8-10-2012

Perspectives of Higher Education Administrators and Staff: Programs and Services for First Generation College Students

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY In Education

2 0 1 2

Committee Approval Page

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI – ST. LOUIS

GRADUATE SCHOOL

August, 2012

We hereby recommend that the dissertation by:

Latishua E. Lewis

Entitled:

PERSPECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

Be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of:

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Title Page

PERSPECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

In the Graduate School of the

University of Missouri St. Louis, 2012

St. Louis, Missouri

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I must THANK GOD for carrying me through all my academic endeavors. There have been many obstacles in my life that could have deterred me from my educational journey. I know I could not have accomplished this goal without the love and support of so many selfless people. I have been blessed with a supportive committee chair Dr. Matthew Davis and committee members Dr. Kimberly Allen, Dr. Charles Fazzaro and Dr. Carl Hoagland. Collectively, their feedback added to the depth of this research by pushing me to elevate my critical and analytical thinking skills. Dr. Davis, thank you for showing me an educational path in which I could embrace my cultural being and learn how I could professionally use elements of my disadvantaged past to contribute to my future career goals. This study would not have come to fruition without the participants who wholeheartedly invited me into their lives and unabashedly shared their expertise on First Generation College Students.

To my mother, the late Mary Lee Johnson, thanks for having the insight to have me participate in the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice program (St. Louis Metropolitan desegregation program), which changed the course of my educational path. Because of your firm discipline, I value the importance of being prepared and having a plan to take care of my responsibilities. I wish that you were here to see the woman I have become. As the youngest of your seven children, I pledge to honorably carry your legacy. Thanks for all the unwritten life lessons. I LOVE & MISS YOU MOMMA.

God blessed me with a beautiful baby girl on November 4, 2001. Jade Elise Lewis, my offspring, thanks for always having your mommy's back. Your humble nature inspires me to want to do better. Jade, also known as "Jazzy", your intellectual competence, creative energy and sense

of style confirms that the sacrifices have been well worth it. I know you will strive for excellence due to witnessing my dedication to education.

To my sisters and brothers, Thank You. To all my nieces and nephews, I hope I have been an example for you. All your DREAMS can come true if you put the time and energy into to making them a reality. Although I am the first to graduate with a college degree, your aspirations assure me that I will not be the last.

Craig Mason, my buddy for life, there are not many people who I can genuinely call a friend. Craig, your friendship is a blessing that will be treasured forever. Our friendship defies the notion that a male and female can't truly be friends {2Pac –Better Dayz}. Marilyn Fisher, your unwavering love has helped me stay grounded. I have leaned on you practically all my life. Thanks for always lending an ear or voice of reason. Marilyn, you have been a big sister, a cousin, an aunt, a friend and to be honest, no title is needed to express the love and respect I have for you. To the "Ray" family your down to earth personalities and outward allegiance to God has truly touched my life. I am grateful for my relationships with each member of your family: Sandy; Thomas; Sharon; Ryan; and Taylor. Ada Williams, my Scorpio mate, thanks for being you. Your one of a kind character is appreciated. I will never forget you extending a helping hand to purchase my schoolbooks upon our initial meeting. Your willingness to help a stranger began our lifelong friendship.

Special thanks are given to all my co-workers at the University of Missouri St.- Louis. I have had the pleasure to work with a diverse group of professionals who have been willing to give me constructive feedback at every turn in the doctoral process. To all the students that I have had the pleasure of serving at the University of Central Missouri, the University of Missouri – St. Louis and various speaking engagements continue to reach for your DREAMS and "Keep

Striving" for excellence. Thanks for keeping my spirit young and my technological advancements up-to-date.

Last, but definitely not least, I acknowledge the eminent women of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. whose paths I have had the pleasure of crossing. Soror Keely Finney, thanks for always keeping it real with me. I know that I can count on you regardless of the mission. Soror Kimberly Morton, my line "sistah", your competitive drive is quite admirable. I appreciate your positive influence on life changing decisions. Soror Knikkia Johnson I appreciate you wholeheartedly accepting my funny acting ways. I can always count on you to be consistent and share your genuine LOVE. Sorors Susan LaGrone, PhD and Theresa Loveless, my mentors, you exude all the qualities of a true sister. I have learned so much from watching you both handle the business of Delta in a respectable and professional manner. Soror Frankie M. Freeman Esq., I am honored that I had the opportunity to share quality time with you during this process. Your humble disposition and sisterly love will forever be remembered. The civil rights and education contributions that you have made over your 95 year life span reminds me that there is still much work to be done to address the issues that plague our communities.

Abstract

This dissertation is an investigation of the perspectives of higher education administrators and staff who provide services that support the academic and social sustainability of African American first generation college students (FGCS). In this study the researcher operated in a dual capacity. The two roles the researcher served as are FGCS and staff member. The researcher is a first generation college student and provides programs and services for the FGCS student population. The participants were from two urban institutions that are in the same overarching academic system. This inquiry focused on administrators and staff sharing their perspectives in narrative form. The rich discussions unveiled experiences that might have an impact on policy and procedures in higher education. Although this data cannot be generalized it can be used as a tool to begin discussions about administrators and staff perceptions of programs and services provided for FGCS. The data in this study was analyzed through a critical race theory framework.

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Chapter One

Introduction

I received a reality check the day I was struck in the back by a .22-caliber bullet. As I lay on the emergency room table covered in blood, thoughts of death crossed my mind. I wondered if I would be the next drive-by-shooting statistic. Death and incarceration were daily occurrences in my neighborhood. It became apparent to me that I needed to change the trajectory of my future. Completing a college degree was one way to make that change. Although, no one in my family had completed college, some had attended trade schools, and others had attended two year or four year institutions. Growing up, my mother always told the seven of us to be the best at whatever we chose to do. I decided that I would become the best student. A few of my siblings chose other paths such as being the best drug dealer or the best criminal. Unlike my siblings, who chose to illegally hustle drugs, I was determined for education to be my 'legal hustle'. More than twenty years have passed since I lay on that emergency room table and almost twenty years since I entered an institution of higher learning. I have learned to cope with social and cultural barriers that have attempted to impede my progress. I am proud to be the first college graduate in my family. Regrettably, at this writing, I am the only one. According to Pike and Kuh (2005) "An institution of higher education cannot change the lineage of its students. But it can implement interventions that increase the odds that first generation college students 'get ready,' 'get in,' and 'get through' by changing the way those students view college and by altering what they do after they arrive" (p. 292).

Common questions by first generation college students (FGCS) include the following: *Is college an option for me? Am I smart enough to go to college? Can I afford*

to get a college education? What will my friends and family think about me attending college? How do I get started? These questions indicate that many do not know where to begin the college planning process or what to expect once they get there. Perhaps the students fear the unknown and/or the appearance of being less intelligent (Choy, 2001). The college admissions process is daunting, so being the first person in your family to attend college can leave the student without adequate resources to succeed. Unfortunately, first generation college students might have no one to help them answer their questions or ease their anxieties. According to Timberlake (2005), colleges welcome first generation college students to attend their institutions; however, many are not prepared to fully support them academically or socially. Engle and Tinto (2008) suggest that one key factor in retaining students involves college personnel assisting them in adjusting socially and academically.

The bureaucratic landscape of higher education can be quite overwhelming for any student. It is even more complex for FGCS because they lack knowledge in areas such as time and money management as well as organizational and communication skills (Thayer, 2000). Many FGCS do not have access to resources, technology or support, all of which are needed to successfully explore prospective college campuses. Thayer (2000) notes that FGCS, typically, have low pre-college critical thinking skills. According to Cushman (2007) critical thinking skills might be underdeveloped primarily due to poor preparation by secondary schools. In addition, students who have attended low achieving schools often have insufficient assistance in exploring their educational options (Case, 2005; Cushman, 2007; Gullatt and Jan, 2003).

The U. S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2006) defines FGCS as neither parent having more than a high school diploma. An expanded definition of FGCS includes students whose parents graduated from high school but do not hold a Bachelor's degree, and has either some college or have obtained a two-year college degree (Case, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). It is important to know which definition is being used to define this student population as the literature is read. For this study, first generation college student's status is appropriate if neither one of their parents or guardians possess a four-year degree (Davis, 2010).

Many studies have been conducted that look at the characteristics of FGCS (Hahs-Vaugh, 2004; Hsiao, 1992; London, 1989; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). No existing studies have examined the perspectives of administrators and staff who provide services for FGCS. This study investigated the perspectives and experiences of the researcher, administrators, and staff, all of whom are responsible for providing services that support FGCS. As a first generation college student and as a staff member who supports FGCS, I have firsthand knowledge that will add to the depth of the study. I interjected my experience into the study, through the use of counter narratives. Specifically, the study is intended to help administrators and staff identify what roles and practices influence students' experiences and impact access, persistence and retention of FGCS. Focusing on these three areas for my study generated one leading research question: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence, and retention of African-American FGCS?

The Access to Success Initiative (A2S) is a project sponsored by the National Association of System Heads and The Education Trust. This initiative works with 24

public higher education systems that are committed to reducing the college entrance and graduation gaps for low-income and minority students in half by 2020 (The Education Trust, n.d.). This research study was conducted at two metropolitan universities that have elected to participate in the Access to Success Initiative. The A2S initiative provides guidelines, for which universities are held accountable, in retaining low-income, minority students, as well as other groups that represent the majority of FGCS (Education Trust, n.d.). The A2S initiative specifically urges universities to purposefully seek low income, minority students as a way to reduce the college entrance and graduation gaps (Education Trust, n.d.). Many students who are FGCS are also low-income and minority. This study will emphasize the emergence of the FGCS category.

As a first generation college student, I have experienced the challenges of navigating the terrain of higher education. As a Student Development Coordinator at a public university located in a metropolitan area, I currently work with FGCS primarily through an office whose mission promotes student development and achievement. I also assist the campus community with programming directed toward FGCS, low-income and minority students. My experience in both roles parallels the work of the PELL researchers that suggests identifying and supporting first generation college students can improve retention and graduation rates of minority students (Pell Institute, 2011).

The Problem

According to U.S. Department of Education (2006), 30% of entering freshmen in the USA are first-generation college students with 24% and/or 4.5 million being both first-generation and low income. Nationally, 89% of low-income first-generation college students leave college within six years without a degree. In addition, more than 25%

leave after their first year, which is four times the dropout rate of higher-income second-generation students. FGCS do not persist at the same rate as non-FGCS (Case, 2005; Choy, 2001; Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Hsiao, 1992; Thayer, 2000). FGCS have special needs that warrant intentional support services as they leave high school and prepare to enter college (Ayala & Stripen, 2002, Engle & Tinto, 2008; Myers, 2003; Thayer, 2000). Although a more recent national study has not been conducted Davis (2010) projects over 40 % of incoming freshmen or FGCS. Through his analysis of demographic trends, he foresees the figure growing above the 50% threshold. Often FGCS are grouped with other student populations such as low income and minority. When students belong to more than one demographic it might present added challenges (Davis, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to answer the research question: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence, and retention of African-American FGCS? As a result of answering the research question the information can inform personal and professional practices in higher education about access, persistence and retention of FGCS from the perspectives of administrators and staff who are held responsible and accountable for the success of FGCS. Current literature does not reflect the perspectives of administrators or staff in providing support for FGCS, perspectives that are vital to the success of this vulnerable student population (The Pell Institute, May 2011).

This research identified the demographic profiles of higher education administrators and staff, their perspectives, and the experiences that shape their influence at the institution where they are employed. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provided the

foundation to document the voices of those who directly work with FGCS including the voice of the author. More specifically, this study enabled the unheard stories of staff who support FGCS to be shared with a larger community. The counter narratives shared in this inquiry confirm the gaps in literature concerning the perspectives of administrators and staff that provide programs and services for FGCS.

This study has significant potential to contribute to the body of literature regarding information about administrators and staff who provide services for FGCS. It investigated what type of support administrators and staff receives from their institutions in assisting FGCS with access, persistence, and retention. The study also discovered the influence the Access to Success Initiative has had at each institution as it relates to FGCS.

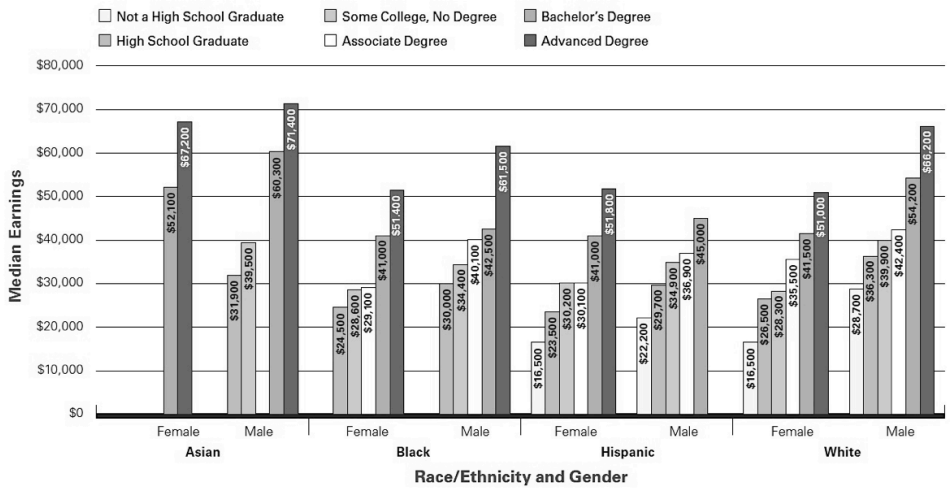
Establishing the Context

According to Collier & Morgan (2008), in all industrialized countries, higher education is a critical pathway to achieving both occupational success and social status. Today, obtaining a college education is essential to the success of underrepresented students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Being educated opens doors for better opportunities that might otherwise be closed (Choy, 2001; Gates, 1996; West, 1993). The importance of education has heightened over the years because of changes in the labor market (United States Department of Education, 2006; Wilson, 2009; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991). Wilson (2009), an African-American sociologist, attributes the change in the labor market as having a great impact on the Black community especially Black males. Social and cultural forces can be used to explain the prevalent inequalities in education for low-income minority students including educational attainment and success in the labor market (Wilson, 2009).

In the Trends in Higher Education Series which is produced by the College Board, *Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society,* the authors illustrated some of the economic and non-economic benefits of obtaining a college education. The *Education Pays report*, shows the median earnings of fulltime workers between the ages of 24 and 34. The following graph depicts the gaps in earning by education level, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Figure 1.4

Median Earnings of Full-Time Year-Round Workers Ages 25–34, by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Education Level, 2008



Note: Sample sizes for the following groups are too small to allow reliable reporting: Asian females with less than a bachelor's degree, Asian males with less than a high school diploma, Asian males with an associate degree, black females with less than a high school diploma, black males with less than a high school diploma, and Hispanic males with an advanced degree.

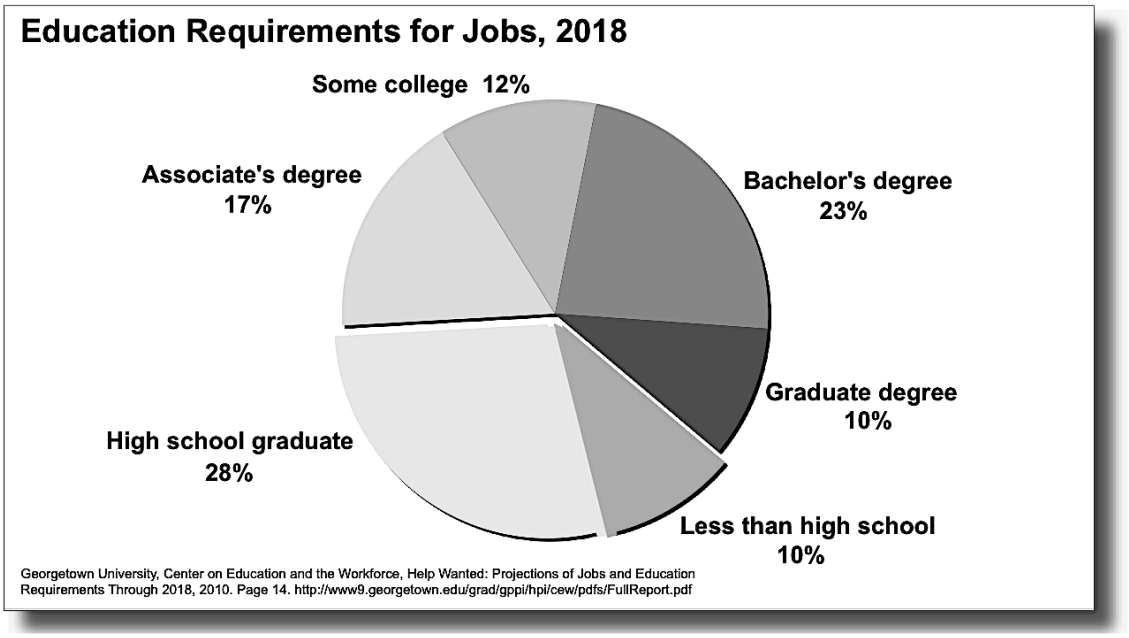
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009; calculations by the authors.

Note. Median Earnings. Adapted from "Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society," by S. Baum, J. Ma and K. Payea, 2010, *Trends in Higher Education Series*, p. 14.Copyright 2010 by College Board Advocacy & Policy Center. Adapted with permission.

There are increasingly large numbers of minority families that are sending their youth to college for the first time in the year 2012:

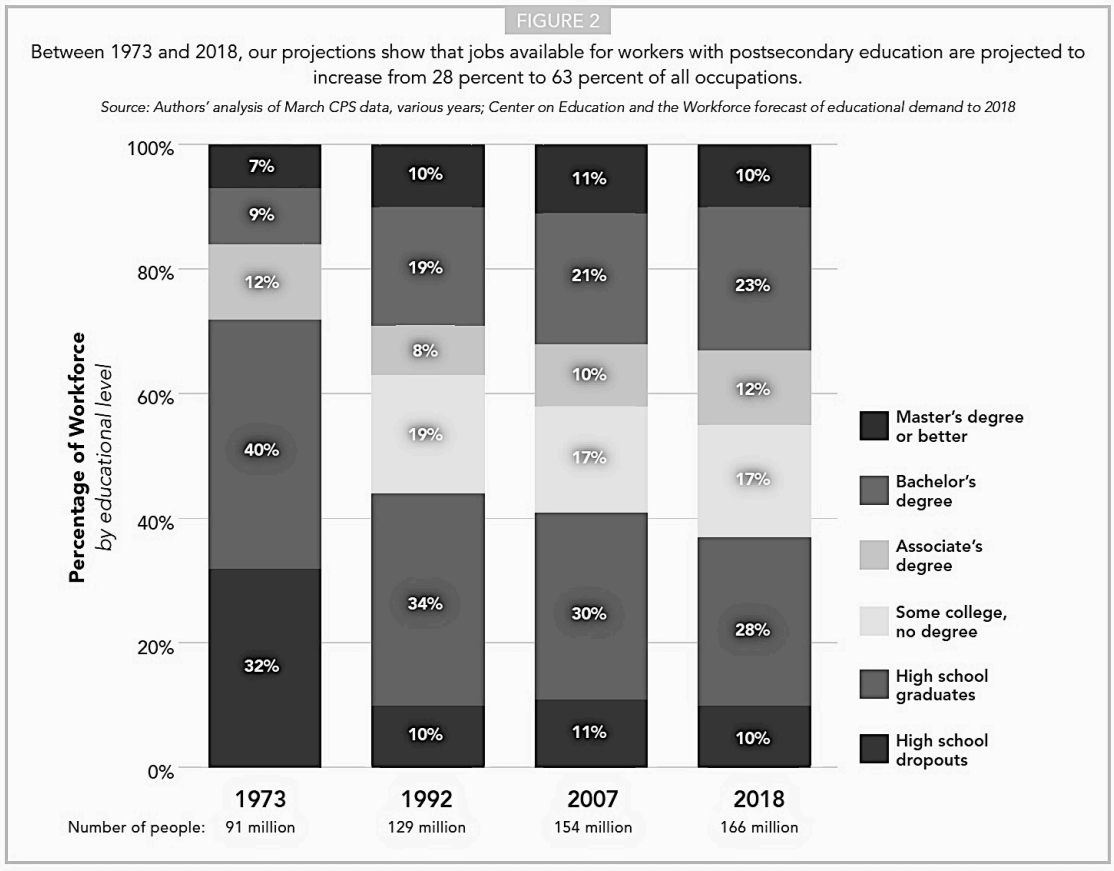
> "The United States is in the midst of a profound educational challenge with a new population of first-generation college students and new immigrants (many from minority and/or low-income families) entering into a social and economic environment which relies more on knowledge than on traditional forms of labor" (Case, 2005, p.1).

According to the U.S. Department of Education: College Completion Tool Kit (2011), in the next decade, more than half of all new jobs will require a postsecondary certificate or degree, and the earning gaps between those that hold a Bachelor's degree and those who do not will continue to widen. The graph below shows the education requirements for jobs by the year 2018 as documented in the Completion Tool Kit (2011).



Note. Education Requirements. *Adapted from College Completion Tool Kit (p. 1)* by A. Duncan, 2011, Washington D.C.: Copyright 2011 by The U.S. Department of Education. Adapted with permission.

Help Wanted: *Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018 report* provides a detailed account of education levels direct impact on occupational attainment and sustainment. The authors suggest that America's current postsecondary system is not producing enough college graduates to keep up with the demand of the labor market. In their analysis they discovered that between 1973 and 2018, across all occupations, jobs available for employees with postsecondary education would increase from 28 percent to 63 percent. Over the next decade there will continue to be a prevalent shift, which moves towards a dominant college economy (The Georgetown university Center on Education and the Workforce, 2012).



Note. Percentage of workforce. "Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018," by A. Carnevale, N. Smith and J. Strohl, 2010, *Center on Education and the Workforce,* p. 14. Copyright 2010 by Georgetown University. Adapted with permission.

The information above shows the importance of education and how the world is moving towards a surplus in jobs that require at least a college degree. When looking at the increased need to obtain a college education, one must call attention to historical racial implications that still warp the education system today (DeGruy, 2005; Gates, 1993; West, 1993; Wilson, 2009). It is difficult to strive for a better education when the public educational system often fails to provide low-income minority students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to make a smooth transition from high school to college (Myers, 2003). Taylor (1999) states that, "Non-White access to education has never been a *de facto* legal or social right; the Constitution and the courts have been, and continue to be, the gatekeeper" (p. 168).

Brief Historical Context

Higher education in the United States began in 1636 at Harvard College (Rudolph, 1990), a period in which Blacks were still enslaved. For nearly three and a half centuries Blacks were consciously disenfranchised from the education process (Gates, 1993; West, 1993; Wilson, 2009). At this point in history, education of Whites was seen as a necessary system because they felt a need to pass knowledge to upcoming generations (Rudolph, 1990). Education of Blacks was not for generational gain but for the slave masters' economic benefit (Wilson, 2009). Scholars argue that past education discrimination of Blacks has a direct impact on the current state of achievement gaps within the Black community (DeGruy, 2005).

