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The Impact of a Community-Based College Access
Program at a Midwestern Institution

by

Ryan Ronald Gonzaga Reed

July 2017

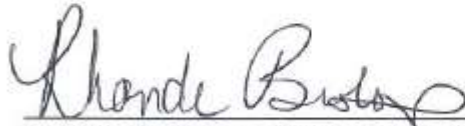
A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
School of Education

The Impact of a Community-Based College Access
Program at a Midwestern Institution

by

Ryan Ronald Gonzaga Reed

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Lindenwood University, School of Education



Dr. Rhonda Bishop, Dissertation Chair

7-11-17
Date



Dr. Sherry DeVore, Committee Member

7-11-17
Date



Dr. Tracy McGrady, Committee Member

7-11-17
Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Ryan Ronald Gonzaga Reed

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Gonzaga Reed', written over a horizontal line.

Date:

7.11.17

Acknowledgements

First, I must thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for sustaining my life each and every day. It is by His grace I have been saved, and I can complete this dissertation. Many other people have helped me on my journey throughout my life, career, and education. I owe a debt of gratitude to all of them.

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To the most important people in my life, my family, I love you and thank you. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for always supporting me. Thank you, Jerilyn, for going through this process with me and encouraging me every step of the way. Elia Eve Gonzaga Reed, you are the light of my life and the best kid anyone could ask for. You have been so generous in allowing Jerilyn and me to go back to school. I have finished writing my paper, and I have no more pages to write. Daddy is going to be able to stay home and play now.

Abstract

Low-income, first-generation, urban students are typically underprepared academically for college-level course work and lack knowledge, which most non-first-generation students possess (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Success in higher education depends on students effectively navigating and transitioning into an institution (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Community-based nonprofit organizations support first-generation, low-income, urban students as they navigate through the provision of college access/readiness programs (Smith, Benitez, Carter, & Melnick, 2012). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of one community-based college access program on the persistence, retention, and matriculation of its participants. Quantitative data included retention rates and grade point averages of 39 students who participated in the program and 82 similarly qualified non-participants. The retention rate for students participating in the program was 95% and the GPA was 2.88, as compared to a 79% retention rate and a GPA of 2.40 for similarly qualified students. The difference in both retention rates and GPA was statistically significant. For the qualitative portion of the study, focus groups were conducted to understand perceptions of 15 participants who were first-generation, low-income, urban students. Their responses were viewed through the lens of Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering. In addition, staff members who have worked longitudinally with students were interviewed. Three themes emerged: relationships, intentional experiences, and self-advocacy. Based on the findings from this study, college access programs should design their curriculum and experiences around the relationship between students and staff members.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In today's societal landscape, the importance of having a post-secondary degree is increasingly necessary to obtain a quality job or career (Choy, 2001). The total enrollment of college and universities is growing and so is the diversity of student demographics (Casazza & Silverman, 2013). A significant portion of the growing population of higher education is first-generation, low-income, urban college students (Ward et al., 2012). Depending on the definition, first-generation students represent between 22% and 47% of the total enrollment of higher education institutions in the United States of America (Choy, 2001).

First-generation students come to, and proceed through, college with a wide variety of issues and barriers which do not exist for other college populations (Ward et al., 2012). Low-income, first-generation students are typically underprepared academically for college-level course work and lack general knowledge, called cultural capital, that most peers possess (Ward et al., 2012). Pike and Kuh (2005) stated success in higher education depends on students effectively navigating the move into an institution and transitioning through school. Colleges and universities have an obligation to acknowledge these transitions and change the way first-generation students view and experience higher education (Ward et al., 2012).

At the end of high school, students whose family members have never attended college are less likely than other student populations to enroll in college, and students who do attend a post-secondary institution are less likely to persist to graduation (Ward et al., 2012). Only 50% of first-generation students expect to earn a bachelor's degree, compared to 90% of their classmates with families who have college experience (Ward et

al., 2012). Statistically, 60% of first-generation students in higher education will leave without obtaining a degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

First-generation students are more likely to drop out during or at the end of their first year in school than traditional students (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013). Tinto (2012) stated a lack of connection to an institution, in addition to family and financial dynamics, lead to student departure. A student's sense of connectedness to an institution is directly related to a sense of mattering or being marginalized (Schlossberg, 1989). College access programs in local communities strive to help first-generation students to attend and complete higher education (Smith et al., 2012).

Background of the Study

In the United States, 13.5 million youth live in poverty (Giroux, 2004). Low-income students are 2.4 times more likely to drop out of school than middle-income students and over 10 times more likely to drop out than high-income peers (Lynch, 2013). Students who drop out of high school are more than eight times as likely to go to prison than peers who have graduated from high school and even greater than peers who attend college (Harlow, 2003).

First-generation students are a minority population with their own set of unique characteristics and needs (Ward et al., 2012). Students who are first in their family to attend college will most likely be dissuaded from attending college, and often receive lower levels of encouragement and support than their peers (Ward et al., 2012). The structure of today's educational systems present challenges for many at-risk students who without support can miss the opportunity of a quality education (Course Catalog).

One organization, Tomorrow's Leaders, has been designed to help at-risk urban students overcome disparities in education and foster skills like communication, assertiveness, empathy, grit, motivation, and self-confidence (Course Catalog). In this study, Tomorrow's Leaders is a pseudonym for a Midwestern non-profit community-based college access program. Students who display the same characteristics championed by Tomorrow's Leaders programs have also been linked to being more successful in school, work, and life (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). The goals of the Tomorrow's Leaders program are to help students: a) gain better academic performance, b) improve attitudes and behaviors, c) increase motivation to learn, d) increase commitment to school and schoolwork, e) decrease disruptive class behavior, noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and referrals, f) reduce emotional distress, and g) decrease depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal (Course Catalog).

There are several programs to address the need to help students become more successful in education and society (Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013). Tomorrow's Leaders, the organization examined in this study, is designed to boost college attendance and completion through immersive leadership experiences, college access, and persistence support which begin in ninth grade (Course Catalog). Participants gain experiences, skills, and values needed to be successful students in higher education and productive members of society at large (Course Catalog). Eligibility for Tomorrow's Leaders is based on family income below \$10,000 per family member and attendance at a partnering school (Course Catalog).

Many organizations who support first-generation, low-income students are involved in helping the students long before they enter higher education (Smith, Benitez,

Carter, & Melnick, 2012). Tomorrow's Leaders is a six-year experience where each year a different leadership trait is emphasized which builds upon previous leadership traits learned in the program (Course Catalog). The progressive leadership traits guide the program experience (Course Catalog). Years one and two are centered around a 21-day summer camp experience and multi-day wilderness adventure experience (Course Catalog). The focus of years one and two is on civic responsibility, community service, and leadership skill development (Course Catalog). In their study, Crocetti, Erentaitė, and Žukauskienė (2014) found civic engagement was important for adolescence's leadership development.

Years three and four of Tomorrow's Leaders focus on higher education preparation (Course Catalog). Year three's capstone experience is a nine-day tour of 10 higher education institutions, which includes both large and small, public and private four-year schools, historically black colleges/universities, community colleges, and specialty schools, such as art institutions (Course Catalog). Year four's primary objective is to prepare teens for life after high school (Course Catalog). Years five and six are designed to provide students with the skills and traits needed to be successful as college students through a summer bridge program (Course Catalog). Summer bridge programs historically have successfully helped at-risk students transition into higher education (Cabrera et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories of student retention and student departure and Nancy Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering were used as the theoretical framework for this study. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories were

selected because it is the most widely accepted theories on why students choose to stay or leave a college. Schlossberg's (1989) theory was used as a guiding light into the social and emotional wellbeing of students' experiences at college.

Tinto's theories of student retention and departure. The most common model of retention in higher education is Tinto's theories of student retention and departure (Forsman, Linder, Moll, Fraser, & Andersson, 2014). The theories were first presented in the literature review, *Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research* (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's (1975) review of literature supported the broad range of research on the topic of higher education retention and brought consistency to the topic. Tinto (1987, 1993) developed the theories into the book, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories most likely gained stature because of the appeal to commonsense and centrum on the notion of integration as the key to retention and departure (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories of student retention and departure are rooted in Arnold van Gennep's (1960) social anthropology study of the rites of passage and Emile Durkheim's (2013) theory of suicide. Tinto's (1975) central idea is one of integration, which asserts whether a student will persist or drop out of an institution can be strongly predicated by the degree in which the student has academically and socially integrated into the institution. Academic integration can be measured by a student's grades, intellectual development, enjoyment of study subject, identification with academic norms and values, and self-identification with one's role as a student (Tinto, 1975). Social integration can be measured by the level of friendship, involvement in a

group, social/personal contact with faculty and staff on campus, and the overall enjoyment of being at an institution (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto (1975) developed factors that contribute to student integration (see Figure 1). These factors include family background, individual attributes, and pre-college schooling (Tinto, 1975). Family background is comprised of socio-economic status, parental level of education, and family expectations for education (Tinto, 1975). Individual attributes include race, gender, and academic ability (Tinto, 1975).

The quality and quantity of education of a student prior to enrollment at an institution of higher education makes up the pre-college schooling factor (Tinto, 1975). Along with the individual characteristics that factor into integration, commitment plays a role (Tinto, 1975). A student must have a commitment to the goal of obtaining a higher education and a commitment to the institution in which he or she enrolls (Tinto, 1975).

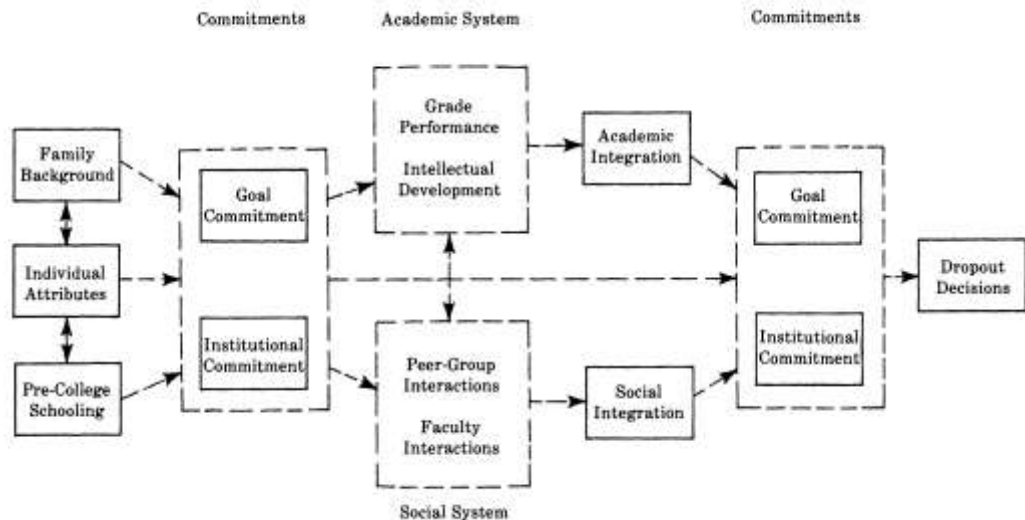


Figure 1. A conceptual schema for dropout from college (Tinto, 1975, p. 95).

Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering. Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering also contributed to the framework of the qualitative portion of this study. Marginality and mattering were explored in college access students' perceptions of college admittance and persistence. By focusing on college access, students' feelings of mattering were explored as a result of relationships built through college access programming. Schlossberg (1989) theorized a student's feeling of marginality and/or mattering could affect the outcome of whether the student completed a college degree.

All students feel some form of marginality in an educational institution at some point (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg (1989) asked the question, "Can a campus community be created that allows all students to find a place of involvement and importance?" (p. 5). The involvement and feeling of importance creates a connection between a student and an institution and increases the sense of mattering (Schlossberg, 1989). A key factor in Schlossberg's system is a student's social network, which educates members on the culture of the group and increases social capital (Huerta & Fishman, 2014). College access programs are a ready-made social network for students (Smith et al., 2012).

Tinto (1993) recognized an adjustment to life in a higher educational institution for students can be difficult both socially and academically, and students may struggle to fit in or may feel marginalized. Improving a student's sense of belonging or mattering can lead to a higher retention rate (Tinto, 2012). The use of Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering allowed for a more in-depth view of Tinto's (1975, 1987,

1993) theories of student retention and student departure, when looking at first-generation, low-income, urban students, who historically are a marginalized group.

Statement of the Problem

First-generation students do not attend higher education institutions at the same rate as other more traditional students and are not as successful once enrolled (Cutuli et al., 2013). Community-based nonprofit organizations try to bridge the gap for at-risk students through college access/readiness programs (Course Catalog). Considerable research has been conducted on students whose families have no history of attending college, low-income college students, and urban college students (Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016; Stephens, Townsend, Hamedani, Destin, & Manzo, 2015; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Extensive research has also been conducted on federally funded college access programs (Coleman, 2015; Grier-Reed & Ganuza, 2012; Morrow, 2015); however, a gap exists in the research that examines community-based non-profit organizations in college access programming.

Because students with the characteristics mentioned above are at risk for not attending higher education institutions and not completing degrees once enrolled, the question of what is working to help these students needs to be answered (Ward et al., 2012). According to Tinto (2012), student retention is challenging and there is no guarantee an institution can retain all students. However, institutions must have a total commitment to the educational encounters that add value to the student's overall experience (Tinto, 2012). Institutions must identify these events in order for students to invest and commit (Ward et al., 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to conduct mixed-method research, using quantitative and qualitative research methods, of community-based college access programs to fill the gap in the research (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2014). The quantitative research in this study focused on the retention rates and academic achievement of students who participated in a community-based college access program compared to students with similar qualifiers who were not served by the community-based college access program. The qualitative research focused on the overall programmatic experience of participants of a community-based college access program as reported directly by those students and staff members of the program.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the community-based college access programs on the persistence, retention, and matriculation of its participants at a large, public, four-year, Midwestern institution by collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data, including retention rates and student success as measured by grade point average, were used to assess Tomorrow's Leaders students' success compared to similarly qualified students. Using qualitative data, collected from students and staff members, the perceptions of first-generation, low-income, urban students participating in community-based college access programs were examined through the framework of Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering.

Research questions and hypotheses. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What statistically significant difference exists between the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders?

H1₀. There is no statistically significant difference between the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

H1_a. A statistically significant difference exists between the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

2. What statistically significant difference exists between the grade point average of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leader, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders?

H2₀. There is no statistically significant difference between the grade point average of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leader, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

H2_a. A statistically significant difference exists between the grade point average of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leader, a

community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

3. How do college students in a community-based college access program perceive their overall programmatic experience?

4. What traits do at-risk students who participate in a community-based college access program gain, which are essential to college success, as reported by staff members who work in the organization?

Definitions of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were defined:

Academic advising. A series of intentional interactions with students to help them synthesize and contextualize their educational experiences within the framework of their aspirations and abilities (National Academic Advising Association, 2016).

Academic success. Indicators of academic achievement are grades, which are most commonly assessed A-F on a 1-100 percentage scale, and grade point averages (GPA) from 0-4.0 scale (Nayak, 2016).

College access programs. A range of governmental and privately-funded programs that prepare low-income students, first-generation students, and minority students for college (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014).

Continuing-generation students. Students who have at least one parent with a four-year degree (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014).

Cultural capital. The value students gain from their parents who support and assist them as they navigate the college experience and seek a higher social status and greater social mobility (Cincinnati, De Wever, Van Keer, & Valcke, 2016).

First-generation students. College students who do not have parents with four-year degrees (Stephens et al., 2014).

Large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution. The large, four-year, public Midwestern institution in this study is a state-funded, comprehensive metropolitan institution offering undergraduate and graduate programs, including the professional doctorate (Course catalog).

Low-income individual. An individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Low-income eligibility for Tomorrow's Leaders is based on family income not to exceed \$10,000 per family member in the household (Course Catalog).

Matriculating. The formal process of entering a university (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Mentorship. A relationship between a younger individual and a more experienced, older individual who helps the younger individual learn to navigate the world (Chang, Longman, & Franco, 2014).

Persistence. The process of participation and attainment of educational goals or degrees (Ross et al., 2012).

Race and ethnicity. Self-identification data items in which students choose the race or races with which they most closely identify (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a).

Retention. The rate in which students progress and continue in higher education at a singular institution, most commonly measured between academic semesters (Tinto, 2012).

Self-efficacy. One's sense of competence and confidence in executing an action that would achieve a desirable outcome (Katz, Eilat, & Nevo, 2014).

Theory of marginality. The feeling of disconnection from others when an individual feels socially isolated and not part of the community (Huerta & Fishman, 2014).

Theory of mattering. The feeling one matters to another individual or community; that others care about him/her and appreciate him/her (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

Traditional college student. Traditional college students are most likely Caucasian, from a middle to upper class socio-economic household, entering college directly from high school, attending college full-time without working, and living on campus (Patton et al., 2016).

Tutoring. Collaborative learning aimed at supplementing classroom instruction through active helping and supporting among peers in small groups or one on one (De Backer, Van Keer, & Valcke, 2012).

Urban. A classification of an area with 50,000 or more people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b).

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified for this study:

Sample demographics. Only students participating in community-based college access programs at a large, public, four-year, Midwestern institution were examined as part of this study. Community-based college access programs are only one resource available to students to help them succeed in higher education. Students who participate

in the Tomorrow's Leaders program could utilize other services provided by the university and other agencies.

Researcher bias. The primary researcher in this study coordinates the community-based college access programs at the large, public, four-year, Midwestern institution analyzed in this study. The relationship between the researcher and the student participants in the study would not allow for a completely bias-free study (Fraenkel et al., 2014). Intentional steps were taken to limit the effects of the relationship between researcher and participants. Oversight of the research was in place to avoid any possible bias (Fraenkel et al., 2014).

Instrument. The qualitative study included individual interviews and focus group interviews using open-ended questions, which were created by the researcher.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The quantitative data received were accurate and correct.
2. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.

Summary

As detailed in Chapter One, students from historically marginalized groups face multiple challenges in the pursuit of higher education (Ward et al., 2012). The focus of the study was on the experiences of a small group of students who have successfully matriculated into a large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution to gain a better understanding of a college access student experience. Tomorrow's Leaders is a community-based college access program that provides first-generation, low-income, urban students resources and pathways to higher education.

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories of student retention and departure and Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering were the theoretical frameworks of this study. While, many research studies have focused on first-generation, low-income and urban college students, as well as federally funded college access programs, little research has been conducted on community-based college access programs. Furthermore, there is a gap in the research of at-risk urban students' overall experience in college matriculation and persistence.

