

**PARENTAL INFLUENCES ON FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS:
CASE STUDIES OF ENROLLMENT AND PERSISTENCE**

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In this study, I investigate the various ways in which parents of first-generation college students influence their children's capacity to acquire the requisite cultural capital needed to enroll and persist in college, as well as the ways in which first-generation students acquire this capital in other ways. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how parents influence a first-generation college student's desire to enroll in college and persist. In addition, the aim of the study is to gauge the influence of parental involvement on first-generation college student persistence while in college. The study examines how parents aid students' acquisition of the requisite cultural capital needed to better position them to attend college. It describes how the socioeconomic background and social class of families influence their capacity to connect to social networks that have the capacity to increase the educational aspirations of their children. The central research question of this study is to then understand how and to what extent families play a role in the educational goals past the secondary level for first-generation college students. Further, how do first-generation college students describe their home lives prior to college?

This study examines these issues through the interrelated theoretical framework that employs Bourdieu's theories on habitus and cultural capital (1977). Participants were actively involved at the time of this study in the TRIO Student Support Services program at the

University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. This study uses an open-ended semi-structured interview format with a sample of purposefully selected respondents. Parents of participants in this study were supportive of their children's inclination to attend college; however, their capacity to offer direct academic support was limited by their own educational background. Further, participants exhibited a high level of involvement in extracurricular activities, an important factor in the development of their educational aspirations. This involvement was only moderately supported by parents of participants.

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PREFACE

The journey towards completion of my doctoral degree and dissertation has been filled with moments of great joy, as well trying times. The joys include watching my beautiful children grow and flourish each day, and experiencing the best that life has to offer alongside the most amazing person I know, my wonderful wife Allison. Her love, patience, and support have been the bedrock on which all that I have is made possible. She has stood by me in the best and worst of times, and has walked this educational journey with me. All I have is because of her, she has my eternal love. To my two boys, Aiden and Ethan, your daily reminders of what life is all about warms my heart and fills my soul, daddy is finally done with his paper.

I have the greatest of appreciation and respect for my parents, Cindy and Duane Dick, who consistently sacrificed for my benefit, even when they had little to give. Their love and support have made me the person I am today. Unfortunately, my mother passed well before her time and before I could finish this degree, but I know that she is in heaven smiling down on me. I dedicate this paper to her memory and will forever carry myself in a way that honors her memory. To my dad, Duane, you arrived just in time to give my mom and me the best life one could ever hope for. You showed me what it means to be a good father, and the value of hard work. To my brother, Kevin, and my sister, Danielle, I am thankful each day to be part of a family that loves and supports each other at all times, even under the most trying of

circumstances. To my in-laws, Dennis and Laura Kish, I am blessed to have you in my life and I am lucky to have your love. I cannot imagine completing this journey without your support.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

A significant variance exists in the likelihood of postsecondary enrollment between first-generation and non first-generation students. First-generation students are defined as those students whose parents' highest level of education completed is high school (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Building on previous research conducted by Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998), Choy (2001) remarks that first-generation students are less likely to enroll in college than non first-generation students. In fact, she cites the variances present in the 1992 graduating cohort of high school students' enrollment rates as of 1994, whereby only 59% of first-generation students had enrolled in college as compared to a 93% enrollment rate for students with parents who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher (Choy, 2001). This specific cohort utilizes the data compiled as part of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 eight graders as part of a National Center for Education Statistics study (Choy, 2001). She also notes that first-generation students were more likely to attend a 2-year public institution and less likely to attend a 4-year public institution. Further, Choy points out that even after controlling for other variables that could influence the college enrollment rate of students (educational aspirations, academic preparedness, involved parents, and family's socioeconomic background), first-generation students were most influenced by their parents' level of education.

1.1.1 Pilot Study

Prior to commencement of this research essay, I conducted a pilot study at Slippery Rock University in order to gain feedback on the interview protocol to be used in this study. I selected one first-generation student who was a participant in the Student Support Services program at Slippery Rock University in partnership with the assistant director of the office. The participant was chosen for his capacity to provide rich accounts of his experience during the interview process, as well as his ability to give constructive feedback on ways in which the interview protocol might be improved.

From the pilot study, the finding of the case study suggested that families do play an important role in the educational expectations past the secondary level for first-generation college students. In the pilot study, the participant conveyed on a number of occasions the direct or indirect role that his parents played on his desire to go on to college. He also noted the importance his sister's completing her degree had on his desire to go back and finish college after initially departing due to academic reasons. The participant in this study strongly suggested on multiple occasions that he wished that his parents had more involvement in his academics and would have had a more active role in his education. He also shared that while his parents were generally supportive, they were not able to provide specific academic support that would have improved his educational outcomes. Further, he indicated that his parents did not actively encourage his high level of extracurricular involvement. He felt that had his parents been able to

guide him more through their own experiences, then he wouldn't have had as many troubles when he first went to college.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how parents influence a first-generation college student's desire to enroll in college and persist. In addition, the aim of the study is to gauge the influence of parental involvement on first-generation college students' persistence while in college. Student participants of this study were active in the Student Support Services TRIO program. The goal of the study is to better understand how families, especially parents, create an environment that leads to college attendance. Previous research indicates that understanding how to navigate the process of gaining acceptance to college can be extremely challenging for students. First-generation students are often at an even greater disadvantage because their parents lack the knowledge base of how the process works and what steps need to be taken along the way.

Many students whose parents attended college anticipate and even expect to go on to postsecondary education. First-generation students are often not fully informed as to the benefits of college, what it takes to attend college, and how to navigate the college entrance process. My dissertation provides information and knowledge that could inform both high schools' and colleges' understanding of the first-generation student population. In addition, later on in my dissertation I suggest how these institutions may serve as a resource to students navigating the educational system.

Choy (2001) offers a series of sequential steps that need to be taken in order to attend college. These steps include: making the choice to one day attend college, academically preparing oneself for collegiate level courses, preparing for and taking an appropriate college entrance examination, selecting and applying to at least one college, and getting accepted to college. It is important to understand if any triggers exist in which parents can more effectively assist their first-generation students in increasing the likelihood that they attend college. This study provides a better understanding of how parents and families can better assist their first-generation students in navigating the process of gaining acceptance to postsecondary education.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Participants in this study have already passed through the college acceptance and enrollment process at the time of the study. My interest is in their experiences that have led them to college, as well as their experiences while in college.

- The central research question of this study is to then understand how and to what extent families play a role in the educational goals past the secondary level for first-generation college students. Further, how do first-generation college students describe their home lives prior to college?

Additional secondary questions were related to how characteristics of a first-generation student's home life influence his or her educational goals past high school. They were:

- What is the relationship between a first-generation student's educational goals and parental involvement in secondary level schooling?
- In what ways do families shape and influence how a first-generation student comes to understand the value of education?

- In what home factors (activities, events or behaviors) does a first-generation student's family regularly engage that may lead to their attending college, as well as their persistence in college? How do these home factors improve their academic preparedness for postsecondary education?

In order to develop a contextual basis of the participants' backgrounds, I asked a series of questions as part of an in-depth semi-structured interview, and they were segmented into three categories (participants, parents, siblings). I explored these questions by discussing these items with participants.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

There are a number of variables that influence the likelihood that a student will go on to attend college after completing his or her high school requirements. Factors such as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, cultural background and gender are a few examples that have been assessed as it relates to accessibility to higher education. An important cohort of students that has drawn recent attention in the literature is first-generation students. These students share many of the characteristics and qualities referenced above such as coming from a lower socioeconomic background or being an ethnic minority.

The context in which first-generation students grow up and make college going decisions is an important perspective to examine. While history shows that issues of accessibility and persistence are not new for first-generation students, it continues to be problematic for those individuals endeavoring to be the first in their family to attend college. Families have the ability to strengthen the desire to attend and succeed in college, or conversely lessen the interest of a child, by either supporting or downplaying the importance of postsecondary education. The

research suggests that having the necessary cultural capital to share with children plays a central role in the encouragement of college attendance and success. For first-generation students whose parents did not attend college, it is sometimes difficult to impart the necessary information, qualities, and attributes that would enhance a student's likelihood of gaining acceptance into college and persisting through graduation. An examination of students that have gained acceptance into college provides a better understanding of the types of familial support efforts that added value to the college enrollment process. This understanding provides value to policymakers and administrators in their quest to more effectively offer appropriate programs that advance the accessibility of first-generation students.

This study carries personal value to me given my own first-generation student background. Having traversed the many obstacles along the way of not only deciding to go to college, but also succeeding once there, my experience was filled with many difficult times. Gaining a better insight and providing guidance to future first-generation students in their pursuit of postsecondary education has been extremely fulfilling.

1.5 CULTURAL CAPITAL/HABITUS

1.5.1 Cultural Capital

According to Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) it is important to examine the impact of first-generation student status on college outcomes through the interconnected lenses of cultural and social capital. They argue that using this theoretical approach is an appropriate

means to gain support of a relationship between college outcomes and a student's generational status (Pascarella et al., 2004). They define social capital as "a form of capital that resides in relationships among individuals that facilitate transaction and the transmission of different resources" (p. 252). They also cite David Bills' conception of cultural capital as representing a comfort level with and understanding of the values of society's dominant culture. They suggest that students whose parents are college educated have a network by which they can access society valued human and cultural capital (Pascarella et al., 2004). This normalizes many of the processes related to gaining access and enrolling into postsecondary education for the students of college educated parents. Related to the variations of differential social and cultural capital for first-generation students is the resulting lesser engagement in academic and social engagement opportunities available to college students.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1977), "taken together, cultural patterns – the ways of talking and acting, moving, dressing, socializing, tastes, likes and dislikes, competencies, and forms of knowledge that distinguish one group from another – constitute the cultural capital of a group" (cited in deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999, p. 207). Cultural capital is a resource, much like money and natural resources, and not all forms have equal value. The cultural elite and the financially privileged control the most valued cultural capital; therefore, acquiring the characteristics of this social group is very important. Bourdieu and Passeron (1994) link cultural capital to the understanding of the pedagogic communication. They argue that an appropriate supposition could be put forward regarding the specific outcomes of all pedagogic work outside of the pedagogic work completed by the family. Specifically, they suggest that the entirety of pedagogic work results from the variance between family introduced habitus and institutional habitus, mastery of scholarly language in this case. Individual comprehension of the academic

curriculum taught in the schools is the entirety of their pedagogic work. Because of the distance between the habitus attained by lower social class students and habitus delivered in educational institutions, as defined by the cultural elite, a negative variance is present that results in lower academic marks because of the miscommunication between the two different habitus. This leads towards differential selection that is unequal for those not from the social groups who understand institutional habitus. Often, this results in an early stratification that is inextricably linked to social class (Oakes, 1992, 1995; Slavin, 1990).

The prestige of a group defines the social value of cultural capital according to the group's positioning within society. This is a reciprocal relationship that correlates to a defining of an individual's reputation being determined by the cultural capital they possess (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). It could be argued that attitudes regarding differentiated levels of social capital give rise to the classism present in many societies. Langhout, Rosselli, and Feinstein (2007) note that "classism is a type of discrimination, much like sexism or racism. In the case of classism, people occupying lower social class levels are treated in ways that exclude, devalue, discount, and separate them" (p. 145). One definition of classism is the stereotyping or unfair treatment resulting from negative attitudes that leave out or minimize those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007). This can lead towards students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds struggling against a stratified education system designed to maintain separation between the classes.

Further problematizing the merit based higher education landscape is the stratification that exists within elementary and secondary schools, in which students' academic performance is often linked to their socioeconomic background and the amount of social capital they hold (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Walpole, 2003). Parents pass on to their children a level of social

and cultural capital in the form of behaviors that are used to advance within social systems. Student social capital is made up of their network of contacts that advance their personal and professional ambitions. Those students without suffer because they do not understand the means by which to acquire the valued social and cultural capital nor do they have the network by which to grow it. This problem is further compounded due to educators' preferential treatment to those students who exhibit high-status cultural capital. This immediately puts those from lower socioeconomic groups at a disadvantage. This likely results from teachers' own upbringing, which often is in middle to upper class families (Walpole, 2003).

It is important to gain the necessary cultural capital to obtain success at the collegiate level. Hahs-Vaughn (2004) argues that a way that first-generation students can secure this necessary cultural capital needed to succeed in college is through participation in co-curricular activities due to their enhanced social capital quotient. Therefore, first-generation students could benefit from becoming involved in student life opportunities such as: leadership activities, community service, clubs and organizations, or student employment. These experiences would tie them into the campus culture whereby they could attain the cultural capital that would benefit their academic success (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). If cultural capital is a resource much like currency that possesses value, then habitus is the understanding of how to best utilize the currency one possesses. Those with less cultural capital tend to have a habitus that cannot take advantage of social systems in the same way as those with a higher level of cultural capital. The next section describes Bourdieu's assertions regarding habitus and the implications on cultural capital acquisition. Specifically, while individuals tend to maintain their social standing given their habitus, human agency avails one of the opportunity for upward social mobility.

1.5.2 Habitus

Bourdieu (1990) describes the responses of the habitus in *The Logic of Practice* by suggesting that habitus quantifies and calculates likely outcomes in relation to past experiences. Otherwise stated, habitus predicts future outcomes given one's history and experience. These experiences are driving forces in molding and shaping future behavior. Responses deriving from the habitus are initially formed in the present, without the necessity of formal calculation, and with consideration of potential outcomes, based on what is believed to be the appropriate action to take or the appropriate thing to say, or conversely the actions not to take or things not to say given past understandings or experiences (Bourdieu, 1990). Simply stated, individuals are conditioned to act in a manner befitting their understanding of how they should act grounded in responses and feedback received from past experiences. This does not preclude one from deviating from what is to be the understanding of one's anticipated or even expected behavior, but rather most are inclined to respond in a manner that is grounded in previous experiences.

Bourdieu (1990) argues that unlike scientific experimentation in which corrective action is taken after each trial undertaken in order to more precisely tune the results moving forward, habitus tends to be much more heavily weighted towards early experiences. It is further noted that due to the social and economic necessity of these early experiences, one's habitus is so strongly shaped and formed, later experiences, while continually shaping the habitus, does not have the same strength as the foundational experiences of the early years. In addition, Bourdieu contends that habitus works towards its own permanence by often discarding new information that questions that which was learned and understood previously, thus giving extra weight to early experiences. Bourdieu further remarks that the limits of habitus are socially and

historically situated, and that while limitless possibilities are available, individuals are inclined to work within self designed parameters established via our past social and historical constructions.

Within each of us, to some degree, is the person who we were for all the previous yesterdays (Bourdieu, 1990). In fact, Bourdieu argues that our past self dominates and influences our present much more than we realize through our unconscious because they are so deeply ingrained into who we are today (Bourdieu, 1990). Our past histories, inculcated into our every fiber, become our habitus, for which our present is actively represented by the entirety of our past (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu (1990) describes habitus as “spontaneity without consciousness or will” otherwise described as an inert force that naturally drives our behavior without our knowing due to our past experiences and unrecognized sense of future outcomes to our behavior (p. 56). This phenomenon speaks to the importance of understanding the acceptable practices of the social groups that one desires to become a part of. Preparing oneself to the orientations of a desired social group is known as anticipatory socialization (Weidman, 1987). It is necessary for a student to prepare and position themselves through meaningful socialization experiences to their desired social group. However, for many, a challenge exists for students unsure of how to position themselves to their desired social groups due to lack of confidence in their appropriate fit to their desired social group (Weidman, 1987).

Extending habitus into a class based system, Bourdieu (1990) notes that the field of sociology characterizes biological individuals as the same when they are products of a like objective environment, thereby having the same habitus. Individuals exposed to the same environment are disposed to the same habitus given their similarity in social, historical, and economic conditions (Bourdieu, 1990). Not even two individuals within the same class will have exactly the same sequential experiences; however, individuals from a like class are much more

likely to have similar experiences to each other than someone from a different class (Bourdieu, 1990).

Habitus is inherited during early childhood and remains throughout one's life. Postone, LiPuma, and Calhoun (1993) characterize Bourdieu's conception of habitus as an intersection between action and structure, as well as between individual and society. While habitus inclines one to act or react in certain ways in any given situation, it is not a *fait accompli* (Postone et al., 1993). Students enter the school with certain understandings of how things are, given the context in which they were reared. This guides their decision making and often leads to a response that is generated from their understandings or ways of knowing. For those from lower social classes this serves as an unrecognized disconnection between their way of knowing and learning and the way that teachers expect them to know and learn. This tends to segment students based on social class into various groups with privilege bestowed upon those who understand how to function in a manner preferred by the school. Thus, upon entrance into the school students are identified with their social class and then segmented for not understanding the values of the dominant group, and for not understanding how to navigate the school in the manner defined by those in power (Oakes, 1992; 1995; Slavin, 1990).

Swartz (2002) supports Bourdieu's argument that habitus originates in an unconscious fashion during the early years of development in response to opportunities and perceived limitations based upon one's social class. Variances in habitus exist between different status groups, races, ethnic groups and gender. These differences serve as the foundation of present and future behavior related to anticipated expectations of failure or success of their social group.

Swartz (1990) further articulates the concept of habitus as a "cultural matrix, varying by people's background, that generates self-fulfilling prophecies" (p. 72). Thus, those students

hailing from lower social classes that believe their life chances and opportunities are limited due to their social origin often find that this becomes their reality. Breaking free from this reproductive cycle poses an overwhelming challenge for many, and it becomes an unrecognizable force that drives their life's path. For many students the schooling system becomes a requirement with academic goals that are only partially fulfilled. Without support and guidance from parents, who often lack the knowledge to guide and support the academic attainment of their children, schools become a canyon of systematic disconnection. An extensive body of research demonstrates that students from lower social classes become lost in a system that is designed to reinforce the inherited cultural tendencies of those being educated and often lack the capacity to untangle the bureaucratic nature of formal schooling (McDermott, 1997).

Paulsen and St. John (2002) argue that the framing of the school system and education decision making are significantly influenced by the cultures and values or habits that have been acquired during students' early schooling years and from their family environments. People are not born with cultural capital; but rather, they acquire it during their early pre schooling years from their families and the communities that they live within. According to deMarrais and LeCompte (1999) habitus is a set of ideas about how the world functions, what things carry value, where one's positioning is located within the greater society, and which types of behavior are appropriate.

Bouveresse (1999) notes that Bourdieu is insistent on the capacity of habitus to forecast and serves as a predictive force. He also is clear that habitus is not a rule, but serves as a dispositional guide that behavior derives from past experiences.

As the value of higher education in the United States continues to increase (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), and as the disparity between those who complete an

undergraduate degree and those who do not grows, it becomes increasingly apparent that making higher education accessible to more students is of great importance, particularly to those students who are from a lower socioeconomic background and those students who would be the first-generation in their families to attend college. While the concept of improved accessibility for first-generation and low-income students has been enhanced, the underlying stratification of the schooling system at all levels remains.

Without the right forms of cultural capital and financial resources needed to excel in an education environment, first-generation students find themselves increasingly stratified to the lower fringes. If this situation is to improve, policy makers must recognize the implications of a schooling system that continues to socially reproduce students based on socioeconomic and generational status. Recognition has the potential to lead to measurable reductions to the gap in educational attainment based on socioeconomic and generational status. By illuminating this issue, higher education institutions may be better positioned to be more rigorous in their enrollment screening process, giving appropriate consideration for socioeconomic and generational status.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF SECTIONS

This study includes six total chapters, with this first chapter providing a comprehensive and detailed overview of the entire study. The second chapter provides a review of relevant literature to the study to provide context to the general experience faced by first-generation students today, as well as a look at the funding of higher education over the past 65 years. The second chapter

discusses generalized characteristics of first-generation students as evidenced by findings in numerous studies conducted on this population. In particular, this section of chapter two discusses the socioeconomics and family characteristics of first-generation students; educational aspirations; accessibility; academic preparedness; enrollment patterns of first-generation college students to include: institutional type and cost factors, how financing decisions contribute to enrollment, and why first-generation students choose to attend college; collegiate experience, persistence, academic outcomes, and post college outcomes of first-generation college students. This is followed by a detailed review of the literature related to cultural capital and cultural reproduction. Lastly, the chapter reviews TRIO Programs, with specific attention given to the Student Support Services program.

The third chapter of this study outlines the methodological approach utilized to examine the research questions of the study. Next, chapter four includes 10 participant profiles which provide a descriptive account of the respondents' family lives and home experiences that influenced how they valued education. The chapter also provides a succinct self profile included to provide greater depth to this researcher's perspective, as well as to illustrate the unique understanding of this phenomenon.

In the fifth chapter, stories derived from the participants' accounts of their home lives are provided as offered through themes that emerged from a constant comparative approach employed to code data collected as part of the in-depth interviews with respondents. These stories are shared in the following themes: influence of parental/familial support of education, personal ambition and motivation for attending college, socioeconomic and class issues, and extracurricular involvement and activities.

The sixth and final chapter includes discussion of the findings and conclusions drawn as a result of this study. In this chapter I explore the connection between the data collected from participant interviews and the literature in the following key themed areas: influence of parental/familial support of education, socioeconomic status and social class, and extracurricular involvement and activities. This study finishes by offering concluding remarks, recommendations for practical applications, and a call for future research.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF HIGHER EDUCATION – THE LAST 65 YEARS

Improving access to higher education is an imperative emphasized time and time again by legislators and policymakers as a means of upward social mobility for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. While addressing the concerns of students from the lower socioeconomic quartiles, as well as minority students, both of which have a much lower propensity of attending college than the privileged is an urgent matter, it is equally important to address the issue of college access faced by many first-generation college students. First-generation students are simply defined as coming from a family where neither parent has attended postsecondary education (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Not until the last few decades has this cohort of students been closely addressed through research (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

Many students characterized as either coming from a lower socioeconomic standing or as an ethnic minority are also identified as first-generation students. Horn and Nunez (2000) point out that while more than 50% of first-generation students are from lower income families, less than 10% of non first-generation students come from a lower income family. A strong connection exists between college attendance and socioeconomic status (Horn & Nunez, 2000). While it is important to recognize that first-generation students may exhibit many similar

qualities to lower socioeconomic students, they have numerous unique characteristics that need to be identified and addressed if gains in accessibility are to occur.

A first look at accessibility across the socioeconomic spectrum shows a marked improvement over the past 50 years; however, it can be misconstrued that education opportunities are now equal for all students interested in attending college. Conversely, research indicates that a consistent 30% gap has existed between low and high income students pertaining to the rate of college attendance from the 1960s through 1999, an important point to reflect on given the increasing enrollment trends for all groups over that same time period (Ballinger, 2007; Perna, 2005). Thus, while gains have been realized for students in all socioeconomic classes, the gap persists; numbers in 1999 reflect an 86% rate of college attendance for higher income students versus only 57% for lower income students (Perna, 2005). Detailed figures provided by the U.S. Census Bureau illustrate the significant variance in mean income levels between those families in the lowest fifth of the population and the highest fifth of the population. In 1966, after recalculating the family income level to 2008 CPI-U-RS adjusted dollars, the mean family income for the lowest fifth of the U.S. population was \$13,360 as compared to \$98,923 for the highest fifth of the U.S. population (USCB, 2009). In 2008, while the population had noted a marked increase in wealth in mean family salary for the highest fifth of the population to \$190,400, the mean family income for the lowest fifth had only increased to \$15,906. This growing gap in mean family income translates to a 19.5% growth in real income from 1966 to 2008 for low income families vs. 92.5% growth in real income for high income families during that same time period. After adjusting the family income levels to 2008 CPI-U-RS adjusted dollars, the mean percentage of wealth held by the lowest fifth compared to the highest fifth has been reduced from 13.8% to 8.4% (USCB, 2009).

A strong relationship exists between first-generation students and the concerns faced by students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds pertaining to accessibility to higher education, it is important to understand the historical context in which strides have been made towards opening up college campuses for all students. As cited by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (Born of Controversy section, para. 11, n.d.), on June 22, 1944 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the G.I. Bill opening the door to higher education to an entirely new population of students. The concept of the bill came from the popular belief that inaction would possibly lead to another economic depression. Legislators noted the need and formulated the G.I. Bill to create opportunities for individuals to attend postsecondary education upon returning from World War II. Prior to the war, owning a home and pursuing postsecondary education were primarily reserved for the wealthy. The Veterans Affairs website also notes that “in the peak year of 1947, veterans accounted for 49% of college admissions. By the time the original GI Bill ended on July 25, 1956, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II veterans had participated in an education or training program” (Born of Controversy section, para. 13, n.d.).

Congress believed that the G.I. Bill would address three important issues for the many veterans returning from the war. It would bring stability to the United States, it would serve to promote economic stimulation, and it would circumvent the issues Europe faced after World War I (Noftsinger & Newbold, 2007). Walpole (2003) emphasizes the importance of the G.I. Bill by noting that it opened up the doors to higher education institutions by providing a significant amount of public resources to former soldiers following the Second World War. College campuses began to see an increase in the number of students who were the first in their family to ever attend postsecondary education. While a number of definitions have been offered regarding first-generation college students, an applicable and appropriate characterization for purposes of

this study is presented by Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) who define these students whose parents' highest level of education completed was high school as first-generation students.

Following the Second World War and the introduction of the G.I. Bill, the United States realized unprecedented growth in higher education institutions. In 1965, it was generally agreed upon that the federal government played a central role in providing equal access to education for all students by making financial resources available to those in need; this was the rationale for passing the Higher Education Act (St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). Many of the students that benefited from the G.I. Bill and other efforts towards improving accessibility were first-generation and lower income students. This shift towards improving accessibility was coupled with other programs designed to reach out to underrepresented populations. In particular, programs geared towards increasing enrollment among African Americans and Latinas/os were emphasized. The 1960s and 1970s marked a substantial change to the landscape of many college campuses because of improved accessibility (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; St. John et al., 2005). Students previously excluded from higher education were now seen on campuses across the country. Individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses, ethnic minorities, and first-generation students now had an opportunity to advance their educational goals at the postsecondary level. In order to sustain the progress made towards accessibility to higher education for first-generation and lower income students, it is pertinent that sustained financial resources continue to be made available; however, recent policy decisions appear to have reduced these needed resources.

According to scholars, there has been a reversing of available financial aid resources to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in recent years. Many of the positive outcomes that were realized from the surge of access programs have begun to stagnate. St. John, Paulsen, and Carter (2005) point out a disturbing trend: "Since 1980, the federal commitment to need-

based grants has contracted as a result of shifting political priorities, if not as a result of a breakdown in the old consensus about equal opportunity” (p. 545). This can make the pursuit of higher education challenging due to financial constraints. This has the effect of limiting postsecondary accessibility that many had fought hard to improve (Walpole, 2003). The capacity to finance higher education for many first-generation and lower income students is often linked to the availability of government provided support and subsidies.

An exploration of recent trends shows that a confluence of factors including reduced government subsidies to postsecondary education (St. John et al., 2005), an increasing need to compete on a global scale (Friedman, 2005), a continual shift by institutions towards funding students based on merit rather than need (Ehrenberg, Zhang, & Levin, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002), and an unrealized improvement towards the accessibility of higher education for students from lower socioeconomic demographics (Ballinger, 2007; Perna, 2005) are influencing how higher education is financed. The challenges associated with financing higher education will likely grow without governmental support. This has the potential of reducing accessibility to higher education for first-generation students that are also from a lower socioeconomic background, as the two factors make college attendance less attainable due to limited resources. Reducing the needed financial resources required to attend college may make the pursuit of higher education an unrealistic goal. Understanding the context in which legislators and policymakers allocate financial resources, in particular resources to higher education, is valuable to understanding if additional resources might be available, and if they are attainable.

A primary concern from many universities’ perspectives is the ongoing dilemma of tighter budgets resulting from decreased government subsidies, both at the federal and state level (Duffy, 2007; Johnstone, 1998), along with an increased demand for services, which drives

tuition upwards. The combination of rising tuition and decreased subsidies has proven detrimental to the access of lower socioeconomic students. The United States is confronted with the potential for a further socioeconomic divide between its citizens as students are faced with the choice of significant debt loads upon graduation from college or foregoing the risk all together. Astin and Oseguera (2004) support this by pointing out that there has been an escalation of financial pressure: “recent cutbacks in federal and state funding, coupled with increasing costs, have made it difficult for institutions to meet the financial need of their poorest students” (p. 323). In order for universities to increase their financial aid offerings, schools typically will boost their revenue base by increasing tuition. This again is problematic for students from the bottom income quartiles because they often will not benefit from the increases in university provided financial aid (Astin & Oseguera, 2004).

As the federal government reduces its level of financial support to higher education, the need for state support grows. However, states continue to shift their resources to other initiatives and prioritize other programs. During times of financial hardship states will often look to cut higher education over other areas because the returns on invested dollars are not as valued to many legislators. Recent years have seen a significant decline in state-related dollars going to postsecondary education as noted by Archibald and Feldman (2006):

Government subsidization of public higher education primarily is a function of the states. Even today, with budgets emerging from crisis, the states provide over four dollars of support for higher education expenses for every dollar of federal subsidy. Yet public effort in support of higher education—measured as state funding per \$1,000 of personal income—has been in decline for the last quarter century. The magnitude of this decline has been quite significant. Aggregate state effort has fallen by 30% since the late 1970s (p. 625).

Furthermore, it is noted that citizens’ interest in funding higher education through tax dollars has declined since the late 1970’s (Archibald & Feldman, 2006). This points to a decline in state

appropriated dollars and connects it to reduced support by state taxpayers. Legislators continue to reduce state funding and ask universities to generate more of their own revenues. Furthermore, legislators call on universities to become more efficient with the resources they already have in place. A number of other initiatives are prioritized over higher education and receive higher levels of state appropriated resources. Archibald and Feldman relay that the most pertinent factors affecting support for financial aid or higher appropriations are an increasingly competitive state allocations process, concurrent reductions in federal funding, state economies that struggle to remain balanced, reductions in families' disposable dollars, and consistent growth in the number of students interested in pursuing higher education. This continued reduction in support of lower income student capacity to finance higher education will have significant long term accessibility consequences. This is reflected in Ballinger's (2007) comments when he states that:

If this socioeconomic access and outcome gap continues in a knowledge based economy, and in spite of a population increase that is primarily among groups in American society that are relatively poor and educationally disadvantaged, then the portion of the nation's population with higher education will diminish while the number of jobs requiring higher education will increase (p. 5).

