scout's undergraduate education included involvement in undergraduate research; their experiences led to their career in higher education, which is why they see the process as rewarding for all students. Scout said:

... [my lab experiments are] little more tailored to student interest. It's a little bit more chaotic, and when students ask me, "What should I do?" sometimes I tell them, "I don't know," because it's much better for me to tell them that I don't know the answer and for them to sort of take ownership of it and kind of get interest in it, rather than me sort of saying, "You need to do this, and this, and this, and this," because that has a diminishing return.

Scout found "learning new things is very stimulating" and believed all students can benefit from this.

4.1.2.2 Asset Based Relationships

Blake's position interacted "extensively" with students through formal classroom instruction and advising. Recognizing over half of students enrolled in their classrooms are first-year students and the large population of first generation students at Brick University, Blake made "it a point to help these students succeed in my classes" and at the institution. Their efforts ranged from arranging tutors for struggling students to discussing feelings of alienation and imposter syndrome for others. In knowing how to act or react in challenging situations with students, Blake, in their role as a faculty member, said they, "... Listen. I mean, listen, let them talk, and if it's something that I'm not comfortable addressing, taking it to somebody who I hope will be more comfortable addressing than me." Additionally, Jaime, provided a similar outlook with respect to their interactions with students:

I'm trying to just shut my mouth more and listen, and really if someone comes to me with a problem, I try to just listen. And then I just ask them what they would like to do or plan to do first and kind of gauge because what I keep finding is people actually know what they should be doing and maybe they just need some feedback or they needed to say it or they just needed someone to hear it. And then sometimes you ask that question and someone has no clue and then that is where you need some advice, but it needs to be advice that they're actively participating in, "All right, I'll give you some advice. Let's come up with a plan."

As a staff member, Jaime attempted to communicate this support to all students, but with consideration to first generation students, Jaime stressed the importance of the faculty and staff relationship to success for this population. As a first generation student, Jaime's positive relationships with faculty resulted in applying to graduate school and obtaining an assistantship, which led to their career in higher education. Jaime's positive interactions with faculty were replicated in the value they give to the faculty and student relationship for first generation students.

... the faculty relationship, if they can have relationships with faculty and feel a sense of connectedness and realize that their faculty are approachable, if they can get a sense of what their faculty can do for them, what their faculty expects of them. I actually feel like that's the centerpiece [to first generation student success].

Furthermore, individuals within the field of higher education recognize the dichotomy of faculty and staff roles, but Jaime does not believe that translates to first generation students.

I don't know if students really differentiate the two. I mean they obviously know who a professor is and who an academic advisor is, but I think if they view you as someone

who's supporting their education, while they know that there are different job roles, I don't think they make as much of a distinction as we maybe think that they do.

Jaime's view of faculty and staff in the shared goal of supporting first generation students affirms the importance of listening to and communicating with students, and highlights that faculty and staff are partners in supporting first generation students' education.

In conversations with students, Alex "listens", but encourages students to "be their own advocate":

I absolutely can listen to a student, and think and help them, challenge them a little bit to develop their own way to be their own advocate. We want to help them be their own best advocate. They need to do that; they need to be that.

Alex highlights the significance of communicating and listening to students to support academic success and persistence. Connecting to an asset-based lens, Alex stresses the importance of cultivating self-advocacy for first generation students, specifically educating first generation students how to advocate for themselves. Through self-advocacy, Alex sees an increased ability for first generation students to impact their higher education experience.

4.1.2.3 Combination Asset and Deficit Based Relationships

For Casey, communication with first generation students, was important because "they identifi[ed] with them". Using asset-based language, Casey characterized their students as "hard working" and "dedicated". Casey recognized students "have varying degrees of academic capabilities", but described their students as "energized" and "driven". Casey's students energized them about their work and encouraged their efforts for academic success and persistence. For this reason, if a student is struggling in their class, communication is vital. Casey detailed their actions in how they would connect someone in this situation:

I would sit the student down and say, "Hey, I know you're struggling. Let's talk about maybe a plan for success." I use a lot of motivational interviewing techniques. That sort of ask, tell, ask, right? "Can I tell you what I think we should do?" And see what the student says. If they say, "Yes," then say, "Can I take you down to the [advising and tutoring location on campus]? ... Can I introduce you to the folks down there? Can we look at maybe who's available for tutors for these subjects?" Because I think sometimes students, again, get in that [pattern] ... of feeling like they can't reach out, right? Of not being able to take that first step. Sometimes it's if you have somebody who can buffer that first step for you, so I can be sort of the gateway to that first step.

Communicating with students is vital to Casey's work. In addressing institutional efforts for first generation college students, Casey believed Brick University could "do better". In connection with their combination lens, Casey highlighted their responsibility to not to "teach [students] how to "write" or "study"; their job is to teach a "particular curricula". As students needed additional support, Casey referred them to the correct contact, usually an academic or student support service; this action or sentiment was mentioned by each participant in the study.

4.1.3 Validation

The validation of first generation students' experiences in higher education can positively impact degree completion (Davis, 2012). Faculty support can increase students' belief in their ability to thrive in a higher education setting and impart an "obligation to succeed" (Terenzini et al, 1994, p. 67). Generation neutral and asset based faculty used aspects of validation to support first generation students. Staff members, regardless of lens, did not use validation to encourage the academic success and persistence of students.

4.1.3.1 Generation Neutral Relationships

As a generation neutral, non-first generation faculty member, Scout used accomplishments to encourage students to succeed academically. With small, manageable assignments, Scout provided all students with the satisfaction of completing a project. In an effort to increase students' self-efficacy, Scout provided students with the opportunity to succeed on a smaller level to build their confidence in a laboratory setting.

4.1.3.2 Asset Based Relationships

Through motivational conversations, Blake detailed how they encouraged first generation students to succeed through informal interactions:

... something I've realized here is that a lot of our first generation college students who are wickedly smart, very hard working and committed, entirely lack in self-confidence. So something I've really worked on over the past five to 10 years, was convincing them just how good they actually are. ...[I sat] down with [a student] and [told] him that, "You're not normal. You're not." ... "The work that you do is absolutely exceptional and you need to know that," ... And first generation college students need to hear those kinds of things.

Blake spoke about the intelligence of first generation students at Brick University, but recognized that they lacked in self-confidence. In order to validate the experiences and goals of their students, Blake stressed their abilities and assets because they “needed to hear those kinds of things”. Furthermore, in efforts to effectively support all students, Blake assumes “every student is a first generation student”.

Expanding on their actions to motivate their students, Blake discussed what they learn from their individual interactions, whether positive or challenging, with first-generation students. Focusing on their potential, Blake said:

... what I learn is how incredibly awesome these young men and women are. ... I mean, it's clichéd for sure, but ... it's an honor and a privilege to work with them. They're young, they're committed, they're humane, they're decent. I have the greatest amount of respect for my students ... They're awesome young men and women. And I always learn that. Every semester I always learn that. And I make it a point to let them know that.