Rudolph (1990) reports the first Black person graduated from college in 1828. This gap represents a 192-year educational head start in favor of Whites. In 1895, W.E.B. Du Bois became the first Black to earn a PhD at Harvard, which was 259 years after it's

founding (Gates, 1996). Munoz (2009) contends that the past educational disparities cannot be denied if effective educational development practices for minority students are to be developed, implemented and evaluated. According to Greene (2006) federal, state and local governing bodies have recognized that gaining access and transitioning to college is a challenge for historically underserved students. Thus, the governing bodies have implemented policies, practices and programs to increase underserved students participation in higher education (Greene, 2006).

The transition from high school to college is made even more difficult if a student of color attends a historically White institution (Munoz, 2009). Research shows that African-American students find it difficult to fit in at predominately White, elite, independent schools that have a history of racial exclusion (Brookins, 1988; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991; Hilraldo, 2010). Intentional racial exclusion of access to higher education for Blacks throughout U.S. history cannot be ignored (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In fact, Blacks fought, shed blood, and even died in pursuit of education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). During slavery, if masters found out their slaves were seeking knowledge, they would discipline them to extreme levels that sometimes resulted in loss of life (DeGruy, 2005).

While combating racial inequalities is a difficult task, critical race theorists have taken leadership in bringing awareness, offering support and encouraging open dialogue that might someday lead to improved educational race relations (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT scholars bring attention to the relationship between race, racism, and power. Taylor (1999) suggests that CRT scholars have redefined racism to encompass the acts of larger systemic structural conventions and customs that uphold and sustain oppressive group

relationships, status, income, and educational attainment. The deep-rooted conventions of oppression make leveling the playing field of education a daunting task (DeGruy, 2005). Many low income FGCS are not academically or socially prepared to enter college (Engle & Tinto, 2008)

Counter-Narratives

Lack of educational preparation presents various challenges for FGCS academically and socially (Choy, 2001; Myers, 2003; Thayer, 2000). Students who are exploring campus life for the first time might find the transition to be difficult, as if one is entering a foreign physical and social environment (Case, 2005; Johnson 2004; Thayer, 2000;). For example, within the Black culture, there is a need to hold on to community ties while at the same time trying to connect with a new community (London, 1989; Johnson, 2004; Thayer, 2000). Many students struggle with this balancing act. According to London (1989), first generation college students might find themselves trying to exist within two cultures, that of their friends and family and that of their college community. In my own narrative, I have addressed this double-consciousness:

> *I struggled with trying to balance what I would consider two different worlds. On one hand, I felt a need to be true to my 'hood', the community that shaped the beginning stages of my identity. On the other hand, I felt a need to sever ties with certain aspects of my community so that I could immerse myself in my new experience. The more educated I become, the more I unconsciously have distanced myself from the people in my neighborhood. Education is changing me. My interests are no longer in sharing stories in the beauty shop. Instead, my interests reside in adding substance to my story. Education helped me to*

> *understand the importance of educating myself so that I could be in a position to help those less fortunate than I. Today I share my story in predominately Black high schools about making the transition from high school to college. I feel compelled to share my story in an attempt to encourage students with similar backgrounds who need to know that they too can obtain a college education. I pride myself on my ability to "keep it real" and by the same token "keep it professional" (Lewis, 2010).*

Subsequently, questions persist for FGCSs: *Am I not worthy of an education? Should I not be given a chance to advance my education? Why am I not prepared to pursue a college education? How will I adapt to leaving my neighborhood? Will I fit in with the college community?* These are a few questions that a first generation college student might think about when educational opportunities seem out of reach. My own experience mirrors these moments of doubt and lack of support:

> *Nothing in my past would have indicated that I was interested in pursuing dreams of working in higher education. I was not only the first in my family to attend and graduate from college, but I was also the first on my block (within my age group) to hold a degree. My block and or community surrounded me with images of the fast life and/or hustler mentality. My block and/or community are where I learned my survival skills. My block and/or community are consumed with memories of drugs, sex, alcohol, and the emergence of ideological views of the hip-hop culture. My internal drive at a very young age made me yearn for more than what my block and/or community could offer me.*

> *At times I felt like an outcast not only in my community but within the confines of my home. I am the youngest of seven children (three sisters and three brothers). We were raised by a single mother who worked tirelessly to provide for her family. There is a 20-year age gap between me and my oldest sibling, which makes for an interesting upbringing to say the least. By the time I reached the eighth grade, all of my brothers had been incarcerated for some length of time and my sisters had fallen victims to the streets. My sisters were victims of physical abuse, molestation and rape. At an early age I became a victim of circumstance, which was a direct reflection of the disparities that plagued my neighborhood. I was shot in my lower back at the age of 14 in a gang related drive-by shooting. I still have the bullet in me, which rests not even an inch from my spine (Lewis, 2011).*

As in the past and still ever present today, Blacks are ridiculed in regard to their academic and achievement identification (Steele, 1997). Steele (1997), Dean of the School of Education at Stanford university, notes that Blacks are made to feel that they are not "normal" and that they fall below standard guidelines; thus, young Black students are presented information that shows that they are less than White students (Ladson-Billing, 1998; Tate, 1997). Steele (1997) recounts societal stereotypes that tarnish the intellectual performance of African Americans, females, and other targeted groups. Acknowledging the barriers that threaten these minorities, collegiate educational processes helps in better understanding why so many students are unprepared to meet the expectations of the prescribed curriculum of higher education (Hilraldo, 2010; Munoz, 2009; Steele, 1997).

The prescribed curriculum sets Black students up for failure and/or makes their educational journey an impassionate quest that does not realistically prepare them for life's challenges (Ladson-Billing, 1998; Tate, 1997). Ladson-Billings (1998), a critical race theorist, calls attention to secondary curriculum as evidence of master scripting. She defines master scripting as failure to include any information that goes against the dominant voice (White males). When Blacks go against the "norm" and question the powers that be, a deliberate attempt is made to tone down or erase their message that hides their true voice. For example, Black students learn little or no information about their ancestors; instead they are taught from curriculum made by White males for White males (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Students have shared experiences that confirm this discrepancy:

> *I presented at the 2009 Teen Leadership conference hosted by the YWCA. I spoke about how to make a conscious effort to pursue your dreams. As part of the presentation, I had pictures of notable Black women. I offered a small prize for students who could name all the women on my power point slide. For example, they were able to identify Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King but were unable to identify Condolezza Rice and Valerie Jarrett. One unidentified student in the audience shared that her school only teaches about the historically-significant Black people, not Blacks who are significant in today's society (Lewis, 2011).*

Often, minority students who have a clear understanding of their ancestral background are more equipped to handle the unforeseen discriminatory practices in both social and professional settings. Our public school system fails to adequately educate Black students about their heritage. Instead the system offers a slanted White privilege

view which gives an unrealistic / unparalleled outlook of lived experiences and practices (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

Definitions of Terms

To gain a better understanding of the terminology used throughout this study, the following terms have been defined. These definitions were crafted to project the meaning of its content as it relates specifically to this research. The definitions are recognized as standard terminology throughout access, persistence and retention research.

Administrators: Institutional leaders of the university who have a direct influence on the programs and services that are provided for FGCS. In this dissertation, administrators are responsible and held accountable for the retention of first generation college students.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): A body of literature that speaks to race, racism, and power seen through a nontraditional lens. The theory allows a platform for the voices of marginalized populations to be identified and their cultural and racial experiences to be shared through narratives/counter narratives.

First Generation College Students (FGCS): "individuals can claim first-generation student status if neither one of their parents or guardians possess a four-year degree" (Davis, 2010, p.2).

Staff: Employees of the university who have a direct relationship and/or responsibility to support first generation college students.

Support Services: Services/programs that have been identified to help students transition from high school to college and whose programmatic focus is persistence of first generation college students.

Limitations and Assumptions

This study is limited to the data collected and analyzed from two semi-structured interviews with each of the eight participants. As well, the study is limited to the researcher's dual role as a FGCS and as a staff member. The researcher assumes that the information shared by participants is accurate and honest to the best of their ability. In addition, the researcher assumes that the information she provides is an accurate account of her childhood experiences and circumstances. The results of this study cannot be generalized to the perspectives of higher education administrators and staff who provide programs and services for FGCS.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one provided an in-depth introduction of the study, which includes the problem statement, purpose of the study, context, and academic and social self-efficacy in narrative form. Chapter two reviews the literature on first generation college students as it relates to access, persistence and college completion through support programs and services provided by administrators and staff. Chapter three details the research methodology used in the study, including the research design and data collection process. Chapter four gives an in-depth analysis of administrators and staff perspectives on FGCS and shows its correlation to critical race theory implications. Chapter five highlights the essential conclusions and suggests recommendations to influence policies/practices that impact the access, persistence and retention of FGCS.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The recent higher education increases in college students is comprised mostly of FGCS (Davis, 2010). Davis foretells the majority of students that enter postsecondary education over the next 10 to 15 years will be FGCS. First generation college students (FGCS) often face unique challenges in their quests for a degree such as conflicting obligations, false expectations, and lack of preparation or support (Ayala & Striplen, 2002; Hsiao, 1992;). Some first generation college students lack social skills that are needed to navigate the terrain of higher education (Hsiao, 2002; Gibbons & Shoffner; London, 1989). There is no single reason FGCS do not succeed, but research indicates that difficult transitions to college, deficiency in basic skills, lack of engagement, and low socio-economic status serve as prominent barriers to graduation (Case, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). According to Pike and Kuh (2005) although institutions cannot change socio-economic factors and cultural ideologies that influence student perceptions, they can provide interventions that assist with access, persistence, and degree completion.

This comprehensive literature review helped focus the purpose of this study: to inform personal and professional practices in higher education about access, persistence and retention of FGCS from the perspectives of administrators and staff. The review of literature identified concepts and provided a historical background to answer my research question: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence and retention of African-American FGCS?

Often universities that invite FGCS to their campus fail to wholeheartedly welcome them, reach out to them, or provide institutional funding for much needed support services (Thayer, 2000; Timberlake, 2005). Some universities have not put forth the effort to ensure that sufficient support services are in place for FGCS (Case, 2005; Cushman, 2007). Awareness of the resources provided by high schools, local organizations, and colleges can help prepare first generation college students for collegiate expectations (Case, 2005; Hsiao, 1992). Collier and Morgan (2008) propose that university success requires mastery of the "college student" role: "Mastering the college student role enables young people to understand their instructors' expectations and to apply their existing skills to meet those expectations successfully (p.425)." Sound support services that understand and address the needs of FGCS can have a positive impact on their overall collegiate experience (Engle & Tinto, 2008; The Pell Institute, 2011; Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Myers, 2003).

College and Career readiness is defined by ACT (American College Testing) as " the acquisition of knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll and succeed in credit-bearing, first-year courses at a postsecondary institution without the need for remediation." Upon gaining access to higher education, FGCS are often not prepared for the academic rigor, which results in the need for remedial courses (Collier & Morgan, 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Although remedial courses are offered at two-year institutions, many four-year institutions do not provide remediation. Thus, FGCS who attend a four-year institution might not get the necessary academic resources to be successful. FGCS lack of being academically or socially prepared to enter college

presents challenges (Cushman, 2007; Gibbons & Schoffner, 2004; Gullatt & Jan, 2003; London, 1989). Moore, Slate, Edmonson, Bustamante, and Onwuegbuzie (2010) states:

> "With so many of fastest-growing jobs requiring some form of postsecondary education, it is imperative that the state, the universities, and the school districts proactively rethink and redesign our high schools so that we truly prepare all students for a future that includes the opportunity to participate in postsecondary education" (p. 834).

Participation in higher education includes student engagement both in and outside of the classroom (Case, 2005; Collier & Morgan, 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hsiao, 1992; Pascarella et. al, 2004). Often FGCS sabotage their engagement inside and outside of the classroom by suffering from the imposter phenomenon (Davis, 2011). Davis describes imposter phenomenon in FGCS as doubting one's ability and fear of not being good enough or able to succeed. He indicates that imposter phenomenon is more in depth than a student not fitting in to the campus culture it involves not being comfortable or confident in academic abilities. Transitioning from high school to college presents a challenge for FGCS (Choy, 2001). Targeted support services and programs can assist FGCS with making a smooth transition (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007).

Support Services and Programs

Due to first generation college students entering college with minimal expectations of their educational outcomes, they rely on their actual college experiences to help them persist and graduate (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ramos-

Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). According to Ousley (2008), many FGCS have a difficult time understanding the expectations of the college culture. Furthermore, FGCS are unaware of the academic and social support services that an institution might offer. Often when services are discovered, FGCS hesitate to seek and accept support because of cultural differences (Timberlake, 2005).

Parscella et al. (2004) discusses a need for institutions to develop more sharply focused and sustained efforts that will increase FGCS's involvement in academic and nonacademic systems on a college campus. Thayer (2000) notes that one common practice of high performing student support services programs is "structured freshman year" programs that include orientation. Timberlake (2005) found that programs that combine academic and social activities are most effective for first generation college students. She notes that student affairs practitioners have a responsibility to make an effort to meet the individual needs of FGCS. In an attempt to meet the individual needs of FGCS, student affairs practitioners should examine their backgrounds from a holistic point of view that entail assessing all contributing factors such as cultural background, finances, academic, and social challenges (Case, 2005; Collier & Morgan, 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Hsiao, 1992; Thayer, 2000; Timberlake, 2005; Pascarella et. al, 2004).

It is vital for FGCS to have a university representative in whom, they can confide in to share celebratory moments and challenges (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). In addition advisors and other support staff should develop meaningful relationships with students in an attempt to establish trust. Early identification of at risk FGCS students can assist administrators and staff in developing programs and services that can be a safety net

(Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Hsiao, 1992; Thayer, 2000; Timberlake, 2005). Professional development opportunities geared towards understanding the FGCS population can help administrators and staff as they develop and implement targeted programs for this student population (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Engle and Tinto (2008) states:

> "Institutions must provide professional development for faculty and staff to not only help them acquire a broader range of pedagogical skills but also learn how to effectively use those skills with at-risk populations, including low-income, first generation students" (p. 28).

Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) recommend that academic advisors and other support staff identify students with low levels of self-efficacy as early as possible during orientation or initial appointments. In addition they recommend that once staff identifies such students, a customized plan to develop an appropriate intervention should be implemented.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy involves belief in one's own capabilities to achieve successfully a behavior that generates a certain outcome (Bandura, 1997; Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Steele, 1997). Academic self-efficacy for the purposes of this paper is defined as a cognitive process that influences behavior and subsequently affects outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Pascarella et al., 2004). Bandura (1997) suggests providing personalized interventions through campus support services in general can enhance that academic self-efficacy. Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007) conducted a study, which revealed that a FGCS level of self-efficacy at the beginning of their

freshmen year predicted later college adjustment. Furthermore, Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols (2007) assert that academic performance for first year college students is directly related to academic self-efficacy.

It is important for staff to be able to recognize faulty self-efficacy (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). When students express that they are not capable of getting into college or succeeding in college, Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols recommend that high school and college advisors challenge that assumption and that advisors design interventions that will lead to increased self-efficacy over time. Ayala and Striplen (2002) found that for most first-generation students, the motivation to enroll in college is a deliberate attempt to improve their social, economic, and occupational standing.

Retention

Paul Thayer, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Special Advisor to the Provost for Retention at Colorado State University, suggests students from first generation backgrounds are least likely to be retained. He asserts: “Students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds are among the least likely to be retained through degree completion. Although (Davis, 2011) agrees that FGCS and low-income students are least likely to be retained in post secondary education he urges institutions to not consider FGCS and low-income as on in the same.

Davis (2011) states:

> “ A superficial understanding of many elements of the college experience is characteristic of first generation college students, which makes it imperative that college officials, especially academic advisors, treat first-generation students

differently from their non-first-generation counterparts, and from low-income students as well, when it comes to academic advising and planning" (p. 44). Institutional retention efforts must take the needs of such students into account if more equitable attainment rates are desired (Davis, 2011, p. 3). FGCS need support services and programs to help welcome them into the campus environment (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007).

The lack of institutional support at some universities for FGCSs might lead one to believe that they are not an important population to study, but London (1989) states, "First generation students who are first in their families to attend a postsecondary institution are an increasingly significant force in higher education". Collier (2008) acknowledges that there are non-academic factors such as social integration, level of financial support, and campus climate that are important in supporting student retention.

Engle & Tinto, (2008), Pike & Kuh, (2005), Case, (2005), Thayer, (2000) suggests that colleges that link FGCS and faculty in some way besides large impersonal classrooms will contribute to persistence and retention. Likewise, support services that seek to retain and graduate FGCS must acknowledge their backgrounds, needs, and expectations before taking action to provide accommodations (Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Myers, 2003; The Pell Institute, 2011;). Davis (2011) recommends that institutions should also take the background of faculty into consideration. He shares that faculty and other university officials may not be able "to put themselves in the shoes of FGCS" because they are accustomed to post secondary "rules of behavior" and/or they were not FGCS themselves. Universities that have a multifaceted approach to retention will assist

students in developing a sense of social security accompanied by a sense of academic competence (Thayer, 2000).

The Impact of Family Support

Efforts to assist first generation college students should include opportunities to introduce their families to the college experience (Gullatt & Jan; Hahs-Vaugh, 2004; Johnson, 2004). Most colleges and universities do very little, if anything, to educate parents (Choy, 2001; Johnson, 2004; Nunez & Alamin, 1998). Johnson (2004) states, "Several decades ago, the idea of 'parent relations' in higher education was virtually unheard of. Since then, programs and offices for parents have been springing up at institutions all across the country" (p. 124) She mentions that even college-educated parents don't know the complexities of today's campus life. Johnson (2004) claims that higher education institutions should change how they relate to parents and can "help parents become effective partners in their children's development at college." Specifically she notes that over the next 5 to 10 years, institutions will see a significant increase in first-generation and minority parents; this demographic change will present major challenges.

First-generation students are likely to enter college with less academic preparation, and limited access to information about the college experience, either firsthand or from relatives (Ayala & Striplen, 2002; Hsiao, 1992; Thayer, 2000). Choy (2001) summarized a series of studies that were conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics about high school graduates and post-secondary students whose parents did not attend college. Choy found that students' enrollment in postsecondary education is strongly related to their parents' education. In fact an increase in parents'

education triggered an increase in students' education. She concludes that students whose parents did not attend college are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to postsecondary access. This disadvantage still exists even after controlling for factors such as educational expectations, academic preparation, support from parents, and family income.

Studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between family income and educational attainment (Choy, 2001; Cushman, 2007; U. S. Department of Education, 1998). Family income influences the likelihood of entering and completing college (Choy, 2001; Cushman, 2007; U. S. Department of Education, 1998), and more than half of the first-generation students who do enroll in college never graduate (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Thayer, 2000). The data shows that this population cannot be addressed with the same level of care as non-first generation college students (Case, 2005; Choy, 2001; Cushman, 2007; London, 1989; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

An attempt to develop relationships with FGCS families could save a number of students from dropping out (Thayer, 2000). Establishing parent support programs and services can be one intervention to ensure that first generation college students do not fall through the cracks (London, 1989; Nunez-Cuccaro-Amin, 1998; Thayer, 2000). Campus involvement is a necessity for this student population (Case, 2005; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). It helps if students are involved with campus life, whether it is an organization related to their major, a mentee opportunity, or a peer network (Case, 2005; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Universities should be intentional in their approach with first generation college students (Case, 2005; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; London, 1989; Nunez-Cuccaro-

Amin, 1998; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Thayer, 2000; The Pell Institute, 2011).This dissertation provides evidence to support the current needs and future trends that administrators and staff identify as key to including families in the educational experience of FGCS.

Critical Race Theory in Higher Education

Noteworthy pioneers in Critical Race Theory include Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado, Kimberle Crenshaw, and William Tate. Their contributions have characterized them as the new generation of civil rights scholars (Litowitz, 1997). In general, CRT scholars, both young and seasoned, seek to further establish and restore the integrity of the minority voice (Dixon, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Bell (1995) describes CRT as "writing and lecturing that features the frequent use of the first person, storytelling, narrative, allegory, interdisciplinary treatment of law, and the unapologetic use of creativity" (p. 896)

CRT can be referred to as a set of historical and contemporary theories that emerged in the late 1980s (Bell, 1995; Dixon, 2006; Tate, 1997). CRT describes the lived experiences and realities of racial and ethnic minorities who are considered marginalized groups and individuals in society (Munoz, 2009; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). According to (Munoz, 2009; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009), at its core, CRT is an applied theory with a clear goal of shedding light on social injustice. As an applied theory for this study, CRT depends heavily on research to help in the efforts to bring about social change that impacts policymaking and advocacy. In addition, CRT provides a theoretical construct for examining administrators and staff perspectives including the researcher. CRT is used to establish a clear understanding of differences and inequities in society that impede educational progress for FGCS, low income and

minority students. It will also be used to deepen the understanding of historic and present-day institutional and structural barriers for administrators and staff who serve first generation college students (Dixon, 2006; Hilraldo, 2010; Munoz, 2009; Tate, 1997; Taylor et al., 2009).

Storytelling as a means of expressing ones' perceptions on various subjects is a typical form of communication in the Black community (Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Sharing stories on porch stoops, in beauty shops, barbershops, or around the kitchen table is common practice in the Black community (Ladson-Billings, 1998). . Adding storytelling to scholarly work helps advance the legacy of Blacks (Delgado, 2000 ; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), a legacy that has been excluded from the history books (Wilson, 2009). The rich personal counter-narratives that are being documented are valuable, especially to those who share similar experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Although CRT first emerged as a counter legal scholarship, many disciplines have found value in its tenets. Ladson-Billings, who is noted for introducing CRT into educational scholarship, specifically expressed the use of CRT in education as a means to establish race at the forefront of the discourse over minorities and schoolings (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Hiraldo (2010) offers an analysis of how CRT can be used in higher education to establish more diverse and inclusive policies and practices to render the success of marginalized student populations. Hiraldo states:

> "An institution can aim to increase diversity of the campus by increasing the number of students of color. However, if the institution does not make the necessary changes to make the campus climate inclusive, the institution will have a difficult time maintaining diversity".

Physical attributes that foster respect for cultural differences contribute to creating a more inclusive campus environment. The physical location of where educating/learning takes place has an impact on student success. Munoz (2009) in his research used CRT to examine campus design and planning. Drawing upon CRT Munoz (2009) explored the contemporary and historical landscapes of post secondary education. He suggests that higher education institutions "design more inclusive educational environments". Furthermore, Munoz (2009) states, " Both professional guides and educational theory have historically neglected research concerning race and the college landscape". He argues that institutions do themselves a disservice when they assume that residence halls, classrooms, and student centers are race neutral. In his article he skillfully demonstrates how CRT can help campus leaders to design architectural structures that form inclusive communities. Along those same lines Iverson, (2007) expresses that higher education diversity plans might become unproductive if the institutions fail to acknowledge the existence of systematic racism. CRT is used in this study as a foundation for identifying disparities in FGCS programs and services at higher education institutions.