Chapter Two is a review of literature and summary of related research. A more in-depth analysis of the theoretical framework is discussed. The research which is focused on first-generation students, low-income students, and college access programs are reviewed. Areas of examination are cultural capital, access to education, persistence and retention issues, the cost of education, and the designing of college access programs.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The matriculation and retention rates for students from disadvantaged backgrounds are well below the rates of traditional students (Cutuli et al., 2013). The need to close the gap in college access and completion has become the charge of several public and private organizations (Casazza & Silverman, 2013). College access programs are designed to help underrepresented students bridge the gap of access and completion (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the outcomes of students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, at a large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution to students meeting the same criteria attending the same institution who do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

Tomorrow's Leaders serves first-generation, low-income, urban students. Relevant literature related to college access programs, student matriculation and retention, and above mentioned students is examined. The topics addressed were the foundation for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theories of student retention and student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993) and the theory of marginality and mattering (Schlossberg, 1989) were used to establish the theoretical framework for this study. The theories by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) and Schlossberg (1989) were carefully chosen to help illustrate why students stay or leave college and how important a student's social and emotional wellbeing play a factor in his or her collegiate experience. Each theory is expanded upon in the following paragraphs.

Tinto's theory of student retention and departure. Tinto's (1975) theories of student retention and departure started its development in 1975 with an article in *Review of Education* entitled, "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research." In 1983, Tinto published the first edition of *Leaving College* in which he expanded the theories of retention and departure. The theory was modified with the publication of the second edition of *Leaving College* in 1993 (Tinto, 2012).

As mentioned prior, Tinto's theories have their foundation in Arnold van Gennepe's (1960) social anthropology studies of rites of passage and Emile Durkheim's (2013) theory of suicide (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) grounded his theories with the foundation of van Gennepe's (1960) theory which centered around the process of establishing membership in society and the series of passages from one membership group to the next. Tinto (1993) viewed the transition of students into college as one of these "passages." Passages are defined by stages of separation, transition, and incorporation (Tinto, 1993). Van Gennepe (1960) believed rites of passage could be a variety of situations, as long as it pertained to the movement of a person or group.

In the first stage of van Gennepe's (1960) rites of passage, separation, the person must withdraw from his or her current place or status and prepare to move on to the next stage. This separation stage is often signified by symbolic action and rituals (van Gennepe, 1960). The second stage, transition, is defined by having removed oneself from a former group, but have not yet entered the next group (van Gennepe, 1960). Incorporation is complete when the person has completed the rite of passage and has assumed a new identity and status in society (van Gennepe, 1960). Tinto (1993) drew many comparisons between van Gennepe's (1960) theory of rites of passage and the

retention of college students. If students could not successfully transition from one stage to the next, such as in the case of high school students becoming college students, they could not be successfully retained (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) used Durkheim's (2013) suicide theory as a guide for the theory of student departure because both behaviors symbolize voluntary withdrawal from a community. Suicide is the willful withdraw from existence, while leaving higher education is the willful withdrawal from school (Tinto, 1993). Each behavior represents a rejection of conventional norms regarding the value of persisting in a community (Tinto, 1993). Durkheim (2013) used the principles of sociology to explain why rates of suicide differed between cultures and how understanding social environment contributes to those rates. Tinto (1993) believed the understanding of the social environment of an institution of higher education can help explain the reason why students choose to willfully depart that institution.

With the foundation of van Gennep (1960) and Durkheim's (2013) work, Tinto (1975) based his theory on the central notion of integration. The strongest prediction of whether a student persists or drops out of school is directly related to his or her level of integration both academically and socially (Tinto 1975). Tinto (2012) designed a framework for institutional action to help students be successful in integrating and persisting in college. The framework is centered on four conditions that promote retention at institutions: expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement (Tinto, 2012).

Expectations have a powerful effect on student performance, and what students expect of themselves can determine their success (Tinto, 2012). Self-expectations are

shaped by institutional actions and expectations of the student (Tinto, 2012). Tinto (2012) stated, “Student success is directly influenced not only by the clarity and consistency of expectations but also by their level” (p. 7). Institutions need to have high expectations for their students that are attainable through hard work (Tinto, 2012). Low expectations are an indication of failure (Tinto, 2012).

Support for students comes in the form of academic, social, and financial (Tinto, 2012). Academic support, especially during the first year of college, is the most important piece of student retention (Tinto, 2012). Success academically increases the likelihood of persistence (Tinto, 2012). Social adjustment does not come easy for all students, and for many, can be the determining factor in staying in school (Tinto, 2012). Financial support is most apparent in retention efforts when students are experiencing financial difficulties (Tinto, 2012). According to Tinto (2012), “without academic, social, and in some cases, financial support, many students, especially those who enter college academically underprepared, struggle to succeed” (p. 7).

Students are more successful when they receive proper assessment and feedback (Tinto, 2012). Institutions that provide assessment and feedback in ways that enable their students to adjust their behavior accordingly, promote student success (Tinto, 2012). First year students need timely feedback as they adjust to new academic and social demands of college (Tinto, 2012).

The most important condition for student success is involvement or engagement (Tinto, 2012). The more academically and socially engaged a student is, the more likely they will be engaged with the institution (Tinto, 2012). Consequently, the more integrated a student is while attending an institution, the more likely he or she will be successful and

remain at that institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Involvement serves as the foundation upon which academic and social membership are built (Tinto, 1993). The more a student feels he or she does not belong or fit in at an institution the less likely he or she is to be engaged or involved; this is exceptionally true for low-income, first-generation students (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Duron, 2013). Schlossberg (1989) explained this feeling of belonging in the theory of marginality and mattering.

Schlossberg's theory of marginality and mattering. Marginality and mattering are polar themes that connect all people across all demographics (Schlossberg, 1989). Everyone asks themselves if they belong, are a part of something, do they make a difference, or are they marginalized or do they matter (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg (1989) addressed this construct of marginality and mattering in the life of college students in her theory.

Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering has its foundations in how people transition in life and the affect those transitions have on them. An event, anticipated or unanticipated, or a nonevent that alters a relationship, routine, or role is considered a transition (Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg, 2012). Schlossberg created the 4S system to identify how to help predict how someone will cope with a transition in his or her life (Anderson et al., 2012).

Schlossberg's 4S system stands for situation, self, supports, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). Situation denotes the characteristics of an event or nonevent such as the timing, duration, what triggered the situation, concurrent stress, and the amount of control one has over the event/nonevent (Anderson et al., 2012). The individual's personal characteristics, demographics, and psychological resources compile

the category of self (Anderson et al., 2012). The support category signifies one's social support network such as intimate partners, family, friends, and coworkers (Anderson et al., 2012). Strategies symbolize the resources and actions someone uses as coping responses in a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The concepts of marginality and mattering are crucial components of Schlossberg's 4S system (Huerta & Fishman, 2014). People in transition often feel marginal and question if they matter (Schlossberg, 1989). With every transitional experience, the potential for feeling marginalized arises (Schlossberg, 1989).

Marginality occurs when a student feels isolated and not a part of a community (Huerta & Fishman, 2014). Mattering relates to a student's perception of feeling valued in a community, with attention, care, and appreciation directed toward the student (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Communities can be formal and informal centered around personal and professional interests (Huerta & Fishman, 2014).

Institutions which focus on making students feel like they matter and encourage students' involvement in communities are more successful in developing an atmosphere of learning which leads to higher retention rates (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Student involvement creates a connection between the student and his or her higher educational community, such as faculty and other students (Schlossberg, 1989). When higher education institutions design activities to reach all types of students, it helps all students feel connected and involved (Schlossberg, 1989).

It is not simply enough to describe situations in which students feel as if they are marginalized or matter (Schlossberg, 1989). It is important to help students deal with issues which make them feel marginalized, so they can ultimately feel they matter

(Schlossberg, 1989). Looking at the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students on a college campus is the first step in understanding what areas can cause marginalization (Schlossberg, 1989). Higher education institutions need to create environments which communicate all students matter and vigilantly identify potential causes for marginality (Schlossberg, 1989).

Schlossberg (1989) stated in her theory the degree in which a student feels marginalized has a direct relationship with student retention rates and persistence to degree completion. Tinto (1993) concurred on the idea that students' level of belonging contributes directly to their decision to drop out or continue in school. At some point, upon entering and persisting through college, all students will feel some sense of marginalization (Schlossberg, 1989). Increasing a student's sense of self-worth or matter is the counterbalance to his or her marginalized feeling (Schlossberg, 1989). Tinto (2012) put forth the notion of improving a student's thoughts of self-efficacy and sense of belonging to increase the likelihood the student will persist to graduation.

A perceived sense of belonging will increase a student's feeling of self-worth and increase personal motivation to succeed (Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 2012). Self-efficacy refers to a student's sense of competence and confidence to achieve desired results in school (Katz et al., 2014). Bandura (1997) described self-efficacy as what one believes one can do under a variety of difference circumstances. A person's beliefs vary in different circumstances, depending on the level of challenge of the activity (Bandura, 1997). Students entering college will have different levels of self-efficacy when facing the new transition (Bandura, 1997; Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 2012).

Bandura (1997) described four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological states. Mastery experiences refer to one's interpretation of one's own performance (Bandura, 1997). Vicarious experiences pertain to the observation of others' actions (Bandura, 1997). Social persuasions denote the messages received from other people, such as parents, friends, and teachers (Bandura, 1997). Emotional and physical feelings, like anxiety and stress, are represented by physiological states (Bandura, 1997). Measuring these four areas helps determine a person's level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy levels can determine how a student perceives a personal sense of belonging and mattering (Bandura, 1997; Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 2012). A sense of mattering can make a substantial difference in a student's ability to succeed in school (Schlossberg, 1989). Likewise, a feeling of marginality and lack of mattering can result in students having lower self-efficacy (Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1993).

First-Generation Students

One would never know who a first-generation student is unless the student self-discloses information on a form or to a staff member (Ward et al., 2012). If first-generation students do not feel compelled to do so, they will remain anonymous on campus (Ward et al., 2012). First-generation students are a minority population, an invisible minority, with unique characteristics and needs (Ward et al., 2012). Being identified as a first-generation student is dependent on the definition of the term (Ward et al., 2012). There are two distinct points when considering the definition of first-generation, and variations exist between those two ends (Ward et al., 2012). The broader definition of a first-generation student is someone whose parents have not obtained a

baccalaureate degree in the United States by the time the student has entered college (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). The key to the broader definition of first-generation students is parents may have attended an institution of higher education without obtaining a bachelor's degree, so therefore, the parents obtained some understanding of college (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012).

The narrower definition of a first-generation student is an individual with parents whose highest educational attainment was either a high school diploma or less (Ishitani, 2006). Defining first-generation status as neither parents obtained a baccalaureate degree would elevate the percentage of first-generations students in colleges, while viewing first-generation students as neither parents have ever attended a postsecondary institution would lower the percentage (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). For the purpose of this study, a first-generation students' status is defined as college students who do not have parents with a four-year degree (Stephens et al., 2014).

The distinction represented by varieties of the definition of first-generation students is important (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Students whose parents attended a higher education institution and may have earned an associate's degree, possess higher cultural capital and are generally more prepared for the college experience than first-generation students whose parents have no postsecondary experience (Ward et al., 2012). Because the level of preparedness for college is a critical factor in student success, any amount of college education received by a parent is an important factor in how a first-generation student will experience college (Choy, 2001). Ward et al. (2012) stated the two definitions affect how an institution will view a first-generation student, but "ultimately the focus of their efforts is the same: to identify the first-generation students

entering the institution, to recognize their unique needs and expectations, and to support their experiences so they will have the greatest likelihood of success” (p. 6).

When first-generation students go to college, it is an entirely new experience met with great uncertainty (Ward et al., 2012). Many first-generation students arrive at college socially and academically underprepared (ACT 2015a; Bernstein, Edmunds, & Fesler, 2014; Coleman Tucker, 2014; Engle, 2007; Pickard & Logan, 2013). First-generation students have vastly different experiences in college than those students whose parents were college educated (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

Cultural capital. The knowledge about college life that non-first-generation students receive from their families is a key factor in their ability to be successful in school (Ward et al., 2012). The concept of this knowledge of experiences tends to be referred to as cultural capital (Ward et al., 2012). In the setting of higher education, cultural capital is the value students gain from their parents that support and assist them as they navigate the college experience and seek a higher social status and greater social mobility; it is a culmination of cultural experiences viewed as educational and social assets (Cincinnati et al., 2016; Jenkins et al., 2013).

Subsequently, the lack of knowledge of the college experience possessed by first-generation students and their families leads to greater struggles in higher education for first-generation students than their non-first-generation peers (Choy, 2001). Cultural capital is the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills which are passed on from one generation to another (Choy, 2001). Cultural capital includes the knowledge students have about getting into college and persisting in school (Ward et al.,

2012). A lack of cultural capital leaves first-generation students without a precise perception on how to be successful in higher education (Ward et al., 2012).

Cultural capital is not gained in a short period of time; it is gained over time from exposure to expectations for and experiences of college life (Choy, 2001). The knowledge students and their families have about the matriculation processes for higher educational institutions, as well as persisting in school once enrolled, is cultural capital (Choy, 2001). Ward et al. (2012) asserted, “Cultural capital is, therefore, the key factor in shaping the experience of first-generation students” (p. 8). Engle et al. (2009) concluded the lack of college-related cultural capital is a major barrier to the success of first-generation students because it provides a critical, intuitive orientation to college life.

Engle et al.’s (2009) study showed a lack of cultural capital leaves first-generation students without an accurate sense of what they must do to be successful in the college admissions process, including how to prepare for, apply to, and pay for college. First-generation students struggle with understanding the college process due to their lack of cultural capital (Mahan, Wilson, Petrosko, & Luthy, 2014). First-generation students understanding of college is very limited due to their shortage of experiences with higher education and absence of critical information concerning college (Mahan et al., 2014). First-generation students lack cultural capital because their parents do not have the information, familiarity, the language, the understanding, experiences, and emotional strength needed for the students to effectively take on the challenges that are readily found in the college environment (Ward et al., 2012).

There is no singular best way to directly measure the intellectual assets a student possesses regarding higher education matriculation, but there is a substantial amount of

research pertaining to the disparity of knowledge of college life has on persistence and the gap which exists between first-generation and non-first-generation students (Choy, 2001). First-generation students often receive lower levels of involvement, support, and encouragement from their parents in the college decision-making process and transition into college life, as compared to their traditional peers (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). First-generation students usually know their families care about success, but due to the lack of parental engagement in combination with little relevant cultural capital to draw from, first-generation students face large obstacles to their success (Ward et al., 2012).

Because first-generation students do not have this fundamental knowledge of college life, they do not compare favorably to their non-first-generation peers in the areas of academic success (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Higher education institutions must create ways to provide first-generation students opportunities to build their college-related cultural capital, which is needed for scholastic success (Ward et al., 2012). Understanding the level of cultural capital possessed and the impact it has on the first-generation students, institutions can design targeted interventions that will connect students who need help with resources and programming to increase the overall cultural capital and lead to greater academic success for the students (Ward et al., 2012).

Access. The United States has one of the highest college participation rates in the world, but a large gap still exists in access to higher education for first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students are more likely to be from low-income families (Engle, 2007) and are disproportionately from ethnic and racial minority groups (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). A good portion of first-

generation students are not only the first in their family to go school but also first in their family to be born in the United States (Coleman Tucker, 2014). First-generation students, on average, have lower levels of academic preparation for college (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). The encouragement to attend college from family members is lacking for first-generation students (Bettinger et al., 2013).

A significant problem in society is the fact first-generation students are less likely to attend college in the first place (Choy, 2001). Twenty-seven percent of high school graduates are from families in which neither parent had attended a post-secondary institution (Choy, 2001). Choy (2001) stated the likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education is strongly related to parents' education, even when other factors are taken into account. Among high school students whose parents had not gone to college, only 59% had enrolled in some form of higher education (Choy, 2001). The enrollment rate for students of parents who had some college experience was 75% and 93% for students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree (Choy, 2001). First-generation students receive less help from their parents in applying to college (Choy, 2001). Unfortunately, first-generation students are more likely to be dissuaded from attending college by their parents (Ward et al., 2012). The level of a parent's education is the most significant predictor of achievement (ACT, 2015a).

First-generation students also tend to have lower educational aspirations compared to non-first-generation college-bound students (Engle, 2007). Across all demographics, first-generation students start college at risk academically (ACT, 2015a). When compared to their non-first-generation peers, first-generation students tend to have lower reading, math, and critical thinking skills, had a less rigorous high school

curriculum, and typically achieved a lower grade point average in high school (ACT, 2015a). Lower levels of academic preparedness often are correlated with lower socioeconomic status and lower-resourced high schools (ACT, 2015a). Students at lower-resourced schools, where a majority of first-generation students attend, have fewer opportunities to engage in college readiness activities (ACT, 2015a). Access to college-level academic curriculum in high school and less exposure to high-impact learning practices are major barriers to first-generation students' matriculation (ACT, 2015a).

Students who are both first-generation and low-income face particular barriers that impede their academic performance (Cabrera et al., 2013; Engle et al., 2009). In one study, nearly half of all first-generation students were marginally or not qualified for admission to a four-year college (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Of the academically qualified first-generation students, 22% of them did not enroll in any type of higher education institution within two years after high school graduation compared to less than 5% of continuing-generation students (Engle, 2007). Engle (2007) theorized because of lack of academic achievement among this population of students, these students received less encouragement to attend college, which leads to only half of first-generation students expected to earn a bachelor's degree. Many first-generation students have no aspirations to attend college and have limited educational and career goals (Engle et al., 2009).

According to Engle et al. (2009), the attitude of many first-generation students is they are not college material, regardless of their academic abilities, and therefore, do not aspire to go to college. First-generation students may be psychologically less prepared for the process of college (Petty, 2014). For many first-generation students, because they do not know anyone who has attended and completed college, they consider it impossible

for them to do so (Engle et al., 2009). College attendance is not a part of the conversation in the homes of first-generation students (Coleman Tucker, 2014). A sense of obligation to serve as role model to others, particularly siblings, becomes an important motivating factor for college enrollment (Huerta & Fishman, 2014).

High school counselors become the primary resource for first-generation students to obtain information about college (Lightweis, 2014; Savitz-Romer, 2012). College admission counselors are also cited as an important resource for obtaining vital information and providing support through the admission process for first-generation students (Johnson & Castrellon, 2014; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016; Sasso & Maldonado, 2015). Admission counselors become the gatekeepers of college access for first-generation students (Delbanco, 2012). Though access to higher education has increased, there still remains a gap for first-generation, low-income students; approximately only 24% of the total enrollment in higher education is made up of first-generation, low-income students; a percentage that has not changed over the past decade (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016).

Persistence and retention. For first-generation students, the transition into college is crucial, and it also represents a period of uncertainty and fear (Ward et al., 2012). Ward et al. (2012) stated, “How these students come to anticipate their college experience, and how they feel about their institution and themselves during the first few weeks of that experience, will often dictate the likelihood they will persist beyond the first year” (p. 46). Staying in college is a more difficult task for a first-generation student than getting into college (Engle et al., 2009). Engle et al. (2009) found self-efficacy, the level of confidence and esteem in regard to the ability to perform academically and

socially, is an important component for the success of first-generation students. First-generation students approach college with lower levels of self-efficacy than non-first-generation students, because of their lack of academic preparedness and inadequate college-related cultural capital (Engle et al., 2009).