Bailey, a first generation faculty member in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field, described the importance of developing excitement about a student's chosen career path as a way to motivate them to continue and validate their experiences.

... just getting them excited about their degree. I think showing professionalism and letting them know that it will lead to something if they stick with it in the classroom is the biggest influence we have. Because some of them do get really run down. We lose a lot in [STEM field] as we always do in [STEM field]. But trying to keep them going ... getting them excited about the degree, showing them a level of professionalism and then that this [challenge/struggle] is normal and you just have to push through it. Just telling them to keep at it, get them through.

Bailey focused on excitement to motivate students to persist by validating their chosen career path. Bailey's actions applied to all students. Bailey is unaware of which students are first generation, and is unable to provide "conscious, directed support" to this population – but recognizes that students "may not have familiarity with the college system and helping students navigate the college process is hopefully helpful to first generation students". In interactions with

students they assumed were first generation through conversation and advising, Bailey stressed the importance of “respect”.

I have a respect for the students in this [local] area, where I grew up. I have a respect that they may not understand what this whole academic thing is all about and that it's tough, and that they probably have a lot of weird stuff going on that I'm unaware of ... That's just more of an attitude, treating the students with respect. I think that helps.

Bailey's behaviors and actions normalized the challenges that occur within higher education, especially in the science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field. Bailey's encouragement and motivation focused on first generation students persisting through difficult material and classes by focusing on the future.

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By validating the experiences of first generation students by showing respect for their experiences and efforts, generation neutral and asset based faculty encouraged students to get involved, increased their self-efficacy, and find success in higher education settings.

4.1.4 Self-Disclosure

First-generation students struggle with sharing their experience, specifically the challenges, with others, and need support from individuals in similar positions, especially if the person is in a position of authority (Housel & Harvey, 2009). For this reason, self-disclosure is important to encourage and motivate first generation students towards academic success and persistence. Asset-based and combination asset and deficit-based, first generation faculty and staff used self-disclosure to encourage first generation students' academic success and persistence. Generation neutral participants did not use self-disclosure to encourage or motivate first generation students towards academic success and persistence.

4.1.4.1 Asset Based Relationships

Self-disclosure is important to encourage and motivate first generation students towards academic success and persistence. A majority of the participants spoke about the importance of sharing their experiences with students. Bailey stated that “helping students”, encouraging and lifting them, energized them as a faculty member. Bailey viewed first generation students, like they were, as trying to “break a cycle or ... advance themselves”; “...a student just trying to do something a little better or different than their family did”. As a first generation faculty member, Bailey discussed that their knowledge of a student's generational status comes from their advising relationship. In reference to working with a student who they discover is first generation during an advising session, Bailey said, “I'll tell them my story real quick. I'll tell them I came out of [local area high school] and that my parents had no idea even what college meant”. Noted by Bailey, the ability to self-disclose with first generation students is ingrained in their efforts with this population. With reflection on their undergraduate college experience, Bailey discussed how they

did not know what “baccalaureate” meant, had “no idea” about the resources available at their institution, and their parents could not assist in their college going process. Using an asset mindset, Bailey explained they did not see first generation students as different in the classroom, but in their “knowledge of academia”, similar to their personal confusion with aspects of their undergraduate career. Bailey said “I could tell when [they] [were] a student who had college parents because they knew all these terms and what it meant to go to college – and [I had no idea]”. Using their experience and academic success as a model, Bailey used self-disclosure to motivate first generation students.

Jaime discussed their ability to motivate first generation students could be different than motivating continuing generation students, specifically by assisting them in “seeing the possibility” of achieving their college degree.

... I would hope that maybe for some students they can relate to me and they just need people who are relatable; who ... this person got their college [degree] and they're some kind of "authority figure" because they have this job at the university. I do think you can make that kind of impact. There are a lot of students I encounter who I feel like they say they're not college material, they're not college ready ... But I think helping them see that possibility ... I hope I can help people when they're in that situation.

Jaime used self-disclosure to “help” first generation college students. As someone who oversees an academic support service, Jaime believes their perspective could be “skewed” because the population of students they advise are struggling at Brick University. Understanding their professional responsibilities impacted their lens and experiences, Jaime discussed the importance of helping struggling first generation students with “see[ing] the possibility” of academic success and providing reassurance when these students are “vulnerable” after a challenging class or assignment. Through an asset perspective, Jaime provided encouragement to first generation

students who feel ostracized in a college environment through self-disclosure.

4.1.4.2 Combination Asset and Deficit Based Relationships

Casey, a first generation faculty member in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field, spoke about their challenges during their undergraduate career and how sharing their story with a first generation student could motivate current students towards success and persistence through the recognition of being “no different than they are”.

Being able to kind of sit them down and share with them my own story, talk to them about how I was a terrible high school student. How I nearly flunked out of community college, right? That I'm honestly no different than they are, it's just that I happened to find the thing that clicked for me and that motivated me. I think having, being able to sort of relate to them in that sense, and also because I come from blue-collar roots. I feel like a lot of them come from blue-collar roots [at Brick University], that they see that and they recognize that. I think, I hope that's motivating for them ... Oftentimes, I try to let that be the sort of guiding factor in how I address them. It's like, "I get it." When they come in and they sit down, and they start, I'm like, "I get it. Let me tell you about me." I feel like that sometimes gets them to be like, "Oh, okay. There's no reason to panic. We can do this."

As Casey self-disclosed their struggles in higher education, including taking breaks during their college education and challenges with discussing their chosen career with family, first generation students can connect with Casey's background, and even see their experiences reflected in Casey's past. Casey used their experiences to assist first generation students in succeeding in their undergraduate career and reducing the anxiety that can accompany goals for students who have “aspirations beyond their bachelor's” degree.

Phoenix recognized their ability to influence first generation college students through self-disclosure:

I think I have the ability to try to influence someone ... I definitely attempt to influence them in a positive way and show them the meaning and the benefits and the joy of learning in higher education. ... I'll let them know my dad finished 10th grade. He wasn't even a high school graduate. So, I have three older siblings and none of them have a bachelor's degree. So, I can identify with that, trying to do something that wasn't common in your family. It was more about the blue-collar family life that was actually a step up from how my dad was raised.

Noted by Phoenix, self-disclosure of their background enables first generation students to connect and identify with their higher education experience. Phoenix spoke at length about the importance of “help[ing] or mak[ing] a difference” in students’ lives; it’s what energized them about working in higher education. Additionally, Phoenix described “identifying with [first generation students] and appreciat[ing] their struggle.” In their role, Phoenix saw strength in the understanding and connection they have with first generation students. Phoenix discussed the importance of students’ “motivations”, “barriers”, and “resources” to academic success and persistence. By self-disclosing their experiences, Phoenix provided students with an example of someone who was first in their family to attend college and persist.

As first generation faculty, Bailey and Casey self-disclosed their undergraduate experiences to motivate students to persist. With their willingness to self-disclose, Bailey and Casey provided opportunities for connection and support to first generation students by encouraging their success in the classroom. As first generation staff members, Jaime and Phoenix

focused on dismantling the barriers first generation students faced, typically associated with students doubts or challenges.