Chapter Summary

An exhaustive search for literature that focused on administrators and staff who provide support services for first generation college students was completed. Limited literature that addressed administrators and staff, specifically, was found. There was literature about programs that serve FGCS and relationships between faculty and FGCS (Case, 2005; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Timberlake, 2005;). Students need to feel the presence and support of both faculty and Student Affairs staff (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Cushman, 2007). There is an obvious gap in the literature in regard

to the perspectives of administrators and staff who are partially responsible for the access, persistence, and retention of first generation college students.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In chapter one, I provided an introduction to the study including but not limited to the problem statement, purpose of the study and the context. I also presented the use of counter narratives in this study as a major component for providing meaning and purpose to the perspectives of administrators and staff in general and the researcher specifically. In chapter two, I reviewed the literature, which identified concepts and provided a historical background for this study. The primary concepts found in the literature review include: support services and programs, self-efficacy, retention, the impact of family support and understanding critical race theory. These concepts have been studied in isolation, but now, it seems appropriate to gain a deeper understanding of how these concepts collectively contribute to the perspectives of higher education administrators and staff. In this chapter, I explain the method for answering the leading research question of the study: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence and retention of African-American FGCS? I discuss reasons for conducting a qualitative research study and explain the research design, role of the researcher, participants, critical race theory as a method, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and study limitations. I explore the experiences administrators and staff face as they try to provide optimal programming and support for FGCS.

Providing optimal programming and support for FGCS begins with building a bridge between high school and college. FGCS transitioning from high school to college experience countless educational and social changes (Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008;

Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Research shows that a clear link between high school and college can assist FGCS with the transition process (Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). *Who is responsible for planning and implementing transition programs?* Both high schools and institutions of higher learning hold some level of responsibility of assuring FGCS are connected to the resources needed to help them succeed (Case, 2005; London, 1989; Pike & Kuh, 2005). This study analyzed the perspectives of higher education administrators and staff that provide assistance for FGCS, which is inclusive of programs to assist with transitioning. This research provided a unique opportunity for the researcher to gather data about FGCS from administrators and staff perspectives. The researchers experience as a FGCS and staff member that serves the population was an advantage in gathering data for this study.

One objective of this study is to use counter narratives to authenticate the experiences of administrators, staff, and the researcher. This study analyzes the perspectives of administrators and staff through examining their interactions and supports of FGCS. This research is significant to the field of education because unlike other studies that focus on the student perspective, it focuses on the perspectives and experiences of administrators and staff, including my own reflections.

Research Question

The research question emerged out of the literature review, which showed a gap in research conducted about the perspectives of administrators and staff regarding their experiences while providing services and programs for FGCS. The literature review provided information about faculty who encounter FGCS in the classroom, but limited data was found to communicate or articulate their interactions with administrators and

staff outside of the classroom. I investigated the following question to gain an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of administrators and staff who serve this student population: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence and retention of African-American FGCS?

Research Design

According to Yin (1994) a research design can be best described as "an action plan that progresses the researcher from the research question to the conclusions" (p.64). I used a qualitative research approach for this dissertation to explore participants in their natural setting, which in turn provided a deeper understanding of their personal and professional education experiences. This study is an in-depth look at participants' interpretations of their own experiences (Berg, 2007; Merriam, 2009). For the purpose of this study, I reviewed both the experiences of administrators and staff who seek to provide opportunities for FGCS on college campuses. Merriam (2009) states, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Using a qualitative approach provided an opportunity to gather opinions, values, and experiences of administrators and staff who assist FGCS in an institution of higher learning setting (Berg, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 1994).

The two research designs I used to answer the research question are case study and autoethnography. The descriptions and analysis will be richer than if other design methods, such as a strict participant observation, were used. I chose a qualitative research design with a phenomenological orientation because it highlights the experiences and behaviors that participants had while experiencing the phenomenon and their reflections

(Merriam, 2009). Within the scope of phenomenological research, it is common for researchers to interject their own experience (Merriam, 2009). Interjecting ones own experience in the study provides an opportunity for the researcher to analyze their experiences and perspectives including potential biases. My shared experiences as a FGCS and as a staff member who serves this student population adds significance to my dissertation. One significant factor is that I was able to provide an insider's view that encapsulates both the student and staff perspective. Another significant factor is that I have an understanding and unique perspectives of how the transition process from secondary to post-secondary education fails to adequately support FGCS. I want readers to better understand the role of administrators and staff that serve FGCS and to better understand the lived experiences of a FGCS. Using the phenomenological approach provides the reader an opportunity to learn detailed information about the benefits and challenges of serving FGCS that are present on college campuses.

I chose a qualitative research design with an autoethnography orientation because it offered a method of accessing personal and professional experiences by focusing on my reflections in an attempt to study the complexity of my educational journey as a low-income, first generation college student. Autoethnography can be defined as a methodological approach in which the researcher is the focus of the research (Ellis, 2009). Using authoethnography as a research approach allowed me to explore the personal and social aspects of my educational experience while recognizing the process of transformation that my experience has brought about (Jones, 2009). Autoethnography methodology permits me to share my personal and professional experiences and give detailed descriptions about the events that have shaped my life (Jones, 2009). Combining

phenomenological and autoethnography, will give a distinctive perspective. While the perspectives of administrators and staff are important, the viewpoint from the researcher will add value to the study as well.

Critical Race Theory as a Method

As a theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory explores the ways in which power and privilege operate in society and the impact they have on race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (Bell, 1995). As well, CRT provides a unique framework for further development of my research on administrators and staff who provide support for FGCS by allowing for the acknowledgement of past disparities that continue to impact the education system. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), CRT can be viewed as an analytical framework for education. This type of perspective assists with investigative parameters to help focus the study. Critical race methodology is defined according to Solozano and Yosso (2002) "as a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process and as a framework that situates the eliminations of racism within a broader structure of eliminating other forms of subordination" (p. 131).

In this study, race has been highlighted to bring attention to its role and the role of racism in education from my point of view, as well as the points of view of other administrators and staff. I want to call attention to the "multiple layers of institutional oppression and discrimination" that might prevent the enhancement of programs and services for FGCS (Matsuda, 1991). In my experience, the majority of administrators and staff who are responsible for serving FGCS belong to an ethnic minority group and/or a marginalized population. I am also quite interested in how race and racism is different for

administrators and staff who belong to the majority population. Ladson-Billings (1998) studied personal and professional experiences of Black scholars at White institutions; the study's title is *Beyond the Big House*. Ladson-Billings (1998) speaks of CRT as being much more than a "powerful narrative" but serving "as a framework for educational equity" (p. 33).

During the first interview (See Appendix F), administrators and staff were asked to reflect on their personal educational experiences, going back as far as childhood. As well, the researcher inquired about their experiences in assisting educational growth and persistence of first generation college students. They were asked to share their interactions with FGCS and how the university provides support. The second interview was used to delve deeper into the participants lived experiences based on their responses in the initial interview. A concerted effort was made to be consistent with all participants during interviews.

The research question sought to discover the factors that higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence and retention of African-American FGCS. A better understanding of administrators and staff, their personal and professional experiences and institutional programs for FGCS were needed to sufficiently answer the research question. Three goals were developed to assist with organization and implementation of the study:

Goal One: To describe the characteristics of administrators and staff who provide services for first generation college students. It was important to know who was responsible for this student population.

Goal Two: To invite stories about the structures in place on the college campuses used in this study that support or fail to support FGCS. These stories speak to the institutional barriers that might or might not exist.

Goal Three: To establish a basis for understanding the current and future aspects of programs and services directed toward FGCS. Understanding the current environment of institutions and their intentions for future improvement will provide knowledge about the universities' commitment to FGCS.

I remained focused throughout the dissertation process by following my dissertation study protocol: I developed clear objectives to support the intention to stay purpose driven; I kept accurate records of all communications with participants; and I followed a guide for reporting that helped to keep the data consistent. This study documents and analyzes the common practices and reflections of administrators and staff who provide support services for FGCS including the researchers' perspective.

Role of the Researcher

My current responsibilities in higher education and my experiences as a FGCS were revealed at all stages of the research process. During the interviews, I made sure not to probe participants based on my own experiences but instead let their responses guide the discussions. As I used the open coding technique, I was mindful to not allow my personal and professional experiences to lead my interpretations of participant's responses. I made a conscious effort to not project my perspectives about FGCS during the interview, coding and analysis processes. I indicate in the ensuing chapter, my professional experiences that were similar and different than participants' responses.

Participants

Over the past 10 years there has been an increase in FGCS gaining access to metropolitan universities (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2005, Case; Thayer, 2000). Participants from two metropolitan universities with diverse student populations were chosen as primary sources of data (See Appendix B). I used a purposeful sample to identify the participants included in the study, which consisted of four administrators/staff participants from each campus. All participants were selected based on their job description and/or responsibilities at the time the study was conducted. Pseudonyms are used for all participants to ensure that their identities remain anonymous. As the author of this study, I served as the researcher and as a participant. As researcher, I documented the experiences of administrators and staff who assisted first generation college students. As a participant, I shared my experiences as a first generation college student and as a staff member who serves FGCS.

Data Collection and Analysis

Upon receiving approval from the university Internal Review Board (IRB), I contacted university representatives through email and in person requesting their participation in this study. The decision to contact specific administrators and staff was based on their current position and role in supporting FGCS. Once participants consented (See Appendix E) to being involved, I began the interview process, which consisted of two semi-structured interviews (See Appendix F). Interviews were conducted in person at a location of the interviewees' choice. The researcher had to travel over 400 miles to and from each interview for one of the institutions in the study. Follow up interviews were also conducted in person. After completing the follow up interviews, there were a few

vague responses, which called for clarification by telephone or email. All data used in this study was gathered over a 12-week period of time. Each of the interviews ranged about one hour to one and a half hours. The time allowed for the interviews was sufficient. It provided an appropriate amount of time for administrators and staff to share their personal and professional experiences, which lead them to being responsible for FGCS directly or indirectly.

I used counter storytelling from administrators, staff, and the researcher as a CRT data collection method. These rich narratives provided a means to understand the experiences of the administrators and staff who might have felt marginalized but also provided an avenue for resistance (Solozano & Yosso, 2002). CRT provided a foundation for the researcher to share personal and professional life experiences throughout the dissertation. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The researcher and two other people were involved in the transcription process. All transcriptions were kept on a passcode protected data storage device, to protect the sensitive nature of the information shared during the interview process. The findings were coded using open coding.

To become more familiar with my subjects, I first listened to the audio recordings in their entirety. Secondly, I went back and listened again, but this time taking notes specifically about related themes and concepts as well as identifying similarities and differences. Thirdly, I began to transcribe the interviews with the assistance of two people. I provided them with detailed instructions on how the transcription process works and gave them a sample from a study I conducted for a previous class assignment.

After all transcriptions were completed, I listened to the audio recordings again and highlighted common words and phrases that persisted throughout the interviews

using open coding. I extracted words and phrases and put them in an excel file to help manage the data. I placed related themes in the same columns. This process gave me a visual display of how the information received was connected on some levels and disconnected on other levels. I identified supporting themes for each column of information. The process was similar to working a puzzle; each piece fits best in one exclusive position. In addition, I used Wordle as a supplementary research tool to analyze pieces of text to produce an illustration of a "word cloud" which shows high frequency words used in selected texts of participant interviews (See Appendix A). Although the process was tedious it was necessary for me to manage the data. The coding process brought to fruition seven emergent categories, which are explained in detail in chapters four and five.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher identified herself as a student in a doctoral program at a Midwestern university, seeking to gain a better understanding of experiences of administrator and staff perspectives that provide programs and services for FGCS. The names of participants were changed in all transcribed materials. The researcher masked specifics in the counter-narratives in an effort not to pose a threat for participants. All field notes and interview data are kept in a confidential file that is passcode-protected on the computer. Handwritten notes will be kept in a fire proof lockbox for at least one year after the study is completed. All participants have been given a thorough outline of what the study entailed and the intention of how the data would be used to add to the already existing body of knowledge of first generation college students. Participants were informed that completing the interview was voluntary and that they had the right to

withdraw at any time. The researcher informed administrators and staff about the intent of the research and the purposes of the study. The researcher had dialogue with lead staff at both campuses identified in this study about FGCS and their campus plans to further implement the Access to Success initiative.

Study Limitations

The researcher identified five limitations. First the study is limited by the use of a small sample, although it was determined to be adequate. This limitation restricts the generalizability of the findings to a larger population. Second, the effect and/or influence of the interview settings limited the results of this study. Some interviews were interrupted by the interviewee being distracted by pressing job related demands such as phone calls, knocks at their office door and a building power outage. Third, of concern, was using the researcher as a participant. This can be favorable but can also present challenges and biases. The researcher recounts childhood memories and experiences throughout her career to the best of her knowledge. Fourth, the study assumes that administrators and staff answered interview questions accurately and to the best of their ability. The fifth limitation involved a condition which could not be controlled the study's design was organized after a major institutional initiative was implemented (Access to Success). The initiative was in its beginning stages of implementation upon conception of this study. The preliminary measures of Access to Success might have given a slanted view of how FGCS are being served at the two institutions used in this study.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I explained the method for answering the research question of the study: What factors do administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence

and retention of African-American FGCS? I discussed reasons for conducting a qualitative research study and explained the research design, participants, role of the researcher, critical race theory as a method, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and study limitations.

Semi-structured interviews generated findings about how data about FGCS is captured and used to serve FGCS. Through storytelling and anecdotes, seven themes emerged to assist in discovering the factors that are critical to persistence and retention of FGCS from a higher education administrator and staff perspective. My analysis and findings are discussed in great detail in chapters four and five.

Chapter Four

Analysis and Discussion

Purpose of the Study

Research has shown that post-secondary education can provide effective programming and services for FGCS by "acknowledging their backgrounds, needs and expectations and then taking action to accommodate them" (Myers, 2003). The purpose of this study is to answer the research question: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence, and retention of African-American FGCS? To answer this question, the study sought to document the perspectives of administrators and staff who are responsible for the success of FGCS. In telling their stories, the administrators and staff in this study reveal the types of experiences that shaped their commitment to higher education. Additionally, the participants shed light on one assumption; they agreed that in most cases on their campus FGCS equates to low-income and minority students versus being a subpopulation for all students.

Through my analysis of the interviews, I argue that the participant's past and present experiences influence how they support FGCS. Their responses to the interview questions demonstrate how institutions have neglected to serve FGCS in general by only targeting low income and minority FGCS. Eight of the participants shared that the support and encouragement that they received from their families had a direct impact on their success. In contrast, the researcher lacked family support and struggled to navigate educational systems throughout her life. Furthermore, there are student affairs principles

that guide practitioners in how to better serve FGCS, yet there are no principles that prepare administrators and staff to provide programs and services for FGCS.

This chapter analyzes and discusses the primary themes I discovered in the sixteen interviews of eight participants. Data were transcribed and coded using an open coding approach. Each participant was interviewed twice to substantiate, compare and cross check the data. The follow up interviews were conducted 30 days after the initial interviews. I merged the data from sixteen interviews using triangulation to determine the similarities and differences among the information received. After a thorough analysis of the data, seven themes emerged: Participant personal and educational experiences; Participant definitions of First Generation College Students; FGCS as specific subpopulations; Institutional Support; Best Practices for making connections; Financial and Social Challenges and Access to Success and retention initiatives. For this study if two or more participants highlighted a concept with high frequency in their interviews, that consistency became a primary theme. Although transcribed interviews of administrators and staff produced over 300 pages, I chose to use responses that focused on enriching and supporting the identified themes. Some of the information that participants shared was unable to be included. I edited out large portions of each participant's response to focus more attention on the sustenance that added to this study. Instead of acknowledging each participant's story individually I interweaved their responses to best illustrate similarities and differences.

The seven themes, which emerged from the data, will be discussed using a narrative descriptive format. The first section of this chapter describes the participants' personal and educational experiences. Section two describes the varied definitions of

FGCS given by interviewees. The third section shares participants' views on FGCS as a subpopulation at their specific campus. The fourth section describes the support participants feel they and/or their programs receive from the institution. Section five presents 'best practices' in making peer, faculty or staff connections. The sixth section explores the financial and social challenges of students in general and FGCS specifically. Section seven identifies access to success and retention initiatives. The final section provides a chapter summary.

The sections are important because they offer an organized approach to the in depth viewpoint of higher education administrators and staff. This study presents an analysis of the rich conversations shared with the researcher about administrators and staff perspectives in providing optimal services and programs for FGCS. The experiences shared in this research cannot be generalized for all administrators and staff.

Participants' Personal and Professional Experiences

This study includes the perspectives of nine student affairs professionals in higher education, of which there are: five females, four males; seven African Americans, two Caucasians; two top administrators, three mid-level administrators, and four staff. Five of the nine participants are FGCS. All participants have at least three years of higher education experience. Participants are employed by two Midwestern institutions that are in the same institutional system. I, the researcher, am the ninth participant in this study. In order for me to differentiate my voice from other participants, I will italicize my stories. The information in this section provides a snapshot of each participant's personal and professional educational experiences.

Frederick's Story

At the time of this study, Frederick was a 36-year-old Black male who holds a master's degree and is currently pursuing a doctorate degree in higher education administration. Frederick has gained progressive leadership experience in higher education over the past 10 years. Colleagues refer to him as an optimist because he always finds the positive in challenging situations. His first job in higher education was as an admissions recruiter, where he dedicated a significant amount of time toward helping underserved students. Frederick was raised in a single parent household in the inner city of a Midwestern state. Frederick grew up with strong family support and encouragement; his elders instilled an expectation of excellence at a young age. Like many of the students Frederick currently mentors, he was once identified as a first generation, low-income minority student. As a first generation college student, Frederick found the admissions process and financial aid process to be quite challenging. His athletic abilities in high school and college provided scholarship opportunities that helped him offset the cost of post secondary education. In his current position Frederick is directly responsible for the success of FGCS from an enrollment management perspective. During our discussion, Frederick shared the influence of his mother and grandparents on his high regard of education:

> My mother had me at the age of 15, so during my grade school years I lived with my grandparents. Both my mother and grandparents expressed to me at an early age that they expected me to excel academically. In the 6th grade, my mother was not satisfied with the inner city public education system... So, she made the decision to sign me up to participate in the desegregation program, which allowed

> me to be educated in a good school district that was not in my neighborhood. My mom expected all "A's" and "B's"… if I got any "C's" I had to lose my social privileges: I couldn't play outside or watch television or do any of those things. Which at the time, you know like most kids I didn't like, because all my friends could do whatever they wanted. But again it gave me an advantage later because I have developed certain study habits and certain expectations. Education has always been a huge part of my life, it's one of the reasons I work in education to this day. (Frederick, 22-31)

Similar to the known characteristics of FGCS (Choy, 2001), Frederick realized that he and his mother lacked awareness of the financial aid process. His only resource for this information was a university employee. He spoke about the lack of understanding he and his mother had about the application and financial aid process and how his admissions representative went the extra mile to explain:

> I mean the thing about the whole process of applying for school and applying for financial aid. If you don't have any background or experience doing it, it can be overwhelming, it can be intimidating. I remember when my mother and I sat down to do the FASFA. We had no idea what we were doing or how to do it, but fortunately we found people to help us through that process. My admissions representative met us at the library and helped us do everything. He explained everything. (Frederick, 166-173)

Frederick attributes his journey in higher education to the experiences he gained as an undergraduate student ambassador at his alma mater, which later led to a full time recruitment position. Fredrick reflects on his recruitment experience:

> When I first started recruiting, I just thought it would be fun to go to my old neighborhood, actually my old city and encourage students to go to college. But once I started recruiting, I saw that it was more than just informing people about college I realized that I could really make a huge difference in communities. I mean not only making sure students were better prepared for college… but also helping them succeed on campus once they arrived because college is not all fun and games and I made sure that my students understood what it took to graduate. I made sure they used the resources on campus; I made sure they put in the proper time to be successful; and that they didn't come to college just for the social experience. I did a great job of increasing enrollment, but I am most proud of actually raising potential graduation rates while I was in that position. More specifically, the ratio increased for the low-income minority students who were the population I was in charge of recruiting for about four years during my tenure. (Frederick, 91-103)

Frederick's compassion for student success has prompted him to take on more progressive roles and responsibilities over the years in higher education. He explains the scope of his present position:

> I currently lead our recruitment initiatives. I manage our budget for recruitment so anything that we do in terms of promoting ourselves or direct recruitments for new students, I am the one who sets the goals, hires and trains the staff to go out and represent the university. Now in terms of secondary responsibilities, it's really my job to make sure that our student body matches the mission and vision of the university and that we uphold the academic standards of the university… As well,

> I provide a certain level of customer service to the metropolitan area in terms of college planning and college preparation… So, we do a lot of early awareness activities and outreach activities in the community, to make sure students are college ready and that they're well informed in terms of the application process and how to apply for scholarships and financial aid. So, it's not necessarily all about them coming to this school, but making sure that they are prepared to go wherever they want to attend. (Frederick, 139-152)

Frederick, a young Black male, seems to actively challenge the status quo to provide better services for students. As a FGCS, he is able to relate to the struggles that might hinder student success. His voice is vital in my research because his current position is directly responsible for the success of FGCS from an enrollment management standpoint, which includes access, persistence and retention. For universities, the creation or implementation of a position or initiative with a focus like Fredrick's could make more apparent the needs of the student population, which allows each university to make more informed decisions about what is important and necessary for the recruitment and retention of FCGS.

Joy's Story

At the time of this study, Joy was a 39-year-old Black female with a master's degree in counseling who aspires to obtain a doctorate degree in educational leadership and policy studies. Joy has worked in higher education for over ten years. Her first job in higher education was as an admissions recruiter. She currently serves in a position that provides her an opportunity to assist pre-collegiate students as they transition to college and multicultural students who have already gained access to college. Access, persistence

and retention of multicultural students are three main components of her day-to-day operations. In her position, many of the students she serves are identified as FGCS. She grew up on a farm in a rural area of a Midwestern state. Joy was raised in a two-parent household where she had several role models in her family, many of whom have a Bachelors or Master's degree. Joy discusses how in her family, continuing her education and community activism were an expectation:

> Education was always an emphasis in my family and because it was something that I was always able to not only hear my family talk about, but I was always able to witness my aunts and my uncles graduating from college… my mother comes from a very large family. I have an uncle who works at the naval academy; he's a professor there. During my childhood, very supportive people surrounded me. I have to say as early as junior high and high school, I've always been driven and been involved in activities and taking on roles of either being the leader or as just apart of the team. My family is very strong about serving people, creating opportunity and always giving back you know, and that's what still motivates me 'till this day… is being in a position to serve others, giving back and being respectful and fair. (Joy, 72-88)

Growing up in a rural area gave Joy some unique experiences. She explains her transition from high school to college:

> When you talk about the transition piece though, going from high school to college, going from a rural town like my little town where I actually grew up on a farm to a small metropolitan area was a challenge. It was a shock for me when I went off to college and quite frankly it was a culture shock. I came from a small

> town where the majority of my population at that time was Caucasian. I came from a family who had a farm and so I always lived in the country, so if you think about Opie and Little House on the Prairie, that was similar to how we lived. When we went to town, we meant we were going to the grocery store. (Joy, 96-104)

Joy's story reflects on the assumption/ stereotypes that are made about Black students. Her background allows her to offer an inside view of the Black rural experience. As well at the time of this study Joy was responsible for two major departments, one that deals with access and one that deals with persistence and retention. Her personal and professional experiences add a unique perspective to my research.