First-generation students benefit more from engagement with peers and involvement in activities than their non-first-generation peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Unfortunately, first-generation students are more likely to not participate or delay involvement in co-curricular activities until after the key transitional period into college has passed (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011). First-generation students are less likely to live on campus, and by doing so, this has a direct and negative impact on learning and transitioning into the college environment (Pike & Kuh, 2005). The most important transitional period in a first-generation student's life is the first year of college (Pike & Kuh, 2005). The first year is the cornerstone of the college experience, the foundation on which a student's academic experience rests; it sets the stage for academic success or failure (Tinto, 1993).

Choy (2001) found first-generation students are more than twice as likely to leave school before their second year than students whose parents had a bachelor's degree; 23% vs. 10%, respectively. Even when taking into account other factors associated with not returning to school such as delaying enrollment after high school, hours worked outside of school, financial aid amount, and demographic characteristics, first-generation status was still a significant indicator of a student leaving school (Choy, 2001).

Choy (2001) concluded first-generation students with a bachelor's degree goal, three years after enrolling in higher education, were enrolled at the rate of 52%, compared to 67% of students whose parents had a bachelor's degree. Also, only 44% of first-generation students enrolled in higher education full-time compared to 62% of non-first-generation students (Choy, 2001). First-generation, low-income students are four times more likely to leave school after the first year than a traditional student (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Six years after enrollment in higher education, 55% of continuing-generation students had completed a bachelor's degree compared to only 11% of first-generation, low-income students (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Pike and Kuh (2005) noted first-generation students do not take advantage of opportunities to engage to the same degree as non-first-generation students, therefore, their academic and social engagement levels are lower and integration into school life can be difficult. First-generation students tend to engage less in the co-curricular aspects of college life than their non-first-generation counterparts for a variety of reasons, including not understanding the value co-curricular involvement has on the undergraduate experience and likelihood of academic success (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). The transition to higher education is a difficult process; it is especially true for first-generation students (Coleman Tucker, 2014).

Low-Income Students

According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.) poverty is “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions.” What is considered poverty is relative to the situation (Payne, 2013). Being poverty stricken in the United States is different from what is considered impoverished in a different country

(Payne, 2013). Poverty occurs in all races and in all areas of the United States (Payne, 2013). The nature of poverty can be separated into two categories; generational poverty and situational poverty, and both are caused by different circumstances from each other (Payne, 2013).

When poverty has existed in a family for two or more generations, it is defined as generational poverty (Payne, 2013). Situational poverty is when circumstances, out of one's control, such death, illness, or divorce, causes poverty in a family (Payne, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016a), a student is considered to live in poverty or be from a low-income household if the family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level. The 2016 poverty guidelines for the continental United States for a household size of three people was an income below \$20,160 annually (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016).

The rate of poverty in the United States is two to three times higher than most other major industrialized nations (Payne, 2013). The bottom quartile for family income in the United States is less than \$34,160 annually (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). In 2014, 53% of K-12 public school students were approved for free or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program (Cahalan, Perna, Yamashita, Ruiz, & Franklin, 2016). Near 58% of single female heads of household with a child under the age of five live in poverty, making them the most at-risk demographic (Payne, 2013).

Being a person or family who lives in poverty is not due to low intellect or lack of ability to work (Payne, 2013). According to Berg (2016), there is a long history in the United States of perceiving people who live in poverty through the lens of eugenics, which perpetuates the myth of low intelligence and lack of ability. Payne (2013) stated

there are many different causes of poverty, and they can be clustered into four main categories. The first category is related to behaviors of the individual and the choices an individual makes that leads to poverty, such as drug and alcohol use (Payne, 2013). The second category is the absence of human and social capital, which can occur when an individual lacks community resources, infrastructure, and support to thrive economically (Payne, 2013). Exploitation of an individual's race or gender is the third category, and it is demonstrated widely in the labor practices of low wages and/or limiting hours work per week to avoid paying benefits (Payne, 2013). The last category, political/economic structures and systems, can not only cause poverty but perpetuate it (Payne, 2013).

There are a few traditional reasons an individual will be able to leave poverty (Payne, 2013). For example, an individual may set a goal for something he or she wants to have or the type of person he or she desires to be (Payne, 2013). Sometimes an individual's situation becomes too painful or unlivable and requires action to be removed from poverty (Payne, 2013). A role model such as an educator or family member, who is not in poverty, often provide the means to lead a person out of poverty (Payne 2013). Another pathway out of poverty is when an individual has a talent that provides an economical opportunity (Payne, 2013).

Access to education. Education is considered the main tool for an individual from a low-socioeconomic situation to advance out of poverty (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Engle, 2007). Payne (2013) also believed education is the key to staying out of poverty. According to Wilson, Iyengar, Pang, Warner, and Luces (2012), the foundation of economic development and prosperity is education. Higher education is regarded as the vehicle that provides equal opportunities to all deserving students, regardless of their

background (Stephens et al., 2012). Individuals with a higher education degree can earn higher wages and have lower unemployment rates (Engle, 2007). Although a bachelor's degree is viewed as a critical component to moving out of poverty, students from low-income families are less likely to attend, persist through, and graduate from college regardless of academic abilities (Soria, 2012; Soria, Weiner, & Lu, 2014). Education institutions operate from middle-class norms, which are difficult for low-income students to understand and follow (Payne, 2013).

There is perpetuated inequality in the educational system in academic preparation of low-income students (Berg, 2016). Bellibaş' (2016) research shows a significant relationship between student achievement and income level. Students from the lowest socioeconomic households scored lower in reading, math, and science than students from the median socioeconomic household (Bellibaş, 2016). Furthermore, the same situation was true when comparing students from median households and students from the highest socioeconomic households (Bellibaş, 2016). The reduction of poverty and the improvement of the educational system are amalgamated (Bellibaş, 2016).

Advancements have been made in education to narrow the achievement gap for students of historically disadvantaged races, but no advancement has been made for students from low-income families (Cahalan, 2013). As a group, students from low socioeconomic families underperform in school (Cutuli et al., 2013). Students from families of the lower 20% income level are five times more likely to drop-out of high school than students from families of the top 20% of income levels (Cahalan, 2013). Students entering ninth grade who are underprepared for high school level academics are highly likely to qualify for free or reduced price meals (Bernstein et al., 2014). High

school seniors from schools, where more than 75% of the student body qualified for free or reduced price meals, graduated at a rate of 68%, compared to 91% of seniors from schools where less than a quarter of students qualified for free or reduced price meals (Cahalan, 2013).

Higher education is considered to be the “great equalizer” for upward mobility of the socioeconomic ladder (Dalton & Crosby, 2015, p. 3). College enrollment of low-income students is small, and many low-income students believe college is out of reach for them (Dalton & Crosby, 2015). Low-income students face difficulty in trying to obtain a higher education degree (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). The ACT (2015b) reported 96% of low-income students aspired to earn a postsecondary degree, yet half of the students did not meet any of the college readiness benchmarks. The lack of college readiness in the academic foundational areas leaves most low-income students with limited higher educational opportunities (ACT, 2015b).

According to Berg (2016), low-income students often lack the math and language skills needed to be successful in college. Berg (2016) also believed the environment in which the students are raised directly impacts their academic achievement, and there are distinct differences between how low-income children are raised compared to middle-income children. Middle-income parents tend to cultivate their child’s growth (Berg, 2016). Conversely, low-income parents use a natural growth approach (Berg, 2016). A natural growth parenting style denotes low levels of cultivating desirable attributes in a child, and cultivating parenting style implies high levels cultivating attributes (Henderson, 2013).

Low-income students spend more time unsupervised and are less actively engaged by adults than middle-income students (Berg, 2016). Middle-income parents applying a cultivating parenting style will use reasoning language and negotiate with their child (Henderson, 2013). The time middle- and higher-income student spend with adults leads to a greater vocabulary, a deeper thought pattern, and the understanding of rules of interaction, this knowledge gained leads to higher achievement (Berg, 2016).

Low-income students face challenges in higher education due in part to meager high school preparation (Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). The ACT (2015b) reported the academic achievement gap between students from low-income and high-income families emerge before high school. Schools which primarily serve low-income students face intractable challenges (ACT, 2015b). Because of a lack of resources to live in areas with better school systems, low-income students attend resource-challenged schools where the population of students whose families are financially deprived is highly concentrated (ACT, 2015a). Limited resources result in constrained academic options (Cabrera et al., 2013). Lack of resources in the school leads to less exposure to high-impact education practices that improve college readiness (ACT, 2015a). Students who take core course, which are classes recommended by colleges for admission, are more academically prepared for college, but few low-income students complete all core courses (ACT, 2015b).

Cost of education. Several higher education institutions in the United States have made it a priority to increase socioeconomic diversity in their student body through targeted recruitment efforts (Stephens et al., 2012). However, low-income students have obstacles in securing funding to complete a college degree (De La Rosa, 2012; Soria et

al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2012). The average unmet need, the financial need after all discounts, grants, and loans are used at four-year public universities for a low-income student, was \$6,000 (De La Rosa, 2012). Low-income students do not expect financial support from their families for the cost of college and seek resources in other areas (De La Rosa, 2012; Martinez, Bilges, Shabass, Miller, & Morote, 2012). The average tuition cost for a low-income student after grants is equal to 42-61% of the family's yearly income, compared to about 11% for a middle-income student (Soria et al., 2014).

According to Soria et al.'s (2014) research, low-income students are more likely to make decisions which negatively impact their academics due to financial concerns. Low-income students borrow more money, work more hours, and accrue more debt (De La Rosa, 2012; Soria et al., 2014). Low-income students also spend more time working and less time on academics compared to the average student (Petty, 2014). Increased work hours of off-campus employment creates a vastly different college experience for a low-income student and does not allow the student to easily connect to the campus community (Soria et al., 2014). Connection to a campus community is vital to retention and persistence (Tinto, 2012).

A majority of students are unaware of the types of financial aid available (Engle et al., 2009). The Federal government created Title IV aid to promote access to education (Guida & Figuli, 2012). Title IV aid comes in the form of grants and loans (Guida & Figuli, 2012). The Pell Grant is the largest need-based grant program in Title IV (Guida & Figuli, 2012). Pell Grants are targeted to low-income students (Guida & Figuli, 2012). In the 2013-14 school year, 61% of Pell Grant awards went to students with family incomes below \$30,000 and 87% of students from families with less than \$50,000 annual

income (Cahalan et al., 2016). The maximum Pell Grant award in 2013-14 was \$5,645.20 (Cahalan et al., 2016).

In 2013, 45% of first-time, full-time undergraduate students received a Federal grant (Cahalan et al., 2016). Family income level is the most accurate predictor of what type of higher education institution a student will attend (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). Only 15% of students at the most competitive admissions institutions received a Federal grant, compared to 51% of less competitive, 55% of non-competitive, 61% of 2-year institutions, and 74% of private for-profit institutions students (Cahalan et al., 2016).

Pell Grant recipients are more likely to attend a two-year institution or for-profit school than a student who is not awarded a Pell Grant (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). Thus, the percentage of low-income students attending four-year colleges is declining (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). The shrinking population of low-income, Pell-eligible students choosing to enroll at four-year schools has created a large equity gap (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). Such an equity gap is contributing to an increased disparity between the number of high- and low-income individuals who attain a bachelor's degree (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). Only households with bachelor's degrees or higher have seen their income grow over the past twenty years (Fry, 2013).

The rising cost of education can limit a student's choice of what type of institution to attend (Cahalan et al., 2016). In 1974, the average annual college cost was \$8,858, and in 2012, the average increased to \$20,234; a 128% increase (Cahalan et al., 2016). College tuition and fees have increased over the past 30 years four times faster than the median family income (Reimherr, Harmon, Strawn, & Choitz, 2013). As the cost of college continues to increase, the percentage of costs covered by Pell Grants has

decreased (Cahalan et al., 2016). In 1975-76, the full award of a Pell Grant covered 67% of college cost (Cahalan et al., 2016). In 2012-13, the maximum award level of a Pell Grant only covered 27% of college cost (Cahalan et al., 2016). In that 37-year time period, 40% of college cost was shifted onto the student (Cahalan et al., 2016). The increased percentage of college cost being placed on low-income students severely limits the student's educational opportunities (Cahalan et al., 2016).

College Access Programs

The ACT (2015a) reported the solution to solve the equity gap in college admissions for low-income and first-generation students was to increase the investment in college access programs. College access programs refer to a range of governmental and privately funded programs that prepare low-income students, first-generation students, and minority students for college (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014). College access programs begin working with students in middle school or in high school, depending on the individual program (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014).

There are two main organizations which support college access programs, the Council for Opportunity in Education and the National College Access Network (Smith et al., 2012). The Council for Opportunity in Education is a nonprofit organization with more than 1,000 college and agency members dedicated to expanding college opportunities for low-income, first-generation, and disabled students (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014). The National College Access Network is an organization of educational partners in a variety of nonprofit organizations and government programs, including community-based access programs, federally funded TRIO/GEAR UP programs, public and private

K-12 schools, higher education institutions, foundations, and corporations (Smith et al., 2012). The following is a review of these programs.

TRIO. College access programs started with the federally supported TRIO programs (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014). It is important to note TRIO is not an acronym, but the name originates with the federal program starting with three programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). The Department of Education TRIO programs are outreach and student services programs designed to identify, provide services, and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities so they can progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). TRIO consists of eight different programs that focus on different populations: Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, Veterans Upward Bound, Training Programs, McNair Scholars, and Upward Bound Math-Science (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

The most common TRIO grants are Upward Bound, Student Support Services, and McNair Scholars (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014). TRIO Upward Bound is a program designed to increase the rate of low-income, first-generation, and disabled high school students who attend college (U.S. Department of Education, 2016c). TRIO Student Support Services is a retention and persistence program for undergraduate students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016d). TRIO McNair Scholars program is charged with increasing the number low-income, first-generation, and other historically disadvantaged students in graduate programs, particularly PhD programs (U.S. Department of

Education, 2016e). The goal of TRIO is to assist qualified students in attending and graduating from college (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

GEAR UP. The Federal government supports a supplementary college access program hosted by individual states called Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014). The GEAR UP grants are a partnership between states, K-12 school districts, colleges, and community agencies (U.S. Department of Education, 2016f). The grants are designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared for and succeed in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016f). The GEAR UP programs begin in seventh grade and are a cohort style program following students through the completion of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2016f). The GEAR UP grants can also be used to provide scholarships for low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016f). Additionally, several states, including California, New Jersey, and New York, fund their own college access programs (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014).

Bridge programs. Individual institutions of higher education have created college access programs outside of TRIO and the GEAR UP grants (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014). To better serve low-income and first-generation students, higher education institutions are creating college access program on campuses called summer bridge programs (Bettinger et al., 2013; De La Rosa, 2012). Summer bridge programs are designed to help low-income and first-generation students attune to the new environment of college over the summer prior to beginning their freshman year (Cabrera et al., 2013). Summer bridge programs focus on both academic and social preparation for college (Cabrera et al., 2013).

Bettinger et al.'s (2013) research of summer bridge program participants showed students who attend the summer bridge programs are more likely to pass college-level math and writing than non-bridge participants. Participation in a bridge program also has a positive correlation on retention rates of low-income, first-generation students (Cabrera et al., 2013). Additionally, students who participated in a bridge program have an increase in their first semester GPA (Cabrera et al., 2013). Cabrera et al. (2013) concluded, summer bridge programs help to promote a successful transition into college for low-income and first-generation students. Engle et al. (2009) calls for all institutions working with Pell Grant recipients to create a summer bridge program.

Non-profit college access programs. There are several nonprofit organizations, both on a national and local level, which provide college access services (Smith et al., 2012). Examples of national organization are Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and College Summit (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014). Community-based college access programs can come in many different forms (Glaser & Warick, 2016). The common types of community-based, early awareness, college access programs are informational programming, scholarship programs/college savings accounts, and cohort style programs (Glaser & Warick, 2016).

Informational programs are designed to help middle school and early high school students understand the academic choices they make can affect their college choices (Glaser & Warick, 2016). Additionally, informational programming is intended to bring awareness of the cost of college, financial aid availability, and the overall economic gains of college attendance (Glaser & Warick, 2016). First-generation, low-income students lack understanding in regards to financial aid (Baum, Minto, & Blatt, 2015). Awareness

programming needs focus both on the pathway to college and also on how to pay for college (Glaser & Warick, 2016). A lack of understanding of how the system of college works can result in low-income and first-generation students overestimating the cost of college, which can discourage them from attending (Baum et al., 2015). Strayhorn, Barrett, Johnson, Kitchen, and Till-Kelly's (2014) evaluation of an informative college access program indicated increased knowledge of academic course work needed to attend college, decreased anxiety over the cost of college, and how to pay for college.

Scholarship style college access programs can be statewide or community-based programs (Baum et al., 2015). In 2015, around 50 college access scholarship programs were in operation (Miller-Adams, 2015). The four benchmark community scholarship programs: Kalamazoo Promise, Denver Scholarship Foundation, Pittsburgh Promise, and EL Dorado Promise have sent more than 15,000 students to college on full scholarship (Miller-Adams, 2015). College saving account programs have traditionally been only utilized by middle-income families, but are entering the college access landscape as programs encourage low-income families to utilize them (Glaser & Warick, 2016).

Cohort style access programs are modeled from TRIO and the GEAR UP programs (Glaser & Warick, 2016). Cohorts are created either in middle school or early high school, and programming is designed to help students understand the college matriculation process (Glaser & Warick, 2016). Cohort style programs are different than informational programs (Glaser & Warick, 2016). Informational programs are designed to increase knowledge to the largest group of students possible (Glaser & Warick, 2016). Cohort style programs work with designated groups of students throughout their secondary and higher education careers (Glaser & Warick, 2016).

The National College Access Network outlined best practices for college access programs (Smith et al., 2012). College access programs should cover three main areas: academic support, social support, and financial support (Smith et al., 2012). Academic support should include academic advising, study skills, note taking skill training, and campus resources guiding (Smith et al., 2012). Social support focuses on the student's sense of belonging and connectedness (Smith et al., 2012). Ways for the staff of college access programs to support a student socially can be through mentoring programs, strengthening faculty/staff relationships with their students, time management training, and monitoring the overall health and well-being of the student (Smith et al., 2012). Financial support may come in the form of scholarships, financial aid counseling, financial literacy, and money management training (Smith et al., 2012).

Summary

In this chapter, Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories of student retention and departure and Nancy Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering were presented as the theoretical framework for this study. A detailed review of the literature included first-generation students, low-income students, and college access programs. In Chapter Three, an explanation of the mixed-method research design and methodology used in this study is provided.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Students from underprivileged backgrounds are an increasing population in higher education (Petty, 2014). Understanding intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate first-generation, low-income students to continue in school is vitally important to the success of an institution (Petty, 2014). According to Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering, student retention is a result of how well a student feels engaged and connected. Per Schlossberg's (1989) theory, the inverse is true; the less a student feels connected, the more likely he or she is to leave an institution. A large body of research exists that focuses on examining the relationship between a student's connection to a school as is related to retention and persistence (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; O'Keeffe, 2013; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). However, very little research exists where the possible connection between a student's participation in an outside organization and academic achievement is examined. To effectively explore whether community-based college access programs impact the retention rates and academic achievement of first-generation, low-income, urban students, a mixed-methods research study was conducted.