Compounding the issue of universities moving towards an approach that rewards merit at the expense of need is a shifting by the federal government of offering grants as the primary means for many to finance higher education to promoting the use of loans to attend college. Specifically, there has been a shift away from need-based grant aid to loans and merit aid in providing students with financial support for college. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) support public policy that provides for a greater availability of need based aid, rather than the present shifting towards a merit based system. They note that first-generation students are much more prone to dropping out of college as compared to non first-generation students because of concerns related

to student loan debt (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). In addition, research has found that first-generation students are less likely to have achieved well enough academically to be eligible for merit aid when compared to non first-generation students (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001).

Many states have reduced their support for public higher education leading to a rise in the cost for many students and their families, particularly those from lower socio-economic groups (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). The past twenty years is best described as a period of high tuition with an emphasis on loans. As noted above, a substantial shift in the manner in which students pay for college has occurred over the past twenty years. Paulsen and St. John (2002) state that because of the reduced state support, the burden of responsibility for higher education financing has moved from the public to students and their families. A pointed fact cited by Duffy (2007), as reported by the College Board in 2006, illustrates the large reductions in Pell Grant Funding, whereby total funding declined from \$13.6 billion in 2004-05 to \$12.7 billion in 2005-06. Duffy (2007) goes on to note that:

The average Pell Grant per recipient dropped from \$2,474 to \$2,354. These figures bring attention to the nation's growing crisis in college access and affordability. The average student now graduates with \$17,500 in student loan debt, and the National Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance estimates that up to 2.4 million qualified students will fail to obtain bachelor's degrees over the next decade because of financial barriers (p. 20).

A more telling illustration of the drastic reduction in Pell Grant support provided to students is the extreme reduction in Pell Grant funding made available as a maximum percentage of cost to attend a four year college. Specifically, the percentage of Pell Grant Funding has been reduced as a percentage of the cost to attend a four-year public college when comparing fiscal year 1976 at

72% down to 32% in fiscal year 2006 (ACE, 2004) . By reducing the amount of funding offered via the Pell Grant, combined with reductions occurring at the federal, state and institution levels, students from disadvantaged backgrounds increasingly accumulate higher debt loads or miss the opportunity to complete college. Student eligibility for the Pell Grant is determined by and established with consideration of multiple factors including: family income and assets, college-aged siblings, and higher education costs for the family (Ehrenberg et al., 2006).

Johnstone (1998) projected a number of issues that would influence the financial patterns of higher education for the near term and foreseeable future when he assessed the landscape of college funding in the late 1990's. The central issue for lower income students is the trend towards institutional management of financial assistance using an individualized price discounting strategy, whereby students of need receive less aid. This continues to push students with the greatest need out of the higher education market (Walpole, 2003) as educational funding will be difficult, if not unrealistic. Further, there are important differences that result from the changing higher education financing structure between students from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds; of particular significance is the much greater impact that results from grant inadequacy and under availability of loans (St. John et al., 2005). Unfortunately, since the time of St. John, Paulsen and Carter's (2005) work things have gotten progressively worse for many students in light of the ongoing national fiscal crisis. Institutions have been forced to make dramatic changes to their operations given unprecedented reductions in state support for higher education, inability for families to secure loans for their student's college, and general concerns that such an investment is a risky choice in times of financial instability. It is my belief that it will take a monumental change in how higher education is supported and funded if a reversal of these negative trends is to be effectuated.

On March 20, 2010, President Barack Obama signed into legislation the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (HR 3221) as part of the Reconciliation Act (Speaker Pelosi, 2010). This reform to the Higher Education Act represents the single largest commitment in higher education funding in more than half a century if it works according to plan. It will make higher education available to many more students from lower income families than otherwise would have been possible if the status quo in funding was maintained. The intention of the bill is to enable students to graduate from college with less debt by increasing scholarship dollars made available through the Pell Grant program and by connecting student loan debt repayment to a more manageable income based program. Specifically, the bill aims to invest \$40 billion over 10 years into the Pell Grant program. This translates to a maximum available Pell Grant of \$5,350 in 2009 moving towards \$6,900 in 2019 (Pelosi, 2010). Further, it seeks to stabilize the availability of student loans at reasonable rates for all families regardless of general economic conditions via a Direct Loan program. This Direct Loan program will remove traditional lenders from the equation by tasking the Department of Education with the administration of loans (Pelosi, 2010). It is believed that this shift towards direct lending will realize more than \$87 billion in savings over 10 years, which will effectively serve as the means by which the Pell Grant increase will be paid for at no additional cost to taxpayers, as well as the means by which a number of other programs aimed at providing financial support for lower income and underrepresented populations. One such investment is the extension and increase in funding to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions that was created as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 (H. 4872, 2010). Additionally of note is the significant increase in support and investment in community colleges that is included as part of the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (Pelosi, 2010).

For those lower socioeconomic status students who desire to attend college in a merit driven higher education system the financial implications are startling. Illustrative is the fact that the average expense of attending a four-year public university represents approximately 60% of family income for low income families versus only 16% for middle income families and a markedly lower 5% for high income families (Ballinger, 2007). Upon examination of the characteristics of students from varying socioeconomic levels, trends begin to emerge that influence those students who make the decision to attend college and navigate the system in order to matriculate. A study conducted in 2003 at more than 200 colleges with more than 12,000 student participants noted that “students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds worked more, studied less, were less involved in extracurricular activities, and had lower grades than their higher SES peers” (Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007, p. 147). These issues are profound and illustrate how students’ financial woes do not cease once they begin college. The reduced likelihood of persistence through graduation stems in large part from their disengagement in the campus life and community, as well as the need to work to finance their schooling. Without the availability of financial aid resources, many students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will not have the opportunity to attend college and subsequently enhance their opportunity to advance their social status.

From the colonial times, Americans have viewed higher education as a social mobilizer, enabling individuals to move up the socioeconomic and social class ladders that exist in society (Walpole, 2003). Paulsen and St. John (2003) argue that the reduction in grant support at both the federal and state levels compels universities to implement tuition hikes which are passed on to students. This creates an added hardship for many students struggling with the decision to attend college. The unfortunate consequence of reduced federal and state support is that upward

social mobility is reduced for many students seeking to advance their social standing. While loans provide an avenue by which lower socioeconomic students can attend universities, the financial burden is becoming so great that many are reluctant to take on this growing risk. Financial indicators such as career earnings show that education is an important investment in one's future; however, when the risks are too great, the number willing to pursue this option will inevitably decrease. By foregoing higher education, first-generation students often decrease their chances of upward social mobility.

While the cost of attending colleges and universities has gone up significantly over the last 30 years, an increased disparity for families' financial capacity to support college due to reduced income has occurred (Haverman & Smeeding, 2006). The 1980s and 1990s marked significant increases in overall enrollment at institutions of higher education. In fact, the National Center of Education Statistics projected in a study completed in 2003 that postsecondary enrollment would grow by an additional 14% among students 25 and under during the 10-year period beginning in 2000. While a marked increase in university enrollment has been realized over the last 30 years, the unfortunate side impact of sorting by academic ability has risen at the collegiate level. Specifically, first-generation and lower income students may have more accessibility to higher education; however, the prestige and quality of the institutions they have open to them is limited as compared to non first-generation and higher socioeconomic students (Kim & Schneider, 2005).

2.2 FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT PROFILE

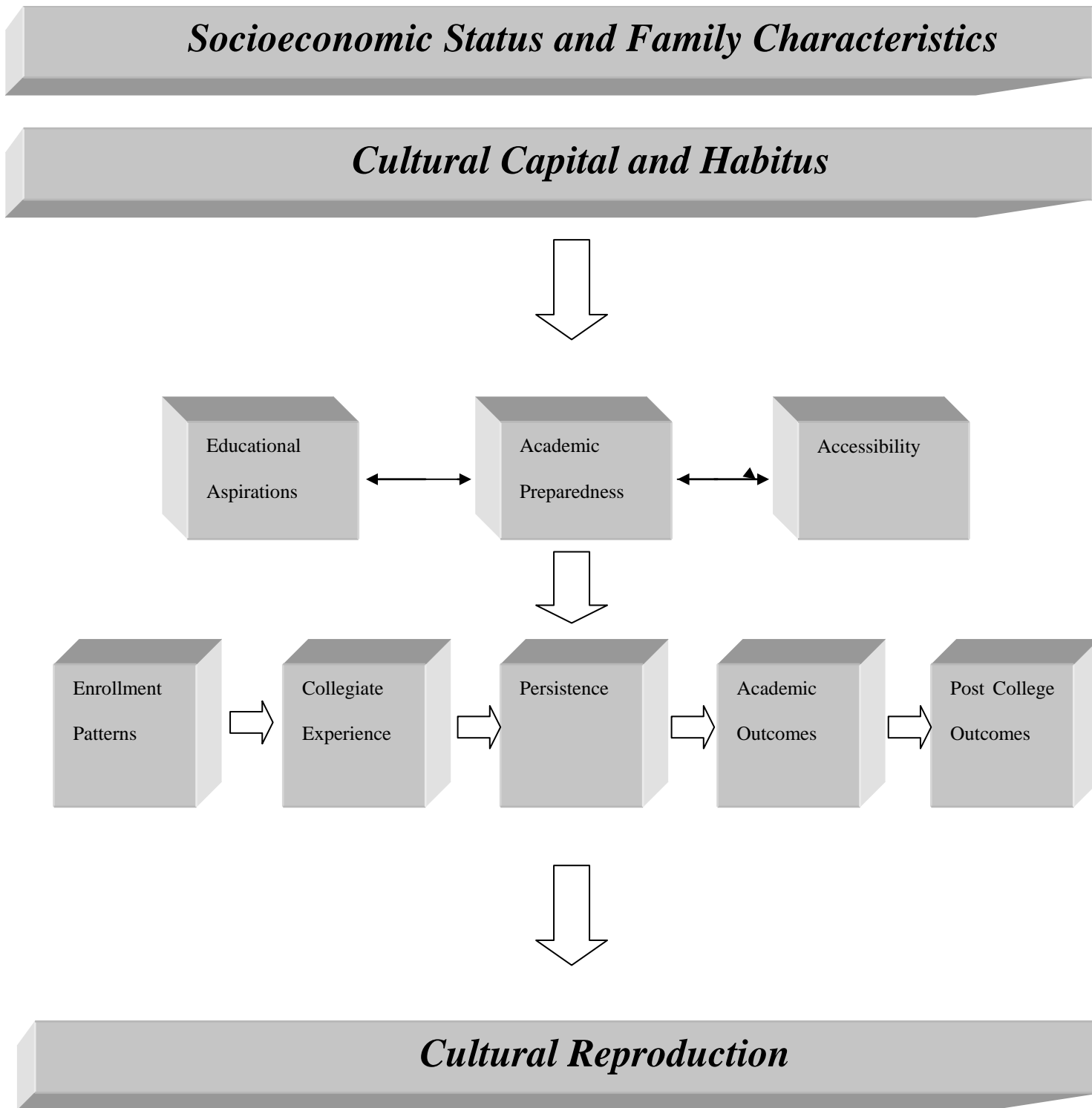
In 1992, approximately 27% of high school graduates were considered first-generation students (Choy, 2001). First-generation students are defined as those students whose parents' highest level of education completed is high school (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin went on to generalize some of the characteristics of the first-generation student population. They noted that first-generation students are often apt to higher rates of attrition than their non first-generation counterparts. In addition, first-generation students are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are more likely to have academic difficulties, and to have lower aspirations of education achievement. Further, Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin observe that they are also older on average and are more likely to have dependent children.

First-generation students are further characterized by their higher propensity of working full-time while attending college part-time (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001). These attributes and qualities each influence the likelihood of persistence for first-generation students. The less engaged these students are and the less committed to the full college experience, the more likely they will be to drop or fail out of college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Pascarella and Terenzini cite Tinto's theory of student departure, which argues that having positive experiences in social and academic settings during college improves a student's likelihood of persistence. By having to dedicate a great deal of time to non class related activities, such as work or family responsibilities, first-generation students have less time to focus on their courses. This often has negative implications for their academic performance, persistence and eventually their graduation.

Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) also describe first-generation students as having a higher likelihood of being married, being more likely to have others dependent on them, and being more likely to be financially independent. Because first-generation students are more likely to be characterized by the above noted qualities, they often face the challenges of supplementing or supporting family financial needs. They also deal with many other important life issues such as work, family, and kids. Consistent with their non-traditional status, first-generation students had a higher likelihood of living off campus, and were less likely to live in university housing (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). The aforementioned demands of a first-generation student's time and the higher probability of living off campus with their families leads to a lesser engaged student. This diminishes their chance of completing their bachelor's degree.

Research findings also show that first-generation students have a greater likelihood of being Hispanic or black; and to more likely be from the bottom socioeconomic quartile (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Furthermore, first-generation students were more likely to be female when compared to non first-generation students, 57% versus 51% (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). It becomes clear that the being a first-generation student and coming from an underrepresented group often occurs simultaneously and creates added barriers to postsecondary success.

Table 1: First-Generation Student Variable Model



Students whose parents' highest level of education is a high school diploma are at considerable risk of either not choosing to attend college due to concerns over affordability or not being able to access the benefits of attending postsecondary schooling. Key demographic, socioeconomic factors and propensity to become involved in out of class experiences all influence the likelihood of a first-generation student's educational pathway before, during and after college. I believe that understanding the implications and characteristics oftentimes associated with being a first-generation student can inform appropriate actions and programming.

2.2.1 Socioeconomics and Family Characteristics

Bui (2002) describes the demographic differences of those students whose parents' highest level of education is high school completion as different from those students whose parents have some college or whose parents completed their college degree. In particular, Bui notes that first-generation students have a higher propensity of coming from a lower socioeconomic status, are more likely to be ethnic minorities, and to not have English as their only language spoken in their homes.

A number of studies have reported on the correlation between first-generation students and historically lower socioeconomic status when compared to non first-generation students. According to 1989–90 data, upon examining the lowest income quartile, Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin noted that 23% of first-generation students were in this quartile as compared to only 5% of those students whose parents had completed higher levels of education. In addition, they noted that only 18% of first-generation students were in the highest income quartile, this in contrast to 59% of non first-generation students falling within the highest income quartile (1998). In a more

recent study, Horn and Nunez (2000) also noted significant variations that were present when comparing first-generation student's socioeconomic background with that of students whose parents had completed some college or finished college. Specifically, they point out that when examining low-income families, an alarming 50% of first-generation students were found in this socioeconomic classification, as compared to only 33% of those students whose parents had some college experience, and less than 10% of those students whose parents had completed a college degree. This influences the stratification of opportunities that exist in the United States, with greater family wealth often leading to greater education opportunities. Even as accessibility is improved for all, another problem grows. This problem connects socioeconomic status with the type of institution that students attend; in this case, greater wealth typically equates to more prestigious universities. The impact of this academic meritocracy can be seen in the employment opportunities available to students after graduation.

First-generation students that reside in the lower socioeconomic classes face the challenges of their parents' not understanding the processes and bureaucracies of university education, as well as the constraints that arise from lack of means by which to finance education. This presents a double whammy when examining the differences that exist within different first-generation student socioeconomic classes (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). It is noteworthy that first-generation students whose parents are in the upper income quartiles had a much greater likelihood of attending college than those first-generation students whose parents are in the lowest income quartiles (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

2.2.2 Educational Aspirations

Pike and Kuh (2005) mention the varied findings that have been identified in previous literature related to the role of educational aspirations of first-generation students. They cite a study by Billson and Terry that suggests no differences exist in the educational aspirations between first-generation students and their non-first-generation counterparts. On the other hand, they point to Terenzini and his colleagues, who believe that first-generation students were more likely to have lower educational goals than non first-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Pike and Kuh offer that the discrepancies in the findings likely result from different data collection methods and/or historical context changes. More recent findings show a connection between first-generation students and lower levels of educational expectations.

Choy (2001) points out that according to the responses given by 8th grade students in the National Education Longitudinal Study in 1988, 93% of students who graduated in 1992 planned on continuing their schooling after high school. As noted previously, Choy states that educational aspirations rose as the level of parental education completed increased.

Ishitani (2003) pointed out a number of studies' findings that determined that first-generation students are likely to receive less parental support as they make their decision as to attend college or not. Bui (2005) notes that because the parents of first-generation students do not have any college experience, intervention is needed prior to high school in order to enhance higher education aspirations of first-generation students. Bui also points out that those students with higher educational aspirations by the eighth grade have a higher likelihood of attending college regardless of their parents' education level. Implementation of intervention programs aimed at improving and encouraging academic achievement at the middle school level may help

first-generation students master needed skills and gain the confidence needed to succeed academically (Bui, 2005). Previous research by Hahs-Vaughn (2004) support this imperative to lessen the academic gap between first-generation students and their non first-generation counterparts by addressing their needs prior to college. They also suggest that early intervention strategies are effective mechanisms to counteract the deficiencies of under prepared students if implemented during the middle school years. Guiding first-generation students and providing an opportunity to participate in a more rigorous high school curriculum will aid their future postsecondary efforts.

2.2.3 Accessibility

Higher education in the United States has been identified as an integral part of competing on a global scale and individual self success. Understanding what compels students to attend college, what variables might stand in their way, and how to address obstacles will guide future investments in accessibility initiatives. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) point out that dramatic differences exist between the earnings of a college graduate as compared to a high school graduate, this serves as a central argument for improving accessibility to higher education for all students. Not until the last quarter century has there been a thorough examination of the issue of accessibility of higher education for first-generation students. A more thorough understanding can guide the efforts of policymakers aiming to improve the accessibility of higher education to those students whose parents who had not gone to college.

Choy (2001) notes rather significant variations in the college attendance patterns of students based on parental education. While most students (97%) note that they plan on pursuing

further education after high school, only 65% actually had done so by the fall term following their high school completion; and that a marked variance is apparent based on parental education attainment (Choy, 2001). She pointed out that in 1999, only 36% of students whose parents have less than a high school diploma went on to attend college immediately following high school. This number jumps to 54% for those students whose parents completed their high school diploma, and an impressive 82% of students whose parents had completed their bachelor's degree or higher (Choy, 2001).

For first-generation students, attending college is not necessarily an obvious next step following high school. Many students whose parents had attended college anticipate and even expect that they will go on to postsecondary education. Because first-generation students are often not fully informed as to the benefits of college, what it takes to attend college, and how to navigate the college entrance process, it would be useful to offer a guide to streamline the process. Choy (2001) illustrates a series of sequential steps that need to be taken in order to attend college. These steps include: making the choice to one day attend college, academically preparing oneself for collegiate level courses, preparing for and taking an appropriate college entrance examination, selecting and applying to at least one college, and getting accepted to college. The findings suggest that first-generation students lagged significantly behind non first-generation students each step of the way. This leads to a greater likelihood that first-generation students will not enroll in some form of postsecondary education due to exhibiting lower educational aspirations, being underprepared academically, failing to taking the necessary college entrance examination, and not taking the steps to apply and become accepted at a college.

2.2.4 Academic Preparedness

In Choy's (2001) study of first-generation students, the differential in academic preparedness for first-generation students as compared to non first-generation students is discussed. First-generation students were much more likely to be marginally qualified or not qualified to be accepted at a 4-year institution, and less likely to be highly qualified for postsecondary education as compared to non first-generation students (Choy, 2001). Achieving the appropriate qualifications is necessary in order to open up the doors to institutions that a student prefers. Unfortunately, due to lower achievement while in high school, first-generation students are not well prepared or qualified to attend the more prestigious colleges and universities.

As noted in by Choy (2001), an important factor in the likelihood that first-generation students will enroll in a postsecondary institution and persist through graduation is their level of academic preparation. Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) cite a number of mechanisms that can be utilized to assess the level of academic preparation. The courses that students take, the rigor of those courses, the number of advanced placement courses taken, as well as their scoring on standardized tests give an indication as to their college readiness.

Numerous variables contribute to whether a student goes to college and to what type of higher education institution that a student chooses, including the type of courses that a student takes while in high school. Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) argue that a relationship exists between college attendance and advanced mathematics course completion and reference that first-generation students were more likely to have taken geometry or algebra II as their highest level of mathematics in high school and less likely to have taken calculus when compared to their non first-generation counterparts. Choy (2001) further expounds upon the

interconnectivity between college attendance and math course taking, citing a strong relationship between the two. In fact, controlling for proficiency at the highest level as of 8th grade, first-generation students were much less likely to take algebra during the 8th grade and much less likely to have taken more advanced courses in math by graduation than non first-generation students (Choy, 2001). For those first-generation students who took 8th grade algebra, no notable variance existed between them and non first-generation students with respect to completing more advance courses in math during high school (Choy, 2001). The connection between level of parental education and mathematics course taking becomes problematic upon consideration of the related patterns in college enrollment and mathematics course taking.

Choy (2001) points out that a marked difference exists at each increased level of mathematics taken and the likelihood of college enrollment. To further illustrate this point, while 76% of those students who took more advanced math courses in high school went on to attend a 4-year college, only 16% of students whose highest level of math was either algebra or geometry went on to a 4-year college (Choy, 2001). Moreover, while participating in the more advanced math curriculum, as opposed to the lower level math courses, in high school significantly enhanced first-generation students' likelihood of attending a 4-year college; it did not negate the gap that exists between them and non first-generation students, who were still much more likely to attend a 4-year college if they also participated in the advanced math curriculum (Choy, 2001).

It is also noteworthy, that first-generation students are much more likely to take a non rigorous high school curriculum as compared to those students' parents who had gone to college (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). In addition, first-generation students are less likely to take a college entrance exam, and those that do attain an average score on the SAT examination

153 points less on average than their non first-generation counterparts (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). The trend continues when examining the rates at which first-generation students sit for the SAT II and AP examinations. More detailed figures note that nearly all American students of parents who are college educated will take the college entrance examination, and that one out of every five first-generation students does not take the test at all (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). First-generation students are much less likely to choose courses that increase their chances of going on to college and achieving success. These academic quality indicators will continue to be problematic for first-generation students if programs and services are not offered.

To further characterize the first-generation student profile, it is important to examine the academic performance upon entering college. The data collected in the Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) study indicated that first-generation students earned lower marks in the classroom as quantified by GPA and were prone to taking one or more remedial courses during the freshman year of college than non first-generation students. Chen (2005) points out that 55% of first-generation students took remedial courses during their time in college, compared with only 27% of their non first-generation counterparts. The marked variance presented suggests that there is a pressing need to improve the academic standing of first-generation students in order to improve postsecondary accessibility and improve persistence.

The curriculum rigor of high school courses influenced the GPA of students when they began college, according to Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez (2001). Thus, as the level of high school curriculum increased, so too did the GPA of students, and subsequently less remediation was noted (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). This is important because first-generation students measured unfavorably against non first-generation students if they took part in the less

rigorous high school curriculum. However, no differences were found between first-generation and non first-generation students who were part of the more rigorous curriculum track (Warburton et al., 2001).

2.2.5 Enrollment Patterns

2.2.5.1 Institutional Type and Cost Factors

Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) describe first-generation students by noting that they have a higher probability of enrolling in 2-year public institutions, private, for-profit postsecondary institutions; and were less likely to enroll at a public 4-year or private, not-for-profit postsecondary institution. The reason that first-generation students make this decision is often connected to cost. This can create several issues for first-generation students. A primary concern is the reduced student support service offerings available at many 2-year institutions. Ishler and Upcraft (2005) argue that it is of great importance that postsecondary institutions create an environment that students can achieve success, particularly during their first year. This environment is comprised of offering a myriad of student services critical to guiding students through their first year of college and beyond. Given the trend of first-generation students having a higher likelihood of being underprepared academically, key student services become even more pertinent (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005).

Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez (2001) found in their research that first-generation students were less likely to enroll in college than non first-generation students, and if they did advance to higher education, they were more apt to attend a public comprehensive institution, less likely to attend a private university, less likely to attend a research university, and more

likely to attend part-time. The reason for first-generation students having a higher propensity of attending college part-time is likely due to the increased probability that they work full time when compared to non first-generation students.

Additional factors of importance in choosing a college for students are institutional costs, institutional location, and institutional reputation and/or prestige. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) looked at these three factors and noted some variances in decision making between first-generation and non first-generation students. As it relates to institutional costs, it was pointed out that a much greater proportion of first-generation students citing costs and capacity to receive needed financial aid as an important determining factor of college choice as compared to non first-generation students (Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). With respect to institutional location, three items of importance to first-generation students were identified as influencing college choice much more so than non first-generation students. These factors included being able to reside at home while attending college, being able to work while completing their studies, and having the institution be close to their homes (Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). As connected to institutional reputation, first-generation students cited job placement for graduates and having the desired course offerings as much more important than non first-generation students (Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

As noted above an important factor in choosing a college for many students, in particular low income and first-generation students is cost. The decision on which college to attend is strongly connected to finances for first-generation students. The choice is often a compromise in order to keep the costs of attending college down; either by choosing a less expensive institution or the level of financial aid made available (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). First-generation students are much more likely to choose an institution if they believe it will provide good post

graduation opportunities for them as well (Choy, 2001). Of equal consequence is the rigor of a first-generation student's high school curriculum. First-generation students have a greater likelihood of going to college and persisting by enhancing the rigor of their high school courses, particularly in math (Horn & Nunez, 2000).

2.2.5.2 How Financing Decisions Contribute to Enrollment

Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) describe the marked differences in how first-generation students fund their college as compared to their non first-generation counterparts. They note that first-generation students are more apt to receive financial aid with a higher propensity of receiving grant dollars and a greater likelihood of obtaining loans. First-generation students are dependent on the availability of these financial resources to attend college. As both federal and state governments continue to decrease the amount of money and resources that they make available, first-generation and lower socioeconomic students find it increasingly difficult to finance their education. This has created a shift, whereby the burden is passed to the student in the form of loans. This presents new challenges for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds looking to attend college. Those first-generation students without the financial means to pay for college are compelled to work more often and take fewer courses at a time. Slower progression through required courses greatly reduces the likelihood of persistence through graduation.

2.2.5.3 Why First-Generation Students Choose to Attend College

Students choose to attend college for a variety of reasons ranging from financial to social to familial. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) examined the reasons for students' decision to

attend college or not and noted some marked variances between first-generation and non first-generation students. They identified factors related to college attendance as connected to both professional ambitions and personal matters. An interesting motivator for first-generation students is the desire to be very well off financially. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin point out that being well off financially was much more of a driving force for first-generation students when compared to non first-generation students. Further, they note that being able to find steady work was of much greater importance to first-generation students as well. Other findings related to college attendance showed that for first-generation students it was less likely a factor for them to go to college in order to influence politics or be a leader in their community as compared to non first-generation students; however, the notion of providing better opportunities for their children and living in close proximity to family were both cited as more important to first-generation students as compared to non first-generation students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

It is also worth noting that contrasting fields of study are present when comparing first-generation and non first-generation students. The findings of the Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez (2001) study show that first-generation students were more likely to study business/management and less likely to study in the social/behavioral or life science fields than non first-generation students. This course of study would be consistent with previous research on first-generation students that connects financial well being with field of study (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

As students begin their college experience, they bring with them a set of expectations and preferred career options that are often influenced by parents (Weidman, 1984; Weidman, 1989). Weidman (1984) further notes in his research the important role that parental pressure to achieve plays in the socialization of teen agers. In his examination of parental influence on career

orientations of college students, Weidman (1984) found that as children are removed from the direct supervision by their parents during their college years, the influence that parents have on career preferences becomes less significant.

2.2.6 Collegiate Experience

The first year of undergraduate education is an important transition point for many, as students learn to navigate the university landscape while simultaneously balancing their new found freedom with many additional responsibilities. This is a volatile time which may lead to academic under performance if students are either under prepared or do not receive the necessary academic support services, oftentimes in the form of academic advising, tutoring, and supplemental instruction (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). First-generation students are less likely to utilize support services that are made available to them. Pike and Kuh (2005) suggest in their research that first-generation students have a lower propensity of measuring up on some key college success indicators. Specifically they noted that first-generation students were not as engaged in college life, had a lesser view of the supportive nature of their campus, and did not believe they had developed as much intellectually. Pike and Kuh believe that these variants are largely related to where students live while in college, as well as their educational aspirations. Pike and Kuh note the consistency of their findings with previous studies conducted by Arthur Chickering, whereby residing on campus while in college had a positive relationship to learning outcomes and expectations for educational outcomes and intellectual development.

The findings suggest that first-generation students have a reduced likelihood of living on campus, a lesser tendency towards building relationships with members of the academic

community, and a sense that faculty members are not attuned with their development (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Furthermore, first-generation students are also more likely to work off campus for more hours than their non first-generation student counterparts. Additional attributes of first-generation students include them not being involved in campus life, leadership opportunities, and campus organizations as often as their non first-generation peers. This can lead to a diminished opportunity to build solid relationships with students and faculty (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Integrating into the life of campus both academically and socially plays a central role in the persistence and graduation of first-generation students.

Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) examined two composite indices, academic integration and social integration, related to the college experience of students. The reason these indices were formulated is connected to the concept that by participating in the specific activities related to the academic and social integration into university life, one's likelihood of persistence is improved.

The first index was a combination of factors related to a student's academic integration into university life; and includes academic advising, attending lectures related to careers, meeting with faculty regarding academic issues, and participation as a member of a study group with fellow students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). The study found that first-generation students generally were more likely to report a lower level of academic integration and less likely to report high levels of academic integration than non first-generation students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). It is of note that differences in the findings were found between institutional types of the student being surveyed. In particular, first-generation students were more likely to report a low level of academic integration, but no difference in the likelihood of reporting a high

level of academic integration at a private, not-for profit 4-year college (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

The second index cited by Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) was related to a student's social integration into university life; this included student's involvement with friends from school, club/organization involvement, outside the classroom faculty contact, and participation in student support service programs. Similar to the findings related to academic integration, first-generation students were more likely to exhibit lower social integration levels. Specifically, the study noted that first-generation students were more likely to report low levels of social integration and less likely to report high levels as compared to non first-generation students. It was pointed out that these variances may be connected to the increased likelihood of students being non-traditional or older. An additional reason for the lower levels of social integration could be connected to cultural differences that often are present for first-generation students.

2.2.7 Persistence

Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) cited a strong correlation between a parents' level of education and the likelihood that a student would persist in college. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin point out that first-generation students were much less likely to have completed their degree or to be enrolled in college 5 years after they commenced their postsecondary education than non first-generation students. Further, they were more likely to have dropped out of college with no degree compared to non first-generation students (Chen, 2005; Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin further strengthened their supposition that persistence was

connected to parental educational attainment. This was illustrated through their findings that showed that the likelihood of persistence improved as parental education levels increased.

Regarding the degree type attained, Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) pointed out that first-generation students were more likely to have completed a vocational certificate and less likely to have completed their bachelor's degree when compared to non first-generation students. There was also a very strong likelihood that as parental education increased, so did the likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree (Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). While all education endeavors after high school are valuable, completion of a bachelor's degree is the great differentiator when it comes to upwards social mobility and future earnings.

Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) extended the previous research on persistence and attainment conducted by Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) to gain further insight into these issues. Specifically, the research examined enrollment spells, persistence at a student's initial 4-year college, and track of persistence towards the baccalaureate degree. The aforementioned study was launched due to the previous research findings (Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) that showed variances in persistence and attainment between first-generation and non first-generation students. Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez also looked to determine if the variances between the two groups remained consistent upon controlling for college entrance exam results, as well as for secondary education preparation.

An "enrollment spell" has been defined as time when a student maintains consistent enrollment at any postsecondary institution without stopping out for a period of more than 4 months, with new spells not commencing until a student reenrolls at a college again after a stop out of more than 4 months (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). It is noted that enrollment spells are an important factor as related to persistence and attainment given the time issues

brought about by breaking continuous enrollment. The length of study is elongated and the continuity of studies is interrupted (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). These factors can greatly increase the likelihood of attrition.

An important finding of the Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) study was a notable difference in the number of enrollment spells, with a specific reference to two or more enrollment spells cited as an important quantifier, between first-generation and non first-generation students. A detailed examination of the study's findings show that the variance between first-generation and non first-generation students is more pronounced for those students completing a less rigorous high school curriculum and for those students receiving college entrance exam scores that placed them in the middle quartiles (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Interestingly, when comparing first-generation and non first-generation students that took a more rigorous high school curriculum or who achieved test results that placed them in the top quartile, no statistically significant variances in the number of enrollment spells were found (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

An additional key factor in persistence through graduation is a student's propensity to maintain continuous enrollment. Examining the differences between first-generation and non first-generation college students' likelihood of either being continuously enrolled or graduated from their initial college from the macro level revealed that a notable difference did exist (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). It was shown that the likelihood of either stopping out or leaving their initial college was pronounced for first-generation students when compared to non first-generation students (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

By taking a closer look at this same issue of continuous enrollment or graduation from initial postsecondary institution while controlling for the academic rigor of high school

curriculum and/or college entrance examination scores revealed markedly different findings. In particular, significant differences existed between first-generation and non first-generation students that took part in a less rigorous curriculum or that achieved a college entrance exam score that placed them in the lower quartiles, whereby first-generation students were of much greater risk of not being continuously enrolled or to have graduated (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). On the other hand, regardless of parent's level of education completed, those students partaking in a more rigorous high school curriculum and/or achieving a college entrance exam score in the top quartile were consistent in their rate of continuous enrollment/college completion at their initial postsecondary institution (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) also examined what they characterized as a "persistence track to a bachelor's degree" as another means to look at the educational outcomes of first-generation students as compared to non first-generation students. They define this characterization as those students that either maintain enrollment, without dropping or stopping out, at their initial 4-year college or laterally shifted to another 4-year college. Generally, non first-generation students were much more likely than first-generation students to stay on the track of persistence to a bachelor's degree, were less likely to have left the persistence track, and less likely to have left their initial 4-year college without coming back (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

In the Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) study, the theme for students that were part of the more rigorous high school curriculum and/or scored in the highest quartile on the college entrance examination realized no difference when comparing first-generation and non first-generation students continued. In this case, first-generation students did not have any differential

with regards to their maintaining track towards persistence of their bachelor's degree when compared to non first-generation students.

However, the unfortunate trend for first-generation students who participated in the less rigorous high school curriculum tracks and/or scored in the lower quartiles on the college entrance examination continued when compared to non first-generation students (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). More specifically, first-generation students were at a much greater risk of not staying on a track of persistence towards a bachelor's degree when compared to non first-generation students. In fact, they were much more likely to have not returned to their initial college (Chen, 2005; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

Pike and Kuh (2005) referenced the work of Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001), pointing out that a significant gap exists between the 3-year persistence rates of first-generation and non first-generation students. Choy (2001) also had found that first-generation students, with the goal of attaining a bachelor's degree, are much less likely to maintain their enrollment after three years when compared to non first-generation students. Choy argues that those who fail to complete their college education run the risk of foregone future earnings and also run the risk of being burdened with loans taken out while attending school.

In contrast to previous studies that showed that the college persistence rate was lower for first-generation students as compared to non first-generation students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001), Chen (2005) found that after controlling for key academic variables and college course taking patterns, no discernible difference in persistence was identified. Chen further notes that, like generation status, other factors were associated with undergraduate degree completion, but not necessarily persistence. These items include family socioeconomic status, educational aspirations, institutional type, enrollment level,

and period of time between high school completion and college enrollment (Chen, 2005). This finding suggests that appropriately and equally prepared students have a similar likelihood of persistence regardless of first-generation or non first-generation status. Further, the findings of Chen's study note that while persistence can be leveled between first-generation and non first-generation students, completion rates still loom as a problematic issue.

2.2.8 Academic Outcomes in College

Once in college the academic performance as measured by a student's grade point average shows a significant variance in the performance between first-generation students and those students whose parents completed college. Chen (2005) examined the academic performance of first-generation students as compared to non first-generation students by looking at first-year grade point averages, cumulative undergraduate grade point averages, and curriculum-specific grade point averages to determine the scope of variances present. According to Chen, students are more likely to graduate the higher their grade point average during the first year of college. Unfortunately, first-generation students earned lower grade point averages during the first year than non first-generation students, 2.5 vs. 2.8 respectively (Chen, 2005). This trend continued throughout a first-generation student's time in college. Even when controlling for academic areas of study, first-generation students were more likely to have a lower overall grade point average (Chen, 2005). An additional matter of consequence for first-generation students was their tendency to withdraw from or repeat courses they had already made an effort to study previously more often than non first-generation students (Chen, 2005).

Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) note that upon commencing their college education, first-generation students will complete less credit hours during the crucial first year, will hold jobs off campus, receive less guidance and support from their families, and they are less likely to complete their college education as compared to their non first-generation counterparts. Each of the aforementioned variables influences the likelihood of first-generation student persistence and attainment (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

Significant challenges to success in postsecondary education are a reality for most students. Chen (2005) suggests that first-generation students are at an even greater risk of not achieving success in college. Chen's study begins by noting previous research related to first-generation students showing the increased difficulties of gaining access to higher education, as well as the difficulties in persisting through graduation as compared to non first-generation students. The previous existing literature did not comprehensively examine the course taking habits of first-generation students. Chen's study addresses this issue and notes a number of variances related to the type of courses taken, frequency of withdrawn or repeated courses, academic achievement of classes taken, as well as frequency of remediation needed.

Chen (2005) took a closer look at what students were studying while in college and noted differences between the habits of first-generation and non first-generation students. The study looked at major areas of academic focus, credit output, remedial course taking, and varieties and quantities of courses taken in various areas.

Due to a lack of appropriate academic preparedness, many students coming out of high school need remediation in order to do collegiate work. Chen (2005) noted that approximately 40% of 1992 12th graders needed to take at least one remedial level course. He further points out that first-generation students are much more likely to participate in remedial level courses. In

fact, 55% of first-generation students will take a remedial course, as contrasted with 27% of their peers whose parents have at least a bachelor's degree (Chen, 2005). Further dissecting the findings of the study show that first-generation students are much more likely to take both remedial mathematics and reading level courses than non first-generation students (Chen, 2005).

Identifying an area for study for undergraduates can be a challenging undertaking for many students, and potentially more challenging for first-generation students who cannot lean on their parents for guidance (Chen, 2005). The results of Chen's study reinforce this issue by noting a significant gap in the number of first-generation students who are undecided (without a chosen major) as compared to non first-generation students (Chen, 2005).

An additional trend identified that separates first-generation from other students is the type of majors they chose to study. Chen (2005) pointed out that students whose parents have at least a bachelor's degree are much more likely to major in math (1.2% versus 0.1%), the sciences (9.5% versus 5.8%), engineering (8.0% versus 5.2%), humanities (7.7 % versus 2.5%), and the arts (6.3% versus 3.6%) than first-generation students. It is suggested the first-generation students are less likely to choose these field of study due to inadequate academic preparation, in the case of the math/sciences; or due to the perception that they will not have the ability to earn higher income, in the case of humanities and arts (Chen, 2005). This fact has the additional consequence when examining the attainment rates by field of study, whereby students in the business and health sciences field completed their degrees at a much lower rate than fields such as education, social sciences, and math (Chen, 2005).

Chen (2005) illustrates the variance in credits earned between first-generation students and their counterparts during the first year of college by noting the average of 18 credits earned for first-generation students versus the average of 25 credits earned for students whose parents

have at least a bachelor's degree. It is also of note that first-generation students are much more likely to have completed less than 10 or fewer credit hours during their first year of college than non first-generation students (Chen, 2005). These quantitative outcomes build on previous research and are reinforced in Chen's study that cites the likelihood of attainment is reduced as the number of credit hours completed during the first year of college goes down.

As part of Chen's (2005) study, a specific assessment of the types of courses in various curricular areas was also examined to determine if differences exist between first-generation and non first-generation students. The findings of this assessment reflect that first-generation students were less likely to take mathematics, science, computing, engineering, social sciences, language, and humanities courses; and were more likely to have earned fewer credits in each of these areas as compared to non first-generation students (Chen, 2005).

2.2.9 Post College Outcomes

Pike and Kuh (2005) argue that education is a highly valuable commodity. In fact, an undergraduate degree can be a social mobilizer, enabling individuals to move up the social ladder. They suggest that, with respect to financial benefit, the bachelor's degree is the keystone of education achievement. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics 1997 report on *The Condition of Education*, the value of a college degree has increasingly risen over the past 25 years. The report noted an increase in the earnings differential of males between the ages of 25 to 34, whereby in 1972 those with a bachelor's or higher degree earned 19% more than their counterparts with only a high school diploma versus a 52% differential in 1995 (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). A more updated figure reflects that the median income for Americans

with a bachelor's degree or higher was 37% greater than that of high school graduates (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

A 2006 study by Haveman and Smeeding noted that by 2010, 42% of all new U.S. jobs are expected to require a postsecondary degree. A more recent study conducted by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce updated these figures pointing out that the percentage of jobs requiring postsecondary schooling will increase its current 59% to 63% over the next 10 years (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). The nominal lifetime value of this differentiated education of a bachelor's degree versus a high school diploma averages \$2.1 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The cost of higher education is steep and growing for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; however, the cost for not attending college is likely much steeper.

Upon completion of undergraduate studies, first-generation students were not found to have a notable difference in compensation received when compared to non first-generation students (Choy, 2001). Choy also noted that while compensation was connected to major, academic performance, gender, and type of college attended, equal salary levels were still present 3 years after college when singling out parental education level. Further, outcomes showed that first-generation students were not as likely to pursue graduate studies as their non first-generation peers (Choy, 2001).

2.2.10 Summary

This section's intent was to provide a comprehensive overview of the aforementioned accessibility issues and its influence on the college going habits and experiences of first-

generation college students. While for many students whose parents attended college before them deciding to continue their education is the natural next step, a rite of passage. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) point out that for first-generation students, deciding to attend college is of great consequence with many factors to consider. They note that decision to attend college is often weighed against potential risks, including the economic risks, as well as the breaking away from family traditions. Many must face the reality that they are academically under prepared, lack the social capital necessary to obtain a college education, and lack the family support needed to navigate the many obstacles toward achieving higher education. These issues can lead to overwhelming choices for first-generation students unfamiliar with the steps that need to be taken in order to advance to postsecondary education, as well as the sometimes bureaucratic nature of college life. Based on the previous research of first-generation students outlined herein, the profile has shown that these students whose parents did not attend college are at a significant disadvantage when compared to their non first-generation counterparts in their pursuit of higher education. The resulting impact is a much greater likelihood of foregone earnings, lost opportunity for upwards social mobility, and a reduced capacity to advance their educational attainment. The issue surrounding accessibility has been around for quite some time and continues to confront many students, including those first-generation students presently under review in this research.

2.3 CULTURAL CAPITAL/CULTURAL REPRODUCTION

Bourdieu (1998) argues that families play a centrally important role in the dissemination and retransmission of an established social order. Cultural and social capital accumulation, as well as their transmission from one generation to the next is closely tied to the family. The foundation building of habitus through the social transmission of understandings begins with the immediate family structure. The conveyance of cultural capital via family practices mold each new generation in the likeness of the previous, oftentimes unconsciously. These critically important early culturally reproductive efforts extend themselves beyond the family following one's early years. They extend to the churches one worships in, the communities lived in, and educational institutions that one attends.

In describing the educational system, Bourdieu and Passeron (1994) suggest that each institution owes its traits and the manner in which it functions to its central aim to create and replicate the academy's guiding principles, whose basis and continuation are interconnected to its primary purpose of indoctrination and deliverance of a reproduced perspective defined by a cultural elite, thus effectuating a reproduction of stratification/differentiation between social classes.

Bourdieu and Campagne (1999) describe the schooling system as being characterized by the extremes that exist along a continuum based upon social class, whereby substandard schools are available to the culturally disadvantaged, while students from the elite class have available long maintained schools similar to the ones their fathers and grandfathers attended. Based on their research of the French educational system, Bourdieu and Champagne (1999) describe an even crueler educational system today than of previous generations. They suggest that in the

1950's a brutal elimination of students not deemed appropriate for secondary schooling occurred early in the process providing a clearer sense to all social classes as to their standing in society. They also argue that students further victimized themselves by placing blame largely on themselves, believing that their lack of merit justified their elimination from the system. At this time, the hierarchy of the educational system was clear to all and drew a clear delineation between social classes. Given the acceptance associated with this delineation between the social classes in the schools, it was to follow that acceptance would continue into understandings about appropriate professions, whereby lower social class individuals would not be availed to the higher paying managerial positions (Bourdieu & Champagne, 1999).

Starting in the mid 20th century, given new mandates and expectations that students would be required to stay in school for an extended time, a greater number of students subsequently achieved higher academic progress throughout the social class continuum. However, Bourdieu and Champagne (1999) argue that this led to exclusionary tactics via highly intensified academic competition among the higher social classes already accustomed to the benefits of the educational system, as well as an awareness and know-how of how to best achieve gains from their investment. In addition, Bourdieu and Champagne (1999) note that many from the lower social class groups came to realize the hidden pitfalls of this newly democratized education system. Specifically, as students advanced through the system, it became clear for many that access did not equate to success, and success in the classroom did not guarantee the opportunities that it had previously. Bourdieu and Champagne (1999) thereby argue that under this newly democratized education system, the system has effectively prolonged or postponed the elimination process that occurs within the schooling system. Furthermore, they suggest that it is plain to see that for those students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds,

both economically and culturally, it is nearly impossible to gain entrance into the schools with the most prestige because the holders of credentials from these institutions believe that it would lessen their degrees' value (Bourdieu & Champagne, 1999). These exclusionary tactics give the appearance of an open system, while in reality access is reserved strictly for the elite few (Bourdieu & Champagne, 1999). This leads to disillusionment with a system that has been supposedly democratized, when the unfortunate reality is that while for the lower social class student the system may be open, opportunities within the system, particularly in the more valued school settings is not open (Bourdieu & Champagne, 1999).

In referencing the sociology of educational institutions, particularly institutions of higher education, Bourdieu posits that the education system is the central means by which society is reproduced. He further notes that schools do this while claiming to be neutral in the transmission of hereditary privilege (Jenkins, 2002). Jenkins notes Bourdieu's first major work in the field of cultural reproduction of privilege that occurs with the school system as *The Inheritors*. In *The Inheritors*, Bourdieu strengthens his stance on the reproductive power of the formal schooling system. He discusses the subtlety by which the reproduction of privilege occurs and how formal systems accomplish their reproductive efforts successfully; by ignoring privilege, schools and other systems claim that they provide equal opportunity. Therefore, he suggests, privilege is concealed under the notion of merit, whereby those born into privileged environments maintain their positioning, and whereby those born into an environment that is marked by challenge and struggle have an immediate handicap (Jenkins, 2002).

A central claim offered by Bourdieu is that a student's academic achievement is highly correlated with parents' cultural background. He notes that in schools, given the lack of intervention on behalf of the school, students' inherited cultural backgrounds end up guiding

academic achievement, which subsequently influences the occupational attainment of graduates. This proves particularly detrimental for those students who come from lower social classes (Swartz, 1990). Formal schooling informally fosters unequal opportunity by not providing the skills and knowledge required to advance up the social strata; even more alarming is that schools tend to reinforce and reproduce the cultural standing of students.

Institutions of higher education hide the social selectivity that exists, suggesting that merit rules the day, thereby legitimizing the perpetuation of social hierarchies through a differentiated and unequal education offering depending on institution type (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994). While higher education has become more accessible to those from all social classes, Bourdieu argues that inter-institutional tracks exist along social and academic lines. The status of the university attended influences the degrees of success attained upon entering the work force (Swartz, 1990). According to this theory, it is no longer merely a matter of completing a requisite level of education, but rather it is of equal importance that one attends the right institutions in order to materially influence one's social standing (Swartz, 1990).

A number of education researchers have discussed the phenomenon of cultural reproduction in the primary and secondary schooling system. McDermott (1997) suggests that the school system, with particular reference to K-12 education, is organized in such a fashion as to facilitate failure and subsequently legitimize it. This leads to failure on the part of many children, particularly those children not attuned to the preferred modes of learning offered by the school (McDermott, 1997). Nieto (2001) notes that "the fact that power and inequality are rarely discussed in schools should come as no surprise. As institutions, schools are charged with maintaining the status quo, but they are also expected to wipe out inequality" (p. 239). deMarrais and Lecompte (1999) agree with Nieto suggesting that by using economic, cultural, and

hegemonic capital, the dominant social class reproduces a class-based society via the schooling system. The above noted assertions by education researchers portray a highly problematic school system that seeks to give favor to the privileged and limit the potential of the lower social class.

Lareau (2003) discusses Bourdieu's model related to social classes, and how within this model, the concept of habitus serve as a driving force one is unaware of, even though it serves as the lens by which they view culture and society. She notes Bourdieu's argument that individuals have different degrees of habitus which can be used to build social networks and navigate cumbersome educational institutions, and subsequently converted into a valuable commodity such as capital, to be used in the real world (Lareau, 2003).

Lareau (2003) offers that various practices and behaviors often are present in families of different social classes. She indicates that middle class parents, both from black and white families, exhibited behaviors of what she terms 'concerted cultivation'. Concerted cultivation is a practice in which families work in a very organized manner; scheduling activities for their children, working to enhance their child's development of social and cognitive skills, and regularly assessing the opinions and talents of their children (Lareau, 2003). Conversely, Lareau (2003) suggests that parents of children from working class and poorer families sought to meet basic needs such as food and shelter; but were less formal in their organization of their children's daily lives. This practice she termed 'accomplishment of natural growth'. This practice gave children much more independence to organize their activities. Lareau indicated that working class and poor families often discussed money and their financial position due to significant economic constraints that were ever present.

2.4 TRIO PROGRAMS

Through deliberate governmental efforts to improve higher education accessibility, a series of programs were created to allow for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who exhibited academic potential to attend college (Thomas, Farrow, & Martinez, 1998). The first such initiative, Upward Bound, was conceived as part of the Economic Act of 1964. Upward Bound specifically aimed to promote high school completion, as well as prepare low-income students for college. Next, Talent Search, the second of the original three TRIO programs grew out of the Higher Education Act of 1965 in order to guide students as they applied for new federal resources made available for higher education. In 1968, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was amended to include a program originally referred to as the Special Services for Disadvantaged Students program, now known as Student Support Services (SSS) (U.S. Department of Education, August 2008). This was the origination and coining of the TRIO name.

The TRIO programs were later expanded to include a variety of other services to further assist a growing pool of eligible students. In 1972, further amendments to the Higher Education Act led to Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) which are geared towards helping adults choose a college program and obtaining the necessary financial aid to attend. This latest round of amendments to the Higher Education Act also led to the initiation of the Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) program designed to aid veterans returning from Vietnam. Further amendments to the Higher Education Act created the Ronald E. McNair Post baccalaureate Achievement Program (MCN) in 1986 and the Upward Bound Math and Science (UBMS) program in 1990. The McNair program sought to assist and encourage students from underrepresented populations

to pursue and complete doctoral education. The Upward Bound Math and Science program was created to give enhanced instruction in the math and science fields (U.S. Department of Education, August 2008).

2.4.1 Student Support Services

The three primary purposes of the Student Support Services programs are to enhance the academic development of participants, to provide basic college requirement assistance, and to push students to finish college. The program also allows for the provision of grant aid to those students already receiving Federal Pell Grants. The Student Support Services program seeks to improve the retention and graduation rates of program participants. It is also designed to help students transition through the progressive higher education levels (U.S. Department of Education, June 2008).

In order to participate in the program, students need to attend an institution that is a Student Support Services grantee. Participants must be both low-income and first-generation or have an identified disability. In addition, all participants must demonstrate a need for academic support. Further requirements dictate that 2/3 of students must be either first-generation college students from families with low-income levels or disabled (U.S. Department of Education, August 2008). Services of the program include basic study skills instruction; tutoring; academic, personal and financial counseling; admissions and financial aid assistance to enroll in both four-year institutions, as well as graduate and professional programs; career preparedness; mentoring, and scholarships to attend college (U.S. Department of Education, June 2008).

2.4.2 Impact of TRIO Programs

According to the High School and Beyond study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, those students who participated in TRIO programs achieved greater academic success after 10 years than those students who did not participate in a TRIO program (Balz & Esten, 1998). The dramatic results of this study indicate a much greater likelihood of persistence to graduation for TRIO students as compared to non TRIO students who were eligible by program definition, 30% versus 12.9% (Balz & Esten, 1998). In addition, TRIO participants were much more likely to have some graduate level experience, 11% versus 5% (Balz & Esten, 1998).

Ward (2006) concedes that while some progress has been achieved via TRIO programs, a number of issues still remain. In particular, a sizable portion of minority students may not meet all of the eligibility requirements even if they likely would greatly benefit from participation (Ward, 2006). Further, many students have dug such a deep hole at the elementary level that it may be too late for them to realize the benefits of TRIO programs which do not begin until high school (Ward, 2006). Moreover, because so many factors influence student academic performance and because TRIO programs are often ancillary to school operations, the impact cannot address all students in need (Ward, 2006). Ward calls for a comprehensive reform of the entire school system aimed improving academic performance via early intervention.

A report by the Pell Institute outlined the findings of four assessment studies on TRIO programs conducted by the United States Department of Education. The results of each study

indicate low-income and first-generation students are positively impacted by their participation in a TRIO program in a significant and consequential way (The Pell Institute, 2009).

2.4.3 Impact of Student Support Services Program

A study conducted by Westat Inc. in 1997 regarding the implications of participation in the Student Support Services program showed that positive differentials existed for students who participated in the program in their academic performance (GPA), credit hours earned, and persistence rate (Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Rak, 1997). The study compared 2,900 Student Support Services (SSS) participants after three years of beginning college with 2,900 non participants who were similar. While the positive differential in the findings was small, it was statistically significant for each of the three aforementioned measures (Chaney et al., 1997; Westat, 1997). Specific results indicated that the first year had the highest potential for realizing results for participants.

Further, as the level of participation increased in the program, either through number of contacts or amount of time, so too do the outcomes of academic performance, persistence, and credit hours completed (Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Rak, 1997; Westat, 1997). It is of note that while the scope of the SSS program has increased considerably over the past 40 years, the financial resourcing per participant and per program are down from 1970 after adjusting for inflation (Chaney et al., 1997; Westat, 1997).

Zhang and Chan (U.S. Department of Education, March 2007) outline in their report on the Student Support Services program during the time period 2002-03 and 2003-04 that

participants at four-year institutions showed an 82% enrollment rate after one year, more than 66% after two years, and greater than 60% after three years of commencing their undergraduate experience (Zhang & Chen, U.S. Department of Education, March 2007). With respect to two-year institutions, participants maintained enrollment at more than 66% after one year, and more than 50% after two-years (Zhang & Chen, U.S. Department of Education, March 2007). The number predictably drops off after two-years as many students who participated in the program complete their associates' requirements. The gender composition of SSS program participants showed that students were much more likely to be female than male at both two and four-year institutions by a wide margin (Zhang & Chan, U.S. Department of Education, March 2007).

In addition to supporting persistence and graduation rates of Student Support Services program participants, a goal of the program is to aid students in seamlessly moving from two-year institutions to four-year institutions (Zhang & Chen, U.S. Department of Education, March 2007). Within two-years of beginning study at a two-year institution, more than 14% of participants had transferred to a four-year college or university, with approximately one-half of this group having completed their associate's degree (Zhang & Chen, U.S. Department of Education, March 2007).

Zhang and Chen (U.S. Department of Education, March 2007) found in their assessment of Student Support Services program outcomes that approximately 23% of participants at two-year institutions had completed their associate degree within three years; and approximately 28% of participants at four-year institutions had completed their bachelor's degree within five years. It is of note that participants at a four-year college/university characterized as first-generation only, had a higher likelihood of completing their undergraduate degree within four or five years as

compared to other eligibility status groups (Zhang & Chen, U.S. Department of Education, March 2007). Zhang and Chen also point out that longevity of participation in program service offerings led to higher rates of degree attainment at all institutions (U.S. Department of Education, March 2007).

2.4.4 Making the Most of TRIO Programs

Engle, Bermeo, and O'Brien (2006) conducted a study for the Pell Institute that examined how first-generation students responded to the services, programs, and communication directed towards them. In partnership with the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation, they assessed which particular offerings had the greatest influence on 135 first-generation students in the state of Texas who had participated in either the Upward Bound program or the Talent Search program (Engle et al., The Pell Institute, 2006). Their findings suggest that the most important factors in aiding first-generation students were increasing the educational aspirations to attend college, enlightening them as to how to complete the college enrollment process, and creating a smoother process of transitioning into the first year of college (Engle et al., The Pell Institute, 2006). Additional evidence provided from individualized in-depth interviews would support the relevance of these findings to individual cases.

One of the key variables for first-generation students in making the decision to attend college is their ability to envision their capacity to attend a postsecondary institution. Many do not have high educational aspirations because they cannot picture how they can make it happen. Engle et al. (The Pell Institute, 2006) referenced increasing the aspirations of first-generation students as an important factor in getting them onto the college pathway. They offered a number

of programs and services that would increase the aspirations of first-generation students. A primary concern that needs addressed in order to increase aspirations is clarifying the connection between career outcomes and how college can lead towards desired goals. Additional areas of importance to first-generation students that can advance their aspiration for attending college include: providing an understanding of how to finance college; enhancing their academic standing so that they believe they are ready for college; showing them that college can be their reality using mentors, and building personal relationships with first-generation students and consistently guiding them through the process of getting accepted into college (Engle et al., The Pell Institute, 2006).

Engle et al. (The Pell Institute, 2006) offer a few pertinent suggestions for how to best assist first-generation students in completing the college enrollment process based on their findings. These suggestions include: beginning to work with students early and meet regularly, thoroughly explaining each step of the process and breaking each step down to simplify the process, showing them how they can fund their postsecondary education using financial aid and other resources, and involving the family as much as possible in the entire process (Engle et al., The Pell Institute, 2006).

Becker (National TRIO Clearinghouse, 1999) calls for a greater involvement with parents in order to enhance the impact of TRIO programs. Building on previous research that connects student performance and parental engagement, Becker outlines a number of programs aimed at improving TRIO participants' success. These programs are designed to bring together the school, the family, and their communities. Specific examples of programs that have been utilized include orientation for parents, newsletters, handbooks for parents, workshops, and advisory boards

(National TRIO Clearinghouse, Becker, 1999). Further investigation on the efficacy of these identified programs would support the call for such programs in the future.

As part of the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 2008, referenced upon passage as the Higher Education Opportunity Act, a new service was mandated of all TRIO programs that they offer financial education programs (Yang & Kezar, The Pell Institute, September, 2009). A driving force for the implementation of this new component of TRIO programs was the continued financial illiteracy that many first-generation and low-income students exhibit. This lack of financial knowledge is often combined with an equally troubling financial aid need gap, that can sometimes approach \$8,000 (Yang & Kezar, The Pell Institute, September 2009). Given the complexity of the financial aid process, along with numerous misconceptions oftentimes held by first-generation students, it is a prudent move to implement financial education into TRIO programs.

2.4.5 Summary

Governmental support of accessibility to higher education for first-generation and lower income students has largely been served by the numerous TRIO programs that now exist. The academic and social preparation of first-generation students to participate in the college track while in high school is a central focus of the initial two TRIO programs, Upward Bound and Talent Search. The third TRIO program, the Student Support Services program, serves as the most recognizable and successful program at guiding first-generation students during their transition to college. Attaining success upon transitioning to college life is often extremely challenging for many students, with unique factors that influence first-generation students. While a number of

opportunities and programs have been available via the TRIO program to first-generation students, certain initiatives have shown a greater value in improving accessibility, as well as eventual persistence through graduation.

Engle et al. (The Pell Institute, 2006) found through their research that certain key factors can aid a first-generation student as they transition into college life. The most important factor in transitioning to college is being prepared academically. The likelihood that a first-generation student is prepared can be improved through dedicated services such as tutoring, mentoring and academic advice while in high school. Upward Bound and Talent Search have been central to providing these services to first-generation students. A first-generation student's preparedness can also be advanced through early admittance summer programs that acclimates them to the academic and social life of college. It is also of great value to provide constant advisement and support during the first year (Engle et al, The Pell Institute, 2006). Other key factors identified by first-generation students that made the transition to college life easier include: exposing students to the many exciting out of class student life activities, maintaining parental involvement throughout college, and providing sound financial education and assistance (Engle et al., The Pell Institute, 2006).

It is important for TRIO program awardees to focus their offerings on those efforts that have shown the most promise in order to maximize the resources provided to them through governmental allocations. Having the capacity to document continual improvement in outcomes for TRIO program participants will substantiate the argument for additional resources needed to serve the large number of eligible students who are not beneficiaries of the program due to current budgetary constraints.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

In order to answer my research questions, I conducted a series of case studies on first-generation college students who are currently participating in the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford Student Support Services program. For purposes of analysis, each individual was treated as a unique case. In addition, I conducted a cross-case analysis in an effort to offer broader based petite generalizations to inform the knowledge on first-generation college students. Throughout the data collection and analysis process I utilized the grounded theory approach for its capacity to progressively make the data more focused and increasingly tightened the theoretical basis of the analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The ongoing and interactive collection and analysis of data led to greater understandings of the phenomenon under study and maintained my persistent involvement with the collected data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital guided the theoretical understandings relevant to this project, supplemented with the related concepts of cultural reproduction, social capital, *habitus*, and social class. The theory of cultural reproduction suggests that the dominant social class intentionally aims to maintain current social structures to its benefit. According to Bourdieu,

one's cultural capital is derived from the habitus one learns, particularly during the formative years of one's life. In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu argues that individuals do not possess habitus, rather it possesses them. Habitus is a guiding principle of all that one does or thinks and serves as a *modus operandi* for behavior (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu defines the habitus to be:

the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus (p. 78).