Scott's Story

At the time of this study, Scott was a 59-year-old White male who holds a master degree and is currently pursuing a doctorate degree in higher education administration. Scott has worked in higher education for over 30 years. His first position in higher education was as an admissions representative. Scott's childhood years were spent in a rural area where he was raised in a two-parent household. As a FGCS, Scott and his family needed assistance in better understanding the admissions process as well as the overall collegiate experience. He has moved up the ranks over the years and now serves as a top administrator in student affairs. Scott provides overarching support for FGCS. Scott recalls the lack of support he had leading up to his first year in college:

> Being in a small high school, the guidance counselor also taught English and Spanish… it was not a full time guidance counselor. The support for the college application process and understanding, all of that was minimal. Not because they

> didn't want to, it was just, you know, when you're teaching English and Spanish and you're a part-time guidance counselor, there are just not enough hours in the day. So there was a lot of trying to do it on your own. My parents helped where they could but they had little understanding of the college application and financial aid process. There was a lot of figuring things out on your own. (Scott, 32-39)

Scott was actively involved in high school. He served as the student body president, and held other positions in student organizations. In college, he remained involved on campus, which sparked his interest in learning more about higher education. Although he started out in healthcare, he switched gears after speaking to his mentor about his future aspirations. He shared why he chose higher education as a career path:

> My first fulltime position in higher education was student recruitment; I also did transcript evaluations for transfer students. I determined how credit would transfer into a degree program. Part of what excited me about going into recruitment is… I thought back to my entry into the college and knowing the struggles that I had trying to do this on my own. [I thought] if I could help students navigate this whole process it would be a very fulfilling career for me… And so, that's, that was one of the reasons, and probably the strongest reason why I really wanted to get into this field. (Scott, 106-114)

Scott's story revealed the need for top down communication in higher education and strong leadership to help support FGCS initiatives (Case, 2005). His unique perspective gives voice to top administrators who strive to provide optimal programs and services for FGCS. Scott's story is important to this research because it gives a White

male perspective about services and programs for a predominately Black student population.

Hope's Story

When this study began, Hope, a Black female, was 30-years-old and completing a master's degree in counseling. Hope has served in a federally funded pre-collegiate preparation program for the past three years. At the start of this study she was informed that the grant she worked under would not be renewed. The primary student population she assisted was Black, low-income and FGCS. Hope, not a citizen of the United States, was born in Kenya. Both of her parents hold advanced degrees and continue to encourage her to become an expert in her field of study. She moved to the United States due to her parent's pursuit of higher education. During our discussion, she made comparisons between the U.S. education system and that of her hometown. She shared her experiences of attending school in Kenya and in the United States:

> I'm not a citizen in the United States so my education journey was in Kenya and the U.S. So, I've had two experiences with two different educational systems. This is because of my parents…they brought the whole family to the United States while they were getting their education. I've done elementary at home, done middle school in the US and went back and finished high school at home then came back to do college here in the US. (Hope, 37-43)

When the researcher inquired about the differences in the education systems in Kenya and the United States, Hope explained:

> In Kenya it's more like the British school system and so even in the way the school is set up is totally different from here. What you call elementary and

> middle school is set up where school is from January to December then it's broken up into three sections. At home you go to school from January to March then you'll have a month break, then go three months, another month break, and go three months... But once you get in high school, then the system is also different because most of the schools are boarding, so there's quite a difference between here and how the system is at home. So, I'm happy for the experiences of education at home and the education here. (Hope, 49-56)

Hope added:

> The major difference in terms of here and at home there's more of, what's the word I'm looking for, rigorous. It's more rigorous at home and more is expected of the students so by the time you get to a certain grade level, you'll definitely have accomplished certain things. That's one difference I've seen. You're not going to go to high school and you don't know how to read. Where the system here you can get passed, you know students can get passed. Here in the U.S., there are a lot more opportunities as opposed to at home because of limits in financial resources. Here the sky can be the limit even if you come from a disadvantaged background. When you take advantage of the resources before you, you can, you know, go far. At the post-secondary level there's a lot more opportunities here in terms of the kinds of study they can go into, the number of schools they can choose from. So, that's some of the differences. (Hope, 68-82)

Hope continued to share her perspective on the difference in the U.S education system in comparison to her home country Kenya:

The financial opportunities students have in the U.S. far exceeded what is available in Kenya. For a long time, all education cost in Kenya. Recently they have begun to offer elementary and middle school for free...Because here there are just a lot more financial resources for students. If you look at a student who really wants to go to college or pursue post-secondary education, I mean even before getting to the level of going to college, education here is pretty much free all the way through high school. At home, education is not free. High school, especially once you get into high school, parents have to pay for a student to go to high school. The better the school, the more expensive it is. So you have a disparity there where some parents who are able to pay for a better education for their child. They'll obviously go to a better school than a parent who's not able to do that. And until about eight or ten years ago, there was a time when elementary education was not free. So you had a lot of parents who were not use to the paying a fee for the students to go to school, but also of purchasing uniforms and school materials. If a parent does not have the finances to do that and the child does not have a uniform to go, then they cannot go to school or money to buy the books. So you'd find that there were a lot of students not going to elementary school. Even when you come to the high school level or post-secondary here, students have the opportunity to apply for financial aid that can pay for them to go to college. If a student really wanted to go to college and even if they're coming from a situation where their parents have no means whatsoever, they can go. They'll need to figure how they do it, find somebody who can help them do that, but there's that opportunity here for a student… Whereas at home, you don't have

> many resources available to a student, especially for post-secondary education. (Hope, 56-77)

Hope's story added value to my research, her job responsibilities at the start of this study specifically involved working with low-income minority students. Her insider view of grant funded pre collegiate programs adds depth to this study. Hope's perspective is unique because she is familiar with Kenyan and the United States educational systems.

Spencer's Story

When this study began, Spencer a Black male was 55-years-old. He has a master's degree and over 30 years of experience in higher education. Spencer is recognized nationally and internationally for his contributions to the field of enrollment management. He grew up in a small modest neighborhood in a Midwestern state with his parents. Spencer's K-12 education was through urban inner city schools. He recognized the many people who supported his educational aspirations and provided opportunities for him to serve students. As a FGCS, he acknowledged the importance of students making personal connections with peers, faculty and staff as a component of their success. He is currently a top administrator in student affairs at a Midwestern university. Spencer recalled that the admissions and financial aid processes were challenging. He reflected on the support from community members that assisted him with completing financial and admissions applications and time management challenges:

> Even though I was a student athlete, and had the support of the athletic department, my family and I still struggled with the application process and the financial aid process. In our neighborhood, we had a funeral home and I can

> remember actually going to the wife of the funeral director to help us complete college paperwork. The director and his wife acted as resources for a lot of things people needed in the neighborhood. They both had college degrees. Once arriving on campus even with the support of my athletic department, there were still some things that I had to learn. Like how to split up my time between practices, games, travel, studying, and mixing some fun in there too. That was a big struggle for me until I was able to get that under control. (Spencer, 7-18)

Spencer shared that there are differences between being a FGCS when he was in college and today's FGCS. One of the biggest differences that came out of the discussion was, technology.

> Students now have this need to be connected in many more ways than we did. Students have cell phones…we had no cell phones; they have cars… transportation wasn't a must have when I attended school. As for us, we communicated by sitting down and writing a letter. I tried to do that every night. I tried to spend some time alone that was relaxing for me. It also helped me practice my writing skills. Students today need to be connected all the time or feel the need to be connected all the time; either by texting, by talking, by Facebook and Twitter. I think if you constantly do those things, they can become a distraction. I talked about my time management… I didn't have to worry about those types of distractions because there was no social media, and there were no cell phones. I just had to make time during the evening to write letters. (Spencer, 25-33)

Some of Spencer's past positions were coach, recruiter, advisor and director of admissions. Spencer shared information about his current position in student affairs:

> The way my position is designed is exciting for someone with my background because I have an enrollment management background. I look at things from an enrollment management standpoint, which includes identifying the right students for the university; helping them be successful and graduate. A lot of universities have student affairs as one position and enrollment management as a separate position. Having them together has a greater impact on student success. (Spencer 98-103)

Spencer's story offers the perspective of a well-respected enrollment management expert. His insight is valuable to this research because he has studied educational trends for over 30 years locally and internationally. Spencer's experiences are valuable to my research. He is a Black male who moved up the ranks in higher education during a time period where Black leadership was not prominent on predominately White campuses (Hilraldo, 2010).

Malcolm's Story

At the time of this study Malcolm, a Black male, was 32-years-old. He holds a bachelor's degree and was pursuing a master's degree in higher education administration. Malcolm lived in an inner city neighborhood in a Midwestern state, where he attended public schools. Malcolm was brought up in a two-parent household. Although his parents attended community college his eldest sister was the first in their family to graduate from a four-year institution. During his undergraduate experience, he became a single parent. Malcolm was faced with challenges, but he did not give up on his pursuit of higher education. He currently works in an admissions office where his primary responsibility is multicultural recruitment.

Unlike other enrollment services coordinators in his office, Malcolm is required to work outside the traditional realm of recruitment practices (Myers, 2003). Malcolm at the time of this study was responsible for multicultural recruitment, which involves him building personal relationships with students and their families. He explained some of his responsibilities:

> I am an enrollment service coordinator. Added to my position, I implement programs that attract under-represented minority students so I do several different activities that are not just recruitment of seniors or juniors. I do a lot of work with parents, ACT prep workshops and also FASFA workshops. I go to community centers and also churches. I really want to see under represented populations everywhere… in school, in industry, in politics, in government…so that's what I bring to the position, that compassion; I want to see that happen. (Malcolm, 79-85)

Malcolm's story demonstrated how serving multicultural students involve more intrusive practices that go beyond the traditional recruitment efforts. He shared how his own educational challenges influence his desire to serve under represented student populations. Malcolm's story is influential to my research because it adds a perspective of a recently hired staff member who comes from the not-for- profit community outreach sector.

Destiny's Story

At the start of this study, Destiny, a Black female, was 30-years-old. She has a master's degree and is currently seeking a doctorate degree in educational leadership. She was born and raised in a suburban area of a city in a Midwestern state. Destiny

participated in several pre-collegiate programs, which gave her both practical and real life experiences. Destiny was an academically astute student who took advantage of opportunities to advance both personally and professionally. She was determined to continue her educational dreams although she became a single parent in high school. Her daughter became one of her biggest motivators to continue to strive for excellence. During her undergraduate experience her determination was seen by administrators, which led to a full time position at her alma mater. When this study began she served in a position that seeks to provide services and programs for multicultural students at a Midwestern university. Her role at the university allows her to be a voice for multicultural students and to provide awareness to the campus community.

As an alumnus of the university, Destiny expressed the need to give back to a university and community that contributed greatly to her personal and professional development. She shared about her first job after transitioning from involved student to professional staff:

> One of my first jobs here at the university was as a recruiter. In that position, I recognized that I was good at helping students gain access to college. Then I realized that a plank in the bridge was missing between getting the students here and keeping them here. (Destiny, 141-146)

Destiny spoke about her roles and responsibilities in her current position:

> It's really to ensure the campus wide community is knowledgeable, aware, and included in the process to support students of color. Whether that's through programming or whether that's through identifying ways to tweak systems, i.e. academic advising on how to better serve an underserved population or through

> conversations within the campus community about how to engage those underserved populations. And those are some difficult conversations, so as director that's kind of what I do 80% of the time. The other 20% or so goes to ensuring that the staff that we have is able to do that at the student level. (Destiny, 172-178)

Destiny added:

> I've just been pursuing, a career and working a system that was designed originally not for persons of color to be successful. I am committed to make that system work and change it so it can work for those that come after me. (Destiny, 163-165)

Destiny recalled a discussion she had with friends over the weekend about her positive experience with the minority student affairs office when she was an undergraduate student:

> I shared with a group of friends this weekend that in the multicultural student affairs office, well at the time when I was a student, it was the minority student affairs office "it saved me". It provided me that safe space and not just to complain about what was going on. It was the standard of excellence. If you wanted to find the high achieving students of color, they were in MSA, and they were strategically plotting to take back what was rightfully theirs, which was a position at the table. During my undergraduate years was the first time that we had a student government president of color. The student programming board for the first time in [the university's] history had, a Black president. I also served on the programming board. Then we chartered the collegiate chapter of NAACP. We

> started putting in place the outlets that we as students needed. We chartered a collegiate chapter of MPAC. Before that it was something called Black Plan Living Counsel. What was that? For me those things saved me because I was surrounded with folks who looked like me, who were as aggressive and on their grind for academics as I. What we did was not just for self but also for the uplift of all students of color. Being in this position is my way of paying it forward to a certain degree. (Destiny, 204-219)

Destiny's story is one of strength, persistence and determination. Her voice presents the social and cultural restraints in serving multicultural students. Destiny's story merges her experience as a student and employee at the same institution. Both perspectives add significance to my research.

Faith's Story

At the time of this study Faith a White female, was 31-years-old with a master's degree. She has served underrepresented student populations for the past 5 years. Faith is the product of a small town located in a Midwestern state. Her mother served as her role model and a trailblazer for her family through the sacrifices she made to become educated. Faith specifically works with low-income first generation college students through a grant-funded program. A majority of the students in the program are low-income African American students. Although Faith is not a FGCS, she did grow up in a low-income household. Her strong faith allowed her to break through color barriers and assist a student population that she feels needs role models of all ethnicities to impact their success.

Many have questioned Faith's sincerity being the only White female in her department. Faith shares how her upbringing allows her to connect with low-income African –American students:

> I gladly accepted this position. You know since I grew up with a parent in the military, that experience exposed me to diverse groups of friends. I have a similar past as many of the students I work with because I grew up low income, and I went to college and got loans and had to struggle, so it's been a really good fit. I feel blessed as a staff to have this opportunity. For one, it feels good to help the students. It's very rewarding! (Faith, 332-336)

Faith's story reflected on her experience as a White female who is the minority in her department. Faith's perspective is unique because Caucasians, in non-administrative positions do not usually have direct contact with students of color in her capacity. Faith is a representation of a White female who has a true desire to help low income minority students reach their educational goals. Her story is important to my study because it challenges the notion that only Black staff can wholeheartedly help Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Researcher's Story

At the time of this study I am a 35-year-old Black female who holds a master's degree and I am currently pursuing my doctorate degree in metropolitan leadership and policy studies. I am a FGCS who grew up in a single parent household. My K-7 grade education was through the inner city public school system in a Midwestern state. My 8-12 grade education was through a desegregation program, which allowed me to be educated

in a suburban school district. I currently have a position, which provides opportunities to serve FGCS in several capacities.

Looking back, I recall being terrified when I first transferred schools in the 8th grade through the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) program. I went from a school that was predominately Black to a predominately White school. I thought my mother was punishing me by making me attend a new school where there were few people who looked like me. I quickly learned that behaviors I thought were normal at my old school were unacceptable at my new school, such as mediocre approaches to learning and classroom discipline. It took a while for me to adapt to the new school culture. Academic excellence was an expectation for everyone. I constantly questioned my academic ability. In math and science classes the teachers spoke in what seemed like a foreign language to me. I was not accustomed to the academic rigor and I soon noticed that I had not learned the foundational skills (at my inner city school) needed to be more successful in the classroom. Although it was quite challenging for me, I managed to maintain mostly "B" and some "C" grades. I remember being surprised that my sister who was in the twelfth grade at an inner city school and I, an eighth grader in a suburban school, had the same algebra book. This was the initial and a pivotal point in my recognition of educational disparities. Identifying blatant educational inequalities prompted me to pursue a career in higher education that would involve assisting underrepresented students as they gain access, persist and graduate from college.

About a year or so after I got shot, I decided that if I wanted to make something of myself I had to leave home. I completed the admissions and financial aid process with the help of the guidance counselor at my high school. By the time I left for college, I had

already been estranged from my mother for two years. In my first college class the professor said, "look at the person to your left, look at the person to your right, there's a 50% chance that one of you will not make it past this semester. That instructor's comments stuck with me. I never wanted to be in the 50% that would have to leave college due to my academic standing with the university. I knew failing college would mean I had no place to live, no food to eat, and no 'good' future employment. For me, college was my survival tool. It was a way to take care of myself and take advantage of opportunities my family did not have.

My story is important to this research. I share a candid perspective about my personal and professional experiences as a FGCS. The information that I share exposes intimate details about my upbringing and how I used education to change the trajectory of my life. My in-depth account of past adversities offers insight into the trials and tribulations that face FGCS as well as best practices for serving FGCS.

Each participant described their past and originating characteristics as a direct influencer of their present and future knowledge and opportunities. In CRT, a person's private and public culture, in this case the expectations of and shared knowledge about higher education, is both legitimate and central to understanding how inequality is applied and rectified. For the participants in this study, their experiential knowledge of how to become and be successful at being a college student directly influenced their college success as well as their choice to serve college populations in their careers. Each spoke of attempting to erase a specific cultural deficit through their work in their current positions. For Destiny, her experiences highlighted the need to make college life welcoming and sustainable for Black students. Spencer identified the need for time

management skills, which according to him, have been compounded by the advent of available technology.

Each story opens a window into what each participant was missing in his or her toolbox for success. Identifying the gaps in knowledge that are characteristic of FGCS provides a guidebook to what colleges and universities should focus on in their quest to provide more support to FGCS for recruitment and retention purposes. Though many of the participants found family, friends, and other supporters to help fill in their personal gaps in knowledge, universities could benefit from being aware of and proactively addressing these gaps in terms of recruitment and retention. The gaps that were uncovered in this study do not represent a comprehensive list; they are just snapshots of what currently exists, and there are other factors involved.

The participant's descriptions of their educational backgrounds and what influenced them to pursue a career in higher education demonstrate that administrators and staff have diverse experiences that contribute to how they perceive FGCS. All of the participants, except the researcher, cited family support as the number one contributor to their success. Five of the nine participants identified themselves as FGCS. The five "first-gen" administrators and staff all mentioned navigating the admissions and financial aid process as their biggest obstacles. Only one of the participants was exposed to a program that specifically served FGCS. Destiny spoke about her experiences in A FGCS program as life changing. The participants, who identified themselves as FGCS, based that identification on their own criteria instead of a globally recognized definition. Their discussions further support Davis (2010) that a global definition of FGCS is nonexistent.

Defining First Generation College Students

Defining FGCS can be quite complex for administrators and staff in higher education. Several definitions of FGCS exist. In this study, participants did not offer a consistent definition of FGCS, nor were they able to provide a written institutional definition. For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose to use Davis' (2010), definition of FGCS which states, " individuals can claim first-generation student status if neither one of their parents or guardians possess a four-year degree"(p.2). This definition provides a simple approach to defining FGCS versus using one of the varied definitions found in chapter two, the literature review. It is important for universities to establish a clear definition of FGCS that can be shared with the entire campus community. When individuals and offices define FGCS for themselves, it can be confusing for students, faculty, and staff. A university wide definition establishes criteria for FGCS to take advantage of programs, services and scholarships. Participants shared their definitions of FGCS.

Frederick's definition of FGCS was similar to the definition used for this study. When asked how the university defines FGCS he responded: "We define FGCS as students from families where neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree". Joy, who works at the same institution, defines FGCS as "Students who are considered the first in their families to pursue higher education". Students and parents can interpret the definitions that they shared quite differently. During our discussions they both shared that an institutional definition of FGCS has not been identified.

Destiny described herself as a FGCS because neither of her parents have a degree. Her sister who is six years older has a degree and she considers both of them to be FGCS

because they are descendants of parents who do not hold degrees. When asked how the university defines FGCS she responded:

> The university looks at the educational attainment of the parents. If the parents have not attended a post-secondary institution and attainted a degree, whether it be an associate's or bachelor's, the university looks at descendant of those parents as first generation college students. So, although my sister and I are six years apart and she has a college degree, I was still considered first generation. (Destiny, 207-211)

Spencer recalled that in the past his institution provided students an optional questionnaire on the application that asked if they were first generation. He recounted that because of low response the checklist was eliminated and replaced with a single question on the admissions application. His response further illustrates that some universities have not defined who they consider to fit the criteria of FGCS on their campus.

> We just define them as the first in their family to attend college. We let the students define that for themselves. We started out when I first started in '94, we gave students a checklist and we had a lot of students that would not respond because it's an optional question. (Spencer, 146-149)

Although the mission of Faith's pre collegiate program, states that her department will serve FGCS, her knowledge of the university's definition of FGCS is unclear.

> I'm not sure, if I know the definition. I know that we talked a little about that through the admissions office process. There's some kind of connect that the school identifies to see if they need extra support. (Faith, 89-93)

Malcolm struggled to define FGCS at his institution. To his knowledge the university does not have a written definition of FGCS. In his role as a multicultural recruiter, Malcolm spoke about the unwritten assumption that he will be responsible for targeting FGCS. Malcolm described how he feels about being a Black male and the only person responsible for recruiting multicultural students. He shared that although a university definition of how to characterize FGCS does not exist, he is responsible for recruiting that student population.

> There's not anything that's really set in stone. It's an understanding that I will be working with FGCS. I do not know if there is a written definition of FGCS, I know overall the definition is the first one to go to school. Some people define it by what type of institution you have, is it secondary, post-secondary, some say four year institutions, some two year institutions, we kind of look at it as basically the interaction of any college period. There is no clear definition to that. (Malcolm, 106-111)

Hope described that part of the Gear Up program's mission is to serve low-income and minority students. She explained that even though targeting first generation is not part of the program's mission, many students who participate with the Gear Up program were low income, minority and first generation. When asked how the university defines FGCS Hope responded:

> First generation students do not have a parent or guardian who attended or completed college. They are the first in their family attempting to do so.

Her response further confirms that institutions need to develop a consistent definition of FGCS that can be used by all administrators and staff.

Identifying which students are FGCS can be retrieved from Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) data or some universities choose to collect the data through the admissions application. Scott shared that his university does not have a written definition of what defines a FGCS. Scott expressed that being first generation has no relevance to race, ethnicity, or gender. He defined FGCS as any student who is first in their family to go on to college. His conversation indicated that being a FGCS might have some racial undertones. Although a majority of FGCS are low-income and minority students, there are quite a few FGCS who do not fall into this classification. Scott suggested that classifying students as FGCS, could be problematic for universities. He shared that FGCS should not be stereotyped.

> My sense is that it's defined as, any student who is the first in their family to go to college. It's not a race or ethnicity or gender issue. It stretches across the gamut. I think that often times they are identified based on the FAFSA. And, you know, so that there is the sense that all first generation students are low income. That may not be true. I mean, you might have a first generation student who comes from a family that's middle or upper class in terms of financial status and so, they're not identified, based on filling out a FAFSA. One of the worst things that we can do is to stereotype who these students are. Students may not be first generation because their family structures span the gamut as well. You have family who might have had a child and there are several years that go by and they have another child and so there's this gap, whether it's 10+ years. And so, the process has changed. So, we have to be careful because what happened ten years ago is very different from

what happens now. I just think the whole stereotype thing extremely concerns me because it doesn't, matter. (Scott, 176-189)

Although Scott is a White FGCS, his experiences are not equal to the experiences of Black FGCS. Black FGCS have an added challenge, that of systemic racial oppression (DeGruy, 2005). Scott seemed to believe that it doesn't matter how Black FGCS came to be FGCS. He was unconcerned with why they are the first in their family to go to college, which limits how Scott prepares for the specific needs of Black FGCS. By ignoring the fact that the Black FGCS have a deficit of experiential knowledge of how to succeed in college, Scott unknowingly limits his possible impact on increasing equity of opportunity to all FGCS.