In this chapter, a review of the problem and the purpose of the research are provided. The research questions and hypotheses guiding the study are restated and the research design is examined. The methodology used to collect data for the quantitative and qualitative research is explained. How participants were identified and selected for this study are reviewed. In addition, the instruments used are described. Lastly, the procedures used to analyze and interpret the data are discussed.

Problem and Purpose Overview

Access to higher education is steadily becoming more of a focus for the nation with President Obama's 2020 goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world (Guida & Figuli, 2012). In order to meet this goal, the retention and graduation rates of first-generation and low-income students will need to rise (Guida & Figuli, 2012). The number of studies of on the topic of increasing retention and graduation rates of at-risk college student populations is on the rise (Laitinen, 2012). According to Engle and Tinto (2008), 60% of first-generation students in higher education will leave post-secondary education without obtaining a degree and are more likely to drop out during their first school year than a traditional student (Bettinger et al., 2013). Research is needed to understand the factors that help at-risk students succeed (Ward et al., 2012).

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a community-based college access program on the persistence, retention, and matriculation of its participants at a large, public, four-year, Midwestern institution by collecting quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data analysis focused on student success, as measured by retention rates and grade point average. Using qualitative data, the perceptions of first-generation, low-income, urban students participating in a community-based college access program were viewed through the framework of Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

During the course of this study, the following research questions and hypotheses were addressed:

1. What statistically significant difference exists between the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders?

H1₀. There is no statistically significant difference between the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

H1_a. A statistically significant difference exists between the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

2. What statistically significant difference exists between the grade point average of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leader, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders?

H2₀. There is no statistically significant difference between the grade point average of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leader, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

H2_a. A statistically significant difference exists between the grade point average of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leader, a

community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders.

3. How do college students in a community-based college access program perceive their overall programmatic experience?

4. What traits do at-risk students who participate in a community-based college access program gain, which are essential to college success, as reported by staff members who work in the organization?

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was used as the research design. Mixed-methods research occurs when both quantitative and qualitative methodology of research is conducted in the same study (Creswell, 2014). The advantage of using mixed-method research is “that by using multiple methods, researchers are better able to gather and analyze considerably more and different kinds of data than they would be able to using just one approach” (Fraenkel et al., 2014, p. 11).

The mixed-method design was the most appropriate research method for this topic because it allows for measurement of quantifiable data and observation of non-quantifiable experiences (Creswell, 2015a). Non-quantifiable aspects of the student experiences, such as maturity growth and involvement experiences, could have an impact on quantifiable data, GPA, and retention (Creswell, 2014). If only a quantitative research method was used in this research study, the results of the study would not give a firsthand perspective of the data collected (Creswell, 2014). The use of only a qualitative approach for this research study would not allow for the results collected to show measurable outcomes (Creswell, 2014). To paint a holistic view of the students'

experiences in community-based college access programs, the research needs to show both quantifiable and non-quantifiable data, mixed-method research allows for this (Creswell, 2015a). Since both methods were used in this study, each one is discussed separately.

Quantitative. Quantitative research transpires when the investigator attempts to clarify phenomena through carefully designed and controlled data collection and analysis (Fraenkel et al., 2014). Quantitative research is used to test the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2014). Variables are measured with the use of instruments, which allow the use of statistics to interpret data (Creswell, 2014).

Variables in quantitative research are numerical in nature and can be ordered or ranked (Bluman, 2015). An independent variable is a characteristic that affects an outcome or the dependent variable (Creswell, 2015b). A dependent variable is an attribute influenced by the independent variable (Creswell, 2015b). The dependent variables in this study were the students' grade point averages and the retention rates. The independent variables were the participation in a community-based college access program or lack thereof.

Quantitative research was chosen in part for this study because it allows for the collection of objective data (Fraenkel et al., 2014). The quantitative portion of the study focused on data collection to provide a numeric description of trends of the sample (Creswell, 2014). The goal of the quantitative portion of the study was to establish generalizations of academic achievement of students participating in a community-based college access program without bias from the researcher (Fraenkel et al., 2014).

Qualitative. Qualitative research is an inquiry approach used for exploring and understanding reasons, opinions, and motivations (Creswell, 2015b). To learn about the tendencies participants are asked broad, general questions, and detailed views of participants are collected and analyzed for descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2015b). Observation of participants are the main means for collecting qualitative data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is used “for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Historically, qualitative research is the most common type of research in the education field (Creswell, 2015b).

Qualitative research was chosen in part for this study because it allowed for gauging of the perceptions of students in this study of marginality and mattering during their college experience (Fraenkel et al., 2014). Students involved with community-based college access programs participated in focus groups. Staff members of a community-based college access program were also interviewed. The objective of this qualitative study was to obtain a complex and detailed understanding of the issues surrounding students' experiences while participating in a community-based college access program (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity in this study, all identifiable information, such as the university's name, access program name, student names, and other identifiers were omitted and pseudonyms were used. Because the researcher is associated with the college access programs department, to reduce bias in the study, the qualitative portion of the study involving students was led by a third party. The researcher was only privy to

transcripts of the qualitative study after they had been transcribed with pseudonyms and assured of anonymity. All participants in the study were given a consent form, which explained the purpose of the study, volunteered willingly without coercion, and were able to withdraw at any time (see Appendix A and B). All data will be kept in a locked cabinet under the supervision of the researcher for three years after the study and then will be destroyed.

Population and Sample

A population can be any size, and it can have multiple characteristics that set it apart from other populations (Fraenkel et al., 2014). The population of this study was first-generation, low-income, urban community-based college access program students at a large, four-year, public Midwestern institution served by Tomorrow's Leaders. As of the fall of 2016 semester, 39 Tomorrow's Leaders students have attended the large, four-year, public Midwestern institution since fall 2014. This study involved the entire population of students served by Tomorrow's Leaders and their organizational staff. The population and samples for the quantitative and qualitative portions of this study are discussed in the following section.

Quantitative. Secondary data for college access program students at a large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution was used. Secondary data are data collected by someone other than the primary researcher (Bluman, 2015). The college access student data were compared to the total population of students who met the same criteria who but were not being served by the college access program. All 39 students in Tomorrow's Leaders at the institution over the past three years were examined for the quantitative analysis of grade point averages and retention rates. First-generation and low-income

freshman students at the institution, who attended high schools served by Tomorrow's Leaders but did not participate in the college access program, were used as the comparison sample. The comparison sample consisted of 82 students.

Qualitative. Students who have participated in the community-based college access programs in secondary education that are first-generation, low-income, and from an urban environment were invited to participate in a focus group. The purpose of focus groups is to collect data through interviews with a small group of people (Creswell, 2015b). Focus groups are designed for the collection of a large amount of data and allow for participation from all group members (Creswell, 2015b). All qualifying students were asked to participate in the study. The target number of participants in the qualitative research portion was 10-20 students. Three focus groups were conducted involving 15 Tomorrow's Leader students.

Staff members of Tomorrow's Leaders who have worked directly with students for four or more years were invited to participate in an interview. Four years of experience was desired because the staff member would have seen the growth of students throughout high school and into college. Six staff members at Tomorrow's Leaders meeting the criteria participated in an interview, including the Chief Executive Officer, a Vice President, and multiple student counselors

Instrumentation

For the purpose of this research study, multiple types of instruments were used. Mixed-method research requires separate instruments for the quantitative and qualitative portions (Creswell, 2015a). The quantitative and qualitative instruments are detailed separately in the following section.

Quantitative. For the quantitative portion, data for grade point averages and retention rates for students in the community-based college access program Tomorrow's Leaders and similarly qualified non-participating students were provided by the Office of Institutional Research in a de-identified format. De-identified data are data with personal identifiers, such as names, removed to prevent a person's identity from being connected to the research (Bluman, 2015).

Qualitative. For the qualitative aspect of the study, focus groups and interviews were conducted. The questions on the instruments for the focus groups (see Appendix C) and interviews (see Appendix D) were developed by the researcher and field-tested to ensure validity and reliability (Creswell, 2015b). Questions developed by Wilson (2015) and Hayter (2015) from previous studies of first-generation college students were also used with permission (see Appendix E). The focus group questions were open-ended in format and focused on the students' experiences in college that they perceived as marginalizing and mattering. The interview questions focused on the staff perception of the students' growth and influence of the community-based college access program on that growth.

Validity and reliability. Validity refers to the appropriateness and usefulness of the information the researcher obtains from the instruments used in the study (Fraenkel et al., 2014). Reliability refers to the consistence of administration and scoring of a test (Creswell, 2014). The use of a mixed-methods research approach strengthens the validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2014).

The quantitative data for this study for both the population of students in the community-based college access program Tomorrow's Leaders and the sample group of

non-community-based college access program participants were provided to the researcher from the Office of Institutional Research. The data were extracted by the Office of Institutional Research and provided in an anonymous, de-identifiable format. Having the data provided by the Office of Institutional Research in anonymous, de-identifiable format ensured the validity of the data because access to the student information is available to college access programs office.

To improve the validity and reliability of the qualitative instrument, field-testing was conducted (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), field-testing is “important to establish the content validity of scores on an instrument and to improve questions, format, and scales” (p. 161). The focus groups and interviews were transcribed, and participants reviewed their statements to ensure accuracy (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The questions asked in interviews and focus groups were designed to gauge students' experiences in a college access program as is it relates to their feelings of marginality and mattering. The focus groups were conducted by a secondary person, not the primary researcher, and were video recorded and transcribed by a third party to ensure non-biased results (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The interviews with Tomorrow's Leaders staff were conducted by the primary researcher and were audio recorded and transcribed by a second party to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2015b).

Data Collection

Data collection began once approval for the research was given by the Institutional Review Boards at Lindenwood University (see Appendix F) and the large, public, four-year, Midwestern institution (see Appendix G). Communication with gatekeepers at the large, public, four-year, Midwestern institution transpired prior to

conducting the research (see Appendix H). Tomorrow's Leaders also approved of the research (see Appendix I).

Quantitative. Quantitative data in de-identifiable form were collected to analyze GPA and retention rates of students served by the community-based college access program and those who were not served by the community-based college access program. Data requested were the students' grade point average for the fall semester of 2016 and enrollment status for the spring semester of 2017. The data collected were provided by the Office of Institutional Research.

Qualitative. Tomorrow's Leaders students were asked to participate in focus groups via electronic mail (see Appendix J). The purpose of the electronic mail was to explain the purpose of the study, the intent of the research being conducted, and how to participate in a focus group. All willing Tomorrow's Leaders students who agreed to participate in a focus group were asked to sign an adult consent form (see Appendix A). Each participant was asked to send contact information to schedule a focus group time at an on-campus location. Tomorrow's Leaders staff members were sent an electronic mail to explain the purpose of the study and invite them to participate in an interview (see Appendix K). Staff interviews were conducted at the Tomorrow's Leaders organization's offices. Each Tomorrow's Leaders staff member who participated in an interview was asked to sign an adult consent form (see Appendix B).

The proctors of the focus groups were trained on how to conduct the sessions. The training involved meeting with the researcher and receiving written instructions about the instruments and procedures to be used during the interview and focus group

sessions (see Appendix L). The focus groups were video and audio recorded. The interviews were audio recorded.

All participants in the focus groups were asked the same series of questions in the same order. Asking multiple focus groups the same series of questions in the same order leads to greater reliability of the qualitative study (Creswell, 2015b). The focus groups were designed to have participants interact with each other, discuss the importance of Tomorrow's Leaders, and gather opinions and perceptions of the program as a group. Staff participants involved in the interviews were asked a series of questions focused on the staff role in the students' experiences in the program and observations of students' experiences matriculating into and persisting through college.

Once the focus groups and interviews were completed, the data were transcribed. A third party not involved in the data collection process was used to transcribe the audio and video recordings. The third party locked all audio and video recordings in a secure location. All participants in the study were assigned pseudonyms by the third party to insure anonymity.

Data Analysis

Mixed-method research requires separate data analysis for the quantitative and qualitative section (Creswell, 2015a). Once data analysis was completed for each method, findings were combined for a holistic analysis. The data analysis methods for the quantitative and qualitative portions of the research are detailed in the following section.

Quantitative. Quantitative data in this study were grade point averages and retention rates of student participants of a community-based college access program and

nonparticipating students with similar demographics. A z -test was used to test the difference between the proportions of each group's retention rates at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Bluman, 2015). A z -test is a statistical test used to determine proportions of two populations of different sizes when the population is normally distributed and the standard deviation is known (Bluman, 2015).

A t -test was used to compare the means of the GPA from both groups to determine if a statistical difference exists between the two means at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Bluman, 2015). According to Bluman (2015), a t -test is an appropriate test to compare two means when the populations are normally distributed. Pearson's Index of Skewness (PI) was used to determine if the data were normally distributed (Seltman, 2012).

Qualitative. Transcripts were provided to the researcher for the focus groups. Data from the focus groups were summarized after completion of all focus groups. The responses were grouped and an analytic approach to the information was taken (Creswell, 2014). The researcher identified themes and patterns from the data collected (Creswell, 2014). The data collected from interviews with staff members were analyzed after the completion of each interview (Creswell, 2015b). The data were grouped into categories, emerging themes were identified, and patterns were connected to develop overarching themes (Creswell, 2014).

Summary

A mixed-method research approach was selected for this study because of the ability to gather and analyze considerably more and different kinds of information (Fraenkel et al., 2014). The intent of this study's quantitative portion was to examine if a difference existed among the grade point average and retention rates of students who

participated in a community-based college access program at a large, four-year, public Midwestern institution and other first-generation, low-income, urban students who did not participate in the community-based college access program. This study also focused on the overall experience of student participants of the community-based college access program through a qualitative analysis. This analysis used perspectives from both first-hand accounts of students and observations from staff members.

In Chapter Four, the quantitative and qualitative data collected are presented. The results of the quantitative data and statistical tests used in the study are depicted. The questions asked in interviews and focus groups are evaluated and described. The themes from the qualitative study are presented and explained.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a community-based college access program at a large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution on the retention rates and academic success of first-generation, low-income, urban students through a mixed method research approach (Creswell, 2014). The above-mentioned students being served by Tomorrow's Leaders and similarly qualified students not being served by the program were participants in the research. Despite numerous research articles on at-risk college students, as well as federally funded college access programs, a gap exists when examining community-based organizations (Grier-Reed & Ganuza, 2012; Morrow, 2015; Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016; Stephens et al, 2015; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). The goal of this study was to add to the body of research concerning the impact of community-based college access programs that serve historically marginalized students.

Four research questions, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data, guided this study. The first research question was focused on the retention rates of students served by Tomorrow's Leader compared to similarly qualified students not being served by that particular program. The second research question was designed to examine the academic success of students served by Tomorrow's Leader compared to similarly qualified students not being served by that particular program, through the examination of the grade point average (GPA) for their first semester in college. De-identifiable data of 39 Tomorrow's Leaders students and 82 similarly qualified students, provided to the researcher from the Office of Institutional Research, were examined to analyze research questions one and two.

Research questions three and four used qualitative data to examine the experiences of students involved with Tomorrow's Leaders through the framework of Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering. The third research question was focused around how students perceived their overall programmatic experience. Three focus groups involving 15 Tomorrow's Leaders students were conducted to accumulate a variety of student perceptions. The fourth research question focused on traits gained by students' involvement in a community-based access program necessary for success in college, as reported by staff members of Tomorrow's Leaders. Interviews with six staff members were conducted to identify these traits and impact of the program on students over the lifetime of the student's involvement in the program.

Demographics

This mixed-method study was conducted at a large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution and at the community-based college access program Tomorrow's Leaders. The population of this study consisted of all students attending the institution over the past three years who were involved in Tomorrow's Leaders and similarly qualified students not involved in Tomorrow's Leaders attending the same institution in the fall semester of 2016. A secondary population for this study was also staff members of Tomorrow's Leaders who had over four years of experience with the organization.

The similarly qualified population of students was determined through a series of deliberate steps. First, all students who had graduated from high schools served by Tomorrow's Leader in their community were gathered. The list of high schools served by Tomorrow's Leaders was provided by the organization. All first semester, first-time college students were then selected. From that group, all first-generation and Pell Grant

eligible students were collected. From this list, all students who were served by Tomorrow's Leaders were removed. A total of 82 students remained, and their data were given to the primary researcher in a de-identifiable format. The number of Tomorrow's Leaders served at the large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution over the past three years was 39. These 39 Tomorrow's Leaders students were used for the quantitative portion of the study. Data for the Tomorrow's Leaders first semester freshman year were also provided to the primary researcher in a de-identifiable format.

Data Analysis

In the following sections, the data collected from both the quantitative and qualitative portions of this study are described. The quantitative questions were analyzed with inferential statistics (Bluman, 2015). The qualitative questions utilized both focus groups and interviews to collect a wide array of perspectives from both students and staff members (Creswell, 2014). The two quantitative and two qualitative research questions that guided this study are discussed and results are provided in the following section.

Research question one. *What statistically significant difference exists between the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders?* Data were collected in a de-identifiable form from the university's Office of Institutional Research and were analyzed for this question. Retention statistics of students in Tomorrow's Leaders for their first semester to the second semester were collected. Retention statistics for similarly qualified students not being served by the program were also collected for fall 2016 to spring 2017 semester. Of the 39 students served by Tomorrow's Leaders, 37

returned for their second semester of college at a 95% retention rate. The comparison group of 82 similarly qualified students not being served by Tomorrow's Leaders had 65 students return for their second semester; a retention rate of 79%.

A z -test, using the portions of the retention rates of students involved in Tomorrow's Leaders and similarly qualified students, was conducted (Bluman, 2015). A z -test was selected because this method examines the difference between the proportions of two populations of different sizes (Bluman, 2015). The retention rate for students in Tomorrow's Leaders was calculated at 0.95, and the rate for similarly qualified students not served by the program was calculated at 0.79. Using Microsoft Excel, a z -test calculated a z -value of 2.205, which achieved a p -value of .9878 or $\alpha = 0.02$ (Bluman, 2015). At $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, it was determined there was a statistically significant difference between the retention rates of each group (Bluman, 2015; Creswell, 2015b; Fraenkel et al., 2014). The retention rate for Tomorrow's Leaders was 16% higher than similarly qualified students, a statistical significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was supported (Bluman, 2015; Creswell, 2015b; Fraenkel et al., 2014).

Research question two. *What statistically significant difference exists between the grade point average of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leader, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders?* Data for question two were also received from the university's Office of Institutional Research in a de-identifiable format. Grade point average data of students in Tomorrow's Leaders for their first semester of their freshman year were collected. Likewise, grade point average

data for the similarly qualified students not being served by Tomorrow's Leaders were collected for their first semester of their freshman year, fall 2016. The mean GPA for the 39 students served by Tomorrow's Leaders was 2.88 on a 4.0 scale. The GPA of the 82 similarly qualified students not involved in the program was 2.40.