Swartz simplifies this complex definition by stating that the actions of humans are regulated and these actions might exhibit regularities in their behavior without becoming dogma to an outside source (Swartz, 2002). This creates a stratified cultural capital system whereby some individuals possess more valuable cultural capital than others. This lends itself to a continued cycle of cultural reproduction in order to maintain the status quo. Robbins (1991) suggests that Bourdieu's central tenet of *Outline of a Theory of Practice* is that new thinking assimilates old information and progresses it further rather than simply replacing it. This phenomenon is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two as part of the literature review.

3.2 CASE STUDY METHOD

The case study method was chosen for this research study because it allows a researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject under review, as well as the meaning for those participants under study (Merriam, 1998). Case study focuses on process and context with an

intention of guiding future practice, policy making and research in the chosen area of study. Thus, it is not critical that confirmation be achieved, but rather the process of discovery is of greater value (Merriam, 1998). Using the case study method allowed me to explore the central research question: to what do extent families play a role in the educational goals past the secondary level for first-generation college students. Further, how do first-generation college students describe their home lives prior to college?

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) describe case study research as a means to explore a current issue in its natural environment by collecting multiple forms of support. Several characteristics are generally agreed on as defining case study research. The first characteristic that defines case study research according to Hancock and Algozzine is that while individuals who are reflective of a group are sometimes the subject of study, case study research will typically look at a phenomenon such as an activity, particular event, program, or a situation. Merriam (1998) also references this characteristic and identifies it as particularistic (p. 29). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) note a second important characteristic defining case study research as being bounded by time and space and occurring in its natural context. Merriam (1998) describes the bounding that occurs within a case study research project as something that one can build a fence around (p. 27). The third characteristic surrounding case study research as noted by Hancock and Algozzine is that it is built on deep and diverse information sources that provide for a richer and more descriptive review of the phenomenon (p. 16).

Merriam (1998) offers the heuristic nature of case study research as its third defining feature. The heuristic quality references the capacity of case studies to enlighten the reader's understanding of the research under review. This feature has the potential to create new

understandings of the phenomenon, enhance the experience of the readers, or solidify current understandings (p. 30). The review of literature creates a general understanding of the issues faced by first-generation college students; however, these issues are not exclusive to first-generation students, and in some instances do not apply universally. Further, Bourdieu suggests that the compounding effects of these various hindrances to college enrollment and persistence can be overwhelming, but does not offer suggestions on how to overcome these constraints. Through the exploration of each case in this study, a clearer understanding will develop of the experience of first-generation students. The individual stories serve as the basis for theory generation that can guide future practice in assisting first-generation students.

Stake (1995) articulates my primary motivation for utilizing the case study method, that is, it serves to both flesh out the uniqueness of each case, while at the same time illustrating commonalities (p. 1). While it could be argued that case studies are not the best method to make generalizations, certain responses often repeat, providing opportunities to make what Stake refers to as petite generalizations. These modifications to existing generalizations can serve to better explain the phenomenon under study. The aim is not necessarily to make grand assertions or new generalizations about the study, but rather to better understand contemporary phenomena. Stake (1995) then offers that the real value of a case study is particularization, rather than generalization (p. 8). This concept is focused on the uniqueness of the case, enabling for a more intimate understanding of the subject under review.

3.3 PARTICIPANT SELECTION

Participants for this study are students enrolled in the Student Support Services program at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. The University of Pittsburgh at Bradford is one of four regional campuses of the University of Pittsburgh; as such, it is considered a state-related university within the state of Pennsylvania. Pitt-Bradford offers 41 majors and more than 50 minors. Situated on 317 acres in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains, Pitt-Bradford boasts unique opportunities to learn in and out of the classroom. While I made no specifications regarding the race, gender or age of participants, it was a requirement that they be participants in the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford Student Support Services program. As noted by the United States Department of Education, the Student Support Services program, one of six outreach programs under the federally sponsored TRIO programs, is designed to assist low-income, first-generation students persist in college through graduation (USDE, 2008). This program originated in 1968 as an amendment of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Originally called the Special Services for Disadvantaged Students program, the program implemented by the United States government is designed to aid students in their effort to realize success in college (USDE, 2008). Examining the overall award list of TRIO Student Support Services program provides context of the size and scope of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford program. In fiscal year 2009, there were 946 projects that received funding with an average program award of \$318,738 and had on average 209 participants (USDE, 2010). These figures are slightly higher than the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford's FY 2009 award of \$252,195 and participant level of 160 (USDE, 2010). At this time, The Student Support Services project is the only active TRIO program available at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford.

The Student Support Services program gives students an opportunity to develop their academic skills, understand basic college requirements, and encourage students to finish college (USDE, 2008). In addition, some participants who receive federal Pell grants have the potential to receive grant aid from the program. Specific programs made available via the Student Support Services program include tutoring, counseling, (academic, personal, and financial), as well as guidance on obtaining financial aid and gaining admittance to higher education. Further assistance is provided for students related to their career options, and direction is provided for those students interested in pursuing graduate education (USDE, 2008). In order to participate in the program, students must either be enrolled or accepted at a college that is a grantee institution. The program is open to low-income students who are first-generation, as well as students that have disabilities and demonstrate academic need. At least two-thirds of student participants at any participating institution must be low-income students who are either disabled or first-generation. In addition, a minimum of one-third of the disabled student participants must be identified as low-income (USDE, 2008). Given the strong relationship that exists between low income status and educational enrollment and attainment, the requirement of TRIO SSS participants to primarily be drawn from a low income background make them a compelling and unique sub population of the first-generation student population to examine. Because I am a first-generation college student, the experiences of those students eligible to participate in the program are of great personal interest. My specific case precluded my participation due to my not demonstrating the academic need; otherwise I would have been eligible.

University representatives who administer the program manage the selection of students based on participants meeting eligibility requirements as defined by the federally sponsored grant

as identified previously. The University of Pittsburgh at Bradford determines eligibility by having applicants answer questions related to parents' educational attainment, socioeconomic status, as well as the number of individuals residing in their household.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Merriam (1998) outlines three techniques that are often used to collect data when doing case study research: interviews, observation, and document analysis. She notes that many researchers in the education field employing a qualitative approach will utilize only one, maybe two in the course of their study. The collection of data using the case study process is highly interactive wherein the implementation of one strategy will often lead to the exploration of other data sources (p. 134). For purposes of better understanding the research questions outlined in this study, case study is the vehicle employed. My aim was to gain better insight into these questions through the investigation of student participants that represent the phenomenon I am interested in gaining insight into. In this instance, the primary objective is to achieve a deeper understanding of the individuals involved in the study (intrinsic case study); subsequently it is the intent to gain a better understanding beyond the individuals being interviewed as cases (instrumental case study) (Stake, 1995).

In the case of intrinsic case study, the primary objective is to understand the specific case under examination (Stake, 1995). The majority of time spent in intrinsic study is dedicated to direct interpretation rather than categorization of information collected due to the short time frame for understanding a complex case (Stake, 1995). Utilizing an instrumental approach to

case study analysis allows for a clearer understanding of the phenomenon being investigated and the relationships inherent to the case (Stake, 1995). This gives rise to the need for a greater categorization of the data as information is collected than would be the case in an intrinsic case study approach (Stake, 1995). Yin (2003) discusses the benefit of case study research in its capacity to ground the results in practical life occurrences. This is of great significance in this study of first-generation students in my effort to unravel the complexities of an often challenging and dynamic experience.

For this study, the in-depth interview is the primary means by which data was collected. This method serves as the central means of data collection because it enabled me to collect a large amount of rich and personalized data about the subjects under study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 39). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) note that interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (p. 40). They further point out that using the semi-structured interview can be a valuable approach because it offers greater flexibility in question format, as well as provides the opportunity to use follow up questions to dig more deeply with research participants in order to gain their perspective (p. 40). I utilized an open-ended format in this study so that I could secure holistic and detailed information.

Merriam (1998) notes that in qualitative research non-probability sampling is the appropriate method. The rationale for this approach is linked to the nature of exploring what occurs and its implications, in contrast to quantitative research which typically seeks how often something occurs or how much (p. 61). She further notes that the form most often used is purposeful sampling, in which the researcher seeks samples that best describe the phenomenon they seek to understand or discover. In this study, I worked work with the program administrator

to select those first-generation students who had the highest potential for sharing descriptive, rich illustrations of their stories. This enabled me to better understand the most important issues surrounding the study as described by the research participants. After reviewing my study with the program director and describing the type of respondents that would serve my study best, she provided individuals that she knew would openly share their stories.

In order to reach a sample size that provides the information that substantiates my findings, I sought a point of saturation or redundancy. Merriam (1998) suggests that this allows the researcher to achieve maximum information. My projection going into the study was that I would solicit a sample size of 8-10 research participants in order to achieve the desired information on which my findings can be reported. Initially, I conducted interviews with eight participants, all of which were female. In order to mitigate gender bias issues, I worked with the program administrator to obtain two additional male participants. Because I had only one non-traditional (30 years or older) student in my initial sample of eight participants, I requested that one of the two new male participants also be a non-traditional student. My intent upon commencement of the collection of data was to evenly distribute the amount of time spent with each research subject. However, those research participants that provided a more descriptive and detailed accounting of their experiences were given more contact hours, better informing my results. My intent was to obtain the most conceptually illustrative examples from participants that would reaffirm and enhance the understanding of the college going experiences of first-generation students. While it was anticipated that there would be some variance in the time spent with each subject based on the quality of feedback they provided during the interview process, I found that the administrator had very effectively selected participants, all of which were eager to

engage the process, and thus shared their stories openly. This resulted in only modest variations in time spent with each participant. The director of the TRIO SSS program was able to coordinate all interview scheduling on my behalf and arranged for a private office in the campus library to ensure the privacy of participants.

It was important to secure permission and access to the subjects to be studied by the administrator in charge of the program. Stake (1995) argues that it is important to illustrate to the program administrator a short, yet descriptive outline that reviews the study to be implemented, any plans for dissemination of the findings, opportunities for draft reviews, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity (p. 57). For this study, I corresponded with the director of the Student Support Services office at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford in order to set up a time that was convenient to meet. I forwarded an advance copy of my study with relevant instruments that I intended to use as I collected data from the participants. It was my intention to review all important aspects of the study, seek feedback and answer questions, and gain permission and access to work with student participants of the program. After detailing the type of participants that I sought as part of the study, the director of the program identified a sample that was purposefully selected to achieve the type of data I needed to effectively address the questions of this study.

Prior to each interview conducted with research participants, I again reviewed the details of the informed consent form, in particular items such as confidentiality, risk/benefits, and the procedures of participation. I also described the format of the interview and pointed out that they should expect it to last approximately 75-90 minutes. As part of the interview, the information was audio taped so that I could transcribe the information in order to effectively analyze the data

given by participants. I communicated to participants that they would have the opportunity to provide feedback on my findings. After all interviews were transcribed, I completed a within case analysis of each participant in the form of a profile that was then sent to each respondent in order to gain any feedback that wished to provide. The initial eight participants were also sent a short list of supplemental questions to provide clarity or confirmation on key items. Seven out of the 10 respondents replied back to the profiles, generally indicating that they were very pleased with how their story reflected what we had discussed. Four of the seven participants who replied back also responded to the additional questions that I had forwarded to them. These responses were folded into analysis of the study. Three of the original participants opted not to respond to my profiles or the supplemental questions, even after multiple communication attempts.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

When using case study research, supported by grounded theory, the highly interactive process between the researcher and the data being collected suggests that analysis works hand and hand with data collection (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Merriam, 1998). In this study, I viewed data analysis as an ongoing process in which findings and interpretations of these findings as the data is collected is continually constructed in order to gain clarity on the subject. Therefore, I utilized a constant comparative method of analyzing the data collected (Merriam, 1998). As suggested by Esterberg (2002), I employed a strategy of writing analytic memos to assist in the development of themes and for the establishment of a framework for analyzing the data. Memoing enabled me to establish connections between the cases that I examined. As I reviewed the transcribed data

collected from the research subjects, I maintained my research questions at the forefront of my thinking at all times. This strategy enabled me to stay focused on the central items I sought to understand further as a result of the study.

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) offer several guidelines that guide case study researchers as they interpret the data they collect as part of their studies. They specifically offer five guidelines that shape an effective case study approach to include: continuous fine-tuning of the study's central research questions based on early findings; regular attention to the research questions being studied; emphasis on the collection and elucidation of that information holding greatest meaning to the study; development of a data management system that includes accurate labeling and coherent storage of data that enables a simple means to retrieve information; and utilization of any resource available that can guide the collection and understanding of data collected. I employed each of these techniques as I analyzed and interpreted this study's data.

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) further suggest that a key point to any case study research is continuous synthesis of data as it is collected and available. This allows for ongoing refinement of the data so that the study focuses only on that which is relevant. Each participant's interview was transcribed to capture the actual conversation shared between myself and each subject. Using memoing as an analytical strategy, I was able to identify trends and categorical themes which served as the basis for initial comparison of the research participants. Time was spent reading each of the transcripts in detail numerous times, constantly refining the information further, and searching for commonalities between participants, as well as unique characteristics of each subject. During this process I added my thoughts regarding commonalities and differences between participants by taking detailed notes on my understandings. By employing

this constant comparative approach as recommended by Merriam (1998), I gained a more solid basis to better understand the trends associated with my population in order to determine appropriate questions for follow up with research participants. Six additional questions were emailed to participants in order to give participants an opportunity to clarify their thoughts on a few topics relevant to the study. Participants were given time to provide this feedback, and those that did not initially respond were afforded the opportunity via a reminder email. Each step served as a refinement of the theoretical understanding of the analysis as prescribed by Merriam's (1998) constant comparative method and Bryant and Charmaz's (2007) grounded theory. As part of the constant comparative approach that was used in this study, I employed an open coding of the data collected, allowing the findings and my interpretation to guide the categorization of information.

Merriam (1998) emphasizes the importance of an effective data management system in case study research as a great deal of information is collected from interviews and field notes taken during observation due to the highly descriptive and detailed nature of the data collected. She articulates the value in building a case study data base in which all information pertaining to the case is brought together, labeled and stored for easy recovery. Using a rigorous management of data, I was able to categorize all relevant information ascertained from the transcribed interviews into categorical themes that served as an important mechanism for cross case analysis.

My study used two stages of analysis as offered by Merriam (1998) – the within-case analysis, as well as a cross-case analysis. Each participant in my study represents a complex case by which to be examined and profiled in order to communicate the holistic findings ascertained. Upon analyzing each participant as a single case, the cross-case analysis allowed for general

understanding about the participants to be evaluated in order to build abstractions across the cases. Table 2 represents the interconnected variables that influence first-generation college student's educational aspirations, as well as their likelihood of persistence.

Table 2: Summary Research Questions, Key Variables, and Research Analysis

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Variables	Analysis
The central research question of this study is to then understand to what extent families play a role in the educational goals past the secondary level for first-generation college students. Further, how do first-generation college students describe their home lives prior to college?	Interview Items 1-32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Aspirations • Accessibility • Academic Preparedness • Enrollment Patterns 	<p>Constant Comparison</p> <p>Identification of Themes (Emergent Categories)</p>
What is the relationship between a first-generation student’s educational goals and parental involvement in secondary level schooling?	Interview Items 1-4, 24-31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Aspirations • Accessibility • Academic Preparedness • Enrollment Patterns 	<p>Constant Comparison</p> <p>Identification of Themes (Emergent Categories)</p>
In what ways do families shape and influence how a first-generation comes to understand the value of education?	Interview Items 24-32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Aspirations • Accessibility • Academic Preparedness • Enrollment Patterns 	<p>Constant Comparison</p> <p>Identification of Themes (Emergent Categories)</p>
In what home factors does a first-generation student’s family regularly engage that may lead to their attending college, as well as their persistence? How do these factors improve their academic preparedness?	Interview Items 15-18, 24-32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Aspirations • Accessibility • Academic Preparedness • Enrollment Patterns • Collegiate Experience • Persistence • Academic Outcomes • Post-College Outcomes 	<p>Constant Comparison</p> <p>Identification of Themes (Emergent Categories)</p>

3.6 VALIDITY AND ISSUES OF RESEARCH BIAS

It is of great importance to the credibility of the research that the researcher addresses threats to the validity of the study. Maxwell (2005) specifically references two areas pertaining to the validity of research that need to be addressed: bias and reactivity. At the beginning of the study it is valuable to explain biases that the researcher holds, particularly related to their theoretical perspectives, understanding, and preconceived beliefs. This aids those reviewing the study to better conclude how findings were realized. Qualitative research does not seek to eliminate variance, but rather to explain how the researcher's expectations might influence the direction of the study. In order to provide in depth clarity as to my own biases, a detailed self profile is included in Chapter 4 as prologue to the within case analysis of research participants. The second area that researchers need to be cognizant of regarding validity is the issue of reactivity (Maxwell, 2005). Understanding how to effectively recognize and manage the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals under study is the concern of qualitative research. It is not the objective of the researcher to undertake the task of eliminating influence.

Merriam (1998) notes that it is of critical importance that results of any research study be trustworthy. She points out that in fields such as education, intervention by practitioners on the lives of people could have a consequential impact. Several researchers have cited a number of means by which to enhance the internal validity of a research study. One such strategy includes respondent validation/member checks (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Respondent validation/member checks seek feedback from those being studied. As noted previously, the first-generation students under study received a draft of their within case analysis in order to provide feedback to me. This was important to determine accuracy of and clarification of the

findings. Merriam (1998) also suggests using peer examination as a means by which to improve internal validity. Asking colleagues in higher education to review and give ongoing feedback on the findings as they materialize provides another means by which to improve the internal validity I achieve in this study. I had two higher education professionals each with more than 10 years of experience to review a draft of my findings in order to provide feedback. They reviewed the study for clarity and concision of findings, as well as suggested additional resources to include in the review of literature.

3.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Because of the descriptive and detailed nature of case study research, the potential to over encumber educators and policy makers intended to gain from the study exists if the report is too long or too exhaustive (Merriam, 1998). Case study also has the potential to make broad reaching generalizations, or conversely, oversimplified accounts of the findings that can mislead readers. It was important to contextualize the findings so that information gleaned as part of the study are not oversimplified nor over generalized. Clarity and concision in the reporting of the findings so as to counteract the possibility of exhausting potential readers was centrally important.

Additional limitations of this study pertain to the low number of respondents, as well as the low number of non-traditional students in the study. While this was anticipated given the structure of the study, it is important to notate. Upon only obtaining one non-traditional participant in the initial pool of respondents, I requested an additional non-traditional student to

mitigate this limitation. Furthermore, the respondents in this study, with only one exception, were highly communicative and offered extremely detailed accounts of their family's home lives. This attribute of the respondents has the potential to influence results. The high level of involvement in extracurricular activities, which serves to build social/cultural capital, represented by most participants in this study is consequential in the building of connections to social networks relevant to college preparation and acceptance. Future studies would be well served to include participants that report lower levels of extracurricular involvement. Additional time and resources for future studies on this subject could expand the size and scope of the sample population.

4.0 PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Using the case study method allowed me to explore the central research question: how and to what extent do families play a role in the educational goals past the secondary level for first-generation college students? Further, how do first-generation college students describe their home lives prior to college? Working with an in-depth interview protocol comprised of open-ended semi-structured questions in three categories (participants, parents, siblings), I was able to provide a better understanding of how parents influence a first-generation college student's desire to enroll in college and persist. The goal of the study is to better understand how families, especially parents, create an environment that leads to college attendance. Additional secondary questions were related to how characteristics of a first-generation student's home life influence his or her educational goals past high school. They were:

- What is the relationship between a first-generation student's educational goals and parental involvement in secondary level schooling?
- In what ways do families shape and influence how a first-generation student comes to understand the value of education?
- In what home factors (activities, events or behaviors) does a first-generation student's family regularly engage in that may lead to their attending college, as well as their persistence in college? How do these home factors improve their academic preparedness for postsecondary education?

The first section of this chapter is a succinct self-profile offered to further describe my own biases related to this study given my own first-generation roots. My personal story provides context for the lens by which I examined the above noted research questions. This chapter also includes a within case analysis in the form of a profile of each participant that provides a context background of the stories of each respondent. The first eight participants represent a traditional aged group of respondents who share a very similar experience with respect to their involvement in extracurricular activities. The high level of involvement represented by these respondents is an important indicator of the social/cultural capital building, an important driver behind the connections to the social networks relevant to college preparation and acceptance. The last two respondents, Sally and Victor, were non-traditional first-generation students who each have had more than 25 years between their high school completion and college attendance. This demographic characteristic was an important departure from the traditional-aged participants, in that there was a marked difference in their high school experience (curriculum tracks, levels of engagement in extracurricular activities, as well as the push for college during those secondary schooling years). The primary purpose of these profiles is to give a descriptive understanding of the participant's upbringing that serves as a foundation for the findings that are detailed in the next two chapters. Within each of the participant profiles is an organizational coding comprised of five main headings: parent's educational background, academic preparedness, extracurricular involvement/community service/work, educational aspirations, and parental/family support of education.

An interesting note about the participants in this study is that five out of the 10 students included in the study were optioned to the Bradford campus of the University of Pittsburgh

system. When students apply to the University of Pittsburgh, they have the option to select a secondary choice from the four regional campuses within the Pitt system. Of the five participants who indicated that they had been optioned to Pitt-Bradford, four had noted that they were not familiar with the campus prior to their application. Only one of the five optioned students knew about this campus, primarily because it was in close proximity to her house. All students indicated that they were very pleased with their experience regardless of whether or not they had been optioned to Pitt-Bradford.

4.2 SELF-PROFILE

Growing up the oldest son in a family of limited financial resources posed numerous challenges and obstacles to my academic development during my elementary and secondary schooling. The implications this had on my upbringing and experience both in and out of school were significant. I detail some of these home life experiences in order to provide a contextual base through which I view this study. Ironically, it is this very experience which has tirelessly driven me to succeed.

My mother was orphaned at an early age, her mother tragically died in an automobile accident when she was three and her father disappeared. She was able to earn her G.E.D., and her career consisted of holding various waitress jobs before she became permanently disabled due to back injuries and a debilitating battle with ulcerative colitis. The years of prednisone use to combat her sickness destroyed her body and left her with a substantial medical record with numerous problems.

My dad was raised by his grandparents because his mother worked many hours and his father was not present for various reasons. He has spent much of his life in a small town in Western Pennsylvania other than his years in the Navy. He has an extremely hard work ethic and also earned his G.E.D. as his highest level of education. After he elected an honorable discharge from the Navy because of my mother's sickness he relocated our family to Pennsylvania from Florida with hopes of career opportunities. Unfortunately, due to the changing marketplace in Pittsburgh and the downturn of the steel industry my dad ended up working multiple jobs in order to support our family. Recent years have been more fortuitous as he has held a union painting job for the past 20 years.

The significance of our socioeconomic status would affect my schooling and the interactions I would have with my classmates and teachers alike. My parents and I had few conversations about my academics or what type of grades I earned during my schooling experience, other than to share that they were very proud of me. My motivation to achieve was largely driven by a strong desire to succeed, as well indirectly by observing my dad's tireless work ethic to support our family. While we did not have an overabundance of resources, we always managed to secure what we needed. My parents were not connected to the schooling system throughout which left me to determine my own educational pathway. Compounding the challenge of my parents' limited understanding of the bureaucratic nature of the school system was that within my family structure, including extended family, there was nobody I could turn to for academic guidance who had navigated the process to college enrollment. Fortuitously, I was able to seek academic guidance from some excellent teachers and guidance counselors at my high school.

Students attending my high school experienced a different educational experience based upon their families political, social, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. As a student from a smaller community of limited financial means within the district, I experienced marginalized cultural capital for many years of my schooling. My relationships with teachers, administrators, and peers were greatly influenced by the amount of cultural capital that I was able to acquire during school. For years people perceived me as another student without much to offer because of the way I spoke, the way I dressed, and how I acted in the classroom. It was difficult to gain acceptance from the more affluent students who seemed to have every opportunity at their disposal. This was frustrating and caused a great deal of contention and personal frustration. Not only would my peers treat me differently, but teachers would react to students from my community markedly differently than those from the more affluent community in my school district.

Students from my community were generally not part of the honors curriculum and many were not part of the college preparatory curriculum. While I maintained at least a “B” average through my elementary and middle schooling, I was often viewed as a distracter to the classroom because of my antics. I would often seek attention and approval of my peers through comedic tactics in the classroom because I felt they would like me if I were funny. Reflecting back, I often wish that I would have been afforded the opportunity to participate in the honors curriculum and taken some A.P. courses. There was only one occasion that I was able to take an honors level course, 9th grade social studies. I word very hard and earned an “A” in this class. Interestingly, I remember opportunities for extra credit that were given on examinations in the class, and the teacher would always relate them to golf, a sport I had no understanding of or

interest in at the time, likely because it is a game of privilege. Unfortunately, I was put back in the middle social studies track for 10th grade, for reasons I am still not sure of. I now wish that I would have dedicated much more of my time to my school work because I know I could have performed at a much higher level, even with the challenges of working long hours at the butcher shop, playing sports throughout the years, and being highly involved in my church.

Although my family was not able to provide the type of support I needed academically, and although we often struggled financially, there was always closeness within our family, as well as a sense of pride and wanting to do well. I believe this served as an important guiding principle of at least keeping me away from the wrong track, like so many of my friends ended up on.

4.3 AMANDA

Amanda is a 20 year old sophomore enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford majoring in Nursing. She is from a small town in Western Pennsylvania approximately 60 miles from the campus. She described her high school as relatively small “where everybody knows everybody” and noted that her town had about 1,000 people, and her high school had approximately 500 students total in grades 7-12. Amanda opted to live on campus from the beginning, an experience she has very much enjoyed. She also mentioned that she has a younger brother who is 16 years old with whom she has been able to share her experiences. Her brother is not quite sure what he wants to study or wants to do for a career. She shared that she has strongly encouraged him into getting involved in extracurricular activities. She noted:

I always pushed him and I was like ‘my brother will do this’... I would tell him to get involved in everything, that’s how you have fun. I mean he is on the golf team, and he plays basketball, baseball so that keeps him busy.

She also expressed that she will be able to work with her parents to help her brother as he navigates the college admission and financial aid application process.

Parent’s Educational Background Amanda said that neither of her parents went to college and further described their educational attainment by suggesting that both parents “just graduated high school.” Her dad is a machinist and has been with the same company for more than 30 years. He started there after completing a vo-tech program as part of a co-op program in high school and has continued working there since. She noted that because of his year’s service he is the fifth longest serving in seniority, an important point, given recent cutbacks at the company. Interestingly, she mentioned that this created additional work for her dad and those not laid off because they really need the employees to do the work. Amanda’s mother has worked in a family physician’s office as the office manager for approximately 20 years. She mentioned that this quite possibly had a strong influence on her desire to pursue nursing as a major because she was always there.

Academic Preparedness When discussing her academic background and how she had done during her first year of college, she said that she had earned a 3.0 her first year, which is comparable to how she did while in high school. Amanda described her high school curricular track as ‘general college prep.’ With respect to her experience with the SAT, she noted the following:

Yeah, my first time they told me you know, it might not be high, I took them a second time and improved and the third time I was like ‘I can do it,’ I did worse than the first and I was like I am not taking them a fourth time.

Amanda mentioned that her high school had dual enrollment and AP course opportunities, but she did not participate. She relayed the following thoughts on not taking advantage of these opportunities while in high school, “I wish I would have, now that I think about it all that dual-enrollment stuff that our high school offered,” and:

Yeah, I wasn't too fond of the AP courses, but the dual enrollment I was like ah, because when I came here everyone was like “oh I don't have to do this,” well I'm doing it because I didn't take that. If I could go back I would definitely take the courses, it would be well worth it.

Even without taking AP and/or dual enrollment courses, Amanda was able to complete 28 credit hours during her first year of college. She also noted that she successfully completed pre-calculus while in high school, and this had the influence of making her more than prepared for the required algebra she needed to take during her first year of college.

Amanda discussed the difference in the rigor of high school classes versus college level classes and said:

I would say some of the classes in high school were the same in college my first year. No one can prepare you for the nursing class, no matter what class you take no one is going to be prepared for that, that's my biggest struggle right now.

She further illustrated the differences in rigor by reflecting on the time commitment required of her in her studies as noting:

I thought I would do better, 'cause I'm not a person that can go and not study. That is not me; I have to put time into things to get the grade that I want. My first year I was like, ok, some of the classes are pretty easy I mean I still studied and I got the grade that I wanted. There were hard classes and I still studied and I didn't get the grade that I wanted and that's the hardest part about it, even nursing is hard but it's like I studied for days on end and it's like I end up getting that grade! It's just like, it's nerve-wracking.

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Pertaining to her involvement in co-curricular out of class activities, Amanda outlined a substantive amount of involvement in

numerous clubs and organization, as well as community service activities. Her high level of involvement is not new, in fact, while in high school she participated in the student council, serving as the president; the interact club which is like the Rotary; the anti-bullying committee; the prom committee, and was selected as student of the month. Furthermore, she noted that she was on the honor roll. Her high level of involvement was largely attributed to her mother. She said the following:

My Mom, she sort of takes charge with a lot of things so I sort of got that way from her, like she was in charge and everything and my Dad is complete opposite and will let somebody else do that. I definitely got that from my Mom being higher up there.

Continuing the trend of being involved in extracurricular activities while in college, Amanda has committed a great deal of her time to a community service fraternity. She mentioned that she did not have a job while in high school and that her parents never expected her to work. After her first year of college she secured a job working with Pennsylvania Department of Transportation holding signs at road construction projects. She said that this was boring work at certain points, but dangerous work at other time when working on high trafficked roadways.

Educational Aspirations When discussing her thoughts on whether she would attend college while she was a high school student, Amanda shared the following, “Yes that was normal for me. I’ve always just been I’m going to finish high school and I’d automatically move on to college.” In fact, in her view it became the norm because of societal expectations that she would go to college. She shared the following as to the necessity of attending college, “you always think you can’t get a job these days unless you have a college degree, I mean plain and simple. I mean I can’t even get a summer job let alone a job for the rest of my life.” She shared how the recent economic times have shaped her thinking, and how a college degree could somewhat insulate her

from the high unemployment rate. She has seen firsthand, both in her extended family, and within her community the challenges of trying to get by without a college degree, and how it has left people she knows well vulnerable to being laid off. She also shared the following with respect to educational aspirations:

As of now I'm going to stop there and if I wanted to go you know back I could but I mean I first thought about just getting associates degree and then working but then I was like I don't know where my life is going to be you know? I could be getting married or whatever, I figured I am in school just do it for four years right in a row and I have no other commitments I guess, I just have school.