4.2 General Support of First Generation Students

Participants highlighted different attitudes, behaviors, and contributions in assisting first generation students at Brick University. The ability to support students through institutional challenges and roadblocks, make a difference, and enable students to succeed and advocate for themselves were among the actions described in the interviews.

4.2.1 Support

Each participant mentioned the importance of providing support to first generation students, as well as the fact that Brick University did not offer tailored support for first generation students. The influence of campus personnel is important to academic success and persistence (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Tinto, 1976) due to institutional knowledge and expertise.

4.2.1.1 Generation Neutral Relationships

Cameron and Skylar both described working with students – “step by step” – to assist them in completing required tasks. Both Cameron and Skylar discussed their willingness to provide additional support and guidance to students. Cameron’s support of students specifically applied to all students as they did not have knowledge of students’ generational status. Additionally, aligning with their neutral viewpoint, Cameron, a non-first generation faculty member, expressed they go

“above and beyond” for all students and did not know how they “could really do any more” for first generation students. Skylar, a first generation staff member, believed certain students needed additional resources and support, but didn’t “necessarily think first generation students need[ed] something special” or “anything extra”. In contrast to their statement, in reference to their strengths in working with first generation students and their families, Skylar said:

With any parent, but especially with first gen, just being very specific as possible, having hand-outs, showing where exactly to click on a website and pulling that information up in front of them. When I have appointments, everything is up on my computer, and they're looking at my screen like a movie, or watching TV. I click step by step through things. This is when you need to do this spot. This is when you need to do this. This is where you click for this. This is where you go for this," and just being as specific as possible ... I think making first gen families feel [welcome] and to kind of give them assurance that everything will be okay.

Additionally, in contrast with Skylar’s generation neutral viewpoint, they detailed aspects of educating the parents of students who were first in their family to attend college. Skylar noted that having “parents understand” processes helped their student. Similar to their students, parents “may not understand certain deadlines or certain procedures” within higher education. Skylar believed that educating the parents enabled them to assist with encouraging their students to schedule their classes, file important paperwork, and persist. In advising and supporting students with a generation neutral viewpoint, first generation populations are not receiving the additional support needed. With Skylar’s understanding that first generation students and parents need additional support, not providing support unless first generation students disclose limits Skylar’s ability to support this population.

Furthermore, Scout highlighted how the size of the campus enabled faculty to have flexibility with students and provide support based on specific student needs.

... I realize that things have to be fairly structured and I think that on this smaller campus there is the ability students to have a little bit more flexibility than there would at [larger campus] where the start time of the class and the end time is a definitive thing and you have to get in and you have to get out and there's a lot of things that need to be done in this short window. Whereas, we're just a little bit more flexible here and students miss a class, we're a little bit more accommodating, I think. There's a little more flexibility to those circumstances.

Small campuses allow for personalized support, small class sizes, and one on one interaction with faculty, and as noted by Scout, this allows additional opportunities for focused support. Scout attributed Brick University's small campus size to providing an additional aspect of support for students.

4.2.1.2 Asset Based Relationships

Bailey, a first generation faculty member in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field, recognized that the larger University system provided “poor customer support” to first generation students through complicated processes of understanding higher education terminology, policies, and procedures. Bailey expressed their frustration at the University's lack of “treating these students as customers and really understanding their questions aren't always often out of laziness ... but some of them they just have no idea”. In an effort to provide the support the institutional system lacked, Bailey guided first generation students in understanding steps students might not recognize: purchasing text books, who the registrar and provost are, and what does their specific degree mean.

In their efforts to support first generation students, Blake, a first generation faculty member in a liberal arts field, highlighted the importance of providing detailed instructions:

... what I've realized is, is that if you recognize what students don't know when they begin, that's all right. It doesn't mean they're dumb or unprepared and can't do great work or anything like that. You can have them do great work. You just need to be explicit in many cases in your instructions and in your expectations, and introduce them to what does college level work mean. And once you do that, you're able to get, I think really just fantastic work out of our students.

Blake described their role at Brick University is to “provide general education courses for primarily first and second year students”; their impact and effort to support first generation students in navigating their collegiate experience, on and off campus, connected to having a larger role in the lives of first generation students. Blake reflected on their experience as a first generation undergraduate and the intimidation factor associated with faculty. As an undergraduate, Blake had the misconception that their professors were “out to get them”, wanted to “trip them up”, and would rather “see them fail rather than see them succeed”. Because these thoughts impacted Blake’s undergraduate experience, they supported students by enlightening them to who faculty really are; they are professors because they “love [their] topic” and “love seeing students learn”.

Academic success in a college environment is a shared responsibility between the student and the institution as a functioning system, including faculty and staff. Blake discussed the importance of “setting expectations and making those expectations clear”. In their efforts to support students, Blake ensures they have “made it clear to [students] what they need to do” for academic success, as well as assist their students in understanding “they have the responsibility

now to go ahead and do it” – connecting to their asset viewpoint. Additionally, Blake spoke to the influence they have on first generation student success:

I help them succeed in their classes. I've designed my classes such that if you do what I asked students to do, you're almost guaranteed to get an A or B. And I have them do a lot, but it's done specifically that you can't just check out of my classes. You have to constantly be doing work. And if you do those things, you're again, you're almost guaranteed to get a good grade. I have a lot of A's and B's in my classes and it's not because of grade inflation, it's not because I'm an easy professor, it's because I work very hard to prepare those students.

Furthermore, Blake stressed the importance of the faculty and student relationship to the academic success and persistence of all students (but especially first generation students) and thought Brick University should formalize these connections.

Jaime, a first generation staff member, discussed “break[ing] down barriers” for students, “I think I'm just trying to provide the best services and I'm trying to break down barriers to those services. When I see barriers, I try to remove them ...” Jaime noted the importance of “more people working towards student success” and the impact it can have on persistence. As an individual responsible for an academic support service on campus, who is referred by faculty and staff to students experiencing academic difficulties, Jaime discussed the importance of students “having connections, having a network, building a network” and its relationship to “good support”. Most of the participants spoke of helping students connect with other professionals or students and making them aware of opportunities to get involved on campus. Participants connected students to academic advisors, a mental health counselor, tutoring services, financial aid, and disability services for assistance with a myriad of issues. Additionally, Jaime recognized the challenge of

“getting students to use [the support service area they supervise], getting them to see the value in it, or getting them to ask for help”, implying an relationship between academic assistance in college and stigma; a theme multiple participants highlighted in their interviews.