A *t*-test, using the means of the GPA's of each group, was conducted (Bluman 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2014). A *t*-test is the appropriate statistical test to compare two means when the populations are normally distributed (Bluman, 2015). A Pearson's Index of Skewness (PI) test determined both populations were normally distributed (Bluman, 2015). The results of the *t*-test using Microsoft Excel was $\alpha = 0.001$ (Bluman, 2015). At $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, it was determined there was a significant statistical difference between the grade point averages of each group (Bluman, 2015; Creswell, 2015b; Fraenkel et al., 2014). The GPA average for Tomorrow's Leaders was 0.48 points higher than similarly qualified students, a statistical significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was supported (Bluman, 2015; Creswell, 2015b; Fraenkel et al., 2014).

The results of the comparison between retention rates and GPA's for students who participated in the community-based access program Tomorrow's Leaders and students who are similarly qualified yet did not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Retention Rates and Grade Point Averages Comparison

	<i>N</i>	Retention Rate	GPA
Tomorrow 's Leaders	39	.95	2.88
Similarly Qualified	87	.79	2.40
$\alpha =$		0.02	.001

Note. $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance; 4.0 GPA scale.

Research question three. *How do college students in a community-based college access program perceive their overall programmatic experience?* The third research question in this study was qualitative and focused on the students who have participated in Tomorrow's Leaders. The focus groups with the student participants were conducted in the spring 2017 semester. Fifteen students participated in three focus groups. Ten questions were asked at each focus group, in the same order, by the same proctor in order to increase reliability (Creswell, 2015b). A proctor was used for the student focus groups to reduce bias in the study and because the researcher is associated with the college access programs department at the institution. In the next section, the focus group questions and answers are examined.

Focus group participant demographic survey. The 15 student participants of the focus groups were asked to fill out an anonymous demographic survey, which included gender, race, class standing, and major of study (see Appendix C). Over half of the group who participated in the study were female. The remainder of the group consisted of male participants and one nonconforming student. A majority of the students who participated identified as African-American with nine students, three students reported as bi-racial,

and three students as Caucasian. The class standing of students was four freshmen, six sophomores, three juniors, and two seniors. The majors of study for the participants varied; three in health and human services, three in criminology, two in business, two in humanities, one in fine arts, one in education, and one undeclared. The survey confirmed the focus groups represented a wide range of students involved in Tomorrow's Leaders.

Focus group question #1. Up until this point, what challenges, both personal and educational, have you encountered as a first-generation/low-income student? In all three focus groups, there was a connection to several topics. First responses from participants indicated families lacked a sense of cultural capital. Cultural capital is the value students gain from their parents that support and assists them as they navigate the college experience and seek a higher social status and greater social mobility (Cincinnati et al., 2016). Student A5 discussed a lack of cultural capital in his/her family when stating, "...I have to teach myself all of this, and I'm having to teach all of these experiences on my own, and my family can't relate. But, they try to support me." Student A1 added to A5's response noting the difficulty of having to navigate college on his/her own when stating, "not having a family who knows what's really going on...so [I am] having to do a lot on my own." Student B1 indicated the challenges he/she faced were not having a support system at home who understood the problems he/she were dealing with at school. Student B1 said "Just having to deal with my situation for the first time and deal with it on my own" were the biggest challenges.

Financial hardship was another topic that emerged in the focus group discussions. Financial hardship was exhibited through the cost of attendance, having to work while in school, and having to financially support family members back home. Student A3

asserted, “being from a low-income family, it’s just like being on your own. It is way more difficult than being a person with support.” Student C3 divulged, “The most challenging thing is just being low-income and just like having to come up with money out of nowhere and being stressed about should I stay in school or should I just work all the time to have money.” Student C2 added, “I’ve had to in my life, find ways to fork up money out of nowhere when emergencies happen, and that’s kind of affected me educationally... challenges [can] get in the way of academics and... keep[ing] my priorities straight...” Students B2 and B4 both expressed concern for providing for their families financially now and in the future once they have completed their degrees.

A third major trend present when speaking to students was the pressure to succeed in college to not disappoint family members. Student B2 described this feeling when stating:

Definitely a lot of pressure on me to try to really set the best standard for my family. A lot of like my young cousins they look up to me a lot for stuff. ...trying to keep their grades up, and then, because it’s definitely hard on me because my family expects a lot from me academically. Especially because with my scholarship... I had an older cousin who had a full-ride sports scholarship who lost it... and the rest of my family is like, you’re not gonna end up like so-and-so. So now I have this added weight on me...

Student B3 added to B2’s statement with, “Because I am the oldest child, so I am fending for my siblings... Basically trying to make my family proud of me.” Student B4 reflected on how the pressure affected him/her: “It affected my ability to concentrate

because I'm always focused on all of these other things. I am super-involved in making sure I am doing everything correctly to live my way successfully for myself and family.”

Focus group question #2. What role has participating in Tomorrow's Leaders played in helping you overcome those challenges? Students who took part in the focus groups expressed the idea that participating in Tomorrow's Leaders taught them how to become independent, supported them through transitions and challenges, and provided staff members who understood them and the challenges they face. Student A5 articulated all the of these themes in his/her response:

I think [Tomorrow's Leaders] helped ease that transition from adolescence to adulthood, especially with having the yearly getaway going to camp, [and] being away from your family for like a month, and learning how to interact with people without your parents being there... The overall support; they give you care packages, some of the staff calling...to make sure you're okay. Just the people from [Tomorrow's Leaders] understand what you go through. because they've been through it...

The awareness of learning how to become an independent person was taught to students in summer camp activities. Student A2 asserted the summers at camp “really gave you the foundation I needed to become independent.” The connection between camp activities and college preparation was affirmed by Student C2's statement, “You are put into this group where you don't know anybody and where you're on your own, but you have to meet new people and you have to communicate, and it reminds me of [my] freshman year in college.” C2 continued by reflecting on how the three years of

summer camp helped the interviewee with his/her transition to his/her freshman year of college.

Supportive and understanding staff members of Tomorrow's Leaders was also a major common theme among all focus groups. Student B4 attributed his/her success in college to Tomorrow's Leaders staff helping him/her realize that he/she will be successful and helped him/her believe in themselves. Student A1 purported, "Even though they [Tomorrow's Leaders Staff] can't do everything, but they have been a big support any time there has been an issue or a problem, something that you need, they are always there." Student C3 avowed. "[Tomorrow Leaders staff] has been a great support system."

***Focus group question #3.** Tell me about the relationships and support systems (student, Tomorrow's Leaders staff, college faculty/staff) you have developed while participating in Tomorrow's Leaders and in what way have they helped you.* Most participants communicated the relationships with members of the Tomorrow's Leaders community have developed into strong, trusting connections because of the longevity of the relationship. Student A4 described the strong positive benefits of the bond with staff members and other student participants because the relationships started in 7th grade. Student A1 conveyed, "The relationships I have developed at [Tomorrow's Leaders] are life-lasting; they are never going anywhere. We all have developed friendships and lifelong people (of support)."

Regarding support systems, participants proclaimed Tomorrow's Leaders have been their transitional support network. Student C4 stated, "The transitions like growing up and transitioning from high school to college, [Tomorrow's Leaders] helped me a lot,

and I am very thankful for that.” Student C6 verbalized the longevity of the transitional support, “The counselors were there in the time in life when we needed them and motivate us and guide us through middle and high school..... just a guiding light for college.”

The sense of belonging students felt through participating in the Tomorrow’s Leaders program was also evident in a majority of the responses. Student B1 expressed this idea of belonging, “[Midwestern institution] is a special case because they have [Tomorrow’s Leaders] students who come here. You get a sense of belonging... a place where you see other people [are] doing okay and in the same boat as you.” Student B4 agreed with Student B1 and added, “because it makes you feel like I have a home somewhere, and we’re doing this together; I’m not all by myself as a first-gen, low-income people.” Having relationships that are supportive and understanding of the situations the students are coming from are important components that create an environment of belonging.

Focus group question #4. What matters and motivates you in your college?

Topics emerged from this question centered on future success, making family members proud, and being a change agent in their community. Most of the students in the focus groups communicated the desire of wanting to succeed in college so they could have a more financially stable life. Student C1 stated, “I want to go through college. I want to get my degree. I want to get a job. I want to do what my parents didn’t. I don’t want my kids to have to feel the struggle...” The concept of achieving the “Dream” was broached by Student C3. The dream being the student’s future family would not have to go through what he or she have had to go through.

The concept of not wanting to disappoint others and self, as well as wanting to make people proud was also prevalent in the answers. Student C5 “want[s] to show them that all their work is gonna payoff.” Student B1 wanted to make his/her mom proud because she did not go to college. A motivating factor for Student A5 “would be disappointing people who believe in me but also disappointing myself, because I know I have a lot of potential.”

Gratitude and the desire to give back to their community and being a role model were also common motivating factors students reported in the focus groups. Student A2 expressed this sentiment:

What motivates me to keep going and to push through, I look at all the different communities, and I know I can't make a change until I better myself. I get all these certificates and the knowledge that I need to better. So, me being in college is a stepping stone to helping other people. So, if I gotta suffer through this to help somebody else who is suffering, then that's why I'm here.

Focus group question #5. *Has this educational experience in college been what you expected? Why or why not?* The consensus in all three focus groups was college was harder than expected, and high school did not prepare them academically for college level classes. Student A5 noted his/her adjustment to attending college by stating:

Growing up in a low income community, like the education there differs from the national average, and so that transition from the curriculum from my high school and elementary [and] middle [school] is way different from college. And coming here, it was sort of shock even though I might have been top of [the] class back in high school doesn't mean I will necessarily succeed in college, so it required a lot

of readjusting how I learn, how I study, and how I retain information. It was probably one of the hardest things going through my college career thus far. Per Student A1, college is hard “mentally” and “financially” on top of academically. Students C1, C2, C3 and C6 talked with each other about having “high GPAs” in high school, “not having to study” and high school being “easy,” but reported having struggled in college coursework.

Another concept discussed in the focus groups was the idea of expecting the unexpected in college. Student B2 related, “At this point, I am at the point of expect the unexpected, because at this point, you never know what curve ball you’re gonna get.” Student B3 “really didn’t know what to expect at all.” Student B1 felt like college “opened [Student B3’s] eyes to the broader picture of life...” Student A1 asserted a “positive note” of the unexpected is “there’s people here I wouldn’t have thought that I would have met or organizations...I have joined I never would have thought I would be part of...” Student C6 reflected on the unexpectedness of college, “If I had known I was gonna go through things I go through in college, I probably would have turned around in high school and stayed there.” Student C6 continued by stating “it’s a learning experience” and you “learn along the way”.

Focus group question #6. *How strongly do you feel your participation in the Tomorrow’s Leaders program contributed to your success?* Overwhelmingly, 13 out of 15 participants in the focus groups voiced the opinion that Tomorrow’s Leaders was the largest contributor to their success. Student B4 spoke for him/herself and other students: “I think many [Tomorrow’s Leaders] students would say they wouldn’t be here but for [Tomorrow’s Leaders]... but it [is] obviously so true when we say that.” Student B4

continued, “I feel very strongly that [Tomorrow’s Leaders] very much so contributed to my success in a number of ways in life, education, and in finding out who I am.”

The reasons given by participants for Tomorrow’s Leaders contributing to their success centered around leadership development activities at summer camp to prepare them for college. Student A2 captured the sentiment of the focus groups with this statement:

I feel like during the whole summer camp portion at [Tomorrow’s Leaders], like the little block classes that we had scheduled for leadership and college application courses, [and] learning different things, I feel that [the activities] really changed my mind and prepared me for working for college and the real world. I feel like I owe it to [Tomorrow’s Leaders] for changing my mind to the way it was at such a young age. Dealing with it now isn’t such a hard transition, because I started off thinking that way.

Student C4 reported staying at a summer camp for 30 days away from home was preparation for moving onto campus Student C4’s freshman year, “I look back now, and it all makes so much more sense.”

Leadership development and being pushed to do more than the students thought they were capable of were important components to success. Student B1 attributed Tomorrow’s Leaders for giving Student B1 his/her fundamental attributes, “So, this is who you are, and I know because I have done x, y, z, and I wouldn’t know myself as well.” Student A4’s participation gained him/her “leadership qualities to be a leader...to be independent and to be able to step outside [Student A4’s] comfort zone...”

Focus group question #7. *When you think about Tomorrow's Leaders, what three words come to mind?* A variety of responses were expressed by participants, but commonalities could be summarized into the following areas: strong relationship/family, support, opportunities and encouraging. Student A2 voiced, "Family, leadership, and patience." Student A3 also stated "family" and added "motivation and uplifting." Student C5 communicated, "Safe, supportive, and relationships." Student B1 said:

I say opportunity, because it provides in multiple senses. So, I go[sic] in a physical way it provides an opportunity to be with people not like you... The opportunity to be around people and grow. The opportunity to just know what's out there, to know, because I didn't know anyone who had gone to college that was like personal to me. I didn't know what it was like for anybody to go to college, so getting the opportunity to meet these people who have done it, are doing it right now, all that kind of spectrum of experience gives you the opportunity to see that, something that's so beautiful, especially as a [student summer camp counselor] not only on myself but I am now showing them; I am that opportunity. I am that person now; it's on both sides of that. Crazy, but that's how I feel.

Focus group question #8. *In your opinion, what were the top two services provided to you by Tomorrow's Leaders?* All participants responded similarly regarding college preparation services, camping experiences, and supportive staff members. Specifically, regarding college preparation services, a majority of participants listed college tours as their number one services provided to them by Tomorrow's Leaders. The college tour trip is the capstone event of year three in Tomorrow's Leaders program

(Course Catalog). The experience is a 9 to 10 day trip when students visit a variety of post-secondary institutions in multiple states, and the trip is designed to expose participants to a wide range of college options (Course Catalog). Student A3 asserted he/she learned more about college in “one week” versus four years in high school. Student A3 explained, “Because over the college tours, we went to many/different kinds of colleges, and we learned more about colleges that you won’t learn in school. I felt the college tour prepared me more for college.”

Another pivotal service to most participants was the camping experience. Student A2 really enjoyed his/her camping experiences because it “took a bunch of inner-city kids and exposed them to the wilderness. I feel like they showed us that there’s more out there than just the street we grew up on or the poverty that we see every day.” These experiences allowed Student A2 to “dream bigger and venture past what we already know.” Student C2 asserted, “Camp[ing] for 24 days for three years in a row simply, because it throws you into a new environment, and how to get out of your comfort zone, and teaches you leadership skills, and prepares you for the future.”

Participants also noted relationships and support from staff members as an important service. Student B1 stated, “support” comes from staff “just being there, being able to answer questions, being available.” Student C3 answered with how important the staff relationship is for Student C3’s family as well, “My mom loves [staff member], she loves them all a lot.”

***Focus group question #9.** What can Tomorrow’s Leaders do to improve, and if given the opportunity, what would you change about the program to help you, or future participants, be more successful in college?* The consensus answer was Tomorrow’s

Leaders should not change how the program is designed and the reason why the program is the way it is. The main suggestion for improvement to the programs was more financial resources. The desire for more financial resources was to expand the number of participants in the program and the overall length of the program. Student B4 stated:

I would want to just change the financial aspect of [Tomorrow's Leaders] and the funding. Because I know that the program has to start now later (the program is now shorter in length than when this student started), like they pulled [students] from [their] freshman year [in] high school vs. pulling them in middle school. That's so imperative, like there's a gap. I guess my [suggestion] to improving [Tomorrow's Leaders] would be financially to where it could sustain and help more teens and actually be bigger than what it is.

Multiple student participants expressed concern over the fact that Tomorrow's Leaders now starts two years later, beginning in high school versus middle school, because their experience began in middle school. Student C3 who has worked as camp counselor for the program asserted, "I would add another year [at camp] on... Especially [for] this new class... they need that."

A few participants suggested a creation of an alumni network and support services. Student B3 expressed a desire for continued support, "After graduations, they're like, well, so what's next. Keep that going, because we aren't done just yet." Student B2 suggested the creation of an "alumni network" because there are several alumni that are successful and "should donate to the program." Student B2 continued, "I think with [Tomorrow's Leaders] being such a success that it is, just having an alumni network would be beneficial for the organization."

Focus group question #10. *Is there something you wish to tell me about your experiences that I did not ask you?* More than one student wanted to express the sentiment of thankfulness for the program because it changed their life. Student C3 declared, “If I didn’t have [Tomorrow’s Leaders], I would not be the person I am today. I would not be here; I wouldn’t be what I am doing now. I think that’s really important to know.” Student C2 added, “I would just like to say I am extremely thankful for [Tomorrow’s Leaders]. If it wasn’t for [Tomorrow’s Leaders], I wouldn’t be where I am today.

Another topic of discussion in one focus group was service projects. Student B2 pronounced, “The service projects, I know for me, were definitely life-changing at times.” Student B2 stated service project taught him/her to be “grateful for what [Student B2] had.” Student B3 asked the focus group, “If you had to do it again, would you?” There was a consensus from all that they would.

Research question four. *What traits do at-risk students who participate in a community-based college access program gain, which are essential to college success, as reported by staff members who work in the organization?* In addition to the 15 students from Tomorrow’s Leaders who participated in focus groups, six staff members from the organization with four-plus years of experience were interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain another perspective of the impact of Tomorrow’s Leaders on the students served in the program. In the following section, the responses obtained from the interviews are discussed.

Interview question #1. *What personal characteristics do you possess which have helped you succeed with the students you serve?* The responses to this question helped

provide understanding to characteristics staff members perceived as important to their work with students. All staff members who were interviewed expressed the importance of having the desire to seek out positive and caring relationship with youth in the program. Staff Member #2 asserted Tomorrow's Leaders places high importance on "really understanding and believing in the power of a caring, consistent relationship between students and with a well-trained adult." Staff Member #3 contributed success of the program to "building authentic relationships with young people."

Building on the concept of genuine relationships, Staff members #5 and #6 reported value in the willingness to have "tough" and "authentic" conversations with the young people they serve. Staff Member #6 proclaimed honest dialogue is "the core of what [Tomorrow's Leaders] do[es]." Staff Member #5 contributed to the topic when Staff Member #5 noted it was important for staff to be consistent and "not wavering when things become difficult" as well as answering questions about "difficult topics" as key to their success.

Multiple staff members who were interviewed conveyed the idea of being able to question their practices as a leader in the program and being willing to change as important. Characteristics that stood out to Staff Member #1 were "self-reflection," giving and receiving "critical feedback" between staff members, and "not being afraid to question or change course." Staff Member #3 noted the importance of being "real about the results and outcomes" of Tomorrow's Leaders programs and using data to strive "to make [Tomorrow's Leaders] more meaningful for the young people served."

***Interview question #2.** Do you use any non-conventional methods when educating and mentoring first-generation, low-income students? If so, what are they?*

The second interview question centered around the methodology used by Tomorrow's Leaders staff to educate students and whether they believe their methods are non-conventional. A key methodology expressed by several staff members was the foundation in "positive youth development" and not in educational development. Staff Member #5 practiced positive youth development by "focus[ing] on social/emotional learning. [Tomorrow's Leaders] recognize that academics and education is one piece of the entire young person..."