Scott's narrative claimed that defining FGCS is not a race, ethnicity or gender issue. He further expressed his concern with FGCS being stereotyped as being Black low-income minority students. Under the lens of the central tenets of CRT, Scott is unwilling to take into consideration that there are worlds of experiences that are separate from his, namely that Black FGCS don't have access to the passed down experiential knowledge of how to succeed in college unlike their counterparts whose parents have a college degrees or White FGCS.

One of the CRT tenets highlights the unwillingness of people to relinquish the idea of the dominant ideology as the only ideology (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Furthermore, his narrative spoke to color-blind racism. According to Forman (2004) color-blind ideologies ignore the systemic nature of race, excuse accountability for racial injustices, and promote apathetic covert acts of racism, which in turn continues to give power and privilege to the dominant group. In his narrative, Scott doesn't recognize the

historical and social circumstances that prevented racial minorities and working-class families from attending college. He sought to convey claims of neutrality for all FGCS. Scott faced challenges as a FGCS but Scott unbeknown to him, still had White privilege when it was his opportunity to navigate the terrain of higher education. Scott's background causes him to view FGCS' struggles as personal instead of systemic. King and Howard-Hamilton (2003) state:

> "Higher education and student affairs professionals should be knowledgeable about and aware of how their own racial identities influence their decisions and interactions with others."

Like his colleagues in this study, Scott's definition of FGCS fails to provide a comprehensive definition.

Each participant defined FGCS differently. Pike and Kuh (2005) suggest that institutions change how they have been addressing the needs of FGCS. One of the first steps to addressing the needs of FGCS begins with defining the student population (Davis, 2010). In this study CRT, provides a lens to offer justification to challenge the claims that higher education is a race neutral environment that operates under an exclusive meritocracy system as it relates to access, persistence and retention of FGCS. The participant's responses suggest administrators and staff claim of being colorblind in regard to FGCS is an outdated dominant ideology. The idea that FGCS are the same as other populations is not verified by the experiences of the participants in this study.

As three of the participants further discussed the definition of FGCS, it was apparent that race was the white elephant in the room. Each of the three participants indirectly spoke of low income, minority students as parallel to FGCS. Malcolm

mentioned that he was responsible for serving FGCS as the multicultural recruiter. Hope identified the reality of the correlation between low income, minority students and FGCS. Scott suggested that identifying as FGCS is not a race or ethnicity or gender issue. Defining FGCS could influence how the participant's interact and engage with FGCS or the lack thereof. For the institutions that participated in this study a clear definition of FGCS can help determine if race is a common factor associated with their "first-gen" student population.

Documenting the participants' definitions is a vital component of this research. The differences in definitions demonstrate the need for universities to adopt an institutional definition. An institutional definition will assure that the correct student population is being identified and aid in accurate data collection of FGCS. Davis (2010) suggests defining FGCS is fundamental to successfully implementing programs and services that meet their needs. He advocates for the development of a "universally accepted definition" of FGCS. According to Davis (2010), once a definition has been established the university can begin to track these students and determine if the numbers are significant enough to provide targeted programs and services.

FGCS as a Subpopulation

In post-secondary education, subpopulations allow administrators and staff to designate specific programs and services for students that are part of the larger population. Typically, when institutions identify subpopulations, often it signifies that there is a need to create targeted programs and services (Case, 2005). Many universities already identify FGCS as an active subpopulation although the two universities in this study do not recognize FGCS as an active subpopulation on their campus. One of the

universities used in this study began tracking FGCS for the first time in 2010. The other university in this study has a longer history of collecting data on FGCS although the information has not been used to create targeted programming. In response to my research question, participants expressed that targeted programming can have a positive influence on student access, persistence and degree completion. The data in this study showed participants disagree about the need for establishing FGCS as a sub population on their campus. They also disagreed as to whether it's better for FGCS to be assisted through general services offered to the entire student body. Targeting FGCS starts with the admissions process. Identifying FGCS early in the admissions process provides an opportunity to develop targeted programming to help them succeed (Davis, 2011). Frederick described the relationship between admissions and FGCS.

> In terms of recruitment, we really provide the same service for every student whether they're first generation or not. First of all we didn't even know who were first generation until we added that to our application in 2010. By asking if a student is a FGCS on the admissions application, we are able to be more intrusive in the recruitment process. Now we have actually placed them in student groups so once they apply we know students that are first generation and they're coded in the system as being "first-gen". And what I try to do is have all my representatives check in with them on a more consistent basis. Because a lot of the students whose parents have gone to college and have older brothers and sisters who have attended, understand the process a little more. They don't need as much guidance and support in the process. (Frederick, 223-237)

Frederick's narrative is unintentionally contradictory. On one hand he spoke about recruitment practices being the same for all students and on the other hand he spoke about how identifying FGCS early in the admissions process allows for a more intrusive recruitment process. His comments implied that the services provided to students are different based on the answers given on the supplemental portion of the application. CRT challenges higher education institutions to diminish claims of racial neutrality (Munoz, 2009). Research shows that students from marginalized backgrounds identify most as being FGCS although there is a significant number of non-minority students who are FGCS (Choy, 2001). Is it okay to provide different admissions services to Black FGCS?

When Frederick spoke about recruitment, I reflected on my experiences as a multicultural recruiter for a predominantly White institution. Like Malcolm, a participant in this study, I recall attending recruitment events that were not required of my co-workers. I represented the university in Church basements, at block party's, talent shows and community outreach programs to name a few. I know I provided different services for the population of students I recruited. While attending non-traditional recruitment events I fully engaged in whatever was taking place. I recall attending a church service and participating in responsive readings (See Appendix C) with the congregation, although they were mostly geared toward the encouragement of Black colleges, I represented an alternative. Students and parents appreciated me sharing in their experiences. What I provided was different than what my co-workers provided students. I worked on establishing relationships with students and their families as I guided them through the admissions process. I followed up with students on a more frequent basis

through telephone, email, multicultural programming and school visits. I shared my experiences with students about the challenges I faced as a Black FGCS attending a Historically White Institution (HWI) and listened to them share the trials and tribulations that they had encountered. Often our conversations ended with a plan/to do list of next steps in the admissions process, specific to their needs. My coworkers had a more prescriptive manner of recruitment; high school visits and recruitment fairs. Typically, my coworkers only engaged in more intrusive recruitment practices when initiated by students or with high achieving students and their family.

Although Frederick's campus took an initial step in assessing how many FGCS were admitted to the university, there is still much work to be done to properly serve this growing student population. Through Frederick's personal analysis of campus trends he described a direct correlation between connecting FGCS with specific campus resources and their academic success. He shared why he has taken new measures to reach FGCS.

> We really try to make sure that we are conscious of certain subpopulations that might be more at risk on our campus. Basically on our campus, we know that low income students, who come from families that make less than $50,000 or receive a Pell grant, first generation college students, and underrepresented minorities, don't graduate or matriculate at the same rate as other students on our campus. So what I wanted to do was to identify those students early and try to develop specific strategies to work with them to make sure that we do the best job we can to retain them. So for the first time in our school history we are starting to track students and place them in student groups and develop targeted programs to make sure that they are successful. (Frederick, 266-276)

Similar to his colleagues who participated in this study, Frederick conveyed how FGCS are often grouped with multicultural students. Frederick and I discussed the pros and cons of institutions grouping FGCS and multicultural students together. The grouping that he describes on the surface seem to support FGCS, but at the core neglects to fully provide services for all FGCS. As revealed in the literature review, a majority of FGCS are low-income and minority students. When asked what contributes to an institutions' decision-making process when determining if FGCS can be a stand-alone program and/or subpopulation, Frederick responded:

> It really just depends on the raw numbers. If you have a large enough population it can be a service of its own and I think that we are getting pretty close to having a large enough number where it could be its own office on this campus. Basically, one-third of our students this year were "first gen" so I mean you're talking roughly around 800 first generation students. It's all a part of enrollment management, it's figuring out statistically where your biggest needs are and developing programs and services to address those needs and if we actually did the research and the math, we probably have several thousand FGCS on campus and we could easily find a way to engage them and create specific programs for them. (Frederick, 830-838)

Programming for FGCS has been in campus discussions at both of the institutions highlighted in this study. Specific program efforts to meet the needs of this subpopulation have not been established on either campus. Even though FGCS programming does not exist, Frederick suggested that some of the "first-gen" population at his institution is

being served through the multicultural office because they employ more proactive measures. He said:

> Currently we do not have any services specifically for FGCS. I know that we've discussed several times different strategies and different things that we could possibly explore to do a better job with first generation students. But we don't have any concrete program developed yet. There's nothing in place. Now, fortunately our Multicultural Relations [Office] has been a lot more proactive this year in terms of working with ethnic minorities. We provided them with a list at the beginning of the year of all of the students of color that enrolled at our institution this year. We also provided them information about which students were "first gen" and low income because they are the least likely to make it back for their second year in college. At least we identified those students upfront before they started here and we know who they are. (Frederick, 381-393)

Frederick's narrative prompted me to share the following story:

There are various measures that can be taken to help assure the success of FGCS. As a FGCS, I was not provided specific support services throughout my undergraduate experience. I had difficulty adjusting at a (HWI). I learned how to navigate the terrain of higher education from Black upperclassmen; to my knowledge the institution did not offer a formalized program for FGCS. I think I would have benefited from a university sponsored program that allowed me an opportunity to check in with a staff member from time to time and that provided programs where other like students could meet and discuss challenges and accomplishments. As a staff member, I take students who disclose that they are the first to attend college very seriously. When I am aware of a student's "first-

gen" status, I make a conscious effort to develop a rapport with him/her that includes me sharing my experiences as a "first-gen" student. Students have seemed surprised to hear that I am the first in my family to attend college. When I share my personal educational journey with students, it has an impact on how much they are willing to share with me. The institution that I am employed with at the time of this study does not offer programs or services geared towards FGCS. There is a campus myth that exists: FGCS are being served through the multicultural office. Some "first-gen students are being served through the multicultural office but there is no formalized program within that office or anywhere else on campus to meet the needs of FGCS. A FGCS sub population is not a "want" it is a "need" on college campuses that are heavily populated with students that fit the criteria.

Creating a stand-alone program and/or subpopulation for FGCS is difficult for Destiny to claim as a necessity. One major concern she described is the implications of labeling the program as services for FGCS. She acknowledged the need for services for FGCS but indicated that institutions should be creative in how the overarching concept is presented to the campus community. Destiny based her beliefs on interactions she had with students in a first year experience course that she co-taught. In her narrative she described how certain labels might impact students' perceptions and create a negative connotation. Later in this paper, I share Destiny's perspective on the impact labeling has on faculty and staff as well. During our conversation, Destiny talked about her apprehension of targeted programming that is branded as specifically for FGCS.

> I'm split with that, simply because, for example, when we label things first generation, multicultural, exceptions to the admissions criteria, the coaching

> program or the advance preparation program, it never ceases to amaze me how the label affects the mental and emotional focus of the students. For example, with our coaching program, it's designed for students who didn't meet the full admissions criteria but we feel that they will be successful with peer mentoring, academic coaching, etc. When you ask students why they're in the coaching program, they always bring out the fact, that "my ACT score was low" or they bring out other negative components which make them feel they've been ostracized. So that's why I'm torn with FGCS being a stand-alone program. Because people automatically assume things like, you're poor or your parents are uneducated or your parents are poor or those negative things, not recognizing that this is an opportunity to change the family tree. (Destiny, 288-299)

Frederick's narrative indicated that institutions should be proactive in learning intricate details about their students as a way to provide them with specific services and programs that might impact their success. Patton et al. states,

> "It is essential that educators and administrators become more cognizant of the numerous ways in which the experiences, languages, and cultures of students of color are minimized in higher education and seek to transform perceptions, practices, and policies that privilege some students at the expense of others. A critical race lens should also be demonstrated in the preparation of new professionals to help them understand the complex dynamics of how race is constructed to grant agency to one group while disadvantaging and stifling the progress of another (p.47)

Frederick recognized that there is overlap with students who fall into the category of "first gen", low-income, and minority. Furthermore, he brought attention to differences he has identified through his experiences in enrollment management with rural and urban FGCS. When asked if there should be independent programming for multicultural and first generation students Frederick, responded:

> They are separate, I mean don't get me wrong, there's a lot of overlap but over half of our first generation students are not minority at this university. As well as the low-income students, about half of the low-income students are minority, however the other half is not. So, it would be difficult to catch everyone under the minority umbrella. All the populations really have individual needs that need to be met. A lot of the services will actually help all the students. To give you an example, a lot of our first generation White students come from rural areas and a lot of our first generation minority students come from urban areas, and those two populations have totally different needs in terms of social transition to our campus. Putting them together could be effective if it's done the right way. It would be difficult to do programming for those two populations together because they have totally different needs. The rural students are not from the surrounding area and I'm pretty sure that they wouldn't be as comfortable in this new setting as a student who has lived in the surrounding area for their entire life. They still will have challenging transitions into our academic community, but socially they should pretty much be comfortable, but again it varies, some will, some won't. But...it's just so much diversity among the subgroups. Even with our African American students who come from North County or West County are a lot

> different from the students we get from the inner city in terms of their expectations, in terms of their academic backgrounds and even programming. Setting programming for those populations is difficult to do because they have different needs. That's why it's so important to know your students and to know what would be beneficial for the different students and to have them get involved in those things they need instead of making everyone go to a workshop; it's best to know which students actually need certain workshops and have them go, as opposed to making everyone go. (Frederick, 737-770)

Administrators and staff could consider programming for FGCS and multicultural as separate entities. Frederick stated in his narrative, "there's a lot of overlap but over half of our FGCS are not minority students at this university". Frederick's narrative recognized racial and cultural differences in FGCS. FGCS and multicultural students are two different student populations that have different needs. Identifying as a FGCS does not exclude students from being members of other demographics (Davis, 2010). He notes some researchers are considering the classification of "first-gen" as a proxy for ethnicity and race. A study conducted by (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007) revealed that in the fall of 2005, 89% of the freshmen at four-year institutions were students of color.

The "University College" model was approved to begin implementation on one of the campuses in this study for spring 2012. This model comprehensively addresses the needs of undecided students. Many FGCS start their collegiate experience as undecided (Tinto, 2000). The "University Model" addresses their lack of decidedness versus their needs as a FGCS. A specific office has not been designated to assist FGCS, but

following the "University College" model might unintentionally provide them support. Students who are FGCS, but not multicultural, have the potential to fall through the cracks because of how the current support services are set up. Destiny describes how implementing the "University College" model could potentially serve some FGCS but will not meet the needs of all that are considered "first-gen".

> We don't have an office that's specifically responsible for FGCS. Often times, a large percentage of FGCS come in undecided. The university is in the process of establishing a "University College". The "University College" is a system that is designed to address the needs of undecided students. The challenge is that because we don't have an office designated to serve FGCS, the needs of that student population might be missed. So whether they're undecided and in "University College", or they're first generation and they're students of color and they're specifically served through our office, there is still that population that might have decided on a major and that might not be of color that doesn't have a safe place to go to get the guidance they need. (Destiny, 191-199)

Although the entire campus plays a role in the success of students there is a need to have specialists for populations of students that have special needs and warrant individual attention (Case, 2005).

In his narrative, Scott described who is responsible for supporting FGCS at his institution:

> Well, I would say certainly, all the enrollment services: admissions, registration, and financial aid. I think we have to help; students and families get through the process. And I think the process is and can become cumbersome. It can be

> daunting, it can be frightening and I especially think the financial aid process is a challenge. We have to take special care in terms of helping students really understand the whole process, because it's easy to be discouraged. When you get discouraged and if you get discouraged enough, you give up. And I never want a family or a student and/or to give up for the wrong reasons. I certainly think the enrollment services are responsible. I think that the Center for Student Success, the Office of Multicultural Relations, and Student Life are responsible. I really think that every single office in Student Affairs needs to, pay particular attentions to first generation students. We have to figure out how we connect them and how we engage them in a way that is comforting to them. We have to push them a little bit so that they don't sell themselves short. I think that students are simply amazing. Many times, we talk about setting realistic goals; that's extremely important because there are many students that once you broaden the horizon for them; they really will rise to the occasion to succeed. When there are failures, I think, we need to be there to assist them and help them understand what went wrong, how to fix it, and encourage them to keep going. If those little things are attended to, students will not have issues that mushroom into something larger. (Scott, 123-146)

Spencer alluded to programming for select subpopulations presenting budgetary concerns in post-secondary education. Spencer described how budgetary constraints have prompted Universities to become generalists in the programs and services they provide. He suggested providing general services is an attempt to cast their net as wide as possible to catch as many students as possible who need support.

> Based on these tight budgetary times, it's hard to segment out certain populations of students. We look at the data in relationship to the number of FGCS coming in and assess what we need to be offering in regard to engagement programs and support services. We don't want to miss something that this population of student's needs. We have discovered that the services and programs that FGCS need benefit all students. So we look as comprehensively as possible at our programming strategies to provide programs and services to meet the needs of all students. (Spencer, 113-119)

Spencer views services and programs for FGCS in a generalist manner. He does not acknowledge the premise of race in identifying this student population, instead he neutralizes race and focuses on other data provided about FGCS.

When discussing the potential to activate a FGCS subpopulation at the institution where Joy worked at the time of this study, she described the lack of programming in general on her campus. Joy communicated her inability to identify whether there were distinct services FGCS needed because of the overall deficit in the services that were currently provided. She indicated that the deficits in services provided were for all students and those were slowly being addressed.

> I think for the populations that we currently have on campus that are utilizing Multicultural Relations; I haven't seen much of a difference in the type of programming that is needed. The reason that I say I'm not seeing such a difference is because there's such a deficit right now across the board and it doesn't matter what school district the students are coming from. My students all are having some major issues. I'm unable to just say this is a first generation

> student or this is a student that's considered at risk. Right now it's kind of across the board. So, that's why the assessment is constant, but its very difficult to say that, again in the time frame that I'm talking about of me being in this role. We're seeing it across the board that some of these needs are across the board with our students. It is very sad because the challenges are getting ready to be greater. (Joy, 271-282)

Similar to the perspective of two participants in this study, Destiny also described the lack of programs and services available for students in general. Destiny was asked to give her perspective on the subpopulations that are being underserved at her current institution at the time of this study.

> I think at any institution there are smaller subgroups that are being underserviced. As we focus on Latino and African American students there are the African American residential and the African American commuter. The traditional versus non-traditional, the traditional parent versus the non-traditional parents, so yes there are subgroups. I'm going to say unfortunately all those subgroups that we would try to service fall into that 87% that are on some type of Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), so kind of a yes and no to that. The traditional [student] versus the non-traditional [student], the traditional parent versus non-traditional parent, so yes there are subgroups. (Destiny, 412-421)

Hope explained her perspective on why it is important for institutions to invest in targeted programs for FGCS. She described challenges that FGCS are faced with that might hinder them from being successful on a college campus. FGCS perceived self-efficacy is a primary component of her narrative. Although Hope agreed with other

participants in this study about the need for establishing FGCS as a viable subpopulation, she expressed concern about how programs are staffed. Hope asserted that properly staffing programs and services is vital to both program and student success.

> I really do believe that it is important to invest in programs for FGCS, because I think sometimes they're faced with challenges that the typical student or students, who have been exposed to the college environment, because their parents or older siblings have been in that environment, does not face. These students come in with a lot more social capital that can help them in figuring out their way around college campuses. With first generation college students, they don't have the experience or resources to kind of rely on and so they're figuring things out as they go along. As you know, there are other issues of race that they might encounter issues of discrimination or issues of dealing with faculty and staff. They might see it but not know exactly how to process it because they don't have an outlet to be able to do that. It becomes a frustration for them. They might turn around and say what's wrong with me, why am I not making it? Why can't I be successful? There is, I guess, the agreement that more programs for this student population is a good idea but the follow through is lacking. Then making sure that the kind of programming is in place that it's staffed right in terms of qualified staff that can effectively deal and deliver that kind of service. The actual nitty gritty of let's get it done, here it is. I don't think that is getting done effectively on this campus. (Hope, 198-214)

Joy explained that her university needs to more effectively and efficiently serve all students. She recognized that there is much work to bring the institution to a higher

level of operating. Joy was optimistic about the future of the Multicultural Affairs Office and its interactions with FGCS. Joy gave a frank synopsis of her perspective on the institution providing adequate support services for FGCS.

> There's growth, a lot of growth that's going to have to take place. I'm not going to sit here and sugar coat that we're here, because we're not yet. There's a lot of growth that has to take place and that's why I have to go back to saying things are happening but there's still a lot of growth that needs to take place. When I first sat in this seat, it became crystal clear that we still needed to do more, okay. My role previous to this really focused on just my high school and middle school students. Once I got my students on this campus, I released them to other departments. Very seldom did I get involved unless I needed to because they were a [previous program participant] student and I still cared about their success. Now that I'm in this seat as an assistant dean, I'm able to get more perspective and particularly when I look at this department, there's just more that we can do, and more that we need to provide. That's why I've actually taken those initiatives with the support of this team because they have been totally supportive of new initiatives, redeveloping workshops, redeveloping some programs that have been historical in a part of this department for many years prior to it being named Multicultural Relations. It used to be student support services. My staff has been very instrumental in making sure that the direction that we're heading in is beneficial to students. (Joy, 217-235)

Frederick acknowledged that FGCS does not always mean minority and/or multicultural. He understands that often FGCS who are not considered multicultural are

overlooked. He briefly described an assumption that institutions make by equating multicultural and "first-gen" as one in the same.

> When discussing FGCS, they are typically grouped with minority students. Some might feel-well if you catch the minority population, then you have caught first generation college students as well. (Frederick, 733-735)

Destiny agreed.

> I think because, sometimes when people hear first generation they automatically think students of color and if we get the 'of color' population through a multicultural office, we're good. But there are still many students who are FGCS who are not being served because they are not students of color. (Destiny, 202-204)

Joy described the benefits of having programs and services for FGCS and their families. She gave details in her narrative about incorporating a family program component in the services that are offered to FGCS. In her past experiences she was able to see the impact parental involvement had on overall student success. Joy suggested unique programming for FGCS is a necessity and should equip families with the tools needed to best support their student.

> There are certain support services that need to look at family dynamics and we need to be able to address those issues. Not everything is going to be general you know so while you heard me say some things that we're identifying, they are not specific to particular populations because that's just where we are right now. But, when we're talking about unique programming we need that, our students need

> that. FGCS could benefit from creating programming to help their parents also understand the transition. (Joy, 289-294)

Like Joy, Hope recognized that programs and services should include a family component. She discussed how parents and family members, as the student, go through the transition. In her narrative she spoke about making sure students and their parents were aware of resources that could help them transition from high school to college.