4.2.1.3 Combination Asset and Deficit Based Relationships

Casey’s decision to work at Brick University was influenced by the size of the institution and their ability to have small class sizes and “see students on a one-to-one basis”. Casey wanted to have an impact on the academic success and persistence of their students. In discussing their relationship with their students and the importance of flexibility as a professor, as well as holding students accountable, Casey said:

I want them to work, I want them to ... work hard and do a good job and do all of that kind of stuff, but I'm also not unyielding. I recognize that they have jobs and lives and all of that kind of stuff. Shit happens sometimes, and sometimes you can't get that paper in by 5:00 PM on a Monday. I give them the benefit of the doubt in that sense sometimes. I tell them, "I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt, but if it becomes a pattern, we're going to have to have another conversation."

In Casey’s role, they interacted with students through formal classroom instruction, “mentorship”, and advising. Casey indirectly and directly supported first generation students on campus; directly, they “[taught], mentor[ed], and advise[d]” students in their specific program and students enrolled in the general education courses they teach. Indirectly, as a first generation faculty member, Casey ensured the first generation student perspective was considered when discussing policies, programming, and activities at Brick University. Similar to Bailey, Casey highlighted the lack of transparency or understanding in university procedures and policies for first generation students. Casey recognized that “first generation students are important”, but felt

university systems to not provide the support this population needs because “there’s not a seat at the table for everyone”. Acknowledging the confusing aspects of college for first generation students, Casey offered support for first generation students beyond their role as a faculty member. Casey provided information on campus resources, focused on reducing the stigma of “asking for help”, and assisted with the development of “roadmap[s] for success”. Casey, as well as Jaime and Phoenix, identified that lack of a freshman seminar on campus was a disservice to first generation students who do not understand “the basics” of higher education. To compensate for program, Casey supplied first generation students with additional information and support, as well as referrals to support services, to assist with note taking skills and time management.

Most participants discussed expanding the network of first generation students to support services or individuals other than faculty. While participants mentioned the importance of the faculty and student relationship, staff members did not mention examples of encouraging students to build relationships with faculty outside of the classroom. Additionally, faculty did not address connecting students with other faculty members.

5.0 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to determine how faculty and staff at a small institution support first generation students and motivate them towards academic success and persistence. Research highlights the importance of faculty and staff to the academic success and persistence college students (Allen, 1992; Cokley, 2000; Fleming, 2012, Voung et al., 2010). Seldom are the perceptions of faculty and staff and their impact or influence – from their point of view – discussed. This research study helps to frame the experience and perceptions of faculty and staff in their support and guidance of first generation college students, highlights the efforts and support first generation faculty and staff provide first generation students, and emphasizes the lens or mindset faculty and staff use in their interactions and thoughts of this population. As first generation students have lower graduation rates than continuing generation students (DeAngelo et al, 2011; NCES, 2017; Whitley et al, 2018), the framework of this study was designed with focus on the complexities of academic success, persistence, and retention for first generation college students. Understanding the impact faculty and staff have on the experiences and successes of first generation college students, this study was developed with a transformational leadership theoretical framework. The study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 10 faculty and staff members at Brick University. The primary research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do faculty and staff support first generation students to motivate them to academic success and persistence/completion?
2. What do faculty and staff identify as their most influential attitudes, behaviors, and/or contributions to helping first generation students succeed and persist?
3. What type of lens do faculty and staff use when motivating first generation students?

Results of the study highlighted two major areas: personally focused support for first generation students and general support for first generation students. A total of five major themes were discovered: validation, self-disclosure, connection, and communication in the area of personally focused support for first generation students and support in the area of general support for first generation students. Chapter five covers a review of the findings of the study, its connection to transformational leadership theory, and the implications for research and practice.

5.1 Overview of Findings

This section will provide an overview of the findings in relation to the study's research questions.

5.1.1 How do faculty and staff support first generation students to motivate them to academic success and persistence/completion?

Through validation and self-disclosure, faculty and staff motivated first generation college students towards academic success and persistence. First generation college students have a lower self-efficacy, or perceived ability in achieving their educational goals (Bandura, 1997), than continuing generation students (Ramos-Sanchez & Nicholas, 2007; Voung et al., 2010). Teaching faculty used validation to increase this populations' self-efficacy and encourage academic success or the continuation of positive academic behaviors, such as academic ability and effort. Asset-based faculty participants, who were also first generation faculty, described using verbal validations of ability and power, normalizing struggles in higher education, and respect to inspire

first generation students. First generation faculty delivered validation connected to their experiences as first generation college students, providing understanding of experiences and challenges and encouragement of academic success and ability. While asset-based, first generation faculty discussed targeted encouragement in conversations with first generation college students, a generation neutral faculty member found it beneficial to use small, manageable assignments to encourage all students. Through the satisfaction of completing an assignment and the learning of “new things”, the generation neutral, non-first generation faculty member provided the opportunity to increase self-efficacy through the accomplishment of a specific goal. First generation faculty predominately verbalized first generation students’ validation or possibility of success, connecting to the importance of building personal relationships with students to motivate them academically (Komarraju et al., 2010). Conversely, generation neutral teaching faculty used manageable classroom assignments to increase students’ self-efficacy. Although providing aspects of academic success and accomplishment, the generation neutral efforts did not provide opportunity to connect in an informal environment, which is deemed most beneficial to the cultivation of relationships with first generation college students (Valdez, 2016). With efforts of validation, generation neutral and asset-based faculty expressed first generation students can achieve their goals, although through different means.

The validation of first generation students’ experiences in higher education positively influences degree completion (Davis, 2012). Predominately first generation faculty and staff used self-disclosure to motivate first generation students. Asset-based and combination asset and deficit-based, first generation participants disclosed the importance of sharing their story with this population. First generation participants felt their personal stories of challenges and successes in higher education motivated first generation college students towards success; participants believed

their ability to motivate first generation students could be higher due to identifying with their challenges. King et al. (2017) found that story-sharing from faculty and staff normalized the experiences first generation college students and enabled them to feel like they are “not alone” (p. 11). This research supports that the self-identification of first generation faculty and staff is important to the academic success and persistence of this population. Additionally, the research highlights that regardless of asset or combination perspectives, the same generational status for campus personnel and first generation students provides an additional opportunity to connect due to shared experiences. Essentially, a shared generational status for asset and deficit-based first generation participants resulted in asset-based behaviors of self-disclosure for purposes of academic success and persistence.

Participants in the study highlighted the importance of supporting first generation students by validating their efforts and experiences. Given the results of this research, there is a gap in the formalized support of first generation college students at Brick University. Validation and self-disclosure were utilized through individual efforts as the institution does not provide an overreaching support system for first generation college students. Additionally, faculty and some staff were uninformed of students’ generational status, connecting to a lack of formalized support or consideration for first generation students’ unique needs. Recognizing their personal challenges in their undergraduate careers, most first generation faculty and staff made concentrated efforts to support this population of students.

5.1.2 What do faculty and staff identify as their most influential attitudes, behaviors, and/or contributions to helping first generation students succeed and persist?