The longevity of the staff/student relationship is another crucial non-conventional method. Staff Member #3 asserted, "relationship-based and individualized approach is not the norm that I see in a lot of programs." Staff Member #4 equated longevity with "persistence." Staff Member #4 described the impact of persistence, "It's the same person you've known for six plus years... they are reliable because relationships are a little inconsistent for teenagers; people are in and out of their lives, but I think we're not." Per Staff Member #6, the "intentional relationship" leads to the ability to have "tough conversations" with students and allows staff to help the students at all levels, tying back into the social/emotional learning.

An additional non-conventional approach to educate and mentor first-generation, low-income students was the use of summer camp. Staff Member #1 emphasized Tomorrow's Leaders "roots [are] in summer camping" and the "experiential learning" involved with "outdoor challenges." Staff Member #1 explained, "I think that by using those methods we are able to expose and really challenge our young people in ways they are not going to be challenged at home or in their communities." Staff Member #3 stated summer camps provide "barriers" and "challenges" for students to work through "that in

other settings are very easy for them [students] to back away from.” These activities, according to Staff Member #3, are “about finding who you are in a foreign environment...that’s a pretty powerful approach.”

Interview question #3. How do you motivate first-generation, low-income college students to complete college? A cohesive answer of setting examples and exposure to college options arose from all interviews. Tomorrow’s Leaders starts early in the program with “setting some sort of post-secondary goal,” declared Staff Member #2. Staff Member #2 asserted early exposure to college comes in the form of having alumni of the program who have graduated from college work with current students, “so the young people can see other students who have walked that same path, and they can see that potential.” Staff Member #2 explained, “Each step along the way we are doing developmentally-appropriate activities,” so students understand “there is a path” for them to college.

Staff Member #3 expressed the importance of students seeing a future for their life. Seeing a vision for their life allowed for students to see how college plays a role in that vision and “really helping them contextualize it and what they see for themselves in the future.” Staff Members #3, #4, and #5 asserted the importance of being honest about barriers and challenges students will face once in college as students set a pathway for their future. Staff Member #4 communicated staff need to “really talk explicitly about the struggles...being open about it being challenging, but it’s possible.” Through these talks about challenges, the resources available to students to be successful through Tomorrow’s Leaders are displayed. These conversations show students the challenges and barriers are real, but so are the resources for them to succeed.

Interview question #4. What barriers, personal and educationally, do you see first-generation, low-income college students have or experience while participating in the program and attending college? Staff responses reflected numerous barriers faced by first-generation, low-income college students. A majority of staff members identified financial restraints, poor academic preparation, and family dynamics as barriers. Staff Member #4 shared, “A big one is finances; that’s a huge one. Both paying for school and also just living and being able to eat.” Staff Member #6 attested many students have the capacity to succeed but lack the basic resources to survive in college.

Poor academic preparation from schools that first-generation, low-income students attend was of high concern to multiple staff members. Staff Member #2 revealed many of the young people are coming from schools that do not produce high ACT scores and do not prepare students for “the level of work at a college campus.” Staff Member #2 asked the question, “How do [students] step through that gap in what [they] should have received thru K-12?” This lack of academic preparation is a challenge many students face.

Family dynamics can become a barrier for first-generation, low-income students in a variety of ways (Ward et al., 2012). Staff Member #1 described a general “lack of support or encouragement from their own families or communities” to attend college. Staff Member #1 conveyed some students’ “parents are telling them that, no, you shouldn’t go to college, because I need you to stay home, help, and pay the rent.” Those are valid concerns for families but can create barriers for students to be successful. Staff Member #4 portrayed the theme of family dynamics as “guilt,” because students “feel bad for leaving [their] family behind.”

Staff Member #6 believed all barriers can be summarized into the concept of “belief:”

One of the first things I think about first-gen students is belief. Do they believe they can be successful beyond high school? Do they believe they can achieve? Do they believe they can get a college degree? Do they believe that they can have a career that’s going to help sustain and pour back into the family? So, the first thing is the belief piece.

Once a student can overcome the initial barrier of not believing in themselves, the other barriers become more manageable to overcome (Bandura, 1997).

Interview question #5. How important do you feel the student/Tomorrow’s Leaders relationship is in your students’ educational pursuits? All staff members interviewed suggested the student/staff member relationship was extremely important to the students’ educational pursuits. Staff Member #5 ranked the importance of the relationship, “On a scale of 1-10, it’s an 11.” Staff Member #6 conveyed, “The reason why our program works is because of relationships.”

Staff members interviewed stressed the authenticity of the relationship between staff and students and the support generated through that relationship are keys to success. Staff Member #2 described the impact of a supportive connection because it allows the students to “see possibilities, think about possibilities [students] would never have [or] never considered elsewhere.” Staff Member #4 revealed students need to “be able to relate to somebody that had gone to college,” because most of the students did not have a personal relationship with someone who has attended outside of Tomorrow’s Leaders.

Interview question #6. *How do you emphasize to students the importance of success in college? What indicators do they give you that they understand?* Notably, Staff Member #1 asserted,

Success in college is not just about passing classes and getting good grades.

Success in college is really setting yourself up to have, to work through and have those experiences that are going to help you grow as a person...”

The notion of success as being relevant to the individual student’s situation was present in all staff interviews. The importance of success via a post-secondary enterprise is emphasized through a variety of exposure activities and intentional interactions. Staff Member #2 explained the activities are designed to be “appropriate for their specific grade level.”

Exposure activities to post-secondary options for students are presented in a variety of ways, including college tours, as noted in the student focus group responses, role models/mentors from a variety of backgrounds, and connecting camp experiences to college experiences. Intentional interactions with students around the topic of post-secondary opportunities was described by Staff Member #6 as “assess[ing] for the best fit,” because Tomorrow’s Leaders “don’t want to [have] happen is a person drop out [of school] because we advised them wrong.” Staff Member #3 explained, “It’s not specific institutions we are trying to promote” but the “message [is a student] should find a program and a school that fits...”

Interview question #7. *What traits does the program try to instill in students that you believe makes them successful in college? And how do you go about teaching them?* All responses uniformly centered around teaching the trait of self-efficacy via

social/emotional learning. Staff Member #1 believed self-efficacy is an important trait, because “teenagers are always told that you’re bad, you’re not smart enough, you don’t have enough money, teenagers are dumb, teenagers can’t do this,” and there is a need to “build self-advocacy.” Staff Member #4 explained self-efficacy is instilled “not so much [by] teaching them what to think but how to think.... We have to allow students to make the decisions.” Staff Member #3 described self-efficacy as “this idea of both knowing who you are then representing who you are authentically and with some responsibility to your peers and to society.”

Key social/emotional learning skills were articulated by Staff Member #2 as “things like problem solving, emotional management, empathy, the ability to work as a team...[and] responsibility...” Staff Member #5 added “time management” skills and “perseverance” as core social/emotional learning traits. Staff Member #6 asserted the skills gained through social/emotional learning are designed to build “young people to the point where they believe that they can achieve, regardless of their family circumstances.”

Interview question #8. *Over the time period when students are involved in the program, how do you see them change or grow?* All staff members interviewed agreed there is tremendous growth in the students in a variety of ways. A concession was given to the fact a large amount of developmental growth occurs in students between 7th and 12th grade, but staff members asserted the growth they see is well beyond the normal developmental growth. Staff Member #3 talked about the growth of the students’ “capacity to use their voice to influence what’s going on around them...” and how other similar students are not finding their voice at this age.

Staff Member #2 described the growth of self-competence as “confidence in themselves as leaders... the capacity to make change... [and the understanding] I have an important voice that can and should be used.” Staff Member #2 believed the self-discovery of one’s voice is the result of the students’ “development of their own identity and sense of self” and they are a “core part of adolescent development.” Tangible skills student participants of Tomorrow’ Leaders have acquired over the period of their involvement as identified by staff members interviewed were: diversified social networks, self-awareness of actions and consequences, tolerances, communication skills, and higher self-confidence.

Interview question #9. What are the advantages and disadvantages to not being a federally funded program, like other college access programs? Do you feel that makes a difference to students’ success in getting into and persisting in college? Why or why not? Interestingly, the general sentiment of answers to this question was it is hard to say or know because the program was not designed with federal funding in mind. All participants expressed the notion of having more funding for the program would be a net positive, so there is a disadvantage in not having as abundant financial resources that could be provided through federal funding. Counter to the disadvantage of having less financial resources, all staff members interviewed stated an advantage of being more flexible and having fewer restrictions on the program. Staff Member #3 communicated, “What we do is a little unique in our approach, intentionally so, and that uniqueness might be harder to recognize in the confines of federal funding stream.” Staff Member #3 continued with the idea federal funding streams make it “harder to engage individuals

[donors] because they often don't see or perceive that there is much of a need for their engagement and resources.”

In regards to the question of making a difference in students' success, there was also a general reaction of unsureness if not being federally funded organization has any impact on students either way. Staff Member #4 stated, “I don't think students know the difference anyway,” because, “I think we do a really good job of showing and making the way... we don't lack certain restrictions of programs because we don't have the money.” Staff Member #5's opinion was, “Our young people are just as successful if not more successful without it.... Without having [federal funding], we just are finding other ways to provide scholarships and other money.” The consensus for impact on students' success was the same as the general funding question; it would be nice to have more resources for students, but there is a lot of freedom and flexibility in their approach to serving students because they do not have federal funding.

Interview question #10. *Is there something you wish to tell me about your experience as a staff member of Tomorrow's Leaders that I did not ask you?* Three of the staff members interviewed wanted it to be noted the importance of the summer camp experience. Staff Member #6 believed summer camp “gives us an opportunity to understand the strengths and areas of growth for our young people...” Another two staff members contributed the success of the Tomorrow's Leaders program to work culture and staff of the organization. Staff Member #4 asserted, “[Tomorrow's Leaders] is a unique organization, and I am privileged to work for an organization that cares so much for teens and their staff and just making the world a better place...” Staff Member #5 voiced:

Work culture is very open, supportive, friendly. There's room for growth, there is good drive for innovation. We're always trying to...do what's best. We're data driven in the sense that we don't get locked into numbers, but we listen to our young people based on their experiences, and we are constantly shaping and reshaping our program. And that work culture and environment is encouraged here.

Focus group and interview data analysis. In addition to the reporting of data results, all qualitative material was examined to identify consistent and recurring themes (Creswell, 2014). A summarization of each focus group and interview question was completed by using notes and matching of responses (Creswell, 2014). Once themes and sub-themes emerged, multiple additional readings of the transcripts were conducted during the coding process for validation (Creswell, 2014). The following themes were developed to recapitulate the results of the qualitative portion of this study.

Emerging theme: Relationships. Participants of both the student focus groups and staff interviews expressed a strong relational bond is created within Tomorrow's Leaders. Multiple students in the focus groups used the word "family" and "relationships" to describe their experiences in the organization. Staff Member #6 attested, "The reason why our program works is because of relationships." The factors which contributed to the strength of the relationship connection between student and staff member as reported by both were the "consistency" and "longevity" of the relationship. Student A4 stated the strength of his/her relationship with Tomorrow's Leaders is because Student A4 have "know them since 7th grade and they've been with us now

in...college.” Staff Member #4 shared, “Persistence is key in these relationships... [Tomorrow’s Leaders] will always be there, and they are reliable...”

Emerging theme: Intentional experiences. Student participants of the focus groups contributed a large portion of their success in college to the intentional experiences they participated in during Tomorrow’s Leaders. Tomorrow’s Leaders staff members who were interviewed talked extensively about intentional experiences. Staff members explained the design of activities and experiences to enhance a supportive atmosphere and increase students’ cultural capital around higher education and leadership.

The experiences and activities were intentionally created to expose students to a variety of post-secondary options. Student C4 asserted, “Everything I’ve learned and even know about college was thru [Tomorrow’s Leaders]. Multiple students stated the college tour trip was the number one service provided to them by Tomorrow’s Leaders. Summer camping as an immersive activity to build leadership traits was brought up in both student focus groups and staff interviews. Staff Member #1 shared Tomorrow’s Leaders’ “roots [are] in summer camping, that kind of experiential learning cycle, the outdoors challenges parts...” Student A5 communicated summer camping “helped ease that transition from adolescence to adulthood.”

Emerging theme: Self-advocacy. As a result of consistent positive relationships built and involvement in intentional experiences, student participants became stronger self-advocates. Significant growth and the indication of moving from a more dependent state to independences were evident in the student’s responses. Student A2 voiced, “I owe [Tomorrow’s Leaders] everything as to who I am today...they really gave you the

foundation I needed to become independent.” Staff members interviewed explained the mission of Tomorrow’s Leaders is teaching self-efficacy through social/emotional learning. Staff Member #3 stated, “Our mission, it is certainly that they each have a life that is fulfilling and rich for them, but that they are also out there really making a difference.” Success, as noted by a few staff members, is in students finding their own voices.

Summary

In this chapter, the association of participation in a community-based college access program at a Midwestern institution was examined to determine the retention rates and academic success of first-generation, low-income, urban students in Tomorrow’s Leaders compared to similarly qualified students not being served by the program. Four research questions guided a mixed method research approach. Through the use of inferential statistics, it was determined there was statistically significant difference between the student participants of Tomorrow’s Leaders and similarly qualified students for research questions one and two. The retention rate for Tomorrow’s Leaders students was 95% compared to 79% for similarly qualified students. The first semester GPA was 2.88 compared to a 2.40 for similarly qualified students.

For the qualitative portion of the study, research questions three and four, focus groups and interviews were conducted. For Research Question Three, a total of 15 students participated in one of three focus groups to discuss their overall experiences in a community-based college access program. For research question four, six staff members of the community-based access program, Tomorrow’s Leaders, were interviewed to identify traits student participants gain while in the program, which are essential to

college success. Through both the focus groups and interviews, three themes emerged: relationships, intentional experiences, and self-advocacy. These three themes are discussed in detail in the final chapter.

In Chapter Five an in-depth summary and conclusions for each research question are provided. The detailed findings for both quantitative and qualitative portions of the study are also listed in the following chapter. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research on the topic of this study are presented.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

As the population of college and university students continues to grow in the United States, the demographics of the population are becoming increasingly diverse (Casazza & Silverman, 2013). First-generation, low-income, urban students are a large portion of the increased diversity in higher education (Petty, 2014; Ward et al., 2012). The challenges, both academically and culturally, faced in higher education by first-generation and low-income students can be overwhelming (Ward et al., 2012).

In this chapter, the findings and outcomes of the study are described and discussed. Literature related to the study and results are addressed. Implications for practice in the areas of first-generation, low-income, urban student retention and academic success, as well as best practices for community-based college access programs are noted. The recommendations for future research in the areas of access programming, first-generation, low income, and urban students also need to be further addressed.

Findings

This mixed-method study was centered around four research questions; two quantitative and two qualitative. The two quantitative research questions were designed to determine if a statistically significant difference existed in the retention rates and GPA between participants in Tomorrow's Leaders and similarly qualified students not being served by the program. Data for research questions one and two were provided to the researcher in de-identifiable format from the Office of Institutional Research. The two qualitative research questions were designed to examine the perceptions of students participating in a community-based college access program through the framework of

Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering; one question from the students' perspective and one from the staffs' perception of students.

Research question one. *What statistically significant difference exists between the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leaders, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders?* The purpose of this quantitative research question was to determine if participation in Tomorrow's Leaders influenced whether first-generation, low-income, urban students returned to school. A total of 121 students at the large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution were examined in Research Question One, 39 members of Tomorrow's Leaders and 82 similarly qualified non-participants in the program. The retention rate for students in Tomorrow's Leaders was 95%, and the rate for similarly qualified students not being served by the program was 79%. A z-test, an inferential statistical test for proportions, produced a z-value of 2.205 or $\alpha = 0.02$ (Bluman, 2015). At $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, it was determined there was a significantly statistical difference between the retention rates of each group, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was supported (Bluman, 2015; Creswell, 2015b; Fraenkel et al., 2014).

Research question two. *What statistically significant difference exists between the grade point average of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participate in Tomorrow's Leader, a community-based college access program, and students who are similarly qualified yet do not participate in Tomorrow's Leaders?* The purpose of this quantitative research question was to ascertain if students who participated in Tomorrow's Leaders are more academically successful, as calculated by 4.0 GPA scale,

than similarly qualified students who did not participate. The mean GPA for the first semester freshman year of the 39 students served by Tomorrow's Leaders was 2.88 on a 4.0 scale. The GPA for the first semester freshman year of the 82 similarly qualified students not involved in the program was 2.40. A *t*-test, an inferential statistical test for means, resulted in $\alpha = 0.001$ (Bluman, 2015). At $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, it was determined there was a statistically significant difference between the grade point averages of each group, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was supported (Bluman, 2015; Creswell, 2015b; Fraenkel et al., 2014).

Research question three. *How do college students in a community-based college access program perceive their overall programmatic experience?* This qualitative research question was designed to garner information on the overall experiences of student participants in Tomorrow's Leaders, both while active participants of the community-based college access program in secondary school and in college. Three focus groups were conducted involving 15 Tomorrow's Leaders students from a variety of academic classes, academic majors, gender, and racial demographic backgrounds. The focus groups represented a wide range of students involved in Tomorrow's Leaders.

All three focus groups were asked the same 10 questions in the same order for greater reliability of the focus groups (Creswell, 2015b). The first portion of the focus groups' questions concentrated on the challenges the students faced in college, how Tomorrow Leaders helped students with those challenges, and what support systems students used. Students reported an inherent lack of cultural capital and financial resources within their own family structures. Participation in Tomorrow's Leaders

provided students with a support system, which was knowledgeable of both college challenges and general socio-economic challenges faced by this subset of students.

The second portion of focus groups' questions consisted of questions centered around what students considered to be important and/or not important in their experiences in college and Tomorrow's Leaders. A common theme was college is harder than first expected, and students were grateful for Tomorrow's Leaders help in transitioning into higher education. Students reflected on experiences at Tomorrow's Leaders and how they directly helped them be successful in college. A majority of students reported the college tour as the single most important activity in helping them matriculate into higher education. Several students discussed how summer camping prepared them for life away from home in the new environment of college.

The final section of the focus group questions was reversed for students to discuss changes they would make to Tomorrow's Leaders and raise any topic which was not previously talked about. The consensus for changes to the Tomorrow's Leaders was to increase the number of students involved in the program and to lengthen the amount of years it serves students. Focus group participants would like to see the program begin earlier in middle school and continue until the completion of college. Topics of discussion were the overall thankfulness of Tomorrow's Leaders' influence in the students' life and the recognition that for some students the program was life-changing.

Research question four. *What traits do at-risk students who participate in a community-based college access program gain, which are essential to college success, as reported by staff members who work in the organization?* This qualitative research question was intended to allow professionals within the field of college access

programming to elaborate on principles taught by their program. Interviews of 10 questions were conducted with six staff members with a tenure of four-plus years at Tomorrow's Leaders. Staff participants included the Chief Executive Officer, a Vice President, and multiple student counselors, to give a more holistic viewpoint of the organization and the educational programming.

One section of the interviews centered around personal characteristics and methods used to motivate and help at-risk students. Staff members communicated the high importance of having authentic encouraging relationships with youth and the willingness to have open and honest conversations with them. Staff members pointed to positive youth development and social/emotional learning practices as the foundations for the program.