Parental/Family Influence on Education Amanda suggested that while her parents were supportive of her going to college and happy about the choice, they did not necessarily push if and where she would go. Her college selection process was more centrally driven by other factors. She specifically noted that:

They really didn't care, it was my own choice. A lot of it has to do with your major, a lot of schools don't have certain majors so you have to work that out and I didn't want to go far away, I wanted to be close to home, and small.

4.4 MARY

Mary is a 20-year old junior majoring in Psychology with a minor in Biology. She has primarily grown up in the state of Maryland living near the Chesapeake Bay. She described the challenges in detail of what it was like to grow up in the heart of a tourist destination. She noted that the local high school had issues with drugs, thus compelling her to attend a school out of state. With the support of her mother and grandparents, whom she lived with, Mary's family established residency in Delaware in order for her to attend high school in Delaware. While it was not the

ideal situation, particularly given the hour long commute each way via public transportation, she noted that it was much better option than her local high school. Mary has two younger sisters that she has been able to offer guidance and support to in their educational endeavors. In addition, she has a much younger brother who is in preschool.

Mary noted a circuitous route that has led her to Pitt-Bradford. She originally began her college education at another institution much closer to her home; but because of some financial hardships she was not able to stay at that university. While she noted a number of challenges at her previous institution, such as a long commute, large campus size, and lack of fit; the primary reason she left was because of an issue associated with her tuition and her residency status. She simply was not able to afford the significantly higher out of state tuition, that she still disputes that she should not have had to pay because she lived in the state of the college her entire life. Because she was not able to pay the increased differential in tuition, the university held her transcripts; this led her to start from the beginning as a new student which effectively cost her a term of credit hours that she had earned. Her journey to Pitt-Bradford was not necessarily planned, but has worked out very well. She explained that she was optioned to the Bradford campus of the University of Pittsburgh as she had noted it as her second choice after the Oakland campus. Interestingly, she was not even aware of where Bradford, Pennsylvania was until she was accepted. She is now in her third year at Pitt-Bradford and intends to finish her undergraduate degree within the next year.

Parent's Educational Background Mary shared that neither of her parents pursued higher education. Her mother dropped out of high school in the 10th grade and her father completed his high school diploma. After high school her mother got her license to cut hair after completing

cosmetology school, although she does not do this any longer; and her father served in one of the branches of the military. She mentioned that while her parents had been engaged at one point, they never married, and actually have been separated from an early point in her life. Because of this she does not often talk to her father. She shared that she did not have much to offer with respect to her father because he has never really been a part of her life. Mary also shared that she and her mother lived with her grandmother throughout her high school years.

Academic Preparedness Mary has achieved a cumulative 3.6 grade point average at Pitt-Bradford and has earned 66 credits thus far. She earned 33 credit hours during her freshman year. Discussing her mathematics background, Mary noted that she had earned a “B” in Calculus while in high school. She expressed how she felt this left her prepared for the rigors of the college math requirements; she was able to earn an “A” in pre-calculus. She also noted that she completed four years of Spanish in high school and has taken French while at Pitt-Bradford. Reflecting upon her high school curriculum and the types of tracks offered at her high school, Mary noted:

They were all considered college prep classes there were some honors and only AP class that they really had were math and English. I didn’t understand when it was an honors English when you were signing up for classes your teachers would pick out what you would be best at, my teacher said that he thought I should be in honors, but he still checked off college prep.

She also shared a story of how she had an option to skip a grade in high school; however she noted:

Mom told me like after 2 years when I was in 10th grade that I was, when I moved to my new school I was ahead of everybody else, when my mom was signing me up that I was eligible to skip a grade and go to 9th grade, but my mom told them no and didn’t tell me until 2 years later.

Speaking to her performance on the SAT, she said that she took the exam three times and offered that “SAT was not that good, but I didn’t take it seriously.”

Mary noted the following comment about students from her high school, “Basically, half of us went to college went to college and half of us didn’t. My one friend started community college and she was only part time but she said she couldn’t handle it so she.” She went on to note the struggles of other friends who have struggled to make the decision to attend college, and thus far have not enrolled. Mary talked about the role her high school played in her decision to attend college:

I felt like it was more of their job to tell you to go to school, like go to college and it seemed pretty redundant because you heard it every year. Then senior year they came in, like the guidance counselors came in and talk with you and told you why you should go. They said that, basically if you want to be able to find a decent job you are going to want to go to college and they showed you how the statistics of how you would make more money than the person who just has a high school diploma and stuff like that.

Her summation of her high school’s influence on college attendance is that they were generally helpful.

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Mary has demonstrated a very high level of involvement in co-curricular activities since her arrival at Pitt-Bradford. Some of the organizations/activities that she is involved with include: the student activities council as the university awareness committee chair, orientation leader, and campus tour guide. In addition, she is organizing the reconstitution of the psychology club on campus. Not only has she been significantly involved in campus clubs and organization, she has also maintained a fairly regular work schedule at a local convenience store/gas station. She noted that maintaining a job is very important and expressed her reason for working, “It is to pay for, like, all of my finances while I

am at school, all my bills that follow me around.” Mary noted that because of the long commute to school and her needing to work while in high school, so that she could buy things that she wanted or needed, she was only able to get involved with the school’s honor society. As part of the honor society, she was able to participate in numerous community service activities, an effort that her mother was able to support and encouraged.

Educational Aspirations Mary shared the following regarding her thoughts on her educational aspirations, “I knew I was going to go to college, I didn’t know about the whole grad school part. I didn’t think I was going to go, I didn’t decide that until I went to college.” She commented that she believed she would likely go to law school because she wanted to be a lawyer; however that plan changed after she took her first class. She quickly changed to psychology, a major she is very happy with. This quick change resulted from a positive experience with initial psychology course in college. Mary did express that for some time during college she had still considered law school, but those thoughts have now dissipated. In fact, upon completion of her undergraduate degree, she suggested that she will pursue her Masters in Social Work.

Parental/Family Influence on Education Mary explained that her mom and grandmother were definitely supportive of her decision to attend college, but they never forced the issue. She noted the following about her mom:

She always said that it was my choice what I wanted to do. She gave me; my family always gave me their opinions of what they wanted me to do but I didn’t have to follow though if I didn’t want to. I think it made it a lot easier not having the stress and I think with basically nobody in my family going to college they didn’t know what it would be like anyways.

She did mention that her grandparents on her step mom's side were a bit more vocal that she should attend college. Her grandmother would often say to her "you are really smart, it'll make a better life for you." Mary said the following about her mother, "she could help me with some things, but she couldn't help me with a lot," she attributed this to her mother's level of education.

4.5 JESSICA

Jessica is a junior Human Relations/Business Management major enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. She is enrolled full-time and has lived on campus each of her three years at Pitt-Bradford. She was raised in a small town located in the southwestern region of the state. She has three siblings, one sister who is 14 years older than, one brother who is 13 years older, and another brother who is 6 years older. She mentioned that none of them had gone to college, thus making her the first from her family to go to college. She also shared as part of her heritage, she has Cherokee ancestry. She characterized her ethnicity as follows, "White, I am Cherokee, but it is a very low fraction, but my great, great grandfather on my mom's side was a full blooded chief and his son married a French lady." Following up on this she noted that while she does not know a great deal about her heritage, it is something she is very much interested in learning about. She offered that she had compiled a list of names in her family and has made a family tree that she intends to explore at some point to better understand her heritage.

Parent's Educational Background Jessica shared that neither of her parents completed their high school education. Her mother dropped out of high school as a senior, she would later earn her G.E.D. Her father attended 9th grade for approximately one week and then dropped out, he

would not go back for his G.E.D. She noted that her mother has always been a homemaker and her father is a foreman and cuts down trees for a living. She described this work as a dangerous and that her father has a number of accidents including an incident in which a tree fell on him and smashed his shoulder. Her father's work also required him to travel quite a bit, oftentimes far away from home.

Academic Preparedness With respect to her educational background, Jessica noted that she has struggled somewhat with her grades in college, but has been able to earn an approximate 2.5 grade point average. This was quite a change from high school in which she had always earned really high marks. She shared that, "I always had a 3.8-4.0 and then I came here and it went down and I was like what happened, but I think it is the whole structure thing." She noted that the regimen of high school suited her style very well and that she suffered academically due to various distractions such as social networking and online games. While in high school she was able to take two college level courses in a partnership program that her high school had with a local community college. She shared that she completed 30 credit hours during her first year at Pitt-Bradford, but did express that she had attempted 18 credit hours during the first term which she believes led to lower grade point average than she wanted. Jessica expressed that her highest level of mathematics that she had completed while in high school was calculus, in which she earned a "C". She shared that her approach to learning math was divergent from the way in which her teachers wanted her to detail her efforts, she specifically said the following when talking about math:

It just was my way of thinking was not the teachers, so I had a hard time learning it. I would want to do it one way; I would show her and she would say 'I don't know how you got that answer.' So when I came here (Pitt-Bradford) I had a hard time with it. I had to take it (math) twice because I got a "D" in it the first time.

She mentioned that she was referring to a fundamental of math class that she had taken while at Pitt-Bradford and that she did not have to take calculus.

Jessica characterized her transition to college from high school as somewhat rocky. She shared that most students from her high school went to colleges that were in close proximity to her hometown; however, she ended up going to Pitt-Bradford because of the options program which resulted in her being more than four hours from her home. When thinking about this she shared:

I was the only person who didn't know anybody, it was hard. Mommy and Daddy left me and I cried. I didn't have a car so they came up and got me, I went home my first weekend here and they brought me back and I had to relive it all over again.

She went on to express how this rocky transition (distance from home, roommate issues, etc.) severely affected her grades during her first year. She did note that she is now in a good place and feels welcome in Bradford for the first time this year.

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Jessica detailed a very broad and involved level of extracurricular activities both while in high school and during her time in college. She also outlined a substantial level of engagement in community service activities. While in high school she shared, "I was into everything like band, Leo, forensics, I went to keystone girl's state summer of my junior year. I did a lot of stuff with friends like marching band." She also shared that she was involved in a number of musical productions while in high school including *Beauty and the Beast* and *Oklahoma*. This high level of involvement has continued into her college career as illustrated by her following comment:

I am in Cancer Awareness, next week think pink week, we like tag pink ribbons everywhere, pink lemonade. I am also in a community service fraternity, it is a nationally

recognized service fraternity, and I am the V.P. of membership so I am on the exec board. We do volunteer stuff everywhere. I am trying to incorporate what I did in high school with the Leo Club with my fraternity, and I am working with the Bradford Lions to start a club in the high school here, I am pretty excited about it, I like volunteering. I have done it ever since I was tiny.

She further went on to talk about how she is or has been involved with programs for UNICEF, Nothing but Nets, Fuzzy Feet, and more. Her passion for community service has led to her aspiration to become a volunteer coordinator for the NFL or the head of a non-profit.

Jessica noted that while she now works at a coffee style shop in the Bradford area to make money during college, she did not have a job while in high school. She gave two reasons why she did not work while in high school, one being the distance from her home and the lack of transportation to any places of employment, and because her parents preferred that she not work as indicated by the comment shared by Jessica, “They didn’t want me to work because they said I would work for the rest of my life, they didn’t get to be kids so they wanted me to have the experience.” She was fine with this decision and focused her efforts on her classes and community service.

Educational Aspirations Jessica expressed that she felt confident that she would attend college and would try and finish her degree in four or five years while she was in high school. A majority of students from her high school went to college right after high school. She did mention that some quit, and others have chosen to begin families already (getting married and having kids). She felt that her high school did a pretty good job of impressing upon everyone the importance of college, but did note, “They were not blatantly saying you need to go to college. They didn’t push it on us.” She gave an illustration of her a typical effort made by her high school to prepare students for life after high school, “they had representatives come in and all

that fun stuff, they had us go to job fairs and stuff like that and hotels in stuff in town.” Now that she is more than halfway through the undergraduate degree, Jessica reflected on the potential of now attending graduate school, “With the major change I have thought about going on past a bachelor's just because business is like really competitive and a lot of people do it.”

Parental/Family Influence on Education Jessica shared that her parents were generally supportive of her interest in going to college to the extent that they could. She went on to say that they help us much as they can with respect to academics and money, but their capacity to do so is limited by their education and financial limitations. She talked about how she was very hard pressed to ask for any money from them knowing that they barely have enough to pay their bills. When talking about her parent's offering aid to her academically, Jessica noted that when it came to classes such as calculus they simply were not able to help her. She went on to state that she very much liked some of her high school teachers that influenced her. While these teachers would not directly say that she should go to college, they were supportive of her educational attainment. Reflecting upon how and why she decided to attend the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, she joked that Pitt-Bradford chose her via the options program. She had originally applied to the Pitt-Oakland campus, but given the lateness of her application, she was optioned to Pitt-Bradford primarily because she had applied as a nursing major, and Pitt-Bradford was the only other campus at that time to offer the nursing program.

4.6 MARYANN

Maryann is a 21 year old junior enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford as a Business Major with minors in Marketing, Communications, and International Business. She is from Washington, D.C. which is approximately a 5 hour drive from the Pitt-Bradford campus. She described her high school as a tag school designed strictly for college preparation that boasted a 100% college acceptance rate. Maryann discussed how she was the only child of her biological parents who never married, but has two younger sisters, 10 and 6 years old, from her mother's remarriage to her father, a younger half-sibling, 4 years old, from her dad, two older step siblings from her step dad, and a cousin that she considers to be more like a brother to her. She also noted that one older step sister has a 13 year old who she has been able to mentor. When speaking about her cousin who is like a brother, she mentioned that has already completed his undergraduate degree and is now pursuing a master's degree. She shared that a primary reason that she is going to college is so that she can serve as a positive role model for her younger sisters.

Parent's Educational Background Maryann said that both of her parents were able to complete high school, and had each had taken some classes after high school, but did not complete an undergraduate degree. She believes that her dad was able to make it until his sophomore year of college, but was not able to finish. Her mother took a few classes, but not immediately following high school. Her mother is a CNA and also works in a nursing home's physical therapy center. She expressed that her father was more challenging to describe with respect to his work because he often does manual labor and has changed jobs quite a bit doing things like cleaning carpets or other side jobs as available. She reflected on how she would help

her father a work when she was a kid at his carpet cleaning business, and how she loved it. Of note is that her step dad has been highly involved in the politics of Washington, D.C. for a number of years.

Academic Preparedness In discussing her educational background, Maryann described having experienced a fairly rigorous high school experience that has prepared her for the challenges of college. She described her high school curricular track as college preparatory, which was the standard for her high school. Maryann noted that her high school offered numerous opportunities to take advanced courses:

We had the IB but I did not participate, we had AP and honor classes you could even join the, there was we had the POSSE foundation. I don't know what the letters stand for, you apply for it your junior year and it is to four specific schools in their program, and you apply and it is competitive, and basically you are trying to get a full scholarship to these four schools, and they test you and follow your progress. Every year my high school gets at least 4 students selected, you can go to M.I.T.

She indicated that she had taken the A.P. Biology course and earned a score of 2, but needed a 3 in order to receive credit. She has been able to achieve a 2.9 grade point average, with over a 3.0 in her major through her first two years of undergraduate study. She mentioned that she originally intended to study both biology and business, but has since decided to stay with only business as her area of study. Maryann was able to earn 30 credit hours during her first year at Pitt-Bradford and has maintained on track to graduate within four years even with having dropped a few courses (chemistry and stats). She highlighted a solid mathematics background having taken trigonometry, geometry, and pre-calculus in high school, as well as achieving success in her applied calculus class at Pitt-Bradford. She described as high school as very intense with essay's due on a regular basis that would push her to work until late at night. She also indicated the school was very strict with their policies and protocols. Her high school

assisted with everything academically, such as SAT preparation. Maryann indicated that she had taken the SAT 3 times and noted, “I fell asleep twice...the first time and the third, the first time it was really cold. I slept maybe 1-15 minutes. It was the essay portion, but I always tell people, but I still scored pretty high on it.” She recalls scoring an approximate 1200.

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Maryann maintains a very high level of involvement in extracurricular activities ranging from clubs and organizations, to sports participation, to study abroad, to community service, and much more. She very much enjoys being involved and indicated, “I have to be busy.” While in high school Maryann participated in three different sports throughout the year including basketball, volleyball, and softball. In addition, was on her high school’s academic team which competed on television. Further activities included SGA Treasurer, taking part in her school’s accreditation, and participating in a young politician’s group. She did not particularly enjoy politics, but participated at the encouragement of her stepdad. As a requirement of her high school, Maryann would complete more than 270 hours of community service, time mostly spent at the nursing home her mother worked at or tutoring young children. She also maintained an active involvement in her Baptist church JAM group, as well as girl scouts which had its home at her church. Maryann has continued a busy out of class schedule while in college. Some of the activities she noted participating in included the alumni alliance, the blue and gold society, as a student ambassador, a campus tour guide, and active minds. She also is a DJ with the radio station, and participates in outdoor sports and recreation opportunities. Maryann also has had the occasion to study abroad in New Zealand last year. In addition to her organizational activities and community service efforts, she has held numerous jobs while in college. She works in the distance education

classroom on campus and serves a student caller for the annual fund phone-a-thon. When she returns home she works at a Museum in Washington D.C.

Educational Aspirations Reflecting on the thought of going to college she said, “I knew I was going to school, I knew I was going to graduate from college.” As noted previously, Maryann’s high school boasts a 100% college attendance rate and maintains a regimented structure in preparing students for college to include a significant amount of community service hours. Prior to being accepted to her high school, she actually needed to pass an interview process as well. Like many colleges do now her high school mandated a pre high school seminar as reflected by the following comment, “We even had to do a summer program, it was called, it was your freshman, the summer before you started you had to go to summer school. It was not a class it was more you had to go and prepare you for the high school experience. You learned to take notes and a math class.” Her mom basically told her that this high school was her only option. It is of note that she had an athletic scholarship offer from a nearby catholic high school that would have fully funded her expenses. At this time she feels that she will definitely pursue a graduate degree, either in business or some other field. She has even expressed going to the Wharton Business School if she chooses to study business in graduate school and begun thinking about the application process.

Parental/Family Influence on Education Maryann characterized her parent’s as having had very challenging upbringings of their own with non-traditional families that experienced significant financial challenges. She believes that this is why they are very supportive of her education, because they want a better life for her. From her mother committing her to go a very rigorous high school with a 100% college attendance rate to her father consistently praising her

and telling her how proud he is of her, she has always felt that they were behind her in her educational endeavors. She communicated that her dad would ask her about her classes while she was in high school and that her mom didn't need to ask because she would have already told her how she was doing. With respect to her mom she shared, "my mom didn't help me a lot with home work, but that was because if I got homework I did it and was done." Her parents have always maintained involvement in her extracurricular activities such as athletics and academic teams. Reflecting back to how the high school her mom put her in she expressed that she always knew she would attend college. This attitude was ingrained into her and she never thought otherwise as indicated by her following comment, "At my school if you had no intention of going to college they were like why are you here, get out. I don't really think about, I thought about it but I didn't put thought into it until my senior year."

4.7 RENEE

Rene is a 20 year old junior from a small town near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford as a Broadcast Communications major. She described her hometown as being primarily comprised of individuals in the lower socioeconomic class and as being overrun with drugs. Rene is in her third year at Pitt-Bradford and has lived on campus all three years. She noted that she has two younger brothers, 18 and 15 years of age respectively, both of who are still in high school. She expressed that she works hard to serve as a positive role model for them and their friends as it is important that they do well in life and have an opportunity to escape from the challenges of their community. Rene made a point of contributing

a great deal of her success and the reason for her making it to college was due to her participation in her high school's Upward Bound program.

Parent's Educational Background Rene said that while her mother was able to complete high school with a specialization in the vo-tech's cosmetology program, her father only had completed his junior year of high school. Her mother worked in health care for years and now is employed at a tobacco shop as a manager. Her dad is disabled and currently unemployed. She did mention that he has held a number of odd jobs throughout the years to include working in a paper factory and working as referee for a novelty jello wrestling operation. Both of her parents have spent their entire lives in the Harrisburg area. Due to the prevalence of drugs, Rene has noted that she has never really liked growing up in that area and has longed to leave the area. She describes the challenges this environment presented in her following comment:

When I grew up it turned into a lot of drugs, it was really hard to stay away from it because the city brought in a lot of drugs and there was nothing for anybody to do being in a small town, it was hard to stay away from that and stay on the right track.

She also described a home environment in which her family often fought. She said the primary reason for the bickering was because her mom worked very hard only to come home to her dad who did not work, and who did not do much around the house. She pointedly noted, "My dad is a bum and my mom is a hard worker."

Academic Preparedness Rene described what has been a very successful first two years at Pitt-Bradford having achieved a grade point average of approximately 3.6. She noted that while she has had a few classes that she has struggled with she has a good system of balancing her academic requirements in order to have success. She has earned 60 credits thus far, and typically will take 12-16 credits per term. Her academic success is a continuation of how she did in high

school, as she noted, “I was always on the distinguished honor roll.” Rene suggested that she was in the general track at her high school which also had vo-tech and some honors courses available. She offered that “I just kind of made my own track. I was like I am going to take some honors courses but they never tried to help.” She did offer that she has some trepidation when it comes to math and science course as illustrated by her following comments:

I was talking to my Chemistry teacher, I am so scared to take my sciences here, I had like 6 different teachers in high school. The one guy was like a funeral director, they had random people walking in off the streets and everyone failed and nobody had any idea what was going on. Magically those failures were gone and everybody got a B, I was like how do you do that and how do you make those things up. They did not even try to prepare us for anything. My math classes were just the bare minimum, the general things that they had to do. Little work sheets... The farthest thing you had to do in my school was Algebra 2. They didn't even try to push you to do any better than that. It was like here are your classes and we will get you to algebra 2 and then you will graduate.

She was please that she had to take fundamentals of math class while at Pitt-Bradford and was able to struggle through and pass it. As a participant in the Upward Bound program, Rene was able to receive guidance and support in her classes, as well as preparation for the SAT. She offered the summation of Upward Bound's guidance in relation to the SAT:

Upward Bound would give me little papers and little test to help me learn what to do and they would give me recommendations on how they are not like most standardized test and explained if you don't know the answer don't answer it... The summer had SAT prep, they would get like old copies of the SATs and they would help us and practice. Upward Bound definitely helped me with my SAT and they would help me find the dates when they were closest to me, they helped me register for them.

Rene attributed the TRIO Upward Bound program for having played a significant role in her college aspirations and readiness. While in high school, she noted “The TRIO programs helped me a lot, going to Upward Bound, they taught me how to study and how to do all that stuff.” Rene painted a somewhat bleak picture of what her high school did to prepare students for college as illustrated through the following comment:

Your general teachers didn't care. Not too many people from there leave and go to college; they didn't push it on anyone, that is one thing that bothered me. The people that want you to go are not helping, my parents were not there, my grandparents, aunts, uncles, no one went to college. The guidance office was no help at all. I would go to my Upward Bound counselor and he helped me. I didn't know how to fill out my applications and they would help me... Upward Bound, the librarian was like voluntary, we had 2 hours after school every week and we could go and work on home work and he would tell us about college. It was part of Upward Bound, you could not go to the summer program if you didn't go to the in school thing. It was helpful and I could do my homework and he would help me fill out the applications and stuff.

She went on to detail how without the assistance of the Upward Bound program she could have been pulled into making some very bad choices.

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Rene described a significant amount of involvement during her time at Pitt-Bradford. She currently serves as the media chair for the Student Government Association, as well as the chair for multiple committees within the Student Activities Council. In addition, she is on the judicial board, the African American student union, she is a student ambassador, she is a member of an active member in a sorority, and serves as a NACA delegate. While in high school she was involved in many activities as well. In addition to her involvement in the Upward Bound program, Rene participated in girl scouts, the Interact club and completed numerous community service activities. Furthermore, she was a cheerleader and involved in her high school's wrestling program. Rene offered the following as to why she always wanted to keep busy in extracurricular activities while in high school:

I was involved in everything in high school, if you look through my year book I am in every single picture. It was good because my family tended to fight a lot at home so I just did everything that I could at school so I stayed away from it for a little while. That was a way to keep myself out of trouble with all the drugs and everything in my town. If I was in school doing whatever it is that I was doing I was not out there getting in trouble.

She also shared the following depiction of the drug issues of some of her close relatives and the resulting influence on her educational aspirations:

A lot of my cousins ended up getting into heroine and I saw them going nowhere and I hated that town and I wanted out so bad so I figured if I devoted all my time to that I could get into a good college and I could get out of that town and do something with my life.

With respect to working, she has not really maintained a job during the school year so that she can focus on her academics and extracurricular involvement. She did note that she has a summer job as a telemarketer that she enjoys. Rene shared that her summer job earnings hold her over briefly during the school, and that while she would like a job she has not had one which is alright with her because she does not do much that requires money.

Educational Aspirations Rene knew early on that she wanted to attend college and that she wanted to get away from the many challenges she faced growing up in a distressed neighborhood. She commented that:

When I was younger I was like I would like to go to college because I am never I am going to get there. I was going to graduate from high school and that was going to be it. As I got older I was like no, I was like I want to at least get my associates, and then it was I want my bachelors, and then I think am going to get my masters. I am at least getting my masters. I never wanted a doctorate, but I am shooting for that master's now.

She struggled against the plight of her upbringing longing for an opportunity to advance her from a socioeconomic perspective. Rene reflected that from an early age:

I started to have big dreams I was like I am going to be rich, I am going to be out of here. I wanted to live in the city and get away from the small town. I wanted to at least finish college and then from there I am going to move to the city and then I am going to find a good job. I started to make my own little road map.

Her family has been financially challenged throughout her life and still relies on food stamps to get by on a monthly basis. She recalls moving more than a dozen times growing up only later to find out this was due to her parents inability to pay their rent. She shared that she wanted to go to college because it would her opportunities to succeed in life.

Parental/Family Influence on Education Rene noted that while her parents did not have all the information to help her prepare and apply to college, they were supportive of her wanting to go to college. A primary concern she had when thinking about college centered on how she would finance her education. She offered:

I was really worried with money cause I always knew that college was expensive and I had no idea how I was going to pay for it. I was just like I am going to do it because it was my only choice, my mom and dad was really supportive. I just started applying places, and they were like it doesn't matter how much it costs they were like we will figure something out. It was one thing that kept pushing me to go, they were going to be there and help me go.

Reflecting on her parent's ability to assist her with her academics she offered, "I saw my mom would struggle, my mom and dad would struggle with even helping me to do my homework since I was in 4th grade and I didn't want it to be that way." Rene noted that while her parents were supportive of her school efforts, their general expectations were not high due to their own level of academic attainment as illustrated from her following comment:

They would always be proud of me when I would say I did good on a test or I said did good on a paper, I am making the distinguished honor roll. They would give me a pat on the back but they expected me to give it my best. I would be upset if I didn't do well on a test, my mom was like but you did your best right... my dad didn't care, he was like whatever but he would be like alright you got a "C", that's not bad and I would be like that is horrible and I would be crying and my mom would tell me to calm down.

While this served as a source of frustration, she did concede that she is relieved that they are proud that she is attending college, and they even brag to their friends about it.

4.8 ERIN

Erin is a 22 year old fifth year senior majoring in pre-physical therapy at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford and resides on campus. She is from a small town in Western Pennsylvania where she attended a high school that has a typical graduating class of approximately 200 students. Erin had initially began her education studying Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh Oakland campus, but quickly find that while she wanted to pursue a degree in Nursing Anesthesia, she did not particularly enjoy Nursing. She also indicated that having come from a small town, the city of Oakland was quite large and a bit of a ‘culture shock’. She decided to transfer to Pitt-Bradford after one term in order to be closer to home and could study pre-physical therapy. Erin indicated that she has two sisters and one brother, all of whom are younger. She mentioned that one of her sister’s attends Pitt-Bradford as well, and that her younger brother attends Penn State Behrend. Her other sister is still in high school at this time.

Parent’s Educational Background Erin shared that both of her parent’s highest level of education was high school and that they both work in the health care profession. Her mother has been a pharmacy’s assistant since completing high school and learned the position while on the job. Her dad is the manager of environmental sciences, which she indicated was the housekeeping department of the hospital he works at. She expressed that he began at the bottom and worked his way up to the manager position. She shared that because both of her parents work in a hospital she has been around hospital’s her whole life. She also noted:

I did have some health problems when I was younger so I was in and out of hospitals and more comfortable than most kids to be in a hospital, but then I’d go in and see my mom at work and she would do fake EKG’s on me.

Academic Preparedness Erin described a superlative academic record in which she has achieved a 3.98 grade point average in her undergraduate degree, and completed 30 credit hours during her first year even with a transition to a new campus halfway through the year. This extends what was an excellent academic record while in high school. While in high school, Erin described her initial track as a scientific curriculum with classes such as physics, chemistry, anatomy and biology. Because she had taken all of the science related courses that she wanted and needed for her area of interest she changed her track to college prep. She indicated that she felt her high school prepared her well for college, particularly her science courses as reflected by the following comment, “I had classes with some people, they were just completely lost and I remember learning that my sophomore year of high school.” Erin did share that she did not like school through the second grade. She also expressed that she had a second set back when transitioning to a public school in sixth grade after having attended Catholic school. She attributed these transition struggles to more social matters as opposed to academic. She used these occasions to immerse herself in her school work which she believes made her a stronger student.

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Erin has been involved in numerous activities during her time at Pitt-Bradford. She is involved with the Tri Beta biological honors society, and previously served as a student ambassador giving campus tours. She also volunteers her time at the SPCA and at the nursing home that she worked at. She also indicated that she has a work study job on campus that allows her to work about 8 hours per week. Erin also works full time during her summers at a hospital. During high school Erin relayed that she was highly involved in a number of organizations as well. She was on the swimming team and also

participated in cheerleading. She also was actively involved in the Health Occupation Student's of America and had the opportunity to compete at the state and national levels. She noted that involvement in this organization enhanced her academic success, "I really think that having the jump on it made the high school experience better because it was not as overwhelming as if you just come straight out of English and try to switch to this." Having participated in numerous health professions related activities supplemented her understanding of what she was learning in her classes giving her a more substantive knowledge base before she even began college, giving what she described as an academic advantage over other students without similar experiences. Erin also volunteered in nursing homes while in high school.