The attitudes, behaviors, and contributions toward first generation student success was highlighted in a multitude of ways. The ability to communicate and connect, support students through institutional challenges and roadblocks, advocate for, and provide validation and self-disclosure of experiences to were among the actions and behaviors described in the interviews. Generation neutral, asset-based, and combination of asset and deficit-based participants discussed the importance of connecting with students. Generation neutral participants highlighted the importance of being friendly, welcoming, and approachable to impact academic success and persistence for all students; traits determined to be beneficial to the development of a supportive advising relationship (Polson & Jurich, 1981; Marquez, 2017). But, most faculty and staff participants, regardless of lens, focused on building personal relationships with first generation students through advising, formal classroom instruction, and out of classroom academic and non-academic interactions. Participants thought the connection of campus personnel to first generation students through personal relationships was important to their success, leading to an increased effort to build these relationships. Cox & Orehovec (2007) found that personal interaction between faculty and students was the one of the most influential and infrequent types of connection on a college campus; at Brick University, most participants discussed connecting with students on this level. The campus' small size could be a contributing factor to the differing research results; small institutions offer additional opportunities to interact with faculty, which relates to academic success and persistence (Allen, 1992; Cokley, 2000; Fleming, 2012, Voung et al., 2010). Moreover, asset-based and combination first generation faculty and staff discussed their ability to identify with first generation students and understand their experiences. Based on this

commonality, first generation faculty and staff connected with, showed care for, and respected first generation college students. First generation participants understood the complexities of the first generation experience (Whitley et al., 2018). The participants' assumed they shared similar experiences with first generation college students at Brick University, and as previously discussed, connected with students to validate their experiences and disclose their stories in efforts to increase academic success and persistence (Whitley et al., 2018).

Faculty and staff used communication, including listening skills, to assist first generation college students in academic success and persistence. Shali (2017) found that “listening habits” (p. 1) influenced and increased academic performance for students, and this research can be applied to faculty providing increased support for first generation college students also. Faculty and staff must listen to the needs or expectations of first generation college students to increase their ability to support this population. First generation, asset-based faculty and staff discussed the importance of listening to the needs of first generation students, especially surrounding challenging situations, which connects to high impact practices used with first generation college students (Whitley et al., 2018). With recognition of their personal experiences in college, first generation faculty and staff understood the need to listen to first generation college students to assist them in reaching their goals. Additionally, a first generation, asset-based staff member discussed the importance of teaching this population to advocate for themselves. Educating first generation students on how to self-advocate is important to their academic success. Self-advocacy enables first generation students to connect to resources important to their academic success and individual needs (CTQ, n.d.). First generation students play a critical role in the first generation college student experience on a college campus (Whitley et al., 2018), and self-advocacy provides this population with the

opportunity to influence their collegiate experience, as well as the experience for other first generation college students.

The influence of campus personnel is important to academic success and persistence (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Tinto, 1976) due to institutional knowledge and expertise. Each participant mentioned the importance of providing support to students. First generation participants, regardless of lens, discussed aspects that the larger university system and Brick University could increase their effectiveness in. Participants mentioned first generation students deal with challenges understanding the terminology and expectations of higher education, and expressed desire for the campus to offer additional support or a freshman seminar to increase assistance and information to this population. Participants believed Brick University and its larger educational system could provide additional formalized support when assisting first generation students to increase academic success and persistence. For first generation students, having a resource or authority figure guide them towards success provides them with opportunities that were not previously known or accessible. Through multiple aspects of support and the development of connections throughout a college system, faculty and staff can expand first generation students' network to help them succeed in a new environment. Moreover, generation neutral and asset-based first generation staff participants highlighted the importance of educating first generation college students' parents on the culture and process-based expectations of higher education, including deadlines, to encourage academic success and persistence for first generation college students. Parental programming is included in 29 percent of cohort-based first generation student programming and 25 percent of non-cohort based programming (Whitley et al., 2018) – connecting to the importance of first generation students' parents to their academic experience, as well as parents' desire to be engaged (Bruner, 2017). Furthermore, regardless of lens, faculty and

staff referred first generation college students to campus resources to expand their network and influence academic success and persistence; students were referred to different support services, including academic advisors, a mental health counselor, tutoring services, financial aid, and disability services. Without the development of a formal “engaged community” at Brick University, faculty and staff participants connected first generation students to resources at the institution. An institutional developed engaged community would enable campus stakeholders to increase their ability to advocate for first generation college students and connect them to resources (Whitley et al., 2018; Winfield, 2019), providing increased support to this population at Brick University.

Current research is limited in its understanding of the influence staff members have on the academic success and persistence of first generation college students. Studies looking at support for first generation college students focuses on the student population or faculty (Eli & Bowen, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979); Valdez, 2016). In seeking to obtain a deeper understanding of the support provided by staff on a college campus, this research is unique. Staff participants, regardless of lens, discussed their efforts to guide first generation college students. A majority of the staff participants, all of whom were classified as first generation, discussed using self-disclosure to support this population and emphasized their ability to identify with the students aided in their efforts to encourage and motivate. Additionally, faculty participants highlighted the importance of connecting first generation college students to academic and support resources throughout the campus, which are overseen by staff at Brick University. Staff members on a college campus are critical to the academic success and persistence of first generation college students (Marquez, 2017; Schreiner et al., 2001) – and the findings of this study highlight their important role.

5.1.3 What type of lens do faculty and staff use when motivating first generation students?

In their support of first generation college students, faculty and staff used generation neutral, asset-based, or a combination of asset and deficit lenses. An asset-based perspective validates the experiences of first generation students and recognizes their strengths, knowledge, skills, and abilities (Whitley et al., 2018). Asset-based terminology used by faculty and staff highlighted their belief of first generation college students to be smart, motivated, and unique, as well as attempting to better themselves through formal education. By describing first generation college students by their assets, these participants showed first generation college students have value at institutions of higher education and can achieve academic success. Additionally, similar to previously conducted research (Schreiner, & Anderson, 2005), asset-based faculty and staff believed by validating the experiences of first generation college students and connecting with and support of this population motivated them towards academic success and persistence.

First generation students need “intentional and thoughtful support” (White, 2016), thus the use of a generation neutral or combination framework is not beneficial to this population. As discussed, generation neutral participants provided information and support, used friendliness in an effort to connect with all students, and highlighted the importance of learning new things to academic success and persistence. Generation neutral participants classified their efforts as high touch, and as detailed in the support section, and believed first generation college students did not need tailored support, ignoring the populations’ unique needs (White, 2016). Generation neutral frameworks assess a student’s background and experiences as separate from academic performance and understanding (Milner, H. R, 2010). By not recognizing first generation students’ experiences and background, generation neutral faculty and staff are missing opportunities to connect with and support this population (White, 2016).