> There was progress, in terms of exposure of students and families to the potential of getting them a college education and the realization that it is attainable. Starting with them from the seventh grade and being able to start college tours allowed some of them to realize college was possible for them, whereas before, the thought of going to college was not something in their minds. When they go to college and they see other African American students, that made them realize that [college] could be something for me because I see someone who looks like me here who's actually accomplishing this. The Gear Up program had major impact in exposing the students and their families to some of the myths they had. It let parents realize there are resources to help their child get into college even if they don't have the financial resources. The exposure let them see that a college education is attainable to them for their child. The program had an impact on the number of students that graduated from our high school cohort and, that in and of itself, gives the students a lot more opportunity than if they're not graduating or if they are dropping out. The program also had a high college enrollment rate for our students. They

> were either going into a two year or four-year college or tech school. It had more students that enrolled into post-secondary education. The enrollment was higher and another big thing was about 60, actually 59 students got scholarships from Gear Up. You've got 35 here who got a full-ride to [this institution] and we also have students that got scholarships to [other institutions in the state]. We have students who will actually have the opportunity to go to college and be able to graduate from college, pretty much debt free if they stick with the program. The program had tangible impact. It definitely left an impact on the students that were served, especially those who took advantage of the program. (Hope, 282-304)

The participants in this study described various strategies to address the needs of FGCS which assumedly in this study refers to Black FGCS. Each participant shared how they have attempted to address the needs of FGCS although a formal program has not been implemented on their campuses. The participant's shared that both of the universities in this study are aware of the FGCS sub-population and discussions have begun to determine how best to serve this growing demographic. CRT illuminates why race should not be ignored, in this case race is a prominent factor that influences how FGCS are served at two Midwestern institutions. Ignoring race ignores the truth of our shared American history and its outcomes. It is no coincidence that by default the FGCS subpopulation is served by multicultural offices. Participants discussed that many of the students they have encountered that self-identified as "first-gen" are students of color and a few were Caucasian. Race is one component that needs to be addressed to best serve

FGCS. Administrators and staff can more effectively serve this sub population if there is a better understanding of the social and cultural differences that impede academic success (Hottinger and Rose, 2006).

Each participant spoke about how their institutions could do a better job of serving FGCS. Joy and Hope experiences highlighted the need to establish a "first-gen" family program. They expressed the importance of making sure that families are brought into the fold along with their students. Frederick and Destiny acknowledged that all FGCS are not multicultural students. They concluded that students that are not of color and identify as being "first-gen" do not have a safe haven on campus to receive the necessary guidance to help them be successful. Addressing how race and racism influences students, faculty and staff experiences on college campuses are both prevalent and permanent components of institutions ability to retain FGCS.

The participants described what seemed to be institutional lackadaisical approaches to serving FGCS. The participants spoke about the non-existence of programs and services available to FGCS. Although they were aware of FGCS being a vibrant student population on their campuses, beginning stages of addressing their needs were just starting to take place. There was no consistency on specifically who is responsible for the success of FGCS besides the overall "kumbaya" (unrealistic optimism) message; it's the entire university's responsibility.

The narratives shared in this section illuminate the lack of intentional programs and services for FGCS. The collective challenges, portrayed in this section in regard to identifying FGCS as a subpopulation and providing programs and services to meet their needs, require campus support. The data in this study suggested that assuring that

programs and services are for all FGCS versus Black FGCS might gather more institutional support.

This theme, FGCS as a subpopulation, is important to this study because it highlights participants' views on FGCS as a subpopulation and considers providing targeted programming and services for FGCS. The participant's responses exposed the inconsistent measures being used to address the holistic needs of FGCS. Although serving FGCS should be a concerted effort of the entire university, the university should identify an office to be responsible for their overall success.

Institutional Support

Institutional support was repeatedly discussed in this study. A method of identifying support from an institution is by assessing both financial backing and targeted programming and services. In response to my research question, this section focuses on the institutional support that staff and administrators feel impedes or empowers the delivery of programs and services for FGCS. Institutional support for this study includes both faculty and staff working collaboratively to serve all students in general and FGCS specifically. There are three levels of institutional support that emerged: 1) access through pre collegiate programming 2) persistence through university programming. Participants disclosed how their institution supports or fails to confirm programs concerning subpopulations such as FGCS and 3) Degree completion through campus connections.

Scott described institutional support as being shown through all employees taking an active interest in the success of students, from maintenance staff all way up to the Chancellor. Scott suggested that new initiatives or changes to existing programs and

services are best communicated from a top down approach. During our discussion he spoke about the importance of leadership being clear about the University's stance on serving FGCS. He acknowledged the need to create initiatives for FGCS and asserts that the campus community is responsible for student success.

> Part of showing support is getting it in the mindset that we all are ambassadors for the university as well as responsible for the students that come here. It's everybody's responsibility. I mean, ultimately, the direction we're hoping to go, is that there is a team approach in the services we provide. What's important is that new initiatives, like programs for FGCS, are communicated from the top down. I think the worst thing we could do is say this is only a student affairs problem because, student development, student success, student engagement impacts every area of the campus. This must be a priority. And it must be communicated that it is everybody's role because, I think too often we say well "This is their role. This is their role. This is their role. This is their role." Well, what happens is if everybody is saying it's someone else's responsibility, it quickly becomes no one's responsibility. And I think that's the worst trap that we could possibly get into. I think it's also extremely detrimental when we draw the lines in the sand and say this is a Student Affairs issue, or this is an Academic Affairs issue, or this is an administrative issue. These concerns cut across all areas of the campus. (Scott, 438-447)

Destiny noticed when leadership changed at her institution more support was given to programs and services for multicultural students. She described the changes as being "long overdue." Destiny gave a stern position about institutions having an

obligation to provide services for FGCS regardless of their race. Although there is an obvious shift in programming geared towards multicultural students, she expressed there is still work to be done. She spoke of campus transition through an analogy:

> I think our biggest challenge is that our campus is in transition. This is the first time in a very long time, at least since I've been here, that you've actually had a vice chancellor and a provost who are in the same book and on the same page regarding student success at this institution. Now you can have your lieutenants or your lieutenant colonels on the same page in the same books, but when your soldiers are all over the place, that makes it very challenging to be strategic on how, you know, to win the war. Now, mind you, these conversations have been going on for several years but we had turnover at the chancellor's level, turnover at the provost level. So, now we actually have some consistent folks who can keep those conversations in frame. And I think when we are able to help both faculty and staff see that the face of FGCS is not just African American or Latino, and even if it is, it is a duty and an obligation for this institutional structure to provide them with what they need to be successful. (Destiny, 333-347)

Joy described the support she received for initiatives she leads. She attributed her support to the relationships with her leadership team and respect in the community. She described how institutional support has heightened access, persistence and retention programs due to national recognition. Although her department is not officially charged with providing support for FGCS, many students that utilize its services fall into the "first-gen" category.

I think this is unique for me and I have to say, that because again I have two departments that are priorities for institutions. One department is responsible for access and one department is responsible for retention of multicultural students. Okay so I haven't had to really deal with a lot of restraints in the financial support for the program because it's been a priority. I think that has a lot to do with the importance that was communicated from the community that we serve, when it comes to the value of the programs and their development. Supplemental funding has taken place. One of the first things I did when I took over this department was get on board with development and bring in supplemental income for our pre collegiate department because I knew what I needed to do. I think it took a lot of proving that pre collegiate programs are worthy programs to keep and when folks started seeing and understanding the impact that the programs have and what we are able to provide to students and the surrounding community, then the support continued. From the Multicultural Relations standpoint I have to say on that end there were things that I assessed very quickly, when I began this position that needed to change immediately. One of the things was the face of the department. The department needed to be something that students really felt was a welcoming environment for them and I don't just mean with the people, I meant the look of it. Two weeks of me stepping into my role I shut the department down, and it got a new face-lift, new furniture and new paint. There were basic things that it needed so the students could feel like it really was a support service for them, but most importantly out of that they needed to feel like they were valued and that's important. That was important to me. I couldn't have students coming to a

> department where I had computers that weren't working. I can't say who dropped the ball where, I just knew what I wouldn't accept as the leader for the department…computers that aren't working, paint chipping off walls, a hodge-podge of furniture for a department that's important like this. When I did take it to my supervisor, he immediately supported that, so that's the truth of the support there. The department had maybe two or three tutors; some of them didn't need to be tutoring, quite frankly. I changed the scope of that program, and I hired more tutors. That got supported. I didn't have a lot of mentors. That was supported. There are a lot of other needs that I've addressed and slowly but surely I'm receiving support for them. (Joy, 529-566)

Frederick described establishing a scholarship for FGCS as one way his institution has shown support. Frederick clarified the need to help alleviate some of the financial burdens FGCS are faced with. He stated how high achieving high school students who were identified as first generation their senior year was selected to be the first to participate in the Opportunity Scholar Program.

> We have developed scholarships specifically for first generation college students, which was a huge addition for us, the Opportunities Scholar Program. It targets first generation college students and underrepresented minorities in the STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] disciplines. We have local companies who have told us that they want to provide students with an opportunity. They want really bright students to not have to worry about money. We see a lot of high achieving FGCS. Academically they're strong, but they don't have the financial means to go to college full time and just concentrate on school.

> So instead of them working full time, we've had companies who step up and say, "we would like to pay for these students to go to school". On the other end, of course, they are going to provide internships and in a way they're building their own workforce through grooming these students to work with them after they graduate. So I mean it's a great program. We got some of the top local students in the area, that we normally wouldn't be able to attract, due to the Opportunity Scholars Program, which gave them a full scholarship. Hopefully in a couple years they'll be huge contributors to the local work force. (Frederick, 914-929)

Scott expressed the need for institutions to find ways to implement programming during harsh economic times. Scott discussed current budgetary restraints in higher education has made it more challenging to provide programming and services for a specific population. He suggested a general approach to student services is advantageous for students and the university. Scott described how students can learn from each other's diverse backgrounds.

> I think that because the university has such a wide population, and the average age being nearly 28 years old. I think we try to pay attention to the various populations but not segment them out and say that we're only going to have this office working with this population. Because I think that, especially now given the economic situations where you have a lot of people returning here, there are folks that went to school fifteen years, might be didn't finish their degree now find themselves in a position where they want to come back and get a degree, or additional courses. It's very frightening to them and in many ways some of the same issues that you're dealing with, with some of the first generation students,

> you're going to deal with, with them as well. And so, one of the things that I really like about the university is that this mix of the student population certainly helps in the learning process, if we take full advantage of it. To have someone who is a first time college student sitting in a class with someone who has been in the workforce that's coming back and able to share some of the real world experience and work experience is great. We need to celebrate that and we need to take full advantage of that because it enhances the learning the process. (Scott, 200-221)

Furthermore, Scott suggested the necessity of collaborative efforts such as sharing resources and responsibilities.

> When we think about budgets and we think about the economic times we randomly say 'well we can't do this,' I think we have to change that to say, 'what can we do and how can we do it?' It's very easy to say we can't do it, we don't have the money to do it. Well, are there other ways to do it? It's important for us to think differently, think collaboratively, think about sharing resources and responsibilities and the communication is extremely important with that. (Scott, 718-723)

Spencer shared that the mission of Upward Bound is to serve low income and FGCS. Spencer explained the relationship between Upward Bound and the institution with which he is currently employed. In his narrative, Spencer spoke about the sensitive nature of a relationship that is governed by federal grant policies and procedures.

> They [Upward Bound Staff] are part of the center for academic development and not just an outside agency. They are a part of that staff. The Upward Bound grant

> does not allow them to align themselves with one university. They have to have open options for all the students they serve. So that's a fine line there. When we talk about supporting FGCS that participate with Upward Bound, they are offered the same resources as any other students who are apart of the university such as the math lab and writing lab. Actually they might have more support because the program calls on the expertise across this campus to support those students a lot. The last four to five years since we've changed the director of that program, we've gotten more students who have chosen [our institution] because they have really understood the benefits of being here, and how they can be supported on a different level. But there's a fine line between what we can do and what we can't do with that program. (Spencer, 311-323)

As a follow up question, I asked Spencer if his campus offered university scholarships for students who participated in Upward Bound. Spencer responded:

> No, we treat those students like other students. We do wave application fees for any student that basically can't afford it when they bring in documentation from their counselor. We just implemented a need based scholarship program. That's all part of our Access to Success initiative. When you look at the population of the Upward Bound students, they all fall in that category, so it's not a scholarship for Upward Bound, but Upward Bound's students are eligible for a need based scholarship if they go here. So a lot of things that we have done for all students, in different categories, those students were considered as we were looking at developing different programs.

I inquired whether Upward Bound students who decided to attend the university where Spencer is employed were tracked on the university side. Spencer responded: "No and that's something that we need to do."

Hope was employed as part of a federally funded six-year partnership grant that provides services and programs for low-income, underserved students. Hope explained that through the grant, the university formed partnerships with local middle and high schools. She shared that there were opportunities that the university could have taken advantage of to assist low-income and minority students. Hope was asked to explain if the relationship between the grant and the university was beneficial or not. Hope responded:

> It was definitely beneficial. There's more that could be done in terms of the opportunity to engage with students. The university could have been more involved in terms of the staff and faculty embracing students in our program. I wish there were opportunities that could have been funded through the university as opposed to having the program to pay faculty and staff that shared their expertise. The university could have been engaged more in that sense in providing more tangible resources that could be utilized by the program. The program would have to pay for everything…we used on campus, we didn't even get a discount. Because we paid for the space, food, technology and faculty and staff if they were presenting. It was hard to have programming on the campus because we could not afford the price of facilities and services. That could have been a great way that we could have gotten the much-needed matching funds. Matching funds were very vital for this particular grant. Matches have to be met and when you

> don't meet the match, the program is in jeopardy of being discontinued. I think that's one reason the grant was not renewed. There was a big discrepancy in how much money was drawn down and what was showing we got in matches. (Hope, 539-559)

Hope and I briefly discussed her recently receiving the news that the Gear Up grant would not be renewed on her campus for 2012. Hope seemed very uneasy speaking about this matter. Her demeanor prompted me to probe further. I asked Hope if she were concerned about the students who recently graduated from the Gear Up program. She responded:

> Definitely, because I realize all the more that even though, yes we met the goal of getting them to go to college, yet for first generation students, its about staying in college and successfully completing college. That is the biggest concern. Okay, we've gotten them there, so now I am concerned if the students will have the support system they need through colleges they chose. That's a big concern. (Hope, 161-165)

I continued to inquire about Hope's concern about retention support. Hope described the lack of services that are available for students who participated in the Gear Up program who now attend the university. In Hope's narrative, she expressed that the institution has yet to identify a staff member or office to assure the success of the 35 Gear Up students who received full scholarships to pay for all expenses. Hope seemed very disappointed about the lack of support services that will benefit the cohort of Gear Up students. She shared her perspective:

> They have limited services but what I feel is the need for staffing to follow through with the students to make sure they are active in those services that can be of help especially academically. I don't know if there is someone to help them identify and access those resources that will be to their benefit. As well, I don't know if someone is helping them build the support they need as a cohort so they can support each other. They need social and academic support to help them deal with the challenges they are facing. Once they get here there are a lot of things they never got a chance to learn about or be taught about. This is their first time in college. They might get bombarded with other things that we were probably not even aware they needed to deal with. The university should support the staff and make sure they follow up with those Gear Up students and make sure they are getting more support. I wonder if there's somebody there to hold the students accountable; if somebody is there to follow up with them and see what issues they are dealing with and if they are getting the support they need to be successful? A structured program does not exist here at the university. It's more like I give them the information and hope that they use it or they have a hodgepodge of people who might be working with them, but it's not a cohesive, structured program that actually focuses on those Gear Up students and other students with similar backgrounds. (Hope, 178-193)

Destiny explained why she felt more support is shown for programs with names that, at face value, were inclusive of the entire student population. I asked Destiny to clarify the reasoning behind being strategic in naming a program in order to gain campus support. Destiny took a long pause before giving her candid response:

> Why do I need to be strategic in the naming in order to gain support across the campus? Well, you know everybody wants to be a Gate's Millennium Scholar or a Rhodes Scholar because you have to create the buy-in. No one wants; I'm not going to say no one wants, I'll say it's very challenging to even find folks that are interested in investing in programs specifically to engage women in certain fields. You know you have these new initiatives around women in the STEM fields and those partnerships and collaborations. It's just apart of the game. In order to strategically crack the system you have to identify what's in it for them. What's in it for them tends to be the association with things that matter, so again naming the program after vested alumni, such as the Henry W. Bloch Scholar program, gets more recognition. It's all in the name to get the buy in from the campus. It's nothing major behind it; it's just a strategy that if it looks like it sounds good then people are going to buy into it. (Destiny, 373-386)

Joy described an encounter she had with faculty and staff members at a leadership forum. Her narrative spoke about how assumptions regarding race can leave many people uninformed. Joy discussed how she turned an awkward situation into a learning opportunity, which she shared with leadership at her institution. Joy's proactive zeal has begun the conversation about race relations in and outside of the classroom. Joy, gained the support from her leadership team to develop workshops that address faculty and staff concerns about working with minority students. In her descriptions she gave matter of fact details about embracing ignorance with humble knowledge.

> I can say to you that I actually was very fortunate. There was an academic leadership forum that took place early in the school year, and I was able to sit at

the table with folks and I talked about the functions of student support services. I was sitting at a table with a group of people that have probably been here just as long as I and when asked what department do you oversee and I said they knew Bridge but as soon as I said in MCR, what's MCR and that was my first flag and I thought okay, so then I said Multicultural Relations. What's that? So then I described what the department's function was and what it should do. Then I began to talk to them about the student population that we serve and typically what some of the characteristics were of the students, and how we need to be prepared for working with that student population. Now I was at a table of all Caucasian faculty at that time. The conversation was great and, I feel like it was great because what came out of it at the end of this was that they said, "we need help". I began to say to them would it help if there were workshops developed for you so that you can understand the multicultural students that you serve. Workshops that will also help you to begin to explore your own assumptions and biases and let me explain why I said that. One of the folks at the table said to me, can you please explain what it's like being a student that grows up in an urban setting coming from a single family home and I kind of chuckled and I said that's exactly why we need these workshops because I didn't grow up in a single family home and I don't know what its like to grow up in an urban setting and I don't know what its like to not have clothing and food, but you assume that because I'm Black and that's why we need help and the conversation actually went a little farther at that table, but when we finished with that what came out of it was that they were actually very willing to say can you help us and so that's another priority that's on

> my list. So I plan to reach out to the office of equal opportunity and I'm also going to probably reach out to the counseling department because there are people who are saying we need help to be able to be prepared to work with the student populations that are going to be the majority that is on this campus. What can we do so that we can be better, so that we can make sure our departments and that our programs are set to really help the students be successful? That impressed me. So, but no we're not there yet, but the fact that the conversation opened enough for me to go back to my own leaders and say this is what happened. Do I have support to be able to do this and be able to begin this, yes? So that's a great thing that I know is to come in the future but no it's not something that's being done right now but there's going to be a huge need for challenging conversations and it just can't be coming from Multicultural Relations. (Joy, 368-404)

Discussions about race in higher education are needed to dispel myths and tear down ideologies of oppression (Hiraldo, 2010). Patton et al. (2007) states, "Elements of CRT can be employed in higher education and student affairs to illuminate racial inequities and hierarchies and to transform colleges and universities." Joy's aforementioned narrative speaks volumes to the evidence of the prevalence of race and racism that continues to plague educational environments.

Malcolm asserted that institutional support is shown through supporting the surrounding community with endeavors that provide communal uplift. At the time of this study Malcolm was a member of select committees around the city and within the university that are working to enroll and attain students from under-represented

populations. In his narrative, Malcolm spoke about community engagement events such as speaking at local churches and attending neighborhood meetings.

> Well, when you say churches or community centers, really you're not just informing the students, you're informing the supporters, you're informing the parents. Many times you might not be talking to any students, especially when you go into a church. I've been to a couple now and there are very few students. I have to let them know I'm not only here for the students; I'm here for them. So it's a community outreach. Under-represented populations are targeted because it's a reflection of our campus climate. We have a responsibility to make sure that we are reaching multicultural students and supporting them when they get here. (Malcolm 242-151)

Hope discussed her day-to-day job responsibilities that involved her establishing relationships in the community where participants lived and attended school. Hope spoke about the grueling process of trying to get representatives from the university to participate in off campus events. She commented about the minimal university support that was offered to enhance programs and services. I formed my relationship with Hope through the Gear Up program. Hope needed a university representative to speak about personal trials and tribulations that impact college success at an off campus location, I answered her request. During our discussion, Hope expressed that the university should be more connected to the community. Her persistence prompted a question. I asked Hope, if she could describe how the local African American community views this university, she responded:

> I know the community perception of the university has not been positive in the past. I think it still needs to do a lot within the terms of building bonds within the African-American community, because if you look at our particular program, Gear Up, aiding with the administration [of the institution], there were challenges with that. The support that you hoped to have gotten from the leadership of the university, was not there. (Hope, 266-268)

I share a similar experience:

When I informed my friend that I had applied for a position at a local predominately White institution, she expressed concern. I told her the position was aligned with my career goals and it was at the type of institution, for which I yearned employment. I was most interested in a public four-year research institution located in an urban area with a diverse student population.

Moving forward, my phone rang as I was headed to my car leaving an interview at a predominately Black institution in the same city. I answered the phone and to my surprise I was offered and accepted the position at the (HWI). When I shared my news with my friend she said, "Why would you want to work at that racist place?" I responded it could not be any worse than the institution I came from, which was located in a rural area in a Midwestern state. I asked her why she thought the institution was racist. She shared that many people in the community and her family had shared stories about racist acts that took place in the classroom and with employees. Of course, I wanted to know more and asked her to give me an example. She informed me that her aunt had worked for the institution and during her tenure was repeatedly passed over for promotions even

though she was more qualified than the chosen candidates. I told my friend I would make the best of the situation.

On my first day of work my supervisor escorted me around the building and introduced me to several people in key offices with whom I would be interacting. Everyone seemed very pleasant and friendly. On my lunch I decided to stay on campus and walk around to familiarize myself with the campus. As I walked on a curvy pathway I could see a well-dressed, Black woman who appeared to be a seasoned professional approaching me with a big smile. I said, "Hello". She said, "Hello" and extended her hand. We shook hands as she introduced herself as a fellow employee and said, "You must be new to the ranch." I returned a friendly smile and said, "Yes, today is my first day. I didn't know I was on a ranch. She chuckled, bent her knees bowed her head and stretched out her arm as if she were doing a curtsey and replied, "Welcome to the institutionalized slave ranch." Those words will remain with me forever. I shared with her that a friend had concerns about me accepting my position. She told me, "The concerns are valid my dear, keep your eyes open and your mouth closed." We briefly discussed some discriminatory practices she had witnessed. I said, "Thank you for the heads up." We exchanged smiles and partied ways. As I walked back to my office I took a deep breath and reflected on the brief conversation I had with a stranger. But strangers we were not in identifying systemic racism. I often wonder what made her feel comfortable enough to share with me in that manner. Was it simply because we were both Black women or did it have anything to do with her first impression of me? Instead of me questioning her motive I decided to take her comments at face value and be more observant of my new environment.

Although little was shared in my brief encounter, the impact spoke volumes to my initial interaction on campus. Now, some five years later, I have my own experiences in which I felt marginalized. I can recount moments that were discriminatory and/or racist behavior that attempted to foreshadow my work ethic, productivity and commitment to student success (too personal to give specifics). I can attest to White privilege influencing decision-making processes versus data moving the direction of institutional programs and services. I have shared with fellow Black university employees in an attempt to do a peer check. Often we concluded that what I identified is not a figment of my imagination. Even as I speak my truths in this narrative, I am concerned about how they will be perceived by privileged administrators and staff.