Educational Aspirations Erin has a very clear sense of her educational aspirations definitively expressing that she will pursue her Doctor of Physical Therapy beginning next year. In fact, she noted that she has already applied to a number of schools that offer Physical Therapy and expects positive news in the near term. Erin reflected that she knew early on that she would pursue graduate studies because most of her career options require a graduate degree – nursing anesthesia, physical therapy, veterinarian were all considerations during high school. She shared, "I always knew that I wanted to go beyond a bachelors, just because all the things I was interested in required going beyond that." She offered that her high school offered an appropriate balance of support as indicated by the following:

Most of my teachers, especially getting up in junior and senior year, they would emphasize college, helping us with our college essays, we would take practice SAT courses. Specifically, one of my English teachers, but he was awesome, I could see past his teaching style, my teacher took me out in the hall and said, 'you are really good at following directions, I think you should do something other than nursing'. I was very thankful for that, they didn't hold your hand all the way through, even our senior projects were even geared towards researching schools, it started off with researching careers then researching schools.

She did suggest that while she felt very supported by her high school in her efforts to pursue college, not everyone received the same support and guidance, particularly those students who participated in the vo-tech program.

Parental/Family Influence on Education Erin indicated that her parents encouraged her to do well in high school, but their ability was limited as expressed in the following, “Yeah, they encouraged me, there was only so much they could do because they didn’t have that education.” She also noted the following about her parents, “they support me, they don’t have super high requirements.” She shared that she really wanted to take advantage of opportunities that her parents could not as reflected in her following thoughts, “I felt that my parents would have gone to college if they had the opportunity and I knew that because I am sure there are jobs that they would rather have, they just didn’t have the opportunity to get the education and they had 4 kids so there was no opportunity to go back, really, so it was just I think the success I wanted. I wanted my parents to be proud.” Erin discussed the initial challenges associated with applying and pursuing college and indicated that her high school helped to assist her with process of college enrollment. She shared that her parents would take her for school visits to universities that she was interested in. Erin described the closeness of her family:

Oh yeah, we have a pretty tight family, my mom’s parents, they really wished they could have had a higher education, so that encouraged me, but they are not pushy. None of them were like saying they would be so disappointed in me if I didn’t make it.

She also shared that while they cannot really offer guidance related to academic matters, they have always been supportive.

4.9 LIZ

Liz is a 21 year old senior majoring in business management enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford and has lived on campus from matriculation. She noted that she liked the apartment style option that the campus offered to her. Liz also has opted for minors in finance and economics. She is from a small town outside of Erie, Pennsylvania located approximately one hour from the Pitt-Bradford campus. She characterized her hometown as generally lower socioeconomic and offered, "I come from a small town like Bradford. I don't want to say scummy, but I don't come from a good place." Liz shared that she has a younger sister that attends Penn State Behrend. Interestingly, she indicated that she has felt much more pressure to succeed from her parents as compared to her sister. She attributes much of this to the close relationship that she has with her father, who has high hopes for her and whom she attempts to emulate.

Parent's Educational Background Liz commented that her mother finished her high school diploma and that her dad attended two years of college. She said that her mother has worked in banking as a personal banker responsible for opening up checking accounts for 30 years. Her dad works as a sales person for an aerospace parts company. He initially started at the bottom of the organization as a tube bender and worked his way up. She shared that he has missed out on some better opportunities that would have been available had he finished a college degree. She indicated that both of her parent's work backgrounds have influenced her educational decision making either directly or indirectly. Her mother's background in banking instilled an interest in banking, finance and customer service oriented careers. Talking about her dad, Liz shared,

“When I graduated high school I wanted to follow in my dad’s footsteps, I wanted to get a career and be like my dad. I want to travel like my dad, everything my dad has, I want.”

Academic Preparedness Liz described a very solid academic record while in college noting that she has achieved a grade point average of 3.15 through her senior year, having just missed the dean’s list the previous term. In fact, she was able to earn a 3.7 grade point average during her first semester at Pitt-Bradford because of her dedication to her studies. This foundation for academic success was built upon her achieving high honors in the general college preparatory track while in high school. She achieved success in high school despite not fully applying herself to her classes. This was illustrated in her response to how her classes were in high school:

Easy, I had high honors all throughout; I don’t remember having home work. I didn’t do homework unless it was collected. Like in English I don’t think I read a single book... I would be reading in class and I would pass it. If you are assigning 6 chapters I have something better to do then sit there and read. I wrote my essays and I worked for it, but I don’t think I worked as hard as I do here.

She expressed that she feels that could have done better had she put forth a greater effort. Liz noted that she did not take any AP classes that were offered, and reflected that she wished she had been invited to participate in the honor society because she did have the grades to qualify. She offered the following frustration pertaining to her high school’s honors society, “I wish I was a part of it. I mean I graduated 28th out of 200 something. I never got an invitation, nothing.” She went on to say that while she had been invited to earn college credits via the dual enrollment option her school offered, she did not participate primarily because of financial considerations. It was noted though, that her younger sister did participate in dual enrollment and took about a semester’s worth of courses. Reflecting on math, Liz indicated that she had taken algebra I and II, trigonometry, but no calculus. Part of the requirements for her degree at Pitt-Bradford

included her taking calculus. She suggested that she had failed this course the first time, but was able to earn a “C” the second time.

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Liz outlined an extensive list of activities that she is involved with during college. She shared, “I am a student ambassador and I have been doing that since I was a freshman, I joined a sorority second semester of my freshman year, I was treasurer for that up until last fall, joined student activities council, SGA senate, and I am the vice chair for one of their committees.” After joining her sorority is when she felt like she began to truly have the ‘college experience’. She also shared that she is the secretary for NSLS on campus and she volunteers as a TRIO mentor in the TRIO lab three nights per week. This high level of involvement is a continuation to her experience in high school in which she played soccer year round, was a swimmer, was in the choir and band, and participated in theatre.

Liz described a very hard work ethic which she attributes a great deal of to her parents. An example of this was illustrated through her maintaining of two full time jobs during the summer months while in college. She noted:

I worked for the first 2 summers of college, the summer before and the summer after my first year of college, I was working two jobs. So I was working first shift at my dad’s shop, which was like 6 (in the morning), so I was working overtime so it was 5:30 in the morning until 3:15, and then I went to work at an ice cream shop from 5 to 10 (and weekends).

She shared that she worked so hard because she is paying her own way through college. Of additional significance was that her day job was as a laborer making aerospace parts by tack welding or grinding excess metal off of parts. She works harder during the summer to earn money for college so that she does not have to maintain a job during the school year.

Educational Aspirations Liz shared that she definitively knew that she would attend college, “Oh yeah, I knew it. There was never any doubt and I feel it was a societal factor; almost everyone from my high school went to college, unless you got bad grades.” She described a very focused set of goals that she wanted to achieve in her career goals that led her to know that she would attend college. She indicated that she may someday attend graduate school in the future, “Maybe some time down the road, not right away, I at least want to get some of my loans paid off, get my feet on the ground before I start looking at grad school.” She also noted the following about graduate school, “It is not on the top of my priority list, but maybe after I do some work. It would not be out of my pocket. Depending on how job searching goes.” She discussed how watching her parents work so hard and miss out on opportunities to advance their careers really impacted her desire to earn a college degree. She believes that attaining a college degree will offer her the credentials she needs to be successful. Her high school also helped to shape her desire to attend college through a consistent encouragement to pursue higher education. She noted the following about her high school, “They have a college fair during the school year, that is where I found out about Pitt, Bradford. They pushed it, they are about pushing grades.”

Parental/Family Influence on Education Liz suggested that her parents were very supportive of her doing well in school and always offered her encouragement. While they could not necessarily provide direct academic guidance, they would help where they could, and on occasion her mother would read her papers to offer input while she was in high school. Liz expressed that she still tells her parents about her grades. She also talked about how her dad helped her to weigh the pros and cons of the colleges she was looking at so that she could make the best choice for her. Her dad also influenced her area of study by suggesting that she enter

college undecided and later choose a major. Liz offered that in addition to her parents, her extended family and cousins encouraged her to attend college because it would help her to reach her career goals. Her parents hard work ethic combined with their pushing of her college attendance very much influenced her desire to do well in school and attend college.

4.10 NEWMAN

Newman is a 22 year old fifth year senior majoring in Computer Information Systems at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. He is from the northwest section of Washington D.C., the location his parents had opted to relocate to from the Philippines in the late 1970's. He indicated that he had initially planned on attending the main campus of the University of Pittsburgh and study computer engineering, but was optioned to the Bradford campus. Newman has lived in the campus residence halls throughout his stay.

He shared that he has a 23 year old sister who recently graduated from Penn State University with a degree in International Politics. She has returned to Washington D.C. in an effort to get her career started. Newman offered the following related to the reasoning for his changing his major to Computer Information Systems early on: "I didn't really like engineering and I was not getting the grades I wanted to so I switched and it was a much more comfortable fit, I started excelling in classes and understanding everything I wanted to."

Parent's Educational Background Newman noted that both of his parents' highest level of education was high school, education that they had received growing up in the Philippines. He

shared that they did not have many opportunities there, which is the reason they relocated to America. He indicated that his parents both were teaching English to others who had relocated as well when they arrived in the United States because they were both fluent. His dad now works as a clerk for the diplomatic office in Washington D.C., and his mother does housekeeping in both Washington D.C. and Georgetown.

Academic Preparedness Newman has been able to earn a 3.0 grade point average as he finalizes his last remaining credits towards his bachelor's degree. He offered the following on the challenges of transitioning to college: "In the beginning it was rough getting use to college, but I switched majors from engineering to CIS, and I made Dean's list for the first time last semester with a 3.7." Reflecting back to his high school academics Newman shared that he had graduated with a 3.3 grade point average.

Newman also noted that he participated in the college preparation track that his high school offered, and that he participated in a finance academy offering that his high school made available. His high school made available a variety of these acceptance based academy offerings. Newman talked about his experiences with required math classes he has taken by noting that he had earned a "C+" in pre-calculus during his senior year; but has since gone on to successfully complete three years of calculus in college as part of his engineering requirements. While he did not recall taking any honors courses in high school, he did take AP Government and AP English. He did not do well on the AP tests, but was able to earn B's in both classes.

When discussing the rigors of high school, Newman suggested that he didn't study for a number of his classes, usually only needing to put extra time into his AP courses. He has a much more deliberate approach to his academics now that he is in college, "there are a lot of things that

I do well now like time management and I actually study for classes, studying a week ahead for a test. Small things like that I didn't do in high school.”

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Newman described a very high level of involvement in extracurricular activities during his time at Pitt-Bradford. He has been a part of the student activities council for 4 years, serving as president for two years, as well as an advisor this year. He also started the Asian student alliance noting a need he saw for this organization. Furthermore, he was part of the dance team and has served as a resident assistant on campus. He contributed a great deal of his time in high school to the Junior ROTC program, an experience he attributes many of his leadership skills to. As part of his ROTC experience he engaged in hundreds of hours of community service. Newman also indicated that currently holds an internship position in communication and marketing that accounts for about 40 hours a month. He also has worked at a book store every summer since his senior year of high school, a job which has fueled his interest of reading and learning.

Educational Aspirations Newman indicated that he knew that he would go to college and earn an undergraduate degree. He shared, “College was in my mind when I began high school in 9th grade. Maybe my parent’s expectations grew on me. I knew I had to do well in high school and they said college was the way to go.” During high school he just had aspirations to earn a bachelor’s degree, but shared that he now has thoughts about attending graduate school to study for a master’s degree in student affairs. He attributes his high level of collegiate involvement and interest in student life for his considering this path. He did note that, because he is from Washington D.C., there are a lot of government related jobs that he has interest in getting involved with. He is currently in the process of exploring all options, and has been in touch with

several graduate schools. If he does pursue a degree in student affairs, he indicated that his primary areas of interest for his career would be student activities or residence life, but was clear to point out, “I am leaving my options open because I know with Student Affairs you can’t be too picky.”

Parental/Familial Influence on Education Newman offered that he had a strong drive to do well in school and have a successful career so that he can help support his parents. He attributes his strong work ethic to his parents who left small communities in the Philippines in order to come to the United States to make a better life. He indicated that they have worked hard their entire lives to ensure that he and his sister have the best opportunities. Newman reflected his parent’s balancing act of wanting him to do well in school and their effort’s to support him, “sometimes a little harsh. My grades in high school were not as good as elementary and middle school, they always pushed me, it was a good push.” He also offered the following about how his parents wanted him to do well, but could not necessarily provide the type of assistance he needed:

There were times when I got my first “D” and my Dad was so upset with me, I remember that. They were not satisfied with “C’s”, it was ok, but they said you could do better. For the most part it was like a learning experience for me and I guess for them as well. I could not go to my parents for help because they would not understand what I was learning. I didn’t have anyone to get help from except my sister because she was a year ahead of me. My sister helped me with my grades and my parents were always after her to help me because she is a smart girl.

He also talked about how pleased his parents were when he got accepted into college:

My Mom and Dad were so happy that I got accepted to college. When I got my acceptance letters they would be so happy that I would not have to work as hard as them, have a good job, good money, provide for my family, it was good.

He shared that he was very appreciative of his parents' continuing support and offered the following story:

I get a call from them once or twice a week, checking up on me, how everything is going. I tell them my grades freely; I wasn't like that in high school. They are more accepting if I got "C" as a final grade. They understand it is college not high school. They are very accepting of what I go through. I was scared when I changed my major, but they were as long as you like what you do, as long as you can get a good job they were ok with it.

They also support him financially in whatever way they can.

4.11 SALLY

Sally is a 45 year old non-traditional part-time commuter student at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford who has lived in the Bradford, Pennsylvania area for the past 4 to 5 years. Her childhood was spent in a small town in north central Pennsylvania, located approximately 12 miles from the campus. Between the time that she left after high school and her recent return she spent some time in Dubois, Pennsylvania, as well North Carolina and New Jersey. Sally is one of five children in her family; she has three brothers and one sister. Having completed approximately 103 total credit hours, she has reached senior year status and is majoring in business management. She is also carrying three minors in archeology, accounting, and economics. Sally noted for the record that she is legally blind which has had numerous implications on her educational experience throughout her life.

Parent's Educational Background Sally said that both of her parent's completed their high school education; however, they did not go on to college. She did point out that "My father was a high school graduate but he was accepted at BYU University, but was not able to go for financial

reasons.” He would never pursue higher education again. Sally went on to explain that both of her parents had careers as factory workers, her mother in Olean, New York, and her father in Bradford, Pennsylvania. Reflecting on how they felt about their jobs she said the following:

You know I don’t think either one of them were crazy about it, they never discussed much of it too much, you can just kind of tell when mom and dad were not happy but they were always home when I was home so ... to me everything was ok.

She did note that her late father worked hard to advance his career as indicated by the following reflection:

The company that he worked for, he was doing an apprenticeship, which I know there were some classes involved with that, but something happened that that fell through, the company lost something and I remember him being distraught about that, but it was not long after that that he got sick.

Academic Preparedness Sally relayed that she has been able to achieve a 3.2 grade point average, rising up against numerous obstacles that have detracted from her capacity to have success in college. Her high school education experience would be well described as troublesome. She noted that during the late 70’s and early 1980’s when she attended middle and high school, she was not given appropriate accommodations necessary given her documented limitations. She described the structure of her high school with the following:

I don’t know how it is today but when I went to high school folks in my situation with limitations, visual limitation, hearing limitations, learning limitations were all treated the same and they actually had a classroom specifically for folks with disabilities, emotional, learning or physical.

She went on to note that she did not participate in this classroom environment because her father insisted that she be mainstreamed. She further detailed this problematic scenario by pointing out that no provisions or aids were made available to her. Because of the challenges associated with this curricular format, she made the choice to opt for the vo-tech option available at her high

school. This had the consequence of limiting her exposure to mathematics as illustrated by the following statement offered by Sally, “I don’t think I had much beyond basic math.” As part of her vocational training in high school, Sally chose a pathway to be a health assistant, equivalent to a nurse’s aide. With the basic skills acquired through this high school vocational training, Sally decided that she would pursue additional training and a career in the medical field. Unfortunately, the military rejected her service due to a failed physical, and she described how a nursing school she had attended had discriminated against her because of her vision. It was until recently that she decided to go back to school. She began by attending Triangle Tech in Dubois, where she was able to earn her associates degree. As noted previously, she is in her senior year and will finish her undergraduate degree within one year.

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Despite some of the challenges she faced while in high school, Sally still was involved in a number of activities and organizations. She noted that she played percussion instruments in the marching band, and dabbled in the drama club. In addition she was a mid distance runner on the track team competing in the 800 meter race. Now that she is back in college, she has returned to a busy out of class schedule, maintaining involvement in a number of clubs, as well as working as part of the campus work study program. Even though she has a 40 minute commute to school each way via public transit, Sally is actively involved in the Non-Traditional Student Association and serves as a mentor for the TRIO program. Of equally important significance to her extracurricular involvement, Sally has had more than 20 years of post high school work experience prior to beginning to college. She shared that she did some computer work, data processing, personal income tax work, and even managed a gas station.

Educational Aspirations Sally described her high school experience with the following:

High school was uncomfortable; truthfully I had and have a visual problem that nobody knew what to do with. I was either coddled or ignored. There was no, two total extremes and there was more ignored then coddled, so I really didn't do well in school. At that time they didn't have a GPA or whatever but my class ranking I was in the bottom 3rd.

These difficulties were nothing new to Sally, unfortunately the represented a continuation of her early childhood educational experiences as illustrated by the following statement:

Oh yeah, with certain disciplines I was good, like reading I was always a good reader. Anything that required me to learn I'm a visual learner and I can't see that's always been a big gripe. If I didn't have the opportunity to visually grasp something in science or math, it was Greek, it was not going to happen. Nobody wanted to make sure that I understood it or knew it either and I was too timid to ask.

When discussing her perception and thoughts as to whether or not she would attend college while she was in high school, Sally offered the following:

Probably not, I don't think I thought I was smart enough, or had the resources to go. I thought that if there was a way to continue my education through going to the military that would be the only way of happening.

Parental/Family Influence on Education Sally's mother did not have a lot to offer when it came to her pursuit of higher education. When reflecting upon any conversations that she had with her mother, Sally said, "I don't remember her saying a whole lot. My mom is reserved; she is very difficult to read so I'm not always sure what is going on with her. I don't really recall anything standing out about that discussion." It is of note that while she did not have conversations with her father about college, he was very supportive of her learning and would spend time discussing academic related items on a regular basis while she was in elementary and high school.

4.12 VICTOR

Victor is a 55 year old nontraditional first year student enrolled in the Nursing program at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. He is a commuter student who keeps an off campus apartment close to campus during the school year, but maintains his home in Erie, Pennsylvania. He returns home each weekend to be with his wife. Victor shared his reason for choosing nursing as his major after all these years out of his high school, "I started back out in school as a nurse's aid and went into the service as a medic in the Navy. I should have pursued it, but I didn't and now I am back." He had served in the Navy near the conclusion of the Vietnam War as a medic. Victor discussed how his journey has brought him back to college, "prior to this I had a job as a machinist, after 9/11 I was laid off 9 times, so I was talking to the career links guy and he said go do something that you are going to have a job at. I thought I was going to go back into nursing." Victor also shared that he has five grown boys ranging in age from 25 to 35, none of which have pursued college at this time. Further, his wife has five children as well, four girls and one boy. They have a total of 12 grandchildren. He also indicated that he has three sisters, one who is older, and two younger than he is.

Parent's Educational Background Discussing his parents' educational attainment, Victor noted "my mother graduated high school, my dad, I don't think he did. He was a farmer you know, I think he might have went to 10th, not sure". He shared the following about his parent's employment, "self employed at the end, he's passed away now. He went to work in the shop, but I would say he was a farmer, he was a milkman. He went into business, driving a dump truck. My mom worked with him."

Academic Preparedness Victor shared that once his high school offered little encouragement for him to attend college, and did not really prepare him due to his being on the vocational track, “when you got accepted in to the technical school that was kind of your path, that was 9th-12th. I think it was 8th that I got accepted in to the track.” He reflected on how others in his school seemed to be on a different program of study:

Yeah, I remember guys doing that. I remember they did a lot more English and I remember them talking about this one teacher being tough, and they said that they had vocabulary words and papers, and we didn’t have that, and I thought well, I heard about it... I didn’t worry about it. I was aware of others going to college, they did have more math, more algebra and things like that.

During high school he noted that he struggled with classes such as algebra. Victor discussed the challenges of returning to school after an extended period:

At first it was a tailspin. The first week was when everything was thrown at you, the second week was like what was that all about, the third week was oops we were in to test taking already, the fourth week was oh my goodness I need help. I needed to seek more help with tutoring and stuff; eventually I had to drop a class (abnormal psychology).

He believes that his military gave him needed study skills to manage college, “I would say the military experience helped, the classes that I took after high school... they brought an awareness to me because, basically I had to keep progressing and it paid off.”

Extracurricular Activities/Community Service/Work Victor shared that he was not really involved with activities while in high school, primarily because he assisted his parents with their work. He also indicated that he felt disconnected to the activities of school because of his participation in the vocational track:

Being in the tech school, it was a two week rotation, so we really were in our own group. When we came back to the home school, I felt detached, but we had a big enough group that I didn’t worry about it.

He suggested that now that he is gaining a better feel for how to navigate college life he is looking into some clubs that would not interfere with his clinical obligations.

Educational Aspirations Reflecting back to the possibility of attending college while he was in high school, Victor noted:

I didn't think about it. My dad, he didn't go, I would help him too. I would help him work on the trucks. After school I would have a job, I remember always having a job, in 8th or 9th grade I quit football and I had a job and I had finances to buy a car and do things. Basically, my life was going to school and having a job.

While in high school he knew he wanted to join the Navy, offering:

I wanted to get into the service, the Navy and then my cousin was a corpsman and so I talked to him about it and so I decided to go into that. It is interesting, I just had thoughts of just wanting to be a medic and I pursued it after high school by going into a tech school before I went into the service, they had a nurse's aide so I did that.

Victor offered that none of his friends went to college. Returning to college resulted from his losing his long time job. Victor shared, "I am on a TAA program. Trade Assistance Act, where you lose your job because of trade (cutbacks)." He noted that as part of this program, he does not have to take out loans because the program fully funds his tuition. Victor did add that he now believes he will earn his bachelor's degree, largely because he feels he needs it for his career.

Parental/Family Influence on Education Victor indicated that while his parents never really instilled a value for education and did not discuss his schoolwork at all, he did learn the value of hard work from his dad, whom he described as a workaholic. Victor illustrated his parent's lack of involvement in his education after grade school:

My mom would help us in elementary school. I talked to my sisters and we had it better than they did. My other two sisters are 10 years younger than me and they can recall how mom and dad were not there for them. I was on my own after 15, I would say.

5.0 STORIES OF ENROLLMENT AND PERSISTENCE

This chapter presents understandings ascertained from categorized themes that emerged upon coding of transcribed interviews conducted with 10 research participants. Each section provides numerous illustrations outlining these 10 first-generation students' responses to the research and interview questions discussed as part of an in-depth interview. The first section discusses the respondents' viewpoints on the influence their parents and families had in supporting their education, and how they valued education. This is followed by a section that offers specific examples shared by participants indicating the reasons that they decided to attend college and what has motivated them. Next, participants shared what growing up in their socioeconomic class was like and how they navigated through difficult class related issues. Lastly, the personal accounts of involvement in extracurricular activities are discussed, along with participants' reasons for becoming involved.

5.1 INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL/FAMILIAL SUPPORT OF EDUCATION

Most of the respondents' stories centered on how parents were supportive of their education and that this support influenced their perception of the value of education in a positive manner. These illustrations commonly noted a general support for their education, as well as the importance of

doing well in school. This section begins with a discussion on the consistent inability of participants' parents to provide the type of academic guidance that could have aided respondents in their preparation and pursuit of college. This is followed by a discussion of participant's accounts of how their parents supported their desire to attend college, but generally did not push or pressure them to do so. Lastly, this section describes how participants would seek out alternative mentors that serve to either complement their parent's efforts or compensate if there is a lack of parental support.

As indicated above, participants indicated that their parents wanted them to do well academically, but a time would arise early on in which they were no longer able to provide meaningful academic support because it was beyond their context and understanding. Respondents unanimously articulated that their parents were unable to provide them with detailed and specific guidance when it pertained to academic matters. The reason most often cited for this was due to the parents' level of education and lack of understanding of the subject matter.

In discussing her parent's inability to guide in her a specific academic way, Amanda shared:

I always tell my parents what I am doing or I have this test and they always can't help me on anything because they have no idea. I mean once I started high school they were pretty much, like math and science they were pretty much done.

Amanda's parents would encourage her to get help via tutors or her teachers knowing that they could not provide direct academic support. Sally offered an argument of why her mother was not able to support her the way she needed when she said:

I don't remember a specific conversation, but I know that she had some difficulty with the last couple of years of high school because her father was sick and she was taking care of him, I think she really struggled the last couple years of high school. I know that she struggled with math because she mentioned that several times.

Sally later offered the following when asked to comment on if her parent's offered direct academic support during high school:

No, not really, I mean even when report cards would come out and they would see what was happening they would say 'well I hope you do better next time.' Very little was said, 'Hope you do better next time,' not, can I help you with something. I think they both thought they were incapable.

Sally did share that her father encouraged her intellectual growth early on though:

My dad, he seemed pretty bright, he wanted to know what was going on with me I remember him pushing me to read and read things that were well above what my age should have been, he caught the interest and fed it with whatever means he had.

Additionally, Sally noted that her father urged her to acquire knowledge well beyond the norm for children her age is indicated by the following, "he had me reading text books that seniors in high school read," while she was in third grade. Mary offered: "They would ask what I would be taking but never really went into detail with the questions... My mom was there if I needed to talk and she would find me the help that I would need." Further expounding on this generalized support Mary noted:

They would ask what I would be taking, but never really went into detail with the questions. Since I was living with my mom and grandma, my mom never really finished high school she could help me with some things, but she couldn't help me with a lot, and my sister is only in middle school and she can't really even help my sister.

In some cases parents, recognizing their inability to provide direct academic support, would suggest that their children seek out the advice of others who may be able to assist them. For instance, Jessica shared that her parents did refer her to others for guidance on academic matters given their lack of understanding as indicated by the following: "They would say call your sister

or brother and see if they can help. They would ask me if I was going to ask my teacher.” It seems apparent from her various statements that they wanted her to have the tools needed for success; they just were not equipped to provide the level of support needed in certain areas. Maryann discussed how her mom did not assist with homework, but claimed that it was because she had already completed it. Rene indicated that her parents were proud of her but were satisfied with her academic performance regardless of how she did. Erin relayed the following about her parents, “Yeah, they encouraged me; there was only so much they could do because they didn’t have that education.” Newman indicated that while his parents supported him and wanted him to do well, “for the most part it was like a learning experience for me, and I guess for them as well. I could not go to my parents for help because they would not understand what I was learning.”

The decision to attend college was not something that parents aggressively pushed or mandated. Nonetheless, most families played an important role in participants’ decision to pursue higher education. Numerous responses offered by participants related to the support they received from their parents pertaining to the decision to attend college suggested a hands off approach. Amanda shared, “they really didn’t care, it was my own choice.” Sally reflected, “Dad was, it was important for us to go to school yes, but that was the only message that I got, yes it is important go to school.” Mary tempered her response by suggesting that her parents did not want to be added pressure on her:

They didn’t push me to go to college, my mom always said that it was my choice what I wanted to do. She gave me; my family always gave me their opinions of what they wanted me to do, but I didn’t have to follow through if I didn’t want to. I think it made it a lot easier not having the stress, and I think with basically nobody in my family going to college, they didn’t know what it would be like anyways.

Jessica added the following related to her parents, “They were not blatantly saying you need to go to college. They didn’t push it on us.”

In all cases, parents were not able to provide the type of academic support, and did not aggressively push their children to attend college. Therefore participants would often seek alternative mentors/individuals to either compensate for their parents’ lack of understanding or to complement what their parents brought forth. From aunts and uncles, to grandparents, to teachers and guidance counselors, it seemed as though participants always had somewhere to turn to support their educational efforts, either through complementing their parents’ efforts or compensating for a lack thereof in a particular area. While they did not always seek out this guidance, someone would always reach back to them and offer support in their pursuit of education.

An example of a story shared by one respondent that discussed the notion of an alternative mentor, as well as what drove them, is Amanda’s account:

I have relatives that went to college, I mean they are younger; my aunt is a school teacher, so she went to college, and my aunt and uncle are both pharmacists so they went to college... I guess it was self motivation ‘cause if I had a question on something I knew my parents could not help me out, I knew someone higher than them with a college education I could ask, no matter if it was a teacher, or my aunt and uncle who went to school I could ask them, I was never left hanging.

In addition, because she was academically inclined and did well in school, college seemed like a natural progression for her to achieve her career and life goals. In some cases, participants shared that they needed guidance and intervention from an alternative supporter to advance their education. For example, Sally noted that her visual counselor was the one that really helped to

propel her back to higher education to get her degree as illustrated by the following comment she made:

I was talking with my blindness and visual counselor, he had stopped at the house to do an eval., and we were talking about future plans and I did express to him an interest that I really wish I could go back to school. He said 'knowing what I know about you I'd have no problem sponsoring you'. So my first term on campus was sponsored by them, so just having him, other than being my blindness and visual counselor really didn't know anything about me had that kind of confidence in me. I was like here we go, I'm going!

Participants described the various alternative mentors that influenced them while in high school serving to either complement their parents' efforts or compensate a lack thereof. These mentors ranged from grandparents to siblings and from teachers to guidance counselors. Mary indicated that it was her grandparents that strongly encouraged her to attend college as reflected by her comment: "my grandparents on my step mom's side, they were a little bit more, they didn't force it, but they were like you should go, you should go, you are really smart, it'll make a better life for you." More often than not, there was always someone besides the parent's that lent their support and encouraged education as a valuable commodity. Liz discussed how she would turn to her school to complement her parent's efforts, "I met with guidance counselors all the time to make sure I was taking the right courses and they helped me look into schools." In Newman's case, he offered that he was fortunate to have his older sister there to help him with his schoolwork as reflected by his comment, "I didn't have anyone to get help from except my sister because she was a year ahead of me. My sister helped me with my grades, and my parents were always after her to help me because she is a smart girl."