Deficit frameworks concentrate on first generation students' barriers to success or "inherent shortcomings" (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 7), and combination asset and deficit-based frameworks value first generation students while attributing lack of equitable outcomes to the students' themselves (Bensimon, 2005). Deficit verbiage in the research described first generation students as lacking knowledge in "how to learn", being unprepared, deficient support from parents, and limited perspectives and understandings of higher education. Faculty and staff who used combination frameworks or verbiage also spoke to the value of first generation college students participants, connecting to "well-meaning" but negative associations for this population (Bensimon, 2005), which can lead to limited academic success or lack of persistence for first generation students (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Bensimon (2005) highlighted that combination faculty and staff focused on changing first generation students and not the institution for better outcomes for the population. This research found that the majority of combination faculty and staff wished the institution offered additional support for first generation students, as suggested by the implementation of a freshman seminar course at Brick University, but also attributed negative attributes and efforts to this population. The results highlight the stigma or stereotypes first generation students can encounter on a college campus, even as faculty and staff are providing guidance and support.

With comparison of first generation participants and their descriptors of first generation students, distinct similarities in the terminology were evident. First generation faculty and staff labeled their undergraduate experiences with challenges, struggles, unpreparedness, and a lack of parental support; the same they verbiage to describe the first generation college students they educate. This research shows that first generation faculty and staff could assume deficit perspectives or ideas about this population due to their personal experiences in higher education.

Limited research is available looking at how first generation faculty, staff, and administrators motivate and guide first generation students towards academic success and persistence; even less is available regarding the impact of generational status on the support of first generation college students. The results of the study highlight the importance of this work.

5.2 Transformational Leadership Theory

Limited studies have researched the connection between transformational leadership and higher education, which is unexpected given the relationship between transformative leaders' actions and behaviors and positive student outcomes. Aspects contributing to academic success and persistence, like self-efficacy (Pillai & Williams, 2004), increased commitment (Pillai & Williams, 2004), additional effort (Arthur et al., 2011), and motivation (Charbonneau et al., 2001) are linked to transformational leadership. Transformational leadership from campus personnel increases students' motivation, knowledge, engagement, and academic success (Balwant, 2016; Mawn, 2012), and as a result, their persistence. Transformational leaders achieve desired results through the implementation of one or more of four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2008).

5.2.1 Idealized Influence

Idealized influence highlights a transformational leaders' status as a role model (Bass & Riggio, 2008); a faculty or staff member who is respected and admired by first generation college students. In transformational leadership theory, first generation college students must believe that

faculty and staff possess positive qualities. The intentional sampling process of participants in the study, as well as the recommendation of faculty with high impact practices from the Director of Academic Affairs, ensured participant's responsibilities and roles at Brick University interacted frequently and supported the student population. Participants believed they had the ability to influence students towards academic success and persistence through different aspects of validation, self-disclosure, support provided, and encouragement; one combination viewpoint participant specifically expressed the importance of being a positive role model to the academic success and persistence of first generation college students. Idealized influence is determined by the faculty or staff member's actions and behavior and aspects of their influence as determined by first generation college students. This research solely looked at the experiences and perceptions of faculty and staff, and as a result, solely represents their point of view. First generation faculty and staff who used asset-based or a combination of asset and deficit-based lenses, aligned with aspects of idealized influence. Participants discussed building relationships with students, being a positive role model, ensuring the possibility of success, and if they were first generation, sharing their story of educational success to further encourage academic success. Students' belief in their ability to succeed in higher education is influenced by faculty and staff (Braxton et al., 2004). The research shows that faculty and staff recognize their ability to impact academic success and persistence for first generation college students and connects to aspects of the actions or behaviors of faculty and staff being "idealized".

5.2.2 Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leaders' actions motivate and encourage followers' behaviors and commitment (Bass & Riggio, 2008); inspirational motivation enables faculty and staff to provide

a shared vision of success between campus personnel and first generation college students. With transformational leadership, faculty and staff demonstrate high standards, communicate positively about future goals, and provide have a strong sense of purpose to first generation students (Transformational Leadership, n.d.). To be inspirational motivators, faculty and staff need to make the plan for success for first generation college students understandable and engaging. The research findings connect to the inspirational motivation of some faculty and staff in the study in the area of personally focused support for first generation college students. Through validation and self-disclosure, generation neutral, asset-based, and combination of asset and deficit-based participants discussed their efforts to motivate first generation students towards academic success and persistence. Predominately first generation faculty and staff used inspirational motivation, basing their motivational efforts off of their personal experiences, to encourage and motivate first generation college students. Additionally, the faculty and staff who oversaw formal classroom instruction, the academic advising process, and academic support services guided students through explicit requirements, development of educational plans, and goals for success, connecting to important factors of detailed expectations and commitment to shared goals of inspirational motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2008). The research shows participants used aspects of inspirational motivation in working with first generation students.

5.2.3 Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation is the process of faculty and staff encouraging first generation students' academic efforts by “questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways” (Bass & Riggio, 2008, p. 7). With intellectual stimulation, first generation students are included in the supportive process of addressing problems and finding solutions, and

as transformational leaders, faculty and staff believe “learning is value and unexpected situations are ... opportunities to learn” (Transformational Leadership, n.d.). In this research, faculty and staff participants did not discuss nurturing first generation students to encourage creativity, innovative thinking, or independent thinking. Generation neutral, asset-based, and combination faculty participants highlighted the value of learning new things and its connection to academic success, but not how they encourage this process for first generation college students. With respect to this research, limited aspects of intellectual stimulation, if any, are occurring with first generation students at Brick University. The participants in the study did not embrace this tenet.

5.2.4 Individualized Consideration

Transformational faculty and staff focus on the first generation students’ needs for development by acting as a mentor or coach (Bass & Riggio, 2008). Individualized consideration enables the students’ support to be tailored to their needs and differences with faculty and staff listening and monitoring progress towards success. When done effectively, first generation students admire, respect, and trust campus personnel and put forth increased academic effort (Burkus, 2010). Participants with generation neutral viewpoints did not implement individualized consideration in their work with first generation college students; the students’ unique needs and differences were not considered. Asset-based and combination participants discussed communicating and listening to students, offering support, self-disclosure based on relatable experiences, validation, and providing respect and encouragement. Only one participant mentioned their effort to mentor or coach first generation college students. This suggests that although faculty and staff at Brick University supply individualized consideration to students, their efforts might not be transformative.

In transformational leadership, faculty and staff must inspire first generation college students to commit to a shared goal of academic success and persistence – challenging them to be inventive problem solvers and increasing their personal development through mentorship and support (Bass & Riggio, 2008). Participants in the study used aspects of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration in their support and guidance of first generation students, but not intellectual stimulation as defined by transformational leadership theory. Without additional research involving first generation students’ perceptions of campus personnel’s actions and behaviors, it is a challenge to determine if participants are transformational leaders. The research has shown that participants inherently utilize characteristics of transformational leadership theory in their goals toward first generation student academic success and persistence, which reinforces the concepts of transformational leadership theory. Going forward, researchers should use transformational leadership theory in determining the impactful behaviors and practices of faculty and staff for student academic success and persistence. Additionally, this framework can be used to institute institutional cultural shifts in higher education, which was highlighted in the asset-based behaviors participants used and their connection to first generation student success. Using a transformational leadership framework can help institutions find equity in first generation student academic success and persistence by ensuring faculty and staff are empowering students to achieve exceptional results.