Another portion of the interviews focused on identifying barriers for students involved in the program, and how Tomorrow's Leaders helped students overcome barriers and grow. Similar to the barriers identified by students, staff reported financial restraints, poor academic preparation, and family dynamics as areas of concern. The use of experiential learning and exposure activities were used to help students grow and gain self-efficacy.

In the last segment of the interviews, staff members were asked to talk about funding structure for the program and their experiences as staff members. The consensus among staff members was the idea of having more financial resources through federal funding would be good, but the lack of flexibility in ways to use the funds would create restraints on the program as it is currently designed. Staff members discussed the importance of the summer camping portion of the program on the students' overall

experience with the organization. Also, two staff members stated the uniqueness of the work culture and feeling privileged to work there.

Emerging themes. Responses from research questions three and four were combined to identify emerging themes within the qualitative portion of this study. Three themes were generated through the focus groups and interviews: relationships, intentional experiences, and self-advocacy. These themes are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Conclusions

In this section, conclusions are discussed and compared with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This study intentionally used a mixed-method research approach to allow for the collection of considerably more and different types of data (Fraenkel et al., 2014). A mixed-method approach allows for measurable quantifiable data and observation of non-quantifiable experiences (Creswell, 2015a). The design of this research was to paint a holistic view of first-generation, low-income, urban students' experiences in a community-based college access program by connecting retention rates and academic success to individual perspectives (Creswell, 2015a). The conclusions are made to represent first-generation, low-income, urban students from Tomorrow's Leaders at a large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution. While most of the time information presented is to answer each research question individually, to offer a holistic viewpoint, it is necessary to include results and information between research questions.

Research question one. The results of Research Question One indicated there was a statistically significant difference in the retention rates of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participated in Tomorrow's Leaders and similarly qualified

students who did not participate. The above-mentioned students in Tomorrow's Leaders had a retention rate from their first to second semesters of 95%. Similarly qualified students not participating in Tomorrow's Leaders had a retention rate of 79%. Choy (2001) reported 23% of first-generation students leave school before their second year, which is on par with the results of this study. Choy (2001) also reported 10% of traditional students leave prior to their second year, so the results of this study show Tomorrow's Leaders students are surpassing the retention rates of traditional students.

The results of Research Question One reinforce Engle et al.'s (2009) statement that college access programs are designed to help bridge the gap between underrepresented students and traditional students' retention rates. Tinto's (1975) theory of retention stated a student's level of integration both academically and socially is the strongest predictor of return to school. The qualitative information helped confirm and explain the results found within the data and is evident in the role the Leaders have and how the students' retention rates are positively impacted.

Research question two. The analysis of Research Question Two focused on the first semester GPA's of Tomorrow's Leaders students compared to first-generation, low-income, urban students who did not participate in the program. Results of the *t*-test signified there is a statistically significant difference between the 2.88 GPA for Tomorrow's Leaders students compared to the 2.40 GPA for similarly qualified students who did not participate in the program. As indicated in the literature of Chapter Two, most first-generation, low-income, urban students are academically underprepared for college (ACT 2015a; Bernstein et al., 2014; Coleman Tucker, 2014; Engle, 2007; Pickard & Logan, 2013).

Pike and Kuh (2005) contributed the poor academic success for first-generation students to their lack of cultural capital. Petty (2014) believed first-generation, low-income students are more likely to be less psychologically prepared for school, which could lead to poor grades. The framework of the Tomorrow's Leaders program is to help first-generation, low-income students increase their cultural capital concerning college and help prepare them for post-secondary success. The results of Research Question Two indicated Tomorrow's Leaders have been successful in improving the academic success of their students compared to the students' counterparts.

Research question three and four. The conclusion for the qualitative Research Questions Three and Four are discussed collectively by emerging themes. Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering was chosen as the theoretical framework for the qualitative portion of this study because of its emphasis on how students perceived their experiences. Research Question Three focused on how students self-report their experiences. Research Question Four explored how staff members of Tomorrow's Leaders report students' growth and experiences in the program. Collectively in Research Questions Three and Four, the following themes emerged: relationships, intentional experiences, and self-advocacy.

Relationships. The most common theme in the responses from focus groups and interviews was the importance of the relationships between students and Tomorrow's Leaders staff members. Both students and staff members pointed to the strength and longevity of their connection with one another as the backbone for the students' success in college. The theme of relationships coincides with Schlossberg's (1989) belief that outcomes for success are directly related to the extent of which a student feels connected.

Transitioning into college from high school, as noted by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) and Schlossberg (1989), is a time of great concern and uncertainty for students.

Schlossberg (1989) stated students in transition often feel marginalized. Longevity and consistency of relationships over several transitional points in a student's life have made Tomorrow's Leaders successful in helping their students matriculate. Student A5 pointed to Tomorrow's Leaders as the main help for his/her transition into college. Student B3 communicated, "[Tomorrow's Leaders] staff have been our backbone throughout this whole ordeal..."

The relationship between students and staff members develops into a support system. Ishitani (2006) asserted the strength of the support system for a first-generation student directly correlates into the students' academic success and matriculation. The results of the retention rates (Research Question One) and academic success (Research Question Two) indicate a strong support system for Tomorrow's Leaders students. Staff Member #5 described the importance of their support system:

If you don't have someone who's been there, or you don't have someone who has experienced it, or you don't feel connected to your institution, and you can't build relationships within the institution or your friends [or] family who have experienced college ... it's really easy to get distracted, misinformed, so the relationship we provide is not only one of support but one of structure and stabilization, which I think is essential for our students to succeed...

It is distractions and misinformation which can cause students with little cultural capital for college to get lost (Choy, 2001). Having an individual who supports at-risk students makes a world of difference (Tinto, 2012).

Intentional experiences. Schlossberg (1989) posed the question: Do policies, practices, and/or activities make students feel like they matter? The activities in Tomorrow's Leaders program are intentionally designed to help students feel like they belong in a college environment. First-generation, low-income students enter the new experience of college with great uncertainty (Ward et al., 2012). Also, first-generation, low-income students have vastly different experiences in college than traditional students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

The uncertainty and difference in experiences first-generation, low-income, urban students encounter are subsidized with intentional experiences in high school designed by Tomorrow's Leaders to prepare students for life in college. Student A3 directly related the experiences of camp to help them adapt to the new environment of college. Many students pointed toward the college tour as their only experiences on a college campus prior to starting school. Student B2 reflected, "[Tomorrow's Leaders] helped me overcome my fears about a lot of different things...get through a mud cave, climb a mountain...if I could survive those things, then I can survive college..." Staff Member #1 believed, "being able to help them make those connections in those challenges and experiences that we are exposing them to here at [Tomorrow's Leaders]... helping them see how they work through those... and helping them apply it back to a college frame [is important]."

Self-advocacy. Strong relationships with Tomorrow's Leaders staff and intentional experiences designed to increase cultural capital culminate into self-advocacy. Schlossberg (1989) believed connections between student and staff allow the student to believe in his/her own self-worth. As a student increases his/her self-efficacy, he or she

transitions from a state of dependency into independence (Bandura, 1997). It is in this state of independence a student finds his or her own voice and takes control of his or her own situation (Katz et al., 2014). Self-advocacy (Dictionary, n. d.) is the act of representing oneself. The goal of a college access program is to help students who many not start college on a level playing field overcome barriers and advocate for themselves (Engle et al., 2009).

Tomorrow's Leaders students reflected on their journey to independence and the role the organization played in helping them become self-advocates. Student A2 stated, "I owe them everything as to who I am today... [Tomorrow's Leaders] teach you to be independent... you really need to be independent especially if you're from a low-income family down here [college] on your own." Student B2 asserted Tomorrow's Leaders "helped a lot with self-worth... they instill in all their students, you can do this, you can do that, which if you didn't know any better, you wouldn't have just thought of on your own." Student C4 affirmed Tomorrow's Leaders "made all of us not be listeners of this information but make us want to put it into action and [be] doers. Doers make their dreams come alive." Being an active participant in one's own education is very important for success in higher education (Tinto, 2012).

Tomorrow's Leaders staff members made it clear their intentions are to increase their students' self-efficacy using social/emotional learning. The focus is placed on helping the student feel as if he or she matters in all aspects of life. Schlossberg (1989) stressed the importance of students feeling they belong and matter in all aspects of life. which will lead to fewer feelings of marginality in school. A by-product of focusing on holistic success in students is success in academia (Schlossberg, 1989). Staff Member #1

communicated students already have the skills and abilities inside them, and Tomorrow's Leaders "just helped bring it out and then helping them apply it back to a college frame." Staff Member #2 talked about helping students build up "core competencies" and discover their "goals and aspirations," which leads to post-secondary aspirations. Staff Member #3 summarized the goals of the program:

I think there's quite a few, but they kind of center in this idea of both knowing who you are, then representing who you are authentically, and with some responsibility to your peers and to society. So, know yourself, and represent yourself, and be a part of the community. Show up as somebody who cares about what happens to other people and the impact that you have on my words and actions I have on others. So, that idea of being responsible, of being true, and being.... Just respectful of the community that I am in.

When students fully grasp this idea of representing themselves, being their own self-advocate, and moving into independence, the barriers they face in higher education due to their demographic backgrounds can more easily be overcome (Ward et al., 2012).

Implications for Practice

There are multiple implications for practice from this study. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories of student retention and student departure were a useful guide to understanding the multiple factors in the decisions students make regarding their educational pursuits. Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering was beneficial in understanding how students feel about their experiences on campus and how staff members of the college access program instill traits to make their students successful.

First-generation, low-income, urban students are not attending college at the same rate and are not as academically successful as traditional students (Cutuli et al., 2013). Because the above-mentioned students are an at-risk population in higher education, answering the question of what is working to help this population is needed (Ward et al., 2012). Tinto's (2012) charge is for all institutions to increase support for all students to improve retention and matriculation rates, specifically support for first-generation and low-income students. Institutions of higher education and college access programs must commit to experiences which add value to a student's education and lead directly towards increased retention and academic success (Tinto, 2012). The emerging themes of this study: relationships, intentional experiences, and self-advocacy have shaped two main implications for practice.

To help describe the main implications and how they interact with one another an analogy is used. The analogy chosen is a wheel. One implication for practice is represented by the center or hub of the wheel. The other implication of practice is illustrated by the spokes, which connect the hub to the wheel. Students are represented by the outside, or the tire on the wheel, signifying their presence and how they are supported by the interior of the wheel. The analogy of the interaction of implications portrayed as a wheel is represented in Figure 2.

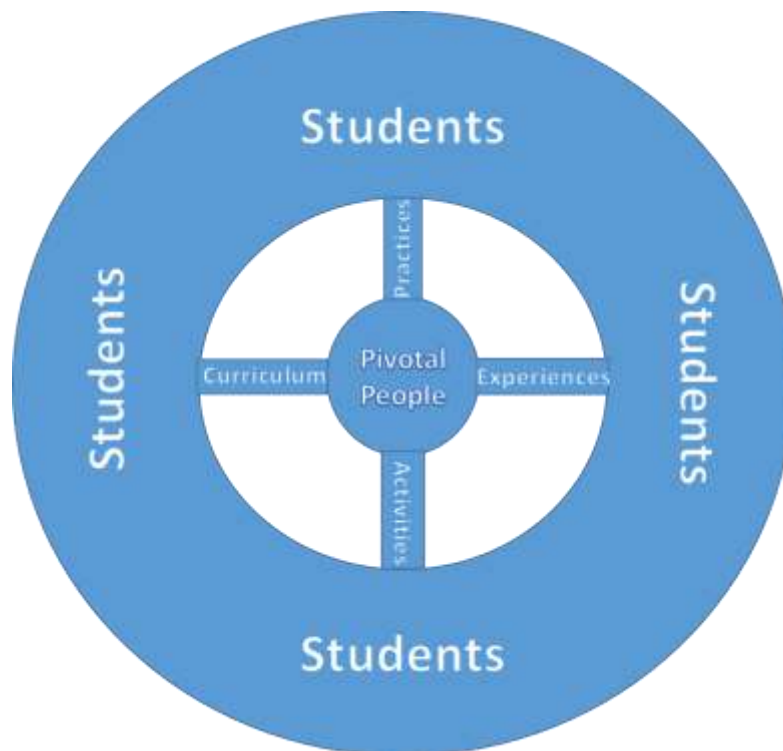


Figure 2. An analogy of the interaction of implications.

Pivotal people. The participants in the student focus groups and staff interviews both expressed the idea the success of the Tomorrow’s Leaders program centered around the relationship built between the student and staff member. Hence, relationships was the first emerging theme. Coleman Tucker (2014) stated supportive relationships are one of the most critical aspects for student success. Building relationships with young adults requires special skills (Patton et al., 2016). Having pivotal people in influential positions within a young person life is very important (Collins, 2015). Collins (2015) stated it is not enough to have the right people on the bus, they also must be in the right seat to be successful. Collins’s (2015) idea that not only the person is important, but also the position the person is placed in.

When building a college access program, build the program around relationships (Smith et al., 2012). The infrastructure of student support programs need to have people at the core (Collins, 2015). Students remember the relationships built with staff members more so than the curriculum of the program (Chang et al., 2014). Intentional experiences and curriculum in college access programs are important, as noted in the results of this study, but they are only spokes connected to the hub, which is a pivotal person. The influence of staff members on students' lives radiates through the spokes of curriculum and planned experiences. Staff members must understand the power of influence they possess over first-generation, low-income students, who, by demographics, are a vulnerable population (Ward et al., 2012).

The concept of what makes a good staff member to engage in relationships with young people is relative (Collins, 2015; Ward et al., 2012). There are some universal key characteristics and principles to follow (Collins, 2015). As Schlossberg (1989) pointed out, students need to feel as if they matter. Staff members need to be able to build up students' sense of self-worth and belonging (Schlossberg, 1989). As related in this study, longevity and constancy of relationships were paramount for students to build trust with the college access program staff. Programing models in which the staff member working with a student changes often, does not allow for the same level of trust to be developed as in models where staff members are constant over long periods of time (Smith et al., 2012).

Communication skills are another key trait staff members need to possess to be successful in building connections with students (Collins, 2015). Effective staff members are supportive and open in their interchange with students (Collins, 2015). As mentioned

by Staff Member #5, “Willingness to have tough conversations...and listen[ing] to young people in those difficult times is the most valuable trait...” It is important for staff members to understand there are areas in a student’s life outside of academics which affect the student’s ability to succeed and must be able to talk about those areas (Patton et al., 2016). Staff members need to be dedicated and relentless in terms of communication, because teenagers are not always steadfast in their availability (Stephens et al., 2012).

The curriculum and design of a college access program are important, but they are only as effective as the staff member who implements it (Collins, 2015; Smith et al., 2012). When the design of a program has the relationship between student and staff at the center, the impact of practices will be greater (Collins, 2015; Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 2012; Ward et al., 2012). The impact of the program will not matter, if the student does not feel as if he or she matter (Schlossberg, 1989).

Principle practices. As indicated above, the personal relationship between the student and the organization needs to be the hub of a program. The spokes of the program are the principle practices. Just as the spokes of a wheel support the overall frame from the hub, principle practices of the organization, the design, and implementation of the curriculum support the overall college access program. The teacher may be the single most important component in the educational process, but the instructor need to be teaching the correct curriculum and skills. The emerging themes of intentional experiences and self-advocacy encapsulate the spirit of principle practices.

Each college access program has its own sets of goals and criteria when working with first-generation and low-income students. This unique agenda will guide the development of activities and curriculum. Organizations must be faithful to their core

principle practices. Principle practices should be built on trust, holistic in approach, make direct correlations between experiences and necessary skills, and move students from a state of dependence to independence (Smith et al., 2012).

Trust is a virtue all organizations should hold steadfastly. Due to the lack of social and cultural capital first-generation, low-income students possess, students place a large amount of faith in organizations to help them bridge the access gap (Ward et al., 2012). Lack of trust is prevalent within the lower socio-economic community (Payne, 2013). It is imperative for organizations to build and maintain trust with their students (Payne, 2013; Schlossberg, 1989; Ward et al., 2012). Organizations need to be honest about what areas they can and cannot help students. In addition, making claims and promises that may only be realistic for a small number of students, such as full scholarships, can be harmful and break established trust (Glaser & Warick, 2016).

The personnel within college access programs need to understand first-generation, low-income students have concerns outside of academia. Programs should be holistic in their approach to support (Glaser & Warick, 2016; Smith et al., 2012). It is only when a student's basic needs are met he or she can truly invest in his or her studies (Ward et al., 2012). A college education is the most prevalent path to upward mobility; it also may not be the path every student takes (Payne, 2013). College access programs should strive to develop skills and traits that are transferable in multiple arenas (Glaser & Warick, 2016; Smith et al., 2012). When constructing intentional experiences, it is important to tie them directly to the learning outcomes for the program (Casazza & Silverman, 2013; Engle, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Glaser & Warick, 2016; Smith et al., 2012). This integration

allows for organizations to be holistic in their approach by knowing what key skills and traits students are learning.

The primary objective of principle practices should be helping first-generation, low-income students move from a state of dependency to independency (Bandura, 1997; Casazza & Silverman, 2013). The relationships built, the trust earned, activities, and the overall mission should be moving students forward. College access programs need to help students build social and cultural capital (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014). A sign of a healthy program is when students need the programs help and services less and less. It is more advantageous to enable a student to do something for his/herself, rather than inhibiting the student by doing it for him or her over and over (Bandura, 1997; Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 2012). By teaching fundamental skills, students will find these skills useful for a lifetime. By teaching self-efficacy, the gap of access and opportunity can be bridged, and the cycle of dependency can end.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was designed using a mixed-method approach in order to have a more holistic understanding of students' involvement in a community-based college access program; however, it should be noted it is not a comprehensive study. The focus of this study centered solely on one community-based college access program at one institution. The magnitude of the population of first-generation, low-income students is vast, as well as the number of organizations who serve as college access programs to the population.

As noted in Chapter One, there were limitations to the study including sample demographics, researcher bias, and the qualitative instrument, which could be addressed in future studies. The demographic sample was only one college-access program at one

institution, and was limited to 39 students. The focus of this study was also only on the first semester of the students' first year. This limitation could be addressed by reproducing this study with all the students of Tomorrow's Leaders at all of the institutions they attend. A long-term research and data tracking of student participants would also be of value to the body of literature.

Other community-based college access programs could be studied to examine their effectiveness at serving first-generation, low-income students. Different geographic locations, institutional types, and programmatic experiences may have an impact on the retention rates and academic success of first-generation, low-incomes students and how they feel about their overall experiences (ACT 2015a, 2015b). Studies on first-generation, low-income students who do not participate in programs designed to help them matriculate and succeed in college could be addressed in future analyses.

The qualitative instrument was adapted from other studies by the researcher, and therefore, was considered a limitation. Continued use and improvement of the instrument would increase the validity of the instrument (Creswell, 2014). Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering has not been used in many studies as a theoretical foundation. Schlossberg (1989) theory could be used to in a multiple different types studies, especially those involving historically underrepresented student populations.