Through a CRT lens, I am able to gain a better understanding of my experiences as a Black woman in post-secondary education. By acknowledging that racism is endemic to American life, I am able to identify the social and cultural constraints in routine interactions between the privileged and the marginalized (Matsuda et al. 1993; Hilraldo, 2010). King and Howard (2003) suggest that higher education professionals have an understanding of their own identity and how their identity influences approaches and practices with students, faculty and staff. The idea of self-reflection and self-discovery through a CRT lens challenges higher education professionals to shy away from White-normative behavior.

Joy also works closely on and with community endeavors. She spoke about the importance of nurturing the relationships that she has built over the years. She and I discussed the significance of the university having a presence in the community to show

support for its local constituents. I asked Joy to describe how the local African American community views this university. She responded:

> I think it's improving. I'm in the community a lot and I've seen it, and this is again from me being on this campus for so many years and being active in the community. Even when I worked in financial aid I was allowed to go out and do financial aid presentations. I think the view of [this university] has slightly improved over the past six years. I'm going to say six to seven years because that's about how long I was a part of the Bridge program. It's been about six or seven years for me now. I think the perception is beginning to change as things continue to evolve. (Joy, 390-397)

Like her colleagues in this study, Joy agreed that community engagement is a key component of institutional support. Joy's narrative described the strained relationship her institution has had with the surrounding community. She discussed seeing some positive change in the universities relationship with the community.

> Well of course, prior to a lot of the changes that have taken place, the community viewed [the university] as a campus that wasn't very supportive of African American staff, faculty, students, in general. I don't think that's a secret. That has been voiced publically on many occasions. I think there have been a lot of initiatives that have taken place to at least have that dialogue so that the community can begin to voice what some of their concerns are. I know there's the chancellor's diversity committee. I do a lot of workshops in the community, bring a lot of folks on campus and I can tell a difference in the perception based on the people that I'm working with. They're beginning to see some positive things that

> are happening on campus and we need to continue to do that. Now the real test is going to be what's going to happen by 2012, 2013. The community isn't silent at all when it comes to being able to identify what they think are some of the challenges at the university. It's improving and that's based on me being actively involved and having that feedback from folks that once felt a certain way, but now they're beginning to see.. oh, okay now you all are offering this, now you're doing this. (Joy 378-393)

Each participant described minimal support for FGCS at their institutions. They gave varied reasons to illustrate why FGCS are not receiving adequate support. Institutional support is needed to assist FGCS as they gain access, persist and complete a college degree (Cushman, 2007). According to Choy (2001) many FGCS are underprepared when they exit high school and pursue post-secondary education. One major component that contributes to FGCS lack of preparation is the educational system that failed to prepare them for college expectations (Hilraldo, 2010). In CRT, lies a strong value system that recognizes everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights. The unequal structure of education has contributed to how FGCS navigate secondary and post-secondary education systems. CRT provides a platform for administrators and staff to acknowledge inequities in education and forge an interest in a commitment to follow a social justice agenda (Hilraldo, 2010).

Joy spoke of dispelling cultural myths through challenging discussions to help administrators and staff to understand what types of support they can provide FGCS. For Hope, she suggested institutions show support by providing adequate amounts of professional staff to serve FGCS. Malcolm shared information about the creation of a

new scholarship specifically for FGCS as an initial step to indicate the universities support. Regardless of how participant's viewed institutional support it was clear that both institutions could be providing additional support for FGCS.

In this section administrators and staff brought attention to their experiences in gaining and providing institutional support. Their perspectives of support were quite different. Some spoke about financial support and others spoke about the campus having a vested interest from the top down as a form of support. This section contributes to my study by revealing a consensus from all participants that there needs to be more institutional support for comprehensive programs and services targeting FGCS.

Campus Networks

In the literature review (Myers, 2003) illustrated the importance of students making connections in and outside of the classroom with peers, faculty and staff. The literature review highlights students who are connected both in and outside of the classroom as being more successful than their counterparts.

My reflections on campus networks.

As a FGCS, I recall making a conscious effort to reach out to Black upperclassmen when I was faced with challenges. Often, the individuals I spoke with suggested I speak with a particular faculty or staff member to further address my concerns. I remember the upperclassmen coaching me on how the conversation should flow and how to best get my point across. As a staff member I encourage students to step outside their comfort zones to build relationships with their peers, faculty and staff. I have spoken with students about the benefits of having a network of people within the campus community to help them navigate the terrain of higher education.

Frederick suggested students who are making connections with peers, faculty, and staff require a deeper understanding of the student population. Frederick stated:

> All of the research and the US Census have confirmed that the fastest growing college populations are low-income and minority students. More specifically the Latino student population and African American student populations are increasing. (Frederick, 376-379)

Joy clearly understands the importance of students developing relationships with several offices on campus. She described campus communities taking holistic approaches in addressing the needs of diverse student populations. It was clear in her narrative that Joy was serious about her position towards multicultural offices in general being responsible for handling the needs of ethnically diverse groups of students. Also, Joy's narrative depicted a sense of urgency for all members of the campus community to be prepared for the rising population of minority students. Joy suggested her campus needs to gain a comprehensive understanding of low-income and minority students, which includes not relying solely on the Multicultural offices to assure their success. When asked what type of characteristics a person should possess who is responsible for assisting FGCS. Joy responded:

> They [students] need to be matched with folks that are able to identify with them and understand what their walks are right now and the situations that they've been in. They [administrators and staff] need to be able to identify with the students and yes it's very much necessary. We're looking at students that in the next couple of years, and let's just focus on this campus, we're going to have a majority of Hispanic, African American and Asian students. We need to be able

> to work with that sector of students and our faculty and staff need to be able to accommodate those groups of students and understand the backgrounds that they're coming from. Being able to identify what some of the situations are, what some of the challenges are, understanding family dynamics, and understanding the mental health issues is important. We need to be prepared for that and so it's going to be a great need for departments like this to be in the forefront of not only serving the students but taking the lead in helping other departments develop appropriate services. It's going to take more than just a single department to best serve "our students." Across the board a lot of campuses don't realize we need to get beyond thinking that you can just point students to one direction and that's that office's responsibility. It's all of our responsibilities to take care of students. No, they're in your classroom; they're coming to get academic advising from you; they're going to need financial aid; they need career development. Everybody is going to have to be prepared to be able to step up to the plate and provide the students with what they need, assess them properly, and give support. (Joy, 294-316)

Spencer, like other administrators and staff in this study, identified developing a campus support network as one key factor that impacts the success of FGCS. Spencer acknowledged new student orientation as one of the initial touch points to reach out to students. He saw new student orientation is as an opportunity to share with students and families what they can expect from the university and what the university expects from them. Spencer referred to new student orientation as the beginning of a partnership

between the University, the student and families. Spencer's narrative spoke about the need for programming that engages students throughout their educational process.

> Well, when you're looking to engage students the right way, start with a comprehensive orientation program. Orientation is one of first opportunities to formally introduce students and their parents to a college campus. Even though they've chosen this university and they have visited, they don't really know what makes this university tick. That's what orientation can do for students. We look at it as a great partnership; it's a partnership with the university and the student, and the students and their support group, meaning their family. The university is really trying to outline to the student how they can engage with the university, and some things that they can expect from the university in return. Orientation does not stop with that one program; it's an ongoing experience. Some campuses have a first year experience, but it's even beyond that. You will see that from sophomore to junior year is a crucial year for a lot of students. You will see a lot of students that when they make it to their junior year, in most cases they are going to finish. The retention rate from the first year to the second year and then from sophomore to junior … it becomes a crucial time in which to keep students engaged and to keep supporting them to help them reach graduation. (Spencer, 473-489)

In addition, Spencer described initial adjustments FGCS are faced with, and how one-on-one interactions can be used to assist students in becoming acclimated with the campus culture. He affirmed that many students benefit from making personal connections.

> FGCS in general became very familiar with their high schools. In some respects, they were kind of the big person on campus at their high school. Then you get to a

> college campus that looks very different than your high school and, I think that, in itself brings in a whole level of discomfort. Then you add in the anxiety around the new classroom situation, which is structured completely different. Having one-on-one interactions, whether it be academic support, peer-to-peer mentoring, or staff mentoring… having someone to connect to on a one-to-one basis is extremely important. The one-on-one interaction really prepares them and gives them the comfort level to move into group academic support programs. We see that over and over with this student population. (Spencer, 158-173)

Spencer discussed why the university created a world-renowned strategy for how to address supplemental instruction. He suggested that supplemental instruction helps FGCS to be more comfortable with college expectations. The comprehensive academic support program he spoke about allows for one-on-one assistance as well as group work. No services exist to specifically support FGCS instead; they are connected to existing services on campus.

> When you look at some of the data around FGCS, there's a step to get them to where they can really feel comfortable. Some of those students feel comfortable in supplemental instruction because it's more of a group discussion about what happened in a particular course. We implemented two things. We went back and looked at how we could get these students connected to one-on-one tutoring because we have seen that FGCS like one-on-one interactions. Then we also implemented our coaching program which provides peer mentoring for students and what we found is that these are services all students can benefit from. The services are impacting the students that are FGCS and all students in general. We

> continue to look at the data and adjust things that we find will reach students that are first generation. (Spencer, 120-135)

Frederick expanded his perspective on campus support networks by acknowledging that at risk student's benefit from personal connections with faculty and staff. He described how developing genuine relationships with FGCS can be the difference between their success and failure. Frederick's narrative touched on a sensitive matter: who is best prepared to address the needs of FGCS.

> Typically under-represented students and at risk students are successful as long as they have a person who they trust and a person that they see as being credible. You can have a very effective relationship with these student populations. I mean, the key is having a person who can relate to them and earn their trust. Now, of course, usually a person from their same situation might be able to relate easier such as someone from a similar situation in terms of being a first generation person, low-income person, a person from their neighborhood. I mean that would create an instant connection, but I don't necessarily think that a person has to be from that background to relate, they just have to work harder to establish that credibility. For example, one of my mentors, my admissions representative in high school, was from a wealthy family that lived in a well-respected suburban neighborhood. We had nothing in common, but he worked really hard to get to know me personally. He always tried to make sure that I was on pace to reach my goals; I respect him for that. So even though he couldn't relate to me from a personal stand point, I knew that I could trust him and he would guide me in the right direction when I went to him for help and that's really what it takes. We have

> to have people who are committed to working with a student, helping them develop a life plan, a realistic life plan keeping them on pace to reach their goals. (Frederick, 497-515)

In addition, Frederick noted the importance of mentoring relationships with peers, faculty and staff.

> Some of the academic departments have mentoring programs. The most important thing for first generation students is that they have people that they meet with on a consistent basis that have a personal relationship with them, whether that be a peer, faculty or staff mentor. Some of the departments have that built in already but others don't. Some departments pair the students up with a faculty mentor, so it's a little harder for them to fall through the cracks. It's important to have that type of relationship with first generation students because you don't know what type of support they get at home. A lot of times they have a lot of challenges that a traditional student doesn't have in terms of navigating the process. In terms of the transition to college, I mean some will have transitional issues in terms of making new friends or fitting in. I mean there's a ton of research out there showing that first generation college students often are alienated and feel out of place when they are around the whole campus. So that's why it's so important to have some type of campus community established for them or some type of program to integrate them into the campus community. (Frederick, 402-427)

Like Frederick, Scott believed mentoring is a way to assure students get connected to campus resources and services. Scott shared that developing a mentoring relationship can provide a safety net for all students.

> Well I think mentoring is really important. And I think mentoring is important for a lot of reasons. One is, when there is a mentoring relationship there, there is a safety net, if you will. And it's not hand holding, I mean, I think so many equate mentoring and special services with handholding. It's not hand holding. There are times that we all need a little extra push and its okay. I think understanding when those times are is important. But I think mentoring is important because, it does provide a safe place for students to go and express any concerns they have. It's a safe place for students to go and not be judged but, where they can really deal honestly and openly about issues and concerns that they have. And I think mentoring is important, not only from a peer-mentoring standpoint but also from a professional, like faculty and staff and alumni. I think that mentors can assist students in many different ways; career choices, life choices, it really doesn't matter. I think it's extremely important. I think having places like the office of Multicultural Relations; is a place that we've tried to equip for all students, not just the students of color. (Scott, 655-670)

Joy described the need for institutions to employ staff who cannot only relate to students, but who also have a genuine interest in their success as a key factor to FGCS success. Joy identified the characteristics that she believed that faculty and staff will need to best serve this student population. She suggested honing in on soft skills to assist in developing rewarding relationships with students. Joy insisted that minority administrators and staff should not be the only ones to address the needs of FGCS. Joy stated, "Students can sense that you care about them not because of your race but because of your sincerity". Joy delved deeper into students making personal connections.

> You have to listen, you have to be able to be patient, and you have to be able to not assume what their story is. Allow them to be able to tell you what their issue is and you not put the period on that sentence for them by making assumptions. Not every single student is going to have the exact same background or family dynamic and so I know those all sound like soft skills, but that's really what it is. You need to be able to have those skills in order to be able to allow the student to have this trust and rapport. If students can't sit down and feel like they can establish a rapport with you, can trust you, they're not going to come in and talk to you, they're not going to come in and listen to the recommendations you have for them academically, socially, or professionally. They're not going to do it, okay! You're going to spin your wheels giving them information thinking that it's of value and they're not going to listen to you because they simply feel like you don't care. We have to get out of the mindset that the only people that can resolve the minority issues are people that are minority. We have a lot of issues on campus and its going to take more than just a select few of African Americans on campus to resolve them. It has to be more than just that group of folks you know. They've got to be able to receive support from other offices besides multicultural relations. (Joy, 444-460)

Joy added:

> What they get from us is not just that they can relate to us because we're Black, what they get from us is the fact that we're stopping, we're listening and we're coming up with a plan for them. The plan would be no different; it has not been any different for my Hispanic students that come in and talk to me that have

> issues, my Bosnian students that come. I can't personally relate to a Bosnian student. I can't personally relate to a Hispanic student, but I can listen and I can say let me get you to this point. Let's talk about this and that's what we have to do. We have a long way to go right now, we have a long way to go. I see the wheels turning to move in that direction and it's great… but now, I'm ready for us to pick up the ball and really run with it here at [this institution]. (Joy, 462-469)

Addressing the issues of FGCS, low-income or minority students can be quite complex. Joy, asserted that the support for Black students needs to come from all administrators and staff. Hiraldo (2010) emphasized the importance of universities acknowledging how systematic barriers have negatively impacted minority students thus creating marginalized experiences.

Hilraldo (2010) states:

> " An institution can aim to increase the diversity of the campus by increasing the number of students of color. However, if the institution does not make the necessary changes to make the campus climate inclusive, the institution will have a difficult time maintaining diversity" (p. 54).

It is quite obvious that institutions are creating opportunities for access, but are failing to retain students. I share a related experience:

In all of my experiences in higher education, regardless of what my position/job responsibilities were, I have been asked to take on additional tasks to assist with supporting Black students. I was asked to perform tasks such as planning summer enhancement programs for high school students, facilitating workshops, and attending community events. I remember having a conversation with one of my supervisors about

attending four different Martin Luther King celebrations on behalf of the university. The university would typically purchase a table for eight and give me the tickets to invite friends and family. I asked my supervisor why was I the only person attending MLK celebrations that the university was invited to attend. His response was that he thought I was the most interested. I informed him that I was interested but I thought other university representatives should attend to show genuine support for the events. He said, "Those type of events don't want to see an old White guy (chuckled). They want to see that we are a diverse campus. I responded by stating, "having one Black person attend an event does not show diversity, it shows that our campus has at least one Black person." He shared that he had never given much thought to the matter and appreciated that we were able to have a candid discussion. Eight representatives from my department attended the next MLK celebration that the university was invited to attend.

In her narrative Destiny reflected on services provided to students. She describes customizing her approach to meet the specific needs of students.

> I am aware of students from all races that are first generation. I think of a particular student who is a Caucasian male and first generation and there are some services that we provide for him that we do for students of color that are the same. But then there are other things that we do for him that we would not necessarily do [also provide] for students of color because that need isn't there. (Destiny, 369-375)

Likewise, Frederick shared an experience from his previous place of employment that highlights the benefits and challenges in building relationships with students.

I coordinated a program at a different university called the Academic Enhancement Program. It was for students who we admitted conditionally. We made them go through this program their first year on campus and we hired retention specialists to work with the students. Basically these were people who were charged with meeting these students on a weekly basis. Checking attendance and making sure they were using support services. We hired three retention specialists to work with a caseload of 150 at-risk students. They all had roughly 50 students each and two of the retention specialists were very effective. Students really respected two of them. They had personal relationships with them and the students really worked hard for them. The third retention specialist, even though she was very well trained, with a master's degree in counseling, a research background, work experience with low income minority students, did not connect very well with the students at all. I mean she had the book knowledge; she didn't have the interpersonal skills or the ability to build meaningful relationships with the students. The students really didn't like her and a lot of them tried to get transferred over to the other counselors. But I mean that is just one example. You can go to class and you can read the research but you have to be able to have the interpersonal skills for it to work. You have to be able to find a balance, you have to relate to students, you have to be able to get on their level to relate to them but, you still have to have the professionalism so that they respect you as an authority figure. They must realize that you are there to help them, not necessarily with friendship, but more of a mentorship and some people struggle finding that balance. I think the unsuccessful retention specialist tried too hard to be an

> authority figure and she took a very hard stand with the students; as opposed to developing a mentoring relationship with them. (Frederick, 521-551)

Hope described staff in the Gear Up program that often went above and beyond to assist students. She attributed follow up and follow through as two contributing factors to student participation in programs and services.

> We had staff that was cognitive of students that needed extra support. Some staff would go beyond the call of duty in terms of following up with students to help with challenges they were enduring. Things as simple as asking students, "Did you bring the paperwork that you need?" Or conducting fundraising activities to offset college tour cost. Some staff stepped up to be that extra support for the student if they saw that the parents were not stepping up to the plate. (Hope, 25-33)

Destiny and I discussed factors surrounding high achieving students having less of a challenge transitioning to college in comparison to their average counterparts. Destiny described a peer connection that was facilitated by her office through a story that illustrates how students at different academic levels can help each other grasp material in an academically rigorous course.

> Case in point... I had three young ladies who all were first semester freshmen in microbiology. Why they were placed in this class, I'm not sure. It goes back to assigning a course based on what we usually do, instead of by where you are. There were two students that were average, no actually one's at a D, one's at a C, and the other student had a B. I suggested that they study together because I realized that there was something that this B student was doing that the D student

> can learn from. The D student had the mental capacity to tell you how things function but had test anxiety. I brought all three of them together; my high achieving young man was from Nigeria, but he graduated from high school here. I got all three of them together; they would not have connected on their own. To see the boost in confidence and motivation was rewarding. They had to be taught how to study in a different format. They knew the content but they really didn't know how to study. I brought them together and the D student's grades were raised to a C+, oh my goodness! The C student remained at a solid C. This office gave them a space to share in a nurturing environment. There are some high and some average students, and even some under achieving students that we just try to consistently keep in the fold. It's that accountability of being in the fold that makes them not want to come back with anything less. I had a student actually sprint into my office the day of the last exam. If he didn't pass this exam he would have had to drop the class. He sprinted in with a 76, and that C was like the best thing for that student. We celebrated in the office and folks were looking at us like, "what is going on?" I am proud to know that the multicultural office was able to keep another one in the fold. So we take students at all levels. (Destiny, 224-250)

Destiny's narrative prompted me to think about my own experience as an average FGCS:

I know from personal experience, average students sometime get lost in the shuffle, by default administrators and staff who pay more attention to high achieving and low achieving students. The well-being of the average student sometimes concerns me because there's nobody actively reaching out to the average student. I was an average

student during high school and my undergraduate experience. If I needed help, there was no one I felt cared enough to reach out to me. I attended a HWI and all the services I received were because I sought them out. I have no recollection of the multicultural office or any other support service on campus taking an active interest in my academic success. I learned how to navigate the terrain of higher education from Black upperclassmen.

I was surprised to learn about a university scholarship that offered assistance specifically for average students. Spencer discussed as part of the scholarship requirements that students are connected to the multicultural office to monitor their success and provide a safety net. Spencer describes a unique scholarship opportunity that was created exclusively at [his institution] for academically average students on behalf of Henry Bloch. Although scholarship dollars are often tied to merit, Spencer states, "The Bloch Scholars program recruits average students and provides financial support to help them succeed." Spencer gives more details about the scholarship:

> The Bloch Scholars program was a gift given on behalf of Henry Bloch when he retired from his place of employment, H & R Block. They gave him two big gifts: a fountain in his honor that is displayed near Union Station and this scholarship program at the institution. What's really interesting is this scholarship is a scholarship for average students, because Henry was an average student when he was in college. These students go to the community college for two years then they come here and we match their scholarship to be able to give them a full tuition scholarship. This scholarship program only exists here. Right now we have about 85 students on campus that are taking advantage of this opportunity, most of them are FGCS. We've had that scholarship for probably 12 years now. Some

> of the stories we've had students share are amazing. Most of these students have expressed that they would not have been able to attend college without the scholarship. It's a struggle with some of the students, but the majority of them take five to six years to graduate. We've had several students start their own businesses; we've had several students that have studied aboard. These are experiences that these students are getting that they had never realized as being an opportunity for them. We had one student that was, I can't think of the name of the award, one of the top scholars of the country, end up competing for that and winning that award. The list goes on and on of the success stories that this scholarship has really provided for these students. It's been a life changer for a lot of these students. (Spencer, 342-363)

Destiny described a strategic approach to programming that helps students, achieve their academic goals. Destiny reflected on her experience as an instructor for a freshmen 100 class, which compares to a freshmen seminar course. She suggested this type of class helps students get acclimated to the campus and learn how to engage in the academic process. Destiny shared the importance of how programs are packaged and presented to students as a means of connecting them to campus resources.

> In teaching this arts and science 100 class, these students were part of the coaching program and when I asked them what it meant to be in the coaching program, all they could identify was either "I wasn't fully admissible", or "my A.C.T score was too low so I'm in this program". They didn't identify with the peer-to-peer mentoring. They didn't identify with the academic support that they got through the coaching program. All they could identify with was that I wasn't

> good enough, so this is my chance that they are giving me so I have to do well. That in itself creates the belief that 'I'm an under achiever and I'm in this special program'. We have to do a better job of how we present these support services. Some students in the course were invited to our 'State of Students of Color'. None of them knew that they all got this invitation because they were on student academic progress SAP. I worked with the vice-chancellor to send out a message, a motivating message to all of our students of color who were on SAP. None of them knew that they were either on some type of probation or messing up with their financial aid. We have to be both strategic and creative in our programming approach. With our students of color we have to authenticate that relationship first. If you try to communicate with a student about personal matters without establishing a relationship many times they do not feel comfortable sharing their business. We need to establish trust to get to the core of what's preventing them from being successful. It's all in how we present ourselves to students. If we don't wrap it right, then we lose them before we even truly have them. (Destiny, 261-292)

This theme is important because it illustrates the impact that personal relationships have in the success of FGCS. Participants shared examples of practices that have both worked, and those that failed to nurture relationships with students. All participants were in agreement about the benefits to FGCS of forming genuine relationships with their peers, faculty, and staff.