5.3 Implications and Recommendations

With respect to the findings of the study, the following discussion highlights implications for research and practice. While the study focused attention on the experiences of 10 faculty and

staff members at Brick University, the results of the study inform the overall understanding of the perceptions of faculty and staff as they interact with first generation students on a small campus. Accordingly, the results connect to implications for research and practice.

5.3.1 Implications for Research

Current research has been limited in its understanding of the perceptions of faculty and staff as they guide students towards academic success and persistence. Available research shows the impact of faculty and staff on student success from the perspective of the student (Colton et al., 1999; Schwartz et al., 2018). This study establishes the need to focus on the faculty and staff who support and influence first generation college students. Based on the results in this study, six recommendations for future research at Brick University and in higher education are to 1. Include interviews of first generation college students who are impacted by the actions and lenses faculty and staff; 2. Study the impact of campus personnel and first generation students' intersecting identities; 3. Look at how the generational status of faculty and staff influence their support of first generation college students; 4. Research how generation neutral, asset, and deficit lenses impact the academic success and persistence of first generation college students; 5. Conduct the study at other types of higher education institutions; and 6. Research needs to focus on the impact of staff at higher education institutions.

Interviewing first generation students may prove helpful in future research. Participants indicated their ability to influence first generation students towards academic success and persistence, but the study did not include the student perspective. Discovering the viewpoint of the first generation college students as a direct response to the efforts of faculty and staff could increase the understanding on how to best support first generation students (Schreiner et al., 2011; Valdez,

2016). Moreover, first generation students can discuss how or if they feel supported by faculty and staff at Brick University to see if disconnections between actions and results are evident.

To ensure generational identity was the priority, this study focused on first generation students regardless of demographics or background. First generation students can have intersecting identities due to race or ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, or income level; these identities influence their experiences (Whitley et al., 2018). Forty-two percent of Black students and 48 percent of Latinx students are first generation compared 28 percent of White students, and first generation students have a lower median household income (\$60,000 less) and more unmet financial need than continuing generation (NCES, 2014). At Brick University, the student population is predominately White Americans (86 percent) (Brick University Report, 2018), and local to the campus, which is in a city with a poverty rate of 21 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Understanding how these intersecting identities at Brick University influences the perceptions of faculty and staff can add insight to their actions and motivations, as well as opportunities for additional training, as these perceptions ultimately impact how faculty and staff support first generation students. Also, faculty and staff possess intersecting identities which influence their lived experiences, background, and lenses. Some of the participants in the study classified themselves as first generation college students, as well as “blue collar”. Limited research exists on the support first generation faculty and staff provide first generation students; focusing on the support, lenses, and relationships of first generation campus personnel and first generation students can reveal the benefits or disadvantages of those relationships.

The participants in the study used generation neutral, asset-based, or combination asset and deficit based lenses when connecting with first generation college students. Most research looks at asset, deficit, and neutral frameworks in relationship to race or ethnicity and gender, but not

generational status (Bensimon, 2005; Milner, 2010). Research shows that first generation students benefit from using asset-based lenses (Whitley et al., 2018), but additional research needs to be done to ensure the best practices for first generation college students. Also, addressing the limitations in this study can help to enhance our understanding of the perceptions of faculty and staff in relation to first generation college students. For instance, this study was situated at a small public institution in a predominately white area. While many institutions of higher education may have similar characteristics, this study's findings cannot be generalized to all faculty and staff. Gaining information from faculty and staff at other types of institutions (public and private) can help to expand the knowledge of the support and guidance provided to first generation students.

Lastly, as previously mentioned, limited research focuses on the faculty and staff who encourage and support first generation students towards academic success and persistence. There is an absence of available research when solely focusing on staff. This research demonstrates the impact staff believe they have on first generation college student success, as well as their efforts and goals in supporting this specialized population. Learning more about the impact of staff from their perspective, as well as the student perspective, would be beneficial for increased training and best practices for higher education professionals.

5.3.2 Implications for Practice

The recommendations for practice were influenced by participants' stated experiences. Recommendations for practice include 1. Training faculty and staff, 2. Institutional investment in first generation students, and 3. Providing access to generational status; and 4. Shifting institutional focus to be student-ready.

Most participants spoke of not attending trainings on any specialized populations on college campus. While all faculty and staff will not have a first-hand understanding of the challenges of first generation students, they can learn more about first generation students and their needs. At Brick University, requiring institutionally mandated training on first generation students, including cultural competency and diversity training as first generation students have intersecting identities, can assist faculty and staff in understanding some of the stereotypes struggles first generation students face (Whitley et al., 2018). Furthermore, the challenges first generation students face are often viewed as inadequacies or deficiencies of the students themselves (Whitley et al., 2018). Increased training provides the opportunity to implement procedures, policies, and best practices focused on celebrating the unique characteristics of first generation students and developing an asset-based institutional culture.

Campus investment in first generation college students can have a significant impact; however, colleges need to be more prepared to work with students this population (Whitley et al, 2018). At Brick University, an engaged community of faculty, staff, and first generation students does not exist, which was evident by the lack of formalized programming or support for first generation students. Institutional investment in first generation students consists of building an engaged community of faculty and staff through their self-identification as first generation students, attending workshops and events, mentorship, and service on first generation committees or task forces (Whitley et al, 2018). The development and involvement of faculty and staff in institutionally formalized efforts at Brick University for first generation students is important to their academic success and persistence.

Research shows first generation students need additional support during their tenure in higher education (White, 2016). Many of the participants noted that unless the student self-

disclosed, they were not knowledgeable about students' generational status. Additionally, participants who did have access to generational status did not consult the information prior to meeting with students, limiting their ability to provide support and guidance to first generation students. First generation students account for almost half of the student population at Brick University (Brick University Report, 2018), and it is imperative that their needs are considered in and out of classrooms. Given that each first generation participant described using self-disclosure to encourage and motivate first generation students, institutions like Brick University should provide access to generational data for faculty and staff. Having access to generational data can help first generation faculty and staff support first generation students and enable this population to feel more connected to faculty and staff (Whitley et al., 2018).

Institutional culture shifts contribute to feelings of inclusion for first generation college students (Whitley et al, 2018). Higher education institutions need to shift their focus to being student ready instead of classifying first generation students as having a lack of college readiness or being underprepared for higher education (Whitley et al, 2018). The onus on first generation student success is on the institution and should not be attributed to students due to perceived deficits. Being "student-ready" includes changing policies, processes, and practices to better serve students and reduce obstacles to success (Whitley et al, 2018). Additionally, institutions need to be proactive about the needs of first generation students and not reactive, including the expansion of programs to support students throughout their enrollment (Whitley et al, 2018). Furthermore, the development of a cohort-based program offers touch support for first generation students would be important (Whitley et al, 2018), which would benefit first generation college students at Brick University. Participants provided numerous examples of assisting students with networking and providing them access to resources across campus. With Brick University being a small campus,

first generation students have multiple support systems; the implementation of a centralized program would aid in these efforts. Creating a culture of success at Brick University for first generation students can lead to institutional change and development of an asset-based culture with this population.