While most participants described an alternative support network that they could turn towards, this was not a sentiment shared by one of the respondents. Rene indicated that although she wished her family, or even her high school, could assist her in preparing for college, they

often did not. She expressed feelings of frustration with this lack of guidance from those she most wanted help from, but detailed how she got a great deal of assistance from the Upward Bound program that was available to her. She indicated that Upward Bound assisted her with SAT preparation, college applications, financial aid, and more.

5.2 PERSONAL AMBITIONS/MOTIVATION FOR ATTENDING COLLEGE

The reasons that these students chose to attend college were very compelling in many cases. Most respondents had the belief that they definitely would attend college even though their parents did not; this was somewhat surprising. In fact, in all but two of the cases, going to college was seen as a foregone conclusion. The two notable exceptions were the two non-traditional students, both of whom are older than 45 years of age. With respect to the traditional participants in this study, the overriding reason for wanting to attend college was so that they could have more financial security than their parents and have the ability to have more stable careers, which they believed a college degree would help with. It was clear that participants viewed a bachelor's degree as a means to increase their socioeconomic standing. This section begins with participant's reflections on their desire to attend college, along with participant's notation of their educational aspirations. The traditional-aged participant population exhibited a very strong conviction that they would attend college, with each describing aspirations for at least a bachelor's degree. The non-traditional participants had a very different high school experience that did not emphasize the necessity and/or importance of college attendance in the same way schools do today. This resulted in these two individuals taking a much different

pathway to college, and describing a much different aspiration for educational attainment, that did not include the bachelor's degree until later in life.

This section also reviews the reasons participants explained for wanting to attend college, with the two primary reasons centering on creating a better life for themselves and desiring to avoid the financial hardships that they have witnessed firsthand in their families. The latter part of this section describes the strong work ethic characterized by many of the participants with its resulting impact on their pursuit of college.

The strong belief by participants that they would attend college was illustrated through their resolute personal stories. Amanda offered the following comments regarding her early awareness that she wanted to attend college:

I've always just been, I'm going to finish high school and I'd automatically move on to college...I think it just became the norm, you know with society I mean, you always think you can't get a job these days unless you have a college degree, I mean plain and simple. I mean I can't even get a summer job let alone a job for the rest of my life.

Mary suggested that she knew that she would definitely pursue an undergraduate education, but the notion of a graduate degree is something new to her as indicated by the following change in her thinking, "I knew I was going to go to college, I didn't know about the whole grad school part. I didn't think I was going to go, I didn't decide that until I went to college."

Maryann offered, "I knew I was going to school, I knew I was going to graduate from college." She came to this belief because her mother had enrolled her in an exclusive high school in the Washington, D.C. area that boasts a 100% college attendance rate. It was so commonplace that students from her school would go to college that she said the following, "At my school if you had no intention of going to college, they were like, why are you here, get out. I don't really

think about, I thought about it, but I didn't put thought into it until my senior year." Similarly, Newman discussed how he knew he would go to college early on and how his parent's expectations influenced him, "college was in my mind when I began high school in 9th grade. Maybe my parent's expectations grew on me. I knew I had to do well in high school and they said college was the way to go."

Alternatively, Rene described a more gradual growth with her educational aspirations that flourished as her confidence in her abilities grew during high school:

When I was younger, I was like I would like to go to college because I am never; I am going to get there. I was going to graduate from high school and that was going to be it. As I got older I was like no, I was like I want to at least get my associates and then it was I want my bachelors, and then I think I am going to get my masters. I am at least getting my masters. I never wanted a doctorate, but I am shooting for that master's now.

As indicated previously, participants' career interests strongly influenced educational aspirations, because they understood that certain jobs required varying levels of education. In Erin's case, she expressed that her career ambitions increased her aspirations beyond the bachelor's degree:

I always knew that I wanted to go beyond a bachelor's just because all the things I was interested in required going beyond that. At one point I was interested in veterinary work which I knew I would have to go to grad school for. Then it was NA (nursing anesthetist) which I knew I would have to go to school for.

It was of interest that the two non-traditional respondents, Sally and Victor, each noted that they did not view themselves as college material given their academic backgrounds. Sally indicated that she largely attributed her academic under preparedness to her visual disability at a time when accommodations were not readily available. Sally noted:

High school was uncomfortable; truthfully, I had and have a visual problem that nobody knew what to do with. I was either coddled or ignored. There were two total extremes, and there was more ignored than coddled, so I really didn't do well in school. At that time they didn't have a GPA or whatever, but my class ranking, I was in the bottom 3rd.

Because of this she indicated that she did not know what she wanted to do with her life, so she opted for the vocational trade school option made available through her high school, which she felt left her underprepared in key areas such as math and science. This experience led her to offer the following when questioned as to whether she would attend college, “Probably not, I don’t think I thought I was smart enough, or had the resources to go.” Not until many years later did she feel that she could manage college, and if not for the help of key advisors does she feel like she could have made it this far.

Victor shared that he really never considered college when he was in high school largely because he was in the vocational track and did not know anyone going to college. He knew early on in high school that we would join the military, and that he wanted to be a medic. He did not view college as an option for many years because he believed he had obligations financially support his wife and children. This led him to take a job as a machinist. It was not until the last 10 years in which he has been repeatedly laid off that he considered returning to school as part of the Trade Assistance Act program. This program fully funds his education in an effort to get him back into the workforce.

In those cases where respondents felt early on that they would attend college, a number of reasons were noted as a rationale for their pursuing higher education. It seems that many respondents were motivated due to the stability that can be achieved in their careers if they have an undergraduate degree. Further, the idea of having the means to achieve a higher level of financial attainment seemed to be an important driver for attending college. Many of the respondents experienced turbulent financial times firsthand, or witnessed someone close to them struggle due to not having a college degree. An overwhelming desire to avoid the financial

hardship experienced in childhood pushed respondents toward college as a means of upward social and financial mobility.

Participants often reflected that they desired job security and financial stability. Economic uncertainty and job instability was a concern expressed by all, to some extent. They indicated that college would minimize these concerns. Amanda shared that her father has been spared being laid off to this point given his seniority; however, he still has stress because there are no guarantees of job security. She illustrated this sentiment with the following:

My dad is okay just because he has seniority, but the other guys below him are laid off, and he said you know with less people he has to do more work and he says he wishes he would hire more people because it puts me behind.

This type of uncertainty was reflected by others as well who indicated that they had parents, aunt and uncles, grandparents, and family friends whom have been laid off and now are struggling financially. Others indicated that in addition to financial stability that would result from obtaining a college degree, they desire to have the financial means by which to pursue their dreams, and in some cases break free from the world they know. This was most clearly described by Rene who reflected on the challenging financial conditions that encompassed her family, as well as the community she grew up in. She discussed why she wanted to attend college: “I started to have big dreams, I was like, I am going to be rich, I am going to be out of here. I wanted to live in the city and get away from the small town. I wanted to at least finish college and then from there I am going to move to the city, and then I am going to find a good job. I started to make my own little road map.”

In Amanda’s case, she witnessed those around her (relatives, family friends, and people in her community) who have been able to achieve financial stability and career success as a

result of their attending college. She noted that her aunt and uncles' success due to college "just knowing they went, and their jobs, my aunt and uncle are pharmacists, so they have beacoup dollars. It's just, it was never like I'm not going to go to school, it was never a thought." While this account was a complementary incentive to pursuing college, along with her desire to avoid the financial difficulties she had witnessed firsthand, Amanda's story was not common amongst the others who were really more centrally interested in financial hardship avoidance.

As reflected in the numerous stories shared above, participants in this study have struggled against the challenges of limited financial resources, have witnessed in their families the hardship that comes with job instability, and have developed an ethos of hard work. Respondents are very cognizant of the necessity to work hard to achieve academic success. It also was indicated that in most cases respondents had a parent/guardian/role model that they looked to as an inspiration for their hard work ethic. It was noteworthy that one respondent who seemed to have been given more educational opportunities than all the others, seemed to take her opportunity for granted. For those who understood the importance of hard work, they also seemed to be aware of the challenges associated with their socioeconomic status and class standing. The illustrations and examples they provided and their willingness to work hard, even in the face of challenging circumstances, speaks to the strong resiliency and agency they have.

Liz described the difficulties many within her community experienced pertaining to finances and limited resources, and how her dad instilled a strong work ethic into her from an early age. She outlined a detailed strategy to obtain a good job before graduation and characterizes her work ethic as follows, "you tell me to come in at 2am, I'll be there at 2 a.m." Mary shared her story of resiliency to succeed even after she was forced to leave her initial

college due to financial circumstances. An issue over residency resulted in a significant differential in her tuition bill which she was not in a position to fund, even with the assistance of loans. She offered the following summation of this challenging experience:

I knew I was going to go to college and then when I had that slip up with [University Name] it kind of upset me, because I really wanted to go to school, when I came here. When I found out about everything at [University Name] it was in the middle of all my transfer applications and that kind of screwed me over because I could not get my transcripts when I owed them the money, so I knew I wanted to go back to school. When I applied here I just said I was going to be a freshman, I figured it was easier to do it that way.

Amanda described her tireless work ethic to succeed academically. She first detailed classes in which she was not able to comprehend the material even after putting in substantial effort. In those instances, she would work that much harder to do what is required of her, “I’ve always been the person to come to class with my work done.” Mary commuted more than an hour each way using public transportation to attend a high school in another state in order to avoid her local high school, which was known to be overrun with drugs. Instead of looking at this commute as a hindrance or an obstacle, she used it as an opportunity to do all of her school work.

Sally shared that most students from her high school were not viewed as college material: “Nobody ever thought about that, honestly a very small portion of the people that I went to high school with went on to college.” Additionally she offered her view on college attendance when she was in high school:

Well then I thought well gosh, I thought when I am done with this I am so done with this, I wanted to go in the service, I thought that would be awesome, so I knew I wanted additional education in something so that I could do something for myself, care for myself financially. I think along the way, it just seemed like things happened, compounded the discouragement.

She shared that she now decided to come to college because “I wanted better for myself and my daughter, for my family in general and somewhere I’ve the confidence that, guess what I can do this.”

Participants’ motivation and ambitions to attend college were largely associated with their interest in securing stable careers and financial security. They viewed an undergraduate degree as the pathway to these ends. It was also clear that participants viewed a bachelor’s degree as a means to increase their socioeconomic standing. Further, they viewed a bachelor’s degree as a tool that would help them to avoid the types of hardship they had encountered in their home lives growing up. Lastly, participants expressed a very clear understanding of the value of hard work, and how through hard work they could overcome the numerous challenges and obstacles standing in their way of success. Connecting education with career possibilities, as well as socioeconomic status, inculcated a strong sense that participants needed to attend college, thus, they were resolved to do so.

5.3 SOCIOECONOMIC AND CLASS ISSUES

The socioeconomic status and social class of respondents played a significant role in many of the participant’s lives. Reflected in many of the participants conversations was that their socioeconomic status influenced their educational experiences and aspirations. Participants described their socioeconomic status as either working or middle class. While three of the respondents indicated that they were working middle class, substantiated by their account of their parents financial resources; six of the respondents indicated that they were in the lower end of

the middle class, with one participant suggesting that she was in the lower socioeconomic status. Many within the lower middle class described circumstances that characterized a lower socioeconomic upbringing. These individuals would describe their families' dependence on social welfare programs, hardships connected to job loss, and unstable living conditions; yet still believed they were positioned somewhere in the middle class. Because of the limited financial resources available to all but three of the participants, connecting with those social networks familiar with the college readiness and acceptance process was oftentimes challenging. Each of the traditional-aged participants connected to these social networks via their high level of engagement in extracurricular activities as indicated in the extracurricular involvement and activities section of this chapter.

This section illustrates the socioeconomic status of participants and the struggles that they faced because of limited financial resources. I also discuss participant's agency and resiliency to overcome the limitations of their social standing, and their struggle to be upwardly mobile. Furthermore, the student's inclination and need to work to support themselves and their pursuit of college is discussed, along with the universal need of participants to receive financial aid (loans, grants, work study, scholarships) to attend college. Lastly, this section discusses participant's appreciation for their parent's willingness to support their college efforts even when they have limited capacity to assist financially.

Specific accounts of respondents' socioeconomic status were illustrated through the various personal stories offered by participants. They noted the many challenges their families faced due to a limited amount of financial resources. Participant's families' socioeconomic background unfortunately positioned them to have less cultural and social capital. The

implications of their lesser capital as compared to those from privileged families, along with a habitus that was not as valuable in the schooling system created a more challenging pathway to higher education. A story characterizing the working class environment that many of the respondents grew up in, Sally noted:

My parents both worked in factories so I am sure they didn't make a lot of money, neither of them were supervisors. We had our basic needs met but nothing too much beyond that. I'm in college now with a daughter and I get SSDI [Social Security Disability Insurance] so as you can imagine I am not any better off than they were.

Without the benefits of college, Sally expressed her socioeconomic status and class has not changed for the positive over the past 30 years.

An additional illustration of the challenges of growing up in a lower socioeconomic working class family was offered by Rene. She shared the difficulties of limited resources that characterized her family's social class and socioeconomic status and how through involvement in extracurricular activities she was able to connect to social networks:

We always had problems with money, when I was little I remember we lived in like 12 different houses because they would rent, and they could not come up with the rent and I would go to a different school. We finally ended up finding a house that was really cheap and we have lived in it since, I was like in 8th grade. One thing that helped me, I was finally like I am going to join a bunch of clubs and make a lot of friends. I figured it was permanent and I tried to make the best of it.

She went on to outline the struggles and social stigma of having to grow up with food stamps. She concluded with the following account of her family's socioeconomic background and her hopes for the future by attending college:

I am in the lower class, definitely in high school I was in the lower class, my family is still really low class. I feel like, I kind of am getting to building myself up a little more, once I graduate from college, I don't think I will be in the low class anymore.

In some cases, participants described their families' ability to meet their basic needs, but not much more. For example, Newman discussed his family's modest socioeconomic status and shared:

I think we got by, we never really had a lot of money, we never went on vacations. If we needed something we would get it. My family does not have a car; we didn't need it because of public transportation. We just kind of got by.

Further calling into question the participants' self reported characterization as middle or working class is the harsh financial circumstances described by some of them. The most telling example of a financially challenging context to grow up in was offered by Jessica whose story indicates that her family is significantly below the poverty line as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for a family of six (U.S. DHHS, 2010). She shared:

When I was in school, not necessarily high school, maybe middle, I guess we would be like the working class, just because my dad was working for my grandpa at the time and he was making maybe \$20k a year, and there were 4 kids, and my mom and dad at home. Funds were stretched, we had a 9x12 trailer and it was literally falling down around us, the roof was caving in, no running water in the kitchen, it was not terrible. It would get cold in the winter; you could feel the wind coming through. Mom would make it fun, she would boil water, she had a wood burner, like the electric would go off and our road would get shut in the winter because we would get 4 feet of snow. The power lines would go down or we could not afford to pay the electric that month, and she would make a little picnic and we would make tents and cook on the fire. It was not that bad.

The agency and attitude demonstrated by Jessica, who grew up so far below the poverty line, is an illuminating example of the resiliency apparent in many of the participants responses to matters related to socioeconomic status and family finances. This type of positive attitude was present in many of the interviews, even in the most trying of family circumstances. Agency and resiliency of the respondents was indicated by all participants to some extent. The challenging circumstances that they have had to confront and overcome in their pursuit of education is compelling and illustrates the capacity to endure against challenging odds. The next few

paragraphs describe participants' stories of agency, as they succeeded in the face of challenges such as limited financial resources, lack of health insurance, or the inability to buy basic educational materials.

Mary shared her story of resilience describing her inability to remain at her initial college due to lack of funding. This issue was further compounded because she could not pay all of the tuition owed to the university. Because of this issue, she ended up applying to this Pitt-Bradford as a freshman and did not receive any of the credits earned at the other institution. She detailed this account by saying:

It was like a financial issue that came into play, so I actually couldn't go back, but I didn't have the money, like I wanted to go finish up the whole year and I was gonna transfer, but the following semester, I didn't have the money to go back.

Further illustrating the numerous challenges Mary has faced, she shared, "I don't have health insurance and I also can't afford the health insurance with everything else." In Jessica's case, she offered the challenges of buying the basics required to pursue her education:

I usually try to pay for books out of pocket. This year I needed 2 of my books and I didn't have any money left, and I didn't have a job at the time and I went over and I asked and got a book voucher and they put that on my student account so I had the book for the class.

It was then her responsibility to pay back this voucher in a short time frame requiring her to work. These types of issues highlight the struggle to pay for some of the most basic needs while in college. These challenges served to undermine their ability to persist and graduate.

While a majority of the participants characterized themselves as lower middle class, they are more accurately described as lower socioeconomic status, as reflected in the above illustrations. As indicated in the introduction to this section, three of the respondents described a

working middle class lifestyle that provided them with resources at a level greater than the other respondents. Based on their personal accounts of their families' socioeconomic status, this would be an accurate depiction. Several stories shared by participants affirm their characterization as working middle class. For example, Maryann described her background in the following manner, "I would call us the working class; we don't live pay check to pay check thankfully. It is a little different from when I was really young, but not that different." Further, Erin and Liz indicated that both of their parents worked and that their collective income provided for a comfortable high school experience. Erin did share that they have experienced financial hardships in their lives such as having their car repossessed and being overburdened with bills at times.

Something that came up amongst all but one of the respondents was the sense that their parents did not expect their kids to work while in high school. The only exception to this was Victor, one of the two non-traditional aged participants. He indicated that from an early age it was expected that he would work for the things he wanted, as well as work to help out his family. While a majority of the participants may not have been required to work, they chose to work to get things that they might want (clothes, cars, toys, etc.). A comment made by Mary when talking about her mother that reflects the sentiment expressed by many participants related to their parents view of working while they were in high school was, "She didn't expect me to have a job, but she did say that if I wanted something that I had to work for it myself because she didn't have the money to really get anything."

All of the respondents indicated now that they are in college they work either during the summer, during the school year, or both in order to help pay living and educational expenses while in college. For many, it seems that working is necessary because they need the money to

help pay for school, books, transportation, insurance, and other necessities? Sally offered the following comment when asked about why she works, “The money was the big concern, I need money.” Mary shared why she works, “It is to pay for like all my finances while I am at school, all my bills that follow me around”. Jessica shared that she works three different jobs in order to help pay for college. Rene indicated that her parents have not been able to provide financial support, but she has been able to work during the summers to earn money for school, “I don’t come from a lot of money, but I saved myself, money to last me a little while in school. I just don’t do that much, so I don’t need that much money.”

An additional area that seemed to be ever present for respondents was the concern surrounding financial aid, loans, and how they are paying for college. All but one of the respondents indicated that they were dependent on student loans to help finance their college education. While there were varying degrees of how much was needed from individual to individual, it was an item that was important to all. Victor represented the single exception, as his education is being funded through a back to work initiative for individuals in the trades who have been laid off. Using a variety of sources (loans, scholarships, working, family support), respondents have been able to manage college attendance. It does seem though that managing the financing of college is largely left to the individual via loans and working because their families typically cannot afford to offer a great deal of assistance.

Many families do help pay for what they can. Amanda shared, “Yeah, they help out a lot. I mean, really they haven’t paid for schooling per se, but I mean they buy all of the other stuff. I mean I pay for my own books, supplies and anything, yeah. They spend several, lots of dollars.”

Even in Jessica's case, an instance where substantial financial resources were not available, parents help:

Thankfully my parents help me as much as they can...They have to do all that and then I am like do you have money left over. I feel kind of bad, but they say they are my parents. It is ok. I don't like taking stuff from people. If it is necessary, then I will ask, but otherwise I try to do it on my own.

Further illustrating participants accounts of their parents' willingness to financially support them when and how they could is conveyed in Rene's personal story. She shared the following example of how her parents financially support her as she pursues college even though they do not have much to contribute:

I was really worried with money 'cause I always knew that college was expensive, and I had no idea how I was going to pay for it. I was just like I am going to do it because it was my only choice; my mom and dad were really supportive. I just started applying places, and they were like it doesn't matter how much it costs, they were like we will figure something out. It was one thing that kept pushing me to go, they were going to be there and help me go.

5.4 EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT AND ACTIVITIES

Respondents exhibited a much higher level of involvement in extracurricular activities throughout high school than I initially had expected, a trend that continued for many in college. This high level of involvement enhances their likelihood of pursuing and attaining success in college. It is interesting that given all the challenges present in their home lives that they would be able to participate in non-academic experiences at reasonably high levels. Some indications were given by respondents that they were encouraged to participate by either their parents, by their high school, or by some other type of mentor. An item that was not always consistent was

the pushing by parents into extracurricular activities. While there was general support from parents, it was not necessarily something that was emphasized as a priority. This section begins by describing parental involvement in the encouragement of extracurricular participation, followed with the role high schools served in encouraging extracurricular involvement. The last part of this section discusses the reasons participants shared for becoming involved.

Respondents made the decision to partake in activities for a variety of reasons ranging from their own self-interest to encouragement from their parents. Amanda offered the following in relation to her high level of involvement in extracurricular activities, “I loved it, I would do it all over again, I mean, I was involved in every club, everything possible and everybody knew me, and they knew me for this and that.” Jessica detailed a long list of community service activities and organizations that she was and is involved with and noted, “I am pretty excited about it, I like volunteering. I have done it ever since I was tiny.” Her passion for service really portrayed that this was a way of life for her. Respondents often would note that their parents or their church were the derivation for their propensity to serve others. Maryann suggested that she would have gotten herself into trouble had she not become so involved in activities as indicated by the following statement she made, “I have to be busy; I can’t be idle, my mom always use to tell me the devil use to like idle hands. It is true, whenever I was bored when I was little, something was destroyed.”

About half of the participants’ parents were directly involved in their children’s activities through an advisory role. In one case, Amanda noted the following about her mother, “When I was in high school she was our cheerleading advisor, and then once I went to college and there was no cheerleading last year, I think she was sort of a little bored. She was like, what am I

going to do tonight or tomorrow night.” Maryann discussed how her mother was extremely involved in getting her and her siblings involved in many activities such as church, Girl Scouts, music lessons, and multiple sports. In this case, her mother immersed herself in her children’s lives. While many indicated that their parents served as a positive reinforcer of their extracurricular activities, Rene viewed her involvement as an escape from the difficulties she often witnessed at home and in her community. Rene offered the following as to why she always wanted to keep busy in extracurricular activities while in high school:

I was involved in everything in high school, if you look through my yearbook I am in every single picture. It was good because my family tended to fight a lot at home so I just did everything that I could at school so I stayed away from it for a little while. That was a way to keep myself out of trouble with all the drugs and everything in my town. If I was in school doing whatever it is that I was doing, I was not out there getting in trouble.

High schools were also cited as a vehicle by which respondents were encouraged to get involved in activities, typically because they sold the notion that involvement was an important component of the college admissions process. Mary offered the following:

My senior year when they were talking to us and telling us what all we have to do and stuff like that... they were like if you didn’t do a whole lot while you were in high school, it makes it a little more difficult for you to get into a school and it was scaring me.

While many participants indicated that their family’s ability to travel was extremely limited due to financial resources, some outlier respondents did have the opportunity to travel. Specifically, two participants, Liz and Maryann shared that they have had the ability to travel quite a bit and noted that it has benefited them in many positive ways. They each indicated that these traveling experiences have broadened their horizons and opened them up to other cultures. Liz reflected on how she has regularly had the opportunity to vacation in Florida, and has traveled outside the country. Maryann has had the opportunity to travel overseas to study abroad in New Zealand.

She also noted that she will be going to Denmark with a relative next summer. These opportunities to travel are significant because they provide experiences that grow cultural and social capital through immersion into new cultures and ideas.

Victor was a notable exception with respect to involvement in extracurricular activities during his high school career. He indicated that he really was not involved at all, and that because he was involved in vo-tech he was disconnected with his school's activity opportunities, and because he worked when he was not in school, he did not have time to participate in such activities. It is of note that Sally, the other non-traditional respondent in the study, did participate in numerous extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, the value added capital gained through this involvement was largely negated due to her school's inability to assess and appropriately accommodate her visual disability.

Participants' interest and inclination to become involved in extracurricular activities is an important means by which to connect to those social networks able to convey the needed cultural/social capital to increase the likelihood of attending college. With only one exception (Victor) participants exhibited a high level of involvement in out of class activities. Their involvement was encouraged by parents, high schools, and other mentors. These advisors encouraged them to become engaged in extracurricular activities with the aim of improving their high school portfolio in anticipation of pursuing college.

5.5 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the participants' strong regard for their parents' support of their educational aspirations. Participants did indicate that while their parents were supportive of their interest in pursuing higher education, they were incapable of providing academic guidance and they were not connected into the schooling system. In addition to parents' lack of direct academic support, participants noted that their parents did not aggressively push college. The second section of this chapter described participants overwhelming sense that they would attend college even though their parents had not. Their primary interests in pursuing college were to enhance their socioeconomic status and to provide for a more stable career. Participants also indicated that they desired to have a better life and to avoid the financial hardships present in their home lives during high school.

The third section of this chapter discussed the socioeconomic backgrounds of participants and class issues that they faced as result of their families financial standing. A majority of the participants are best characterized as lower socioeconomic status, with three out of the 10 respondents coming from a working middle class background. Even with the limited financial resources available to them, participants exhibited a great deal of agency to overcome economic limitations and succeed academically. The last section of this chapter described participants' high level of involvement in activities, and the reasons they became involved.

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The chapter begins with a thematically organized discussion pertaining to the influence of parental/familial support of education, socioeconomic status and class issues, as well as extracurricular involvement in activities on the persistence patterns of first-generation college students who are currently participants in the TRIO Student Support Services program at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. The dynamics of socioeconomic and social class are discussed as they relate to relevant literature. Next, I outline key conclusions on the importance of extracurricular involvement in student's obtaining the cultural/social capital pertinent to the college enrollment process. This is followed by a discussion of the implications for practical application of the findings, as well as a call for future research, along with concluding remarks.

6.1 INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL/FAMILIAL SUPPORT OF EDUCATION

Sean Patrick Kelly's study on social class and tracking within schools illustrates the challenges for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who struggle against a system that tends to favor those familiar with the bureaucracy of the school system (Weis, 2008). Those students whose parents are educated and/or have more financial resources are interconnected with the social networks that guide the academic tracking of students in school. Kelly indicates that

students from the lower social class are at a distinct disadvantage because their parents do not have the ability or do not know how to work the school to ensure that their children are enrolled in the college preparation curriculum (Weis, 2008).

This issue was more present for the two nontraditional students in my student who ended up in the vocational tracks, a fact that they attributed in part to their parents lack of involvement with the school, as well as their school's decision to place them in these tracks. The other respondents indicated that they were each involved with the college preparatory curriculum at a minimum. Given the more recent push for higher education by secondary schools, coupled with an increased understanding by parents regarding the value of education, the fact that respondents participated in the college preparation track is not surprising. A concern that was addressed in three of the respondent's cases was that they were not afforded the opportunity to participate in the honors track or advanced placement courses. This illustrates the maintaining of a social order that serves to benefit the privileged as Bourdieu has argued.

Kelly suggests that middle-class parents become engaged in social networks because of the benefits connected to participation in higher track classes, and how through this participation they stand to increase the likelihood that their children are afforded better opportunities (Weis, 2008). Kelly further indicates that while parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds and classes value education for their children, parents of higher social standing are better positioned to negotiate with school personnel what they want for their children. This issue is largely attributed to lower social class parent's lack of understanding of curriculum jargon and the language often used by school officials. This often leads towards deference being given to school officials, whom they view as having occupations of high social status (Weis, 2008). Participants in this

study, with one exception, shared that their parents were not actively involved in the decisions related to curriculum track placement, courses selected, and college preparation received. Maryann, the one exception, indicated that her mother had been actively involved in getting her into a highly regarded secondary school that boasts a 100% college attendance rate and pushed for her to be in more rigorous classes.

The participants' remarks that their parents were not as involved in the college preparation and enrollment process as they would have preferred is not surprising. Ishitani (2003) pointed out a number of studies' findings that determined that first-generation students are likely to receive less parental support as they make their decision to attend college or not. Bui (2005) notes that because the parents of first-generation students do not have any college experience, guiding them through this process can be very daunting. As indicated in the Influence of Parental/Familial Support of Education section of Chapter 5, respondents noted that their parents were supportive of their education and that this support influenced their perception of the value of education in a positive manner. However, when further exploring the issue, participants suggested that while their parents wanted them to do well academically, a time would arise early on in which they were no longer able to provide the type of meaningful academic support they needed because it was beyond their context and understanding. Respondents' often articulated how their parents were unable to provide them with detailed and specific guidance when it pertained to academic matters.

It is highly advantageous for parents to become active participants in their children's educational lives, as well as positively influence their inclination to become involved with extracurricular activities which can serve to enhance their educational aspirations. They need to

not only encourage them to do well academically, they need to either directly support their academic needs or find the resources necessary for their children to do well. This more intrusive approach by parents has the potential to mitigate many barriers to academic success. Weidman (1984) notes in his research the important role that parental pressure to achieve plays in the socialization of teen-agers and traditional college students. An appropriate pushing towards socialization is not only welcomed, but desired whenever possible. Study participants often noted that their parents did not aggressively push or mandate that they pursue college.

6.2 SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Bui (2002) indicates that there are noteworthy variances in socioeconomic backgrounds of those students whose parents' highest level of education is high school completion as compared to those students whose parents have some college or whose parents completed their college degree. Specifically, first-generation students have a higher likelihood of being raised in a lower socioeconomic family as compared to their non first-generation peers (Bui, 2002). Horn and Nunez (2000) provide further data on the significant variations that were present when comparing first-generation student's socioeconomic background with that of students whose parents had completed some college or finished college. Notably, when examining low-income families, an alarming 50% of first-generation students were found in this socioeconomic classification, as compared to only 33% of those students whose parents had some college experience, and less than 10% of those students whose parents had completed a college degree. In this context, low income is defined as less than \$25,000 annually. This study confirmed these

documented trends for first-generation students; most were best classified as coming from lower to middle working class families.

As indicated previously, there were three exceptions in which the participants were from working middle class families. The implication for such an economic distinction was illuminating in Maryann's case. Maryann is from an upper middle class family and had been given an opportunity to attend an exceptional secondary school that boasts a 100% college going rate amongst its graduates. As the literature suggests, it is noteworthy that first-generation students whose parents are in the upper income quartiles had a much greater likelihood of attending college than those first-generation students whose parents are in the lowest income quartiles (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Maryann's economic background and experience provided her with an experience that quite comfortably assured her college attendance without concern for cost like many of the other participants.