Summary

A post-secondary degree is a valuable tool to help people improve their socioeconomic standing (Payne, 2013). The total enrollment of institutions of higher education is growing and diversifying, including a large portion of first-generation, low-income, urban students (Casazza & Silverman, 2013; Ward et al., 2012). A first-

generation college student is someone whose parents have not obtained a four-year degree (Stephens et al., 2014). The U.S. Department of Education (2016a) defines low-income as an individual whose family's taxable income does not exceed 150% of the poverty level. Because first-generation, low-income students do not attend college, retain between semesters, graduate, and succeed academically at the same rate as their traditional student counterparts, the question of what is working to help these students needs to be answered (Bettinger et al., 2013; Cutuli et al., 2013; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Lynch, 2013; Ward et al., 2012).

As stated in Chapter One, first-generation, low-income, urban students come to college with a wide variety of issues and barriers which do not exist for most traditional students (Ward et al., 2012). Tomorrow's Leaders is a community-based college access program designed to help first-generation, low-income, urban students overcome barriers to and in higher education (Course Catalog). The focus of this mixed-method study was the retention rates, academic achievement measured by GPA, and overall experiences of a small group of first-generation, low-income, urban students who have successfully matriculated into a large, four-year, public, Midwestern institution utilizing the resources of Tomorrow's Leaders. The perspectives of staff members who worked with these students at Tomorrow's Leaders was also explored as part of the qualitative portion. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories of student retention and departure, and Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering were used as the theoretical framework for the study.

In Chapter Two, a review of literature related to first-generation students, low-income students, college access programs, and theoretical frameworks for the study was

presented. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theories of student retention and departure centers around the students social and academic integration into an institution. The level of integration directly determines if a student chooses to leave or stay at a school (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Schlossberg (1989), in the theory of marginality and mattering, stated a student's feeling of marginality and/or mattering could affect the outcomes of the student's academic success. The literature confirmed first-generation and low-income students struggle in higher education without proper support (ACT 2015a; Bernstein et al., 2014; Casazza & Silverman, 2013; Choy, 2001; Cutuli et al., 2013; Engle et al., 2009; Ward et al., 2012). The different types of college access programs designed to support first-generation, low-income students were also discussed.

Chapter Three focused on the methodology of this study. A mixed-method research approach was chosen to allow for a more holistic view of the experiences of students who participated in Tomorrow's Leaders at a large, four-year, public Midwestern institution (Creswell, 2014). Two quantitative research questions were created to examine if a difference existed among the retention rates and grade point averages of first-generation, low-income, urban students who participated in Tomorrow's Leaders as compared to similarly qualified students who did not participate in the program. Two qualitative research questions focused on the overall programmatic experiences of student participants in Tomorrow's Leaders and the traits they received from the program as reported by staff members.

For the quantitative research questions, the results of both questions were found to be statistically significant. The qualitative portion of the mixed-method study involved focus groups with students and interviews with staff members of Tomorrow's Leaders.

The findings from the focus group and interview questions were reported, and three themes emerged: relationships, intentional experiences, and self-advocacy.

Finally, in Chapter Five, the findings of the four research questions were discussed and conclusions were formulated and compared with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. In Research Questions One and Two, participation in Tomorrow's Leaders significantly increases first-generation, low-income, urban students' retention rates and academic success was indicated. The emerging themes, resulting in answering Research Questions Three and Four, were relationships, intentional experiences, and self-advocacy, which support Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) and Schlossberg's (1989) theories on what factors support students' success in higher education.

The implications of this study are directly tied into the emerging themes. In the implications, it was suggested college access programs design their curriculum and experiences around the relationship between the student and staff member (Casazza & Silverman, 2013; Chang et al., 2014; Collins, 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 1989; Smith et al., 2012). Likewise, the design of the curriculum should be based on trust, holistic in approach, make direct correlations between experiences and necessary skills, and move students from a state of dependence to independence (Bandura, 1997; Casazza & Silverman, 2013; Engle, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Glaser & Warick, 2016; Smith et al., 2012).

The goal of all college access programs and institutions of higher education should be to help bridge the gap in access to higher education and to improve academic achievement for all first-generation, low-income students (Franklin & Hoyler, 2014; Glaser & Warick, 2016; Smith et al., 2012). Future research on the impact of college

access programs on first-generation, low-income, urban students to address the limitations of this study is needed. This study found the positive impact Tomorrow's Leaders have on student retention rates, grade point averages, and the encouraging environment; all have a profound effect on historically marginalized students.

Appendix A

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

“The Impact of a College Access Program at a Midwestern Institution”

Principal Investigator Ryan Reed

Telephone: ██████████ E-mail: ██████████

Participant _____

Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ryan Reed under the guidance of Dr. Rhonda Bishop. The purpose of this research is to understand the impact the participation in a college access program has on your success in college.
2. a) Your participation will involve:
 - Participating in a focus group and answering 10 questions about your involvement in a college access program.
 - This will be a one-time commitment that will occur at an agreed upon time and location.

b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be about two hours. Approximately 15 college access students will be involved in this research.
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about how college access programs.
5. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study, and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Ryan Reed at [REDACTED] or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Rhonda Bishop at [REDACTED]. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Provost, at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

Participant's Signature	Date	Participant's Printed Name
Signature of Principal Investigator		Investigator's Printed Name
	Date	

Appendix B

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

“The Impact of a College Access Program at a Midwestern Institution”

Principal Investigator Ryan Reed

Telephone: [REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

Participant _____

Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ryan Reed under the guidance of Dr. Rhonda Bishop. The purpose of this research is to understand the impact the participation in a college access program has on your success in college.
2. a) Your participation will involve:
 - Participating in an interview and answering 10 questions about your involvement as a staff member in a college access program.
 - This will be a one-time commitment that will occur at an agreed upon time and location.

b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be about one hour. Approximately 5 college access staff will be involved in this research.
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about how college access programs.
5. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study, and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Ryan Reed at [REDACTED] or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Rhonda Bishop at [REDACTED]. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Provost, at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

 Participant's Signature

Date

 Participant's Printed Name

 Signature of Principal Investigator Date

 Investigator's Printed Name

Appendix C

Focus group questions

Demographic handout – assigned group and number, gender, race, major, class rank, and number of semesters of attendance at current school.

1. Up until this point, what challenges, both personal and educational, have you encountered as a first-generation/low-income student? (Please ask for clarification or more information as needed).
2. What role has participating in Tomorrow's Leaders played in helping you overcome those challenges?
3. Tell me about the relationships and support systems you have developed while participating in Tomorrow's Leaders and in what way have they helped you.
 - a. student
 - b. Tomorrow's Leaders staff
 - c. college faculty/staff
4. What matters and motivates you in your college?
5. Has this educational experience in college been what you expected? Why or why not?
6. How strongly do you feel your participation in the Tomorrow's Leaders program contributed to your success?
7. When you think about Tomorrow's Leaders, what three words come to mind?
8. In your opinion, what were the top two services provided to you by Tomorrow's Leaders?
9. What can Tomorrow's Leaders do to improve, and if given the opportunity, what would you change about the program to help you, or future participants, be more successful in college?
10. Is there something you wish to tell me about your experiences that I did not ask you?

Appendix D

Interview questions for staff

1. What personal characteristics do you possess which have helped you succeed with the students you serve?
2. Do you use any non-conventional methods when educating and mentoring first-generation, low-income students? If so, what are the methods?
3. How do you motivate first-generation, low-income college students to complete college?
4. What barriers, personal and educationally, do you see first-generation, low-income college students have or experience while participating in the program and attending college?
5. How important do you feel the student/Tomorrow's Leaders relationship is in your students' educational pursuits?
6. How do you emphasize to students the importance of success in college? What indicators do they give you that they understand?
7. What traits does the program try to instill in students that you believe makes them successful in college? And how do you go about teaching them?
8. Over the time period when students are involved in the program, how do you see them change or grow?
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of not being a federally funded program, like other college access programs?
 - a. Do you feel that makes a difference to students' success in getting into and persisting in college? Why or why not?
10. Is there something you wish to tell me about your experience as a staff member of Tomorrow's Leaders that I did not ask you?

Appendix E

From: Hayter, Sonya [mailto: [REDACTED]]
Sent: Tuesday, July 19, 2016 9:32 AM
To: Reed, Ryan R < [REDACTED] >
Subject: RE: Lindenwood EdD

Ryan – good to hear from you. Absolutely fine... please feel free to use what you need. I would love to read your dissertation upon completion because the topic is so close to mine. As you might expect I am highly interested in first-generation college students and nontraditional college students as well. Best of luck to you – stay the course and keep moving forward!

Let me know how I may help you.

Sonya

Sonya Hayter EdD

[REDACTED]

From: Reed, Ryan R [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, July 12, 2016 3:48 PM
To: Hayter, Sonya
Subject: Lindenwood EdD

Dr. Hayter –

My name is Ryan Reed, we haven't met, but we have a lot of people in common. I am currently working on my dissertation at Lindenwood for my EdD. I am wanting to write about Schlossberg's Marginality and Mattering as it relates the first-gen, low-income student I work with at [REDACTED]. Dr. Bishop (Rhonda) suggested I read your dissertation. I am interested in the questions you used in your student interviews for gauge marginality and mattering. I am wanting to know if I could possibly use some of your questions for my research? I am not sure if I will use all or any, but Dr. Bishop wants us to reach out to people if we are thinking about using similar instruments. Please let me know. Thanks,

Have a Blessed Day!

Ryan Reed

From: Wilson, Tajuan [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, July 12, 2016 4:07 PM
To: Reed, Ryan R <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Permission to use instrument

Ryan-

You absolutely have my permission to utilize my qualitative instrument. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I'm happy to provide assistance, however, I can and I look forward to seeing your finished product.

Best wishes for a successful dissertation process!

Dr. TaJuan R. Wilson
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

On Jul 12, 2016, at 4:55 PM, Reed, Ryan R <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Dr. Wilson –

I am writing to request permission to use your qualitative instrument that you designed for your dissertation. I would like to use the focus group questions. Thank you for your support of my research.

Have a Blessed Day!

Ryan Reed

Appendix F

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: January 4, 2017

TO: Ryan R Reed
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [928921-1] The Impact of College Access Programs at a Midwestern Institution

IRB REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: January 4, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE: January 3, 2018
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review (Category 7) based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of January 3, 2018.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three

If you have any questions, please contact Michael Leary at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

Appendix G

REQUEST FOR SINGLE IRB REVIEW

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
v. December 2013

For research conducted at [REDACTED]
subject to review by another qualified IRB

The Principal Investigator must complete this form for research involving human subjects at [REDACTED], in which another IRB is requested to be the IRB of Record. After submitting this form to [REDACTED], the IRB will review it and determine if single IRB review is appropriate.

For OSRP Use Only Date Submitted: _____ Date Received: 1/9/17 Application #: _____

A. PERSONNEL INFORMATION

Principal Investigator (PI) Name: Ryan Reed PI Title: Coordinator of Access Programs
PI School: [REDACTED] PI Department: Multicultural Student Services
PI Email: RyanReed@[REDACTED] PI Phone Number: [REDACTED]
Co-worker name(s): Jerilyn Reed

B. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD OF RECORD INFORMATION

Institution Name: Lindenwood University
IRB Phone Number: 636-949-4730
IRB Contact Person (email): IRB@lindenwood.edu
IRB Application Number: 928921-1
(attach approval letter)
Names of other collaborating institutions (if applicable): _____

C. PROJECT INFORMATION

Title of Study: The Impact of College Access Programs at a Midwestern Institution
Proposed Project Dates: Jan 2017 till Jan 2018

Request for Single IRB Review

December 2013

C. PROJECT INFORMATION (cont...)

Brief Description of Proposed Project:

This is a mixed methods study of students involved in Access Programs. The PI will examine the GPA and retention rates of students who participate in the College Access programs compared to similarly qualified students that do not participate in the program for the quantitative portion. The PI will also conduct focus groups with students who participate in the Access Programs for the qualitative portion to have better understanding of the students overall experience at [redacted] and with Access Programs.

Risks Associated with this Study:

No none risk is associated with this study.

Is this research subject to HIPAA regulations? Yes No

D. INVESTIGATOR ASSURANCE

I hereby agree to conduct this study in accordance with the procedures set forth in my project description, to uphold the ethical guidelines as set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46, 45 CFR 160 and 164 and the [redacted] HIPAA policy. I understand that, if this request is approved, the IRB at Lindenwood University will be responsible for the initial and continuing review of this project. The decision to allow single IRB review is at the discretion of the IRB at [redacted].

Principal Investigator Signature

Date

E. IRB RECOMMENDATION Approved for Single IRB Review Recommendation for Review for [redacted]

Chairman of the IRB Signature

Date


Appendix H



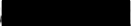
July 12, 2016

Dr. Rhonda Bishop
Lindenwood University
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, MO 63301

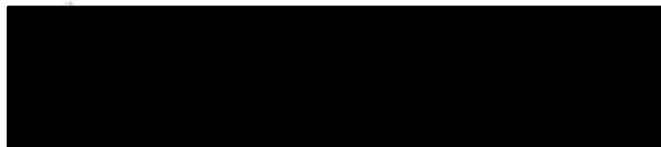

Dear Dr. Bishop:

I am pleased to write a letter of support for Ryan Reed's dissertation research, "The Impact of College Access Programs at a Midwestern Institution". I understand that Ryan plans to conduct research with students at  where he is currently employed. As the Vice President for Student Affairs, I am supportive of Ryan's proposed research and am anxious to read his dissertation upon completion of his study.

Ryan tells me that he plans to do a mixed method study. The quantitative research will look at GPA and retention rates of access students. The qualitative research will be interview/focus groups with access students to gage their experiences getting into and staying in college and how their access programs provided them support. I know that Ryan will seek the appropriate IRB approval in order to conduct this research.

If I can provide any additional information, please feel free to contact me at . Thank you.


Sincerely,



Appendix I




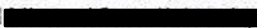



September 30, 2015





Mr. Ryan Reed



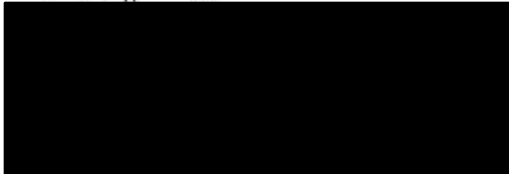
Dear Mr. Reed:

We are pleased to have the opportunity, through your dissertation, to learn more about the impact of  on indicators of postsecondary success for the young adults who attended . We understand that this study will include a mixed methods approach—using secondary data to analyze the differences in Freshman GPA, and college retention and persistence rates between  participants and a comparison group as well as focus groups with  participants and interviews with  staff.

You have our permission to name  in your dissertation proposal and in your final dissertation write-up. If you pursue writing or presenting this study for broader dissemination purposes (e.g., manuscript for peer-reviewed journal, conference presentation, article for non-scholarly outlet, etc.), we request the opportunity to review and provide input on a pre-submission version.

Thank you for choosing the  as the focus of your study. It is our goal through our programs to help teens thrive in learning, work and life, and we look forward to the opportunity to use your study findings to inform and improve our work.

Sincerely,



Appendix J

LINDENWOOD

Recruitment Email**The Impact of a College Access Program at a Midwestern Institution**

Dear Student,

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri, completing an Educational Doctorate in Higher Education Administration. Additionally, I am the Coordinator of Access Programs at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

For my dissertation, I am conducting research on students who have participated in [REDACTED] and how that involvement has affected their college success.

To conduct this research, I would like to have [REDACTED] students participate in a focus group. I would like to have three focus groups with about five students each. The focus group would be approximately two hours and would take place at an agreed upon location and time that would allow for the most participation.

If you are interested in participating, I would ask that you provide me the best contact information and availability. Should you have any questions about this process, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED]. You may also contact my Professor, Dr. Rhonda Bishop, at [REDACTED] with any questions or concerns regarding this research.

Thank you for your consideration.
Ryan Reed
Doctoral Candidate
Lindenwood University

Appendix K**LINDENWOOD****Recruitment Email for Staff**

The Impact of a College Access Program at a Midwestern Institution

Dear [REDACTED] Staff Member,

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri, completing an Educational Doctorate in Higher Education Administration. Additionally, I am the Coordinator of Access Programs at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

For my dissertation, I am conducting research on students who have participated in [REDACTED] and how that involvement has affected their college success.

To conduct this research, I would like to have [REDACTED] staff participate in an interview. The interview would be approximately one hour and would take place at an agreed upon location and time.

If you are interested in participating, I would ask that you provide me the best contact information and availability. Should you have any questions about this process, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED]. You may also contact my Professor, Dr. Rhonda Bishop, at [REDACTED] with any questions or concerns regarding this research.

Thank you for your consideration.
Ryan Reed
Doctoral Candidate
Lindenwood University

Appendix L

Proctor Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to be a proctor for this study. In order to be consistent and reliable, each of you is being trained to facilitate this process. Please follow the instructions given and ask any questions to clarify and simplify the process as needed.

1. Using the voice recorders and video camera provided, audio record each focus group session using the provided voice recorder. Turn the tape recorder and video camera on and begin recording so the entire process is available for review. Each audio recording should be labeled, and copies of the files should be maintained in four different secure locations: the original device, drop box, email, and an external hard drive.
2. Verbally go over the consent form with the group. Remind students that they do not have to respond to every question and that they can terminate their participation at any time.
3. Identify each focus group by letter and each student by number (ex. Focus Group A, Student 1, Focus Group B, Student 1, etc.). In this step, each focus group will be identified by a letter and each participant will be assigned a number. For example, the members of the first Focus Group can be labeled A1-A6, the members of the second Focus Group B1-B-6, and so on. At this point, assign each student by letter and number and have he or she speak the number. Inform students each time they speak, they will also need to reference their assigned group and number to ensure consistency. It can be before or after their statement.
4. Have students complete the demographic sheet and add their assigned group and number the sheet.
5. Ask each question in order, and give an opportunity for each student to answer. For example, each student should be given the opportunity to respond to question 1 and provide his/her corresponding identifying information before moving on to other questions.
6. Ask for clarification as needed. Some students might not provide you with the appropriate detail needed to draw conclusions and themes from during the analysis process. It is acceptable to ask for clarification as you feel necessary. For example, if a student makes a statement of how many times a situation occurs, it is acceptable to clarify how many times it occurred.
7. Maintain field notes during the process in order to make the analysis less difficult. Field notes are taken by recording major themes, ideas, comments, and observations

regarding group dynamics and are hand-written. In addition, make regular member checks by summarizing information and questioning participants to ensure accuracy.

8. Summarize key ideas in the field notes section. Essentially, look for patterns of findings.
9. After the focus group has ended, please label all recordings and maintain them on the original device, in drop box, via email, as well as the external hard drive provided.

References

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Vita

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Reed has over 15 years of higher education experience at multiple institutions in the areas of residence life, academic advising, admissions, and student affairs. Reed has also served on multiple committees and task forces concerning diversity, retention, recruitment, conduct, and hiring. Reed is a Staff Senator and certified Master Academic Advisor at Missouri State University. Additionally, Reed serves on the board of directors for the Springfield Vineyard Church as the treasurer. Reed is also very active in his community through a variety of community service projects.