5.4 Conclusion

This study looked to understand faculty and staff perceptions of first generation college students at Brick University. The research found that through using generation neutral, asset-based, and a combination of asset-based and deficit relationships, 10 faculty and staff believed they influenced academic success and persistence for first generation college students. Additionally, the study found that faculty and staff use aspects of transformative leadership theory in their efforts to inspire and support academic success and persistence. First generation faculty and staff described behaviors and actions to encourage greater academic success and persistence for first generation students than continuing generation students due to their ability to identify with the population.

Barriers to institutional support of first generation students must be remedied to achieve equity in academic success and persistence for this population. Institutions must continually work to ensure that first generation students have the support they need for academic success in college. This study reinforced the idea that the perceptions of faculty and staff are important to understand how they support, motivate, and respond to the needs of first generation college students.

Appendix A Emails

Appendix A.1 Email from the Chancellor

Subject: Notification of Research Project at Brick University

Dear Colleagues:

Monique Eguavoen, as part of her EdD dissertation in practice, is about to conduct a research study focused on how faculty and staff influence the academic success, persistence, and motivation to continue for our first generation students. To do this, she will need some help from some of you. I hope you will consider getting involved when she contacts you.

Here is a brief description of the effort she is planning: First generation students face significant hurdles in completing their education, but research has shown, that academic and social integration are important factors towards success in college – and faculty and staff are vital to this. By focusing on faculty and staff, Monique seeks to determine how these individuals support and guide first generation students.

The process is scheduled to begin soon, and those who are invited to serve will hear from Monique shortly.

Best Wishes,

The Chancellor of BU

Appendix A.2 Email from the Researcher

Subject: Seeking Participants for a Study about Interventions that Support First Generation Students

Dear Person:

I'm writing as a follow-up to an initial email that the Chancellor sent in regard to my research study that will begin as soon as possible at Brick University. I would like to cordially invite you to participate in the project. Due to your leadership position on campus and frequent interaction with our students in a professional capacity, I feel that you would add a lot to the research, and hope that you will consider participating.

The purpose of the study is to learn how faculty and staff encourage and support first generation students to academic success, persistence, and motivation to continue. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a 60 to 75 minute, one-on-one interview. You will be asked about your experience supporting first generation students. The interview will take place in your office or a reserved conference room at a time that is convenient for you.

Please let me know if you would like to participate in this research effort. Thank you.

Best,

Monique

Appendix B Informed Consent

An Exploration of How Faculty and Staff Influence the Academic Success and Persistence of First Generation Students

You are invited to participate in a research study of how faculty and staff influence the academic success and persistence of first generation students. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study and participate in the interview. The principal investigator (PI) for this study is Monique Eguavoen, doctoral student, in the Administrative and Policy Studies: Higher Education Management program at the University of Pittsburgh. The Brick University faculty or staff member (circle one) is [Name of Professional], [Title of Professional] of [Name of Division].

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the influence faculty and staff have on the academic success and persistence of first generation students. For the purpose of this study, first generation students are defined as students who are the first in their family to attend a four year institution – meaning neither parent nor guardian possess a bachelor’s degree. This study will attempt to learn more about the support faculty and staff provide first generation students, and the associated beliefs of faculty and staff that influence student success and persistence.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview for approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted in your office or a private conference room. The interview will be audio recorded.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The interviewer will ask you questions about your experience working with first generation students at Brick University. You are welcome to share as much or as little information as you wish. If you experience discomfort at any time you can ask the interviewer to terminate the interview. The foreseeable risk of this project includes the possibility of someone identifying the institution and your position in the study. Although gender neutral pseudonyms will be used for you and a pseudonym for the institution, the general division in which you work will be mentioned in the study. The benefits to participation are: 1) the opportunity to share your perspective with a practitioner scholar; 2) to participate in a study and learn more about the research process; 3) to help professionals learn about the support and attitudes and behaviors associated with the academic persistence and success of first generation students.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this study. The interviewer is grateful for your participation and will thank you for your time.

Confidentiality

The records for this study will be kept private and confidential. All reports, articles, or presentations that might be published will not include any personal identifying information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All research records will be stored in a locked file on the primary investigators’ computer or a locked office for the duration of the research project. The researcher will have access to the interview transcripts and audio recordings. Transcripts and audio recordings will be destroyed after any resulting publications are completed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. There are no substantial risks associated with this project, nor are there any direct benefits to you. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during this study without judgement from the researcher or affecting any relationships at Brick University.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is: Monique Eguavoen (Principal Investigator). You may ask any questions that you have immediately. If you have questions after the conclusion of the interview, you are encouraged to contact Monique Eguavoen at meguavoen@pitt.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, or if you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board, at (412) 383-1480 or irb@pitt.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

Participant signature

Date

Investigator signature

Date

Appendix C Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

1. Tell me about your position and responsibilities at Brick University.
2. For the purpose of this research, first generation college students are classified as individuals who are first in their family to attend a four-year institution – meaning neither parent nor guardian possesses a bachelor’s degree. Based on this definition, would you be classified as a first generation college student?
3. How does your position interact with first generation students at BU?
4. How does your role directly or indirectly support first generation students at BU?

Semi-Structured Interview

Institutional Efforts

1. Tell me about the initiatives or policies in your department that supports first generation students to academic success, persistence, or motivation to continue.
Prompts and follow-up questions:
 - a. How and when were these initiatives started?
 - b. Are the efforts impacting students? In what ways?
 - c. What do you believe has the greatest impact on first generation students’ success?
2. Do you know of initiatives in other areas that help first generation students?
 - a. How do these efforts support first generation students toward degree completion?
3. From your perspective, what is the biggest institutional challenge at BU in supporting first generation students?
4. Which campus resources are being used the most by first generation students for academic success, persistence, and motivation towards graduation?
5. Are there resources you would like to offer first generation students that are not available at the institution?

Personal Efforts

6. Describe yourself and how you made the decision to work in higher education.
Prompts and follow-up questions:
 - d. How did you decide to start working at Brick University?
5. Are you aware/how would you describe the influence you have to motivate first generation students to complete their degree?
6. What do you find the most energizing about your work?

7. What words do you think students and colleagues would use to describe you?
8. What strengths do you see in your work with first generation students?
9. What practices do you employ to help first generation students with academic success and motivation to complete?
10. How would you advise a colleague to respond to a student who was struggling or considering leaving the institution?

Student Focused

11. Can you please tell me about a time where working with a first generation student or students stood out to you?

Prompts and follow-up questions:

- a. Was this in individual interaction or a group interaction?
 - b. What did the student do or say?
 - c. How did the student respond?
 - d. Have you changed the type of advice you provide students?
2. Can you please tell me about a time where you were challenged working with a first generation student?

Prompts and follow-up questions:

- a. What were you thinking?
- b. How did you know that this was a challenging situation? How did you know how to react?
- c. What did you learn?

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