Key factors identified by students as having a significant influence on college selection are institutional costs, institutional location, and institutional reputation and/or prestige. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) looked at these three factors and noted some variances in decision making between first-generation and non first-generation students. As it relates to institutional costs, it was pointed out that a much greater proportion of first-generation students cite costs and capacity to receive needed financial aid as an important determining factor of college choice as compared to non first-generation students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). All of the respondents in the study indicated a definite need for financial aid, and all but one noted that they required student loans to make college possible. While three of the respondent's families had more resources to draw from, no participants were able to attend college without financial aid.

An interesting motivator for first-generation students is the desire to be very well off financially. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) also examined the reasons for students' decision to attend college or not and noted some marked variances between first-generation and non first-generation students. They identified factors related to college attendance as connected to both professional ambitions and personal matters. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin point out that being well off financially was much more of a driving force for first-generation students when compared to non first-generation students. Further, they note that being able to find steady work was of much greater importance to first-generation students as well. This was a consistent response from all participants in this study as well. Respondents strongly indicated that they chose to attend college in hopes of obtaining a job with stability that would provide financial resources that would position them in the middle class or higher.

Chen (2005) notes that first-generation students were more likely to select majors in business and the health care professions as compared to non first-generation students, and are less likely to select engineering, communications, and the social sciences as a major. The findings of this study were generally in accord with these previous findings, with all but two of the respondents majoring in the health care professions or business. Renee is a communications major and Mary has opted to study psychology. Respondents shared that they selected their field of study because they believed it would prepare and position them to get a good job.

6.3 SOCIAL CLASS

Bourdieu makes the argument that the cultural capital acquired in the homes of those less privileged is not received with the same regard and does not carry the same value as the capital held by those from families with financial resources from the perspective of the schooling system, which is comprised of standards that tend to be arbitrary and benefit those in privileged homes (Lareau, 2003). She also introduced the concepts of ‘concerted cultivation’ and ‘accomplishment of natural growth’ which represent parenting styles that reflect how children’s activities are structured. Lareau (2003) also notes that variant styles exist between differing socioeconomic backgrounds. Finally, she discussed the implications of how Bourdieu’s concept of habitus serves as the lens by which society is unconsciously viewed (Lareau, 2003). This underscores the need to provide habitus enhancing cultivation efforts during a student’s early childhood given the lasting presence of early inculcated habitus.

In my study, Maryann’s parents orchestrated her activities in what Lareau (2003) would describe as a concerted cultivation of skills which serve as an important aspect of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. This cultivation of skills serves as the central means by which participants enhanced their habitus. This is achieved through their extensive involvement in extracurricular activities. Maryann’s story represents the exception in my study, as other participants’ parents generally employed an accomplishment of natural growth approach to child rearing. Parents of these participants sought to meet the basic needs of their children (food, shelter, clothing), beyond that the respondents were free to organize their activities (Lareau, 2003). Participants in my study used their time to become highly involved in many activities and organizations. This high level of extracurricular engagement enabled them to tap into social networks that developed

the skills and dispositions to desire college attendance. On occasion, parents used a mixed parenting strategy approach based on time, resources, and family circumstances in which they would attempt to employ a concerted cultivation of skills. It is of note, that parents were not always the driving force for the acquisition of these social and cognitive skills, as indicative of an accomplishment of natural growth parenting strategy. In half of the cases in this study, participants expressed that either their high school, a mentor, or in some cases self interest motivated them to become involved in extracurricular activities and community service. It is not surprising that these participants who could not rely on their parents were largely encamped in the working lower class.

Lareau (2003) also suggests that social classes can be categorized into concrete groups such as poor, working class, and middle class, a principle that serves to better understand behaviors and anticipated responses of families within a particular group. She further argues against other social scientists who claim societal class differences occur in gradations. Her data supports her arguments that clear distinctions exist between societal classes because of the varying child-rearing practices she found using Bourdieu's work. I do not believe that clearly defined categories are necessary in order to make Bourdieu's concepts work. While I agree that important distinctions can be derived by noting which social class an individual comes from, it is necessary to understand the children's perspective of their social class. I believe that there is a blurring of social class lines by children today. Gradation allows for class related understandings as opposed to class specific. Confining an individual to a specific social class can limit the potential understandings assessed when analyzing their cases. In this study, respondents often

indicated a mixed socioeconomic and social class that derived from their belief that they were encamped in any and/or all of the following social class groups; low, working, middle.

Lareau (2003) further argues that parents of children from working class and poor families tended to relinquish their responsibility to professionals and institutional officials when dealing with schools or similar institutions. In those instances in which they attempted to become involved on their children's behalf, parents in working class and poor families often felt as if they were not adept at managing the situation in the way they wished. Further compounding the difficulties that families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have in navigating the school system is the sequestering of preferred educational practices by the privileged. Bourdieu argues that efforts to widely disseminate elite practices to the greater population would serve to devalue these practices, which would lead to alternative sorting strategies. In other words, Bourdieu contends that social stratification and the maintaining of an unequal grouping of social classes occurs intentionally, and any effort to subvert this system would lead to a reorganization designed by and for the privileged for purposes of maintaining their privilege (Lareau, 2003). This further confounds the potential of students from lower social class standings.

With the various obstacles and challenges confronting students from lower socioeconomic and social class backgrounds, hope and possibility have the potential to be constrained. Jean Anyon's study on social class and school knowledge introduces the concept of 'possibility' as a dominant theme for students in middle class schools (Weis, 2008). Education is viewed by students from this social background as a key determining factor in the capacity to gain admittance to college, as well as important to obtaining a job. Participants in this study experienced varying levels of financial hardship (loss of home, dependence on social welfare

systems, loss of employment, limited financial resources necessary to buy basic necessities) that had the potential to extinguish any hope for success, yet they still persevered. A belief existed that if one applied themselves through hard work great potential was possible. The participants in my study shared this same sentiment and often expressed that they had a hard work ethic, oftentimes passed on from their parents. There was a very palpable and real sense of hope and potential exhibited by all of the participants as to what college could and would do for them in their lives. Participants in my study universally expressed a current sense of hope and possibility to succeed with the aid of a college education. It was important for them to connect to appropriate social networks to gain and refine the skills and capital needed to prepare for college. Preparing oneself to the orientations of a desired social group is known as anticipatory socialization (Weidman, 1989). It is necessary for a student to prepare and position themselves through meaningful socialization experiences to their desired social group. However, for many, a challenge exists for students unsure of how to position themselves to their desired social groups due to lack of confidence in their appropriate fit to their desired social group (Weidman, 1989).

Education is a highly valuable commodity that can serve as a social mobilizer, enabling individuals to move up the social ladder (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Pike and Kuh (2005) suggest that, with respect to financial benefit, the bachelor's degree is the keystone of education achievement. Participants mirrored these findings and supported this argument through their many references to their need to obtain a college degree to provide a better life for themselves.

6.4 EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES

Gaining the necessary cultural capital is an important factor for obtaining success at the collegiate level. Haahs-Vaughn (2004) argues that participation in co-curricular activities is an important means for first-generation students to secure this necessary cultural capital central to success in college because it has the benefit of enhancing their social capital quotient. First-generation students therefore have an opportunity to benefit from becoming involved in student life opportunities such as: leadership activities, community service, clubs and organizations, or student employment. Through engagement in these extracurricular activities, first-generation students have the capacity to connect to social networks with the intended goal of acquiring cultural and social capital advantageous to their efforts to prepare for and pursue college (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Cultural capital is a resource, much like money and natural resources, and not all forms have equal value. The dominant culture controls the most valued cultural capital; therefore, acquiring the characteristics of the dominant culture is very important.

According to Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) it is important to examine the impact of first-generation student status on college outcomes through the interconnected lenses of cultural and social capital. Using this theoretical approach is an appropriate means to gain support of a relationship between college outcomes and a student's generational status (Pascarella et al., 2004). They define social capital as "a form of capital that resides in relationships among individuals that facilitate transaction and the transmission of different resources" (p. 252). They continue by suggesting that students whose parents are college educated have a network by which they can access society valued human and cultural

capital (Pascarella et al., 2004). These students whose parents are college educated receive the benefits of their parent's knowledge of how to gain access and enroll at a college or university, thereby normalizing the many challenges present in this process along the way. Because first-generation students tend to possess less social and cultural capital, they are more likely to be less engaged in academic and social engagement opportunities available to college students.

There exists a substantial pool of theoretical literature that suggests that social participation serves an important role in educational attainment, as well as the establishment of educational aspirations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Student persistence models have argued that engaging one socially in extracurricular activities serves the purpose of connecting them to the institution. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reference various studies conducted by Tinto (1975, 1987) and Spady (1970) that this connection to the institution serves to increase the likelihood of persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) go on to reference the work of Hanks and Eckland (1976) in which they argue that participation in extracurricular activities creates and supports high educational aspirations and career outcomes by networking socially with like minded peers whom are achievement oriented. Further, it is argued by Hanks and Eckland (1976) that that realization of these aspirations and goals is enhanced because students acquire the skills necessary to succeed and excel (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Along with this strong theoretical basis, Pascarella and Terenzini noted that a great deal of research has been conducted concerning the relationship between extracurricular involvement and persistence, as well as the relationship between extracurricular involvement and attainment. They go on to note that there is a positive relationship between persistence and both the quality and frequency of engagement in

extracurricular activities. Pascarella and Terenzini note Hanks and Eckland's study (1976) who argue that there is a clear relationship between involvement and attainment.

With respect to educational aspirations there is a moderately positive relationship to extracurricular involvement (Pascarella, 1985) as cited in Pascarella and Terenzini (1991). It is argued that this relationship potentially exists because those that tend to engage in extracurricular activities are already more likely to have higher aspirations as compared to their peers who are not involved. This point's to the significance of both parents and schools strongly urging students to become actively involved in extracurricular activities. Creating a culture and value system of involvement as necessary provides a framework for enhanced success. Pike and Kuh (2005) point out that Terenzini, along with his colleagues, believe that first-generation students are more likely to have lower educational goals than non first-generation students. As noted above the quality and frequency of involvement in extracurricular activities serves to improve educational aspirations and increase the likelihood of persistence. It was clear that the respondents in my study exhibited a much higher level of involvement in extracurricular activities throughout high school than I initially had expected, a trend that continued for many in college. This involvement served as an important means to connect to social networks that improved the likelihood of their going to college and having success.

Participants in my study exhibited a high level of engagement in clubs, organizations, service, church organizations and other activities. An important factor in my study's finding that participants were involved at a high level in extracurricular activities studies may be that respondents were drawn from an organized, federally funded program (TRIO SSS) aimed at improving educational outcomes. The individuals who participated showed a higher propensity

to become involved in organized activities, an important attribute in their gaining the necessary social capital to advance their educational pursuits. This was not necessarily their motivation to become involved, but it likely had the impact of enhancing their educational aspirations according to the literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Understanding that involvement is an important component of college readiness, as well as a means by which to acquire needed cultural capital, it is prudent that first-generation students are encouraged by their parents and/or a supportive mentor to become involved in some meaningful out of class experiences. As indicated through numerous illustrations given by respondents in the extracurricular involvement section of Chapter 5, high schools were cited as another vehicle by which respondents were encouraged to get involved in activities, typically because they sold the notion that involvement was an important component of the college admissions process. Respondents consistently noted a high level of involvement in activities, often resulting from a push given by either their parents/family and/or some other influential adult who indicated that it was important to do so. There were multiple cases in which participants' parents would become directly involved in their child's activities through an advisory role. While various mechanisms served as catalysts for participant engagement in extracurricular activities, the key was that they got involved. Using involvement in extracurricular activities as a mechanism by which to acquire social/cultural capital, it is centrally important to ensure that parents get involved and find a means by which to connect first-generation students to appropriate social networks, thereby increasing their educational aspirations and likelihood of education attainment.

Referencing back to the overwhelming level of engagement present among the majority of respondents, it becomes more apparent that this aptitude to participate in extracurricular activities served as an important developer of their educational aspirations, and subsequently their educational attainment. The notable exception to the above reference high level of extracurricular involvement was present in one of the two non-traditional respondents. While Sally exhibited a high level involvement, comparable to the more traditional aged students, Victor noted that he really was not involved in any activities during high school. Victor did share that he worked often from an early age as a means to have self-sufficiency and because his parents did not have an abundance of resources. He also attributed the fact that he was on the vocational track in the early 1970's, and did not really spend time at his high school, to his lack of involvement. The two non-traditional students in this study largely attributed their not attending college directly after high school to their being on a vocational track, rather than a college preparation track. Their lack of academic preparation for the rigors of higher education disinclined their interest in college.

It is interesting that given all the challenges present in their home lives that most respondents would be able to participate in non-academic experiences at reasonably high levels. Some indications were given by respondents that they were encouraged to participate by either their parents, by their high school, or by some other type of mentor. An item that was not always consistent was the pushing by parents into extracurricular activities. While there was general support from parents, it was not necessarily something that was emphasized as a priority. With an understanding that each individual possesses some quotient of cultural capital, it becomes

important that one is in possession of the appropriate amount and quality that can serve to strengthen educational aspirations.

Further, using Bourdieu's theoretical language that everyone has a habitus, which can be viewed as the value of one's cultural capital, it becomes important to garner the requisite amount of habitus in order to increase one's educational aspirations and likelihood of educational attainment. Participants had numerous reasons for wanting to increase their educational attainment. These reasons ranged from creating a better life for themselves to enhancing their job security, and from avoiding the financial hardships they experienced in their home lives to improving their socioeconomic status. Bourdieu (1990) describes habitus as "spontaneity without consciousness or will" (p. 56) otherwise described as an inert force that naturally drives our behavior without our knowing due to our past experiences and unrecognized sense of future outcomes to our behavior (p. 56). This phenomenon speaks to the importance of understanding the acceptable practices of the social groups that one desires to become a part of.

As noted previously, preparing oneself to the orientations of a desired social group is known as anticipatory socialization (Weidman, 1989). It is necessary for a student to prepare and position themselves through meaningful socialization experiences to their desired social group. However, for many, a challenge exists for students unsure of how to position themselves to their desired social groups due to lack of confidence in their appropriate fit to their desired social group (Weidman, 1989). Given that student social capital is made up of their network of contacts that advance their personal and professional ambitions, it becomes clear that those students without the needed capital suffer because they do not understand the means by which to acquire the valued social and cultural capital, nor do they have the network by which to grow it.

Multiple reviews of the data collected give detailed examples and illustrations of the extracurricular involvement of each of the respondents. Participants in my study were drawn from a sample that had succeeded in gaining acceptance into college and also exhibited a very high level of involvement in extracurricular activities. Their high level of involvement served the important function of connecting them to social networks that built important academic, social, and personal skills. It also served to develop the needed capital to increase their educational aspirations and improve their likelihood of attending college. As indicated in the earlier review of literature, data offered in numerous national studies of first-generation students suggest that they do not regularly participate in extracurricular activities. It is through involvement in extracurricular activities that first-generation students develop the skills and cultural capital centrally important to growing their habitus that serves them well in their pursuit of education.

6.5 DISCUSSION

As indicated at the beginning of this study, the intention was to gain a better understanding as to what extent families play a role in the educational goals past the secondary level for first-generation college students. Further, how do first-generation college students describe their home lives prior to college? Participants of this study who are TRIO Student Support Services members at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford shared their personal stories, detailing what it was like to grow up as a first-generation college student. They indicated that the primary role that their families, in particular their parents, played in the establishment of educational goals and aspirations was to encourage them to do well in school. While participants noted that their

parent's capacity to support them in their academic endeavors was largely limited to positive encouragement due to their lack of understanding of the schooling system, they always felt that their parents were in their corner wanting them to do well. With one exception, the participants indicated that their parents were not directly involved in the types of classes they took in high school, or the curriculum that they participated in. They also indicated that their parents were not as involved in the college preparation and enrollment process as they would have preferred, indicating that it would have been beneficial to them had their parents been more involved.

I found that participants from the lower socioeconomic families were highly cognizant of their family's socioeconomic status and financial struggles. Participants in this study detailed a strong resiliency and agency to overcome these financial and social class struggles, and shared their desire for a better life. The study also found that parents also wanted a better life for their children and believed that education was the means by which to achieve it. A belief existed that if one applied oneself through hard work, great potential was possible. The participants in my study shared this same sentiment and often expressed that they had a hard work ethic, often passed on from their parents. There was a very palpable and real sense of hope and potential exhibited by all of the participants as to what college could and would do for them in their lives. Participants in my study universally expressed a current sense of hope and possibility to succeed with the aid of a college education.

Participants shared that their parents and families support of their education influenced their appreciation and enhanced the perception they had about education. Participants shared that while their parents were supportive of their desire to attend college, they rarely if ever pushed it upon them. In those cases, where participants felt that their parents could not provide all the

guidance and support necessary to prepare for enrollment in college, they would seek out an alternative mentor that served to either complement their parent's efforts or compensate for what their parents could not provide. Participants in my study have universally exhibited the capacity to persist in college. This is important given that most respondents were either juniors or seniors, thus, very likely to persist through graduation. Participants attributed their strong desire to finish college to their connection to the institution through their social networks and extracurricular involvement.

The study found that participants participated in extracurricular activities at a much higher level than the literature suggests they would. Participants indicated that they were encouraged to participate by either their parents, by their high school, or by some other type of mentor. An item that was not always consistent was the pushing by parents into extracurricular activities. While there was general support from parents, it was not necessarily something that was emphasized as a priority. In addition, even if parents actively encouraged their children's participation in extracurricular activities, they were unaware of the positive implications that this involvement had in the growth of their child's educational aspirations, along with the enhanced capital acquired. In those cases where parents were not highly encouraging of their student's involvement, high schools were cited as a motivator for participants to become involved in extracurricular activities. High schools would discuss the importance of involvement in the college enrollment process and how out of class activities aid students in their ambition to attend college.

6.6 IMPLICATIONS

It has been argued that education is a commodity with substantial value to those who possess it (Pike & Kuh, 2005). It has the potential to enhance the social mobility and socioeconomic status for those whom attain it. It has been found that the value of a college degree continues to increase. Notably, the median income for those with a bachelor's degree in the United States is 37% higher than those with only a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Further, it has been suggested by a study conducted by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce that 63% of jobs will require postsecondary schooling by 2020 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). One indication of the value of a bachelor's degree is that, on average, an individual will make approximately \$2.1 million more than someone with only a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

The benefits for acquiring a college degree are many, and the consequences of not obtaining one can be costly. Creating a framework by which students from first-generation families and/or underrepresented groups can acquire the requisite skills needed to enroll and persist in college is an important task that needs immediate attention. It is important not only for the individuals who stand to benefit from receiving a college education, but also a society that depends on education to spawn innovation, creativity, and advancement to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive global environment. The role that parents and families play in actively encouraging their children's perception of education, as well as their inclination to become involved with extracurricular activities which can serve to enhance their educational aspirations is important, and has the potential to remedy some of the social class issues that first-generation student are confronted with. It is important to connect these students to appropriate social

networks so that they may gain the skills and capital needed to prepare for and succeed in college.

6.6.1 Recommendations for Practical Application

Families play a central role in the establishment of educational goals of first-generation students. It is important for parents to be active participants in their children's academic lives. They need to work with their children to enhance the perception that they have of education. Further, they need to encourage, participate, and support their children's inclination to become involved with extracurricular activities because of its capacity to enhance their educational aspirations. It is understandable that parents of first-generation students will not have all the answers related to the educational system or how to best support their children. However, it is critical that they emphasize the value of education to their children and avail their time and whatever resources they have available to aid their children's acquisition of education. They also need to partner with their children employing a concerted cultivation approach (Lareau, 2003), primarily through supporting involvement in extracurricular activities because of its capacity to build social networks and enhance much needed social capital. While there are no guarantees that students will attend college given a high level of educational support, the evidence suggests that it greatly enhances this possibility. Further, first-generation students who receive minimal or no support from their parents are not destined to forego college; however, the obstacles they face will add stress to their educational journey, and subsequently reduce the likelihood of their attending college.

In addition to the key role that parents and families play in the college enrollment and persistence of first-generation students, schools also serve an important function in their capacity to engage students in extracurricular activities. The partnership between family and school holds the greatest potential for students to acquire the necessary academic preparation, social networking, dispositions, and skills needed in their preparation for college life. It is important that frequent opportunities be made available that bring together parents with schools in the spirit of preparing students for college life.

An important benefit to families would be that schools could provide a better understanding of the complexities of the schooling system, and how parents can better support their children's integration into the social networks of the school. These insights provide greater clarity on what is working from the perspective of those that have established the schooling structure. It is important that student's appreciation for the value of education be established early on in high school, if not sooner. Any delays can result in setbacks that would likely be detrimental to college enrollment. Thus, from the time a student matriculates into the secondary schooling system, schools should begin their efforts to reach out to both parents and students to provide them with a pathway for success.

Schools should partner with parents to employ a strategy that includes a series of sequential steps to be taken in order to prepare students for college attendance. Participants in my study reflected that key steps aided their readiness and transition to higher education. The most important component of their college preparation was having the academic skills to succeed at the collegiate level. This was achieved by taking courses as part of a college preparatory track. In addition, participants suggested that while taking a college entrance exam was challenging, they

knew that it was a necessary part of the college application process. In addition to appropriate academic preparation and college enrollment processes, schools also need to offer a defined co-curricular program aimed at engaging students in clubs, organizations, activities, and service in an effort to prepare them for the real world. These efforts also serve to connect students to social networks, and subsequently serve to teach them the skills and dispositions needed to be successful in the college preparation and enrollment process. This type of extracurricular program should be integrated into the overall educational experience offered at the secondary level. Further, it should be a key component of the post-secondary experience for all college students.

Student integration into the social fabric of the schooling system should not be viewed only as adding value to what is learned in the classroom, but rather as an equally important component in the overall educational experience of students. Without the practical application of information obtained in the classroom, students are merely receptacles for information to be stored, rather than vehicles by which to transmit their academic understandings into meaningful learning. Bringing together students from various social, economic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds in consequential out of class experiences serve the interest of all participants. In this era of helicopter parents, in which parents are highly involved in their kids' lives, it is important to effectively educate parents on how to successfully advise and guide their children's educational and extracurricular activities. High schools and colleges could greatly assist students by offering specific and practical advice to parents on those factors which increase the likelihood of college readiness and enrollment. It needs to extend beyond a simple information sharing

approach to a format in which parents are brought in as partner in a more intrusive and developmental manner.

Policy makers need to be informed as to the quantifiable benefits of programs that support accessibility and attainment. Through effective assessment, legislators will have the data needed to continue funding for these important programs. Unfortunately, many federally funded programs have seen reductions to their budgets, forcing some programs to shut down after many years of service. This is not surprising given the enormous strain on both federal and state budgets. However, if the rhetoric about accessibility to higher education is to be made realistic, then a robust effort to support these programs must be sustained, or preferably enhanced.

An additional practice that has proven to be beneficial and should be strengthened is the availability of academic counselors, peer mentors, and other volunteers. These compensatory and/or complementary individuals have the ability to work with students to provide needed support when parents do not have the capacity to do so alone.

6.6.2 Implications for Future Research

This study was conducted with a limited sample chosen for its ability to provide detailed accounts of the experiences of first-generation student's home lives. Additional research that extended these research questions and interview protocol to a larger sample at multiple higher education institutions could further strengthen the study's findings. This research could be extended to examine the experiences of students studying at community colleges. Because a significant number of first-generation students study in a community college environment, I

believe it would be valuable to study their experiences. Understanding the process by which students make the decision to attend college would provide additional insight into the different ways in which first-generation and non first-generation students view the college going process. Further studying first-generation students' approach and reasons for getting involved in extracurricular activities, along with additional detailing of the capital enhancing outcomes gained through participation would further support the importance of connecting to social networks.

In addition, integrating additional qualitative methods and/or appropriate quantitative methods to complement the data collected, using a mixed method approach could further substantiate and strengthen the results. Another area of research that should be considered for exploration in the future is to compare the results of a first-generation population to that of a non first-generation college student cohort. Furthermore, future research that explores the different experiences of first-generation students who grow up in affluent families could serve to illustrate any variances between different socioeconomic and social class groups.

In the future, I would like to examine which type of social networking and extracurricular activities had the greatest capacity to enhance first-generation students' likelihood of enrolling and persisting in college. I would also like to extend this research as part of a longitudinal study to include labor market outcomes with the respondents that participated in this study. I believe that it would provide useful insight into how the home experiences of first-generation students impacted their post college lives. Lastly, the results of a study that examined the implications of a dedicated cultivation of skills through extracurricular involvement between an experimental group and a control group would greatly enhance the findings of this work.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Title: **Parental Influences on First-Generation College Students: Case Studies of Enrollment and Persistence among TRIO Participants**

Principle Investigator: Kelly M. Austin, Ph.D. Student, Administrative and Policy Studies
School of Education, 450 Schoolhouse Road, 266 Blackington Hall, Johnstown,
PA 15904

Phone: 814-418-0537 Email: kaustin@pitt.edu

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to assess how the home lives of first-generation students, in particular, the role of their parents, influenced their persistence while in college. Specifically, participants will be involved with the Student Support Services TRIO program at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford.

Participants: Approximately 8 students who are participating in the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford Student Support Services TRIO program will be invited to participate in this research study. As a participant you agree that you are 18 years of age or older.

Procedures: If you agree to take part in this study, you will participate in an individual interview. As part of this interview, you will be asked questions about your home life, the role your parents played in your academic life, what type of academic and social experiences you were involved with during high and are involved with now, as well as your perceptions of your education experience. The initial interview will last approximately 60-75 minutes, with a potential follow-up interview if I need more information, or if I need to clarify responses from the initial interview. I will contact you if a follow-up is required.

Confidentiality: All information related to your participation in this study, or secured during the interview process will not be released to others without your written permission, unless it is required by law. Further, your interview transcripts will be identified by using a pseudonym. This pseudonym would also be used in any publications or presentations of the research results. Information derived from you, as part of this research study, will be kept in a locked file cabinet of the principle investigator. Upon completion of the study, audiotapes will be destroyed. As noted above, information would only be released if required by law, or in atypical cases, if required by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office or the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board for purposes of reviewing study's conduct.

Risks: It is clear to you that no physical risks are associated with your participation in this study. This study will center on your attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of your life as a student. No known risks are apparent with your participation in this research project.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you resulting from your participating in the study. It is possible that you will gain insight into yourself as a result of participating in the interview.

Freedom to Withdraw: Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. In addition, you have the option to not participate or stop participating even if you begin the process without penalty. If you choose not to participate in the study, or opt to withdraw later, there will be no adverse impact related to your relationship to the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford.

More information about study: You may contact the principle investigator of the research study listed at the beginning of this consent form if you have any questions about this research study.

IRB Contact Information:

If questions in relation to your rights as a research subject, you may contact:
Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office,
1-866-212-2668.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator(s) listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number(s) given. I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns or complaints be addressed by a listed investigator. I understand that this interview may be audiotaped.

I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that have occurred during my participation.

By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research study. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

Participant's Signature

Printed Name of Participant

Date

CERTIFICATION of INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions as they arise.”

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES PARTICIPANTS

Interview Questions
Student Support Services Program
Educational Goals of First-Generation Students

Interview Questions:

Participant

1. What was high school like for you?
2. What was your expectation for how much schooling you would complete when you were still in high school? Now?
3. Describe the educational aspirations you had while in high school. Now.
4. Describe what you viewed as your post high school potential.
5. When you were not in class in high school, what type of activities what you participate in?
6. Describe your perception of how your teachers/administrators at your high school encouraged college. Did you feel that you received different encouragement than other students?
7. What was your family's response to your attending college?
8. How have your parents helped you in your effort to finish college? If yes, how so?
9. How have other people outside your family helped you in your effort to finish college? If yes, how so?
10. What other people outside of your family encouraged you to attend college?
11. Would you say that it was normal for people from your high school to attend college? How about your close friends? How did this influence your decision making process?
12. How would you describe your socioeconomic status?
13. What is it like to be a part of this socioeconomic status while in college?
14. What race/ethnic group would you describe yourself as?
15. Describe any differences in your perceptions related to fashion and style now as compared to when you were in high school.

16. Describe any differences in your perceptions related to food and beverage now as compared to when you were in high school.
17. Describe any differences in your perceptions related to reading vs. television watching now as compared to when you were in high school.
18. Describe any differences in your perceptions related to how you spend leisure time now as compared to when you were in high school.
19. Describe any experiences where you felt that you were faced with a situation in a schooling context where you felt underprepared to face the social challenges of the moment given your past experiences? What did you do? Did this change how your perspective?
20. How well did high school prepare you for college?
21. How would you characterize your experience with math/science while in high school?
22. How would you describe the track of your high school classes that you participated in?
23. Have you had to stop out of college for any reason? If so, please describe that experience.

Parents

24. Characterize and talk about discussions that you would have about the classes you would take while in high school.
25. How often did you talk about your school work?
26. How would you describe your parents, their interests?
27. What kind of help did your parents give you with your homework while you were in school?
28. What did your parents think of you participating in school activities? Out of school activities? What types of things did you do with your parents/family?
29. Did your parents expect you to work while you were in high school? If yes, was there any rationale for their wanting you to work?
30. Did your parents participate in any community/church/social organizations? Could you describe the roles they held?
31. Discuss any conversations that you had with your parents about attending college?

Siblings

32. Were you able to learn anything from your brothers/sisters about college life that has helped you to be successful? Or have you helped your younger siblings? Describe the sibling's experiences with school?

Supplemental Questions

1. At what point did you know that you would attend college, how did you know?
2. Did you ever experience anxiety related to any of the following items: college readiness, finances, social standing?
3. What role did your parents play in the types of classes you took in high school, if any?
4. What led you to believe college would serve as a vehicle to achieve personal and professional goals?
5. Other than your parents, did you have any other person (aunt, uncle, grandparent, counselor) that helped you in the establishment of your educational goals and in your pursuit of college. How did this relationship come to be, did you reach out to them or did they reach out to you?
6. If you believe your success in going to college was partially or entirely self motivated, where do you think this self motivation comes from?

APPENDIX C

PERSONAL/DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Dissertation Interview Participant Information Sheet

Name _____

Residential/Commuter Student _____

If commuter, commuting time _____

Gender _____

Major _____

Grade Point Average _____

TRIO SSS participant _____

Parent's highest level of education (mother) _____

Parent's highest level of education (father) _____

Full-time or part-time student _____

Do you have a job, how many hours do you work each week _____

Credit hours completed during first year _____

Credit hours completed thus far _____

Highest level of math completed in high school _____

List any clubs/organization you are in _____

College financing (yes/no)

Loans _____

Grants _____

Scholarships _____

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