Financial and Social Challenges

This section offers information that will help in answering this research question: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence, and retention of African-American FGCS? It's no secret that FGCS face both financial and social challenges in post-secondary education learning environments or that these two common issues often hinder FGCS success. Participants in this study identify and offer solutions to the challenges.

My reflections as a FGCS on financial and social challenges:

As a first generation college student, I borrowed the maximum amount of student loans to pay for school and living expenses. At the time, I knew I would have to pay the loans back but did not understand the intricate details. I do not recall receiving an explanation of the financial aid process. I was told that I needed to sign forms to release funds to the university. By the end of my sophomore year, I found myself in eight thousand dollars of credit card debt in addition to what I owed for my student loans.

Frederick asserted that institutions should address the social and financial challenges for FGCS through awareness programs. He emphasized that the university should be prepared to help students cope with these unforeseen hurdles. He recognized that, although FGCS have other challenges, financial and social problems are the most prevalent.

> Most of the concerns I see with first generation students are social and financial. There are other problems, but the financial aid process is a huge hurdle in terms of borrowing money because if you haven't had anyone in your family that has been through the process of college, you might have some concerns about borrowing

> that type of money for school. So anything we can do to alleviate that stress and help them deal with those issues will help us be better prepared to serve them and they'll do better on campus. (Frederick, 905-913)

Frederick explained how the financial aid process for FGCS and their families sometimes requires a more intrusive approach. Frederick went in to more detail about financial challenges:

> We reach out more to "first gen" students just to remind them about deadlines and to make sure they understand what's going on. Especially around financial aid season, we do financial aid calls, where we call to make sure the students have received their financial aid award letter from us and that they understand it. And typically the calls to "first gen" students would be a lot longer because we actually walk them through everything and explain the difference between loans and grants. We explain how much money they are borrowing and how much is "free money." We explain the payback period, the firming period, we really walk them through the basics of financial aid and most of the time it's the parents we educate on the process as well because they typically have a lot of questions. (Frederick, 273-246)

Destiny discussed having challenging conversation with students about their finances. Although she believed some students are truly struggling to afford their college education, she implied that some student's financial burdens are the result of making poor choices. I asked Destiny to describe how financial constraints impede student success for the student population served by her office. Destiny responded:

It's interesting that you ask me this because any student that's Pell grant eligible, that's a Missouri resident, their unmet tuition needs and fees are met by university. If you live at home then you're good. I still find students that are struggling financially even with tuition and fees covered. There's a large majority whose financial burdens are self-inflicted. That's when we're having conversations about living within your means and understanding that you can't wear this or get this and have that. On the other side, there are students who live at home and are still struggling to make ends meet even with tuition and fees being covered because they must work to help their parents with the bills. It becomes a matter of "I got my work-study job", then" I have an on-campus job", then "I have my off-campus job on the weekend." So instead of focusing on what they don't have we really have started helping them budget their money. Naming their money before they get it is a problem, because what's missing in all of our students is just a better understanding of financial responsibility. We are teaching students how to be good stewards of what they do have, and that's one of the things that's missing. Well that's one of the things that we introduced this year in the arts and science 100 classes that I co-taught. What's budgeting? Even the students that have the financial assistance from their families still don't have the faintest idea of how to name their money and budget their money and make it work for them. If you're barely eating then the reality is you don't need a cell phone bill that's a $130 a month. Those are the real conversations that we're having.

> It seems elementary or remedial, like why do you have to have that conversation, but that's their reality. It goes back to meeting students where they are. I once was there, trying to understand a debit card. "Honey if it's not there, it's gone, please see the cashier". How we help them understand what they have and what they need and make it work with the finances that they have is key. (Destiny, 387-412)

I recall an experience related to Destiny's narrative:

Prior to this study, I had a conversation with two young ladies with whom I have an established relationship. They began a conversation about needing to purchase a car. I asked them if they were considering picking up a car note or saving money to outright buy a car. They both responded simultaneously, "pick up a car note". I said, "I know how much money you make and you believe you can afford a car note? The two young ladies nodded their heads. I told them, "You can't afford a car". I went on to share with them that purchasing a car could wait until they graduated and could find gainful employment. This is a conversation that I have had with several students. I know of at least three students that dropped out of school because they needed to work more to pay for a car. For some students their focus on material possessions often negatively impacts their ability to complete a college degree.

Destiny shared the importance of having down to earth conversations with students to help them realize the seriousness of sound financial practices. Destiny acknowledged that some students do not respond well to sugar coated feedback from administrators and staff. In her narrative, she discussed the need to "get real" with students.

> Some students outright take advantage of the system. The relationship that we have with students changes the direction in which our conversations can go. The conversations get real, real. You can't get that Indian Remy sew in weave every two weeks and you owe us $400 dollars. When you install [hair weave], wash and reinstall [hair weave]. It gets that real. Often times there are folks that can't, that don't want to get that real. (Destiny, 264-268)

The concept of "keeping it real" is nomenclature used in many communities, especially the Black community. I often question if "keeping it real" has its rightful place in higher education. I had a supervisor tell me, "Others are concerned with how you speak with students". He claimed my speaking was not the same language as my coworkers. I informed him that my communication style is different, but it's still appropriate and professional. That's one attribute that I appreciate about myself. I can talk to a thug on a street corner one day and the next day make a presentation to top administrators at the university.

Destiny shared another "real" conversation she had with a student:

> You can't come tell me that you're homeless honey and have just told me that you spent $60 to get your son's ears pierced and $180 on the earrings. That's not homelessness, that's a need for realignment of priorities. So students know, the word on campus is, if you want to get your life together go to Multicultural Student Affairs (MSA), but just be ready for what they have to say because they will hold you accountable. You can't tell me that the climate is chilly in the classroom, you can tell me all these other things, but first I'm going to examine you, we're going to examine you. We're going to break some things down to

> build you back up stronger, so I might not say the things that you want to hear but it's all for your betterment. I share with them that I was there. I was financially irresponsible; I was living outside of my means. To know I drive a car that's paid for, I'm never entering into another car note, why because this is what it looks like. This is how much money you can save to go elsewhere without throwing it away in interest over five years. A lot of students, first generation students, are coming from families where those conversations are not the norm because they're trying to make ends meet. My goal is to keep lights on, keep you fed and keep you clothed. How do we change that mindset, how do we change that family tree? Destiny responded to her own question… change comes from us having these tough conversations. (Destiny, 432-452)

Destiny's narrative prompted this reflection:

Destiny's narrative spoke to my experience as a FGCS. By the time I went off to college, I had been estranged from my mother for 2 years, I was considered independent. Having an independent status allowed me to be able to take out additional unsubsidized loans. Although I knew I was racking up student loan debt, I rationalized it by telling myself that the loans were an investment in my future. Even if I would have had my mother's support, I would not have been able to afford college tuition, books and other miscellaneous fees. I found myself maxing out on my student loans every semester to have enough money to not only survive but enjoy my undergraduate experience. I did not have anyone sending me care packages or making sure I had money to eat, wash clothes or purchase hygiene items. I did not have a budget, instead I had a will to survive. I also took advantage of federal subsidies such as a work-study job, section eight and food

stamps. I know I wasted some of the loan money I was issued, but a majority of it was spent on my educational needs and living expenses. I wish my mom had talked more to me about financial responsibility. All I remember is that when we went to the store my mom was laying down plastic. When I started college I got a whole lot of plastic like my mommy. Not knowing about interest and the importance of paying your bills on time, my credit card debt got out of control while in college. In fact I really didn't have a true understanding of money management until my late 20's. I started looking at what I was doing with my money and really knowing what it meant to get a 4% interest rate versus paying 20% interest for purchases.

This theme, financial and social, is important to this study because it highlights participants' views on how students make meaning of personal and school financial obligations. The participant's responses suggest that students and families struggle with understanding the financial aspects of pursuing a post-secondary education, which is related to social norms. Destiny shared the harsh reality that some students do not have good money management skills, which includes not knowing the difference between a "need" and a "want". Malcolm spoke about the university offering more awareness programs that address the financial and social barriers that impact how students gain access, persist and are retained on college campuses. The participants' perspectives on this matter added value to this study by illuminating heartfelt discussions on how both finances and social sustainability influences the success of FGCS.

Access to Success (A2S) and Retention Initiatives

The implications of Access to Success cannot be fully analyzed because the initiative is in its beginning stages. It would be premature for me to make assumptions

about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Access to Success. In this study, participants shared their experiences thus far with implementing Access to Success on their campuses. I felt the information that they provided was essential to the direction of my research because they are components to student success as stated below. Access to Success has been for the most part a positive retention tool for all participants. It is obvious that one institution has a more robust access to success plan for development, implementation and evaluation. Access to Success and retention initiatives are core components to student success. This theme emerged from the frequency with which both terms were used. In this section, Frederick's voice dominates the discussion, mostly because of his role at his institution. Other participants' voice about access to success and retention were limited or null.

Hope, like her colleagues in this study, identified student readiness and the notion of attending college seeming to be out of reach as barriers to gaining access to higher education. Hope describes students who have a lack of understanding about the college admissions process. She discussed how her programs exposed students to college life in a way that helps them visualize future opportunities. Hope shares access challenges:

> The students' major challenges in the program were [focused on] academic preparation. I saw many students get to twelfth grade and not have what they needed to meet college admissions requirements. That's a major challenge. We found out a lot of the students in the area of academics were not as strong as they needed to be. They were not aware of what the requirements for high school graduation were or of what the requirements were for them to go into college. Many did not have a base knowledge of the process from high school to college.

> They did not understand that high school would impact what college one could attend. So, with that knowledge, we started taking them on college tours. We found some of them had never been on a college campus. So going to some of these institutions and seeing people who looked like them, you could see that some of them started to realize that person could be them. The college tours helped them to understand what college is and what life on college campuses looks like. We took an abstract idea that was way out there for some of them and made it something they could actually work toward. A comment that we heard from parents and students was, "I didn't think that this was something I could even aim for or even think about". So we helped to break down those myths; we helped them see what the college experience is like. We opened up the eyes of some of them who had never even thought about considering college. (Hope, 248-265)

Spencer described the A2S committee, also known on his campus as the "Delivery Team". The A2S system wide initiative has brought focus to understanding the campus climate. He discussed the campus conducting climate surveys to get a sense of how students, faculty and staff view the university. Frederick discussed how A2S has impacted [his institution].

> A2S has been good in helping the university to look at different ways of monitoring students and different ways of establishing initiatives to measure our success with our incoming population of students. What we're finding is that these are things that we should be doing with all of our students. The delivery team meets to prioritize our goals. A2S has really helped us to understand the

> climate on the campus. We have this set of measures that are clearly things that will help students be successful and help the university be better. (Spencer, 191-197)

Destiny described A2S as system that has been developed which forces the university to look at populations of students who are not matriculating at a growing rate. She and I discussed how A2S has shined the light on deficits in the programs and services that are currently offered. She spoke about FGCS being on the institutions radar as a sub population that warrants more of the institution's commitment.

> Access to Success has allowed the university to see the multiple sub-populations that are being under-served. We have been able to fine tune and tweak some small things that have a great impact on student success through Assess to Success. FGCS is very close to being an action item in this institution because, now we see that the things we've tweaked for the A2S population are things that can serve FGCS as well. (Destiny, 81-88)

Frederick related that A2S has shed light on programs and services that need to be enhanced or eliminated at [his] institution. He described the impact A2S had on one particular policy and procedure. Although he seemed excited about the initiative, he expressed that the needs that have been identified through A2S are slowly being addressed.

> The thing that A2S did for this university is it made people more aware of how sub-populations were doing on campus. Again, [This institution] in the past had not tracked these groups or paid close attention to how they were performing. The best thing about A2S is it just went in with the magnifying glass, into the numbers

> to really shine light on how we are doing with the various sub-populations and that we've identified the gaps. Now A2S is trying to influence policy and to create targeted programs to close the gaps that we have. I mean one thing that A2S has really spearheaded is the academic probation policies, which used to be managed by the various units. There was no consistency at all, but now it is actually centralized through the Registrar's office. So now whenever a student goes below a 2.0, they're automatically placed on academic probation. Before this A2S initiative it was luck of the draw, only some students were placed on academic probation after they went below a 2.0. A2S is active on campus. It's like anything else involved with change, it's a slow process. Some of the initiatives that we took on we were able to see some immediate change like with the academic probation policy. There are probably 10 to 12 other things that we haven't made any progress on. (Frederick, 678-725)

Although Joy was aware of A2S, she did not have an active role in planning and implementation. Joy does however see access and retention as “hot topics” in higher education. She suggested that A2S will help focus institutional resources on underrepresented students. In her narrative, she described new initiatives that came out of A2S discussions.

> I have not had a lot of dealings with A2S until most recently. In the past month or so, there’s not been a lot that I have done with Access to Success as it relates to the Multicultural Relations. Recently I have taken in the Sister Scholars program, which is an A2S initiative, and so I am helping a faculty member develop the initiative into a female mentoring program. We also have the African American

> male mentoring initiative. Hispanic students are interested in a Hispanic mentoring program, so I'm getting ready to work with a faculty member to start that. That's also part of A2S. I was familiar with A2S before it actually became a big known concept because I served on a committee with the system's president, which was his college access pipeline group. At that time College Access was the highlight that was the big thing. Now the shift has moved to retention. So while College Access is still a huge focus, retention has dollars that are tied to its success. Access to Success is focusing on underrepresented students and other folks are looking at how to identify what we do in our department to meet these goals, to be able to satisfy the needs that Access to Success has outlined for us to be able to be that support system that underrepresented students need (Joy, 471-526)

Scott's sentiment is similar to his colleagues in this study. He expressed how A2S has helped academic and student affairs begin the discussions about retention, graduation rates and student engagement. Scott suggested the university does not need an initiative to show compassion for students and their overall success. Scott's narrative described how caring for students should be second nature for administrators and staff.

> I think the whole Access to Success initiative is getting conversations going and that has probably been the catalyst to get the academic units to be more involved in this because there are specific goals that they are being held to. My role with A2S is to get the entire student affairs unit involved. As a division, we're setting our goals. My role on the provost council is to continue to push the academic units to take this seriously because when you think about Access to Success you

> really don't need an initiative like this to care about what we should already be doing. It's really fundamental. You know, worrying about retention, worrying about graduation rates, and worrying about student's connectivity and engagement with the campus. Learning about and being concerned about academic rigor and responsibility. Those are things that we don't really need 'Big Daddy' to stand over us and say "you need to be doing these things." Now, it's good that we have this initiative because if that's what it takes, so be it. We have to celebrate the fact that we're moving in a new direction and that, you know, hopefully we're, meeting the overall goals of the A2S initiative. (Scott, 323-348)

Frederick discussed A2S as one component that assists his institution in increasing retention rates. He described how his institution compares to its competitors. His discussion reveals how programs and services that are just coming to fruition have been mandated on other campuses for over 20 years. He suggested that the fact that his institution has not seen growth in retention rates as having a direct correlation to outdated programs and services. He spoke about the university taking more aggressive measures to become current on student development policies and practices.

> Most of the departments don't have a strong retention plan that's actually working. Our retention rates are below average and we're under performing as an institution. We are a selective institution; our mission's standards are established by the Coordinating Board of Higher Education. If you compare us to other selective institutions, we rank dead last in the state in terms of first to second year retention and in our four year-and six year graduation rates. Some of our competitors are as much as ten percentage points higher than us in terms of

> graduating students. Our students also take the most hours in the state to earn a bachelor degree, and they borrow the most money to earn a degree. So those are all areas that are measureable that we need to work to make better. There are a lot of things involved, of course, in retention. One major area is having a formal first year transition program starting with orientation. This past year was our first year having a mandatory orientation program for freshmen. We've had the lowest first year retention rate for freshmen ever since we existed. Our competitors have had mandatory orientation and first year experience programs for at least 20 years. We were a little late in the game in implementing a mandatory orientation. In order for us to catch up to everyone else, we have to develop a comprehensive first year program where we help students decide or figure out what they want to do in terms of their long term career interests, their major match, and really finding themselves. (Frederick, 452-482)

Frederick added:

> Typically the schools that have strong retention programs will have one person who's responsible for retention overall and then that person holds all the various units responsible for retention of their specific students. So if you have a center for students with Disabilities, a Center for Internationals, Center for Student Success, Multicultural Relations, all of them should have individual retention goals that are coordinated by the person that is over retention. But see with our campus, we don't have that person who holds the other offices responsible. No one on this campus has clear retention goals. Some offices are starting to develop retention goals. (Frederick, 567-579)

Spencer recognized that his institution needs to take an active interest in increasing retention rates. He shared that much work needs to be done to assure students reach graduation.

> Our retention rates are not where they need to be, number one, but when were looking at that data, the data relating to the sophomore and junior year jumps out at us also. We have a lot of work to do here to help our students engage, and to help them get through this university. (Spencer, 492-496)

Frederick and I discussed his ability to analyze data and put information in easy to understand terms. He stressed the importance of data driven decision-making. In Frederick's narrative he described how data can support decisions to enhance or implement programs and services that have a direct influence on retention.

> When we run lists and we crunch numbers, we can always pull by certain student groups to see how certain students are doing. But there is an element that goes beyond the report that the computer generates. A lot of people have access to data that they are not using to make decisions. (Frederick, 288-289)

Frederick further stated:

> Anyone who can run a People Soft query can pull the students by their groups and I actually do several quantitative analyses by request for a particular student population. Everything on the supplemental page of our application is what we track. People would ask us how many veterans apply at your institution. We didn't know because we didn't ask. They would ask how many first generation students we had, we didn't know because we didn't ask. The only way we knew if a student was "first gen" was if they indicated that on the FAFSA. The FAFSA asks for

> your parents' highest level of education. So we would have to go in and look each student up, individually on the FAFSA to see if they were "first gen", which of course no one ever did because it was too much work. But now we do it on the front end as of 2010, so we have a pretty good idea of who they are. (Frederick, 293-322)

Frederick suggested that creating student groups in the university database was only the initial step in improving services and programs for students. Frederick recommended the data be used to create targeted programming versus only being used for persistence and retention information.

> I would like to see us be a lot more proactive with these populations. I mean right now the student groups are used mostly to monitor persistence and retention of these groups. But I would like to eventually see programs for these students as they make the transition to our campus. Honestly, with the volume of FGCS we have, we should create targeted programs that start at our orientation all the way through their first year on campus. (Frederick, 329-337)

At the time of this study Frederick spearheaded an initiative to identify and track FGCS in a more robust manner. He spoke about how he strategically presented timely information to implement change at his place of employment.

> First I showed the numbers in terms of how many FGCS we have. Then I showed how these students persist compared to the rest of the student body. Next I identified gaps that would justify the need for an intervention to close those gaps. First of all, the national gaps are pretty large. I mean when you compare low-income students to students who have significant income, there's a huge gap there.

> When you compare students who are the first in their family to go to college to students who have college degrees, there's about a 14-15% graduation gap. And then you compare minorities to the majority population, it's almost an 18% gap for graduation, so our institution's statistics are pretty in line with the national statistics. The biggest gap for us is minority versus majority. We have to create stronger support services for them. Twenty-eight percent of our new students this year were ethnic minorities, which are the fastest growing population on our campus. The last five years, our growth has come from the African American and Latino communities, but our retention graduation rates for those groups are among the lowest on campus. So closing that gap would not only benefit the minority community, it would also benefit the campus. All of our rates would go up substantially. We would be producing more graduates for the work force because a lot of the companies we're working with right now are donating money for scholarships, specifically for students of color because they know we're not producing enough graduates. So we can help the community and everyone else by graduating more students. (Frederick, 342-374)

Frederick added:

> Let me just say it this way, if the university doesn't have retention goals, then they can't fail. I mean that's the best way to explain it. We have not had any goals, so no one really felt like we were failing until recently when a local newspaper ran the article on degree completion and we ranked last out of all our competitors. I'm not really sure anyone was even aware or concerned about our graduation rates, honestly. Now that there has been more of a public concern, I think there's more

> of a sense of accountability and now people want to do better, so we can be proud of our institution but it's going to take a lot of hard work, a lot of change in order to get to where we need to be because we didn't get here overnight. And we have to make up for years of not really providing the type of services the students need. Our students take the most credits in the state to earn a degree and that's a sure sign that we have some big loopholes to close. (Frederick, 880-893)

Scott and Frederick shared a similar perspective that data driven decision making will equip universities with the necessary tools to implement programming that will impact access, persistence and retention. Scott gave a candid response about the lack of data usage at his institution and recognizes that some departments on campus utilize data to make decisions and others do not. He spoke about the State holding Universities accountable for providing access for students, creating services to retain students and increasing degree completion. He suggested that the new accountability measure will force the hand of universities to thoroughly assess students.

> In some circles data is used to make decisions, in many circles no. But the data is there. I mean, we know how our students have performed, we know if we retained them, what their academic performance is. We have a slew of consulting reports and we have a five-year review process. It's important that we take all of the feedback seriously and that we really, really, really do use the data to not say "well this department should be canned and that department," but to say, how can we improve our services? It's a continuous process with the important goal of student success being at the forefront of that. We have to get into the habit of being challenged and we're going to continue to be challenged. Assessment is

> huge. And results are huge. I mean, the state is looking at performance funding and there are certain benchmarks that schools are going to have to meet. And, so we're going to be forced to look at the data and use the data more and more. And it's unfortunate that it takes something like that to really use the data but, we'll be forced to use it and I think that's a good thing. Now the whole accountability factor, I think it's going to depend on who's in charge. (Scott, 456-473)

Fredrick added:

> For the last 20 years we have been doing the same things in terms of support services. Most of the things we do are based on habit, not based on actual data. We haven't assessed our services thoroughly and we haven't asked the students if their needs are being met. We have had several surveys, the data has told us for years that we haven't been meeting our students' needs, but we really haven't made a strategic change to try to address those issues that the students have been having. For example if you know you have a growing population of Veteran students while under an enrollment managing model, you track to see how many more Veterans we plan to enroll and if the numbers are large enough that they might justify creating additional programs for Veteran students. Same thing for minority students, if we know the majority of our growth is coming from the ethnic minority community that means we probably need to be expanding our programs and services for students of color. Again, we've been a creature of habit. Our office of Multicultural Relations is very small, their resources are limited and we enroll the most students of color in the state. Yeah, we have one of the smallest offices of Multicultural Relations. Functioning under an enrollment

> management model will help us. Do we have enough people to effectively serve 2,800 students of color? These are things that again as an institution we never even considered. (Frederick, 840-259)

I asked Joy, "How many FGCS does your department serve?"

> Oh you're asking me another question I don't have that data for right now. Let me tell you why I don't. It's because we're just now stepping into this role. I had to kind of create a tracking system of how many students are being served in this department and so at the end of this semester will really be the first snapshot that I have. I'm not working on any thing previous. I'm working on what I'm able to assess and then moving forward. That's not to take away from what has been previously done but I can only work on the actual data that I know and see for myself. At the end of the this semester we will have evaluated every point of contact from the number of students that receive tutoring, the number of students that are being mentored, the number of students that are being involved in the male mentoring program and the sister scholars program. Those two, male mentoring and sister scholars, are two new components to the department [derived from A2S]. The expansion of the mentoring services, the expansion of the tutoring services, and then revamping the counselors and how those are set up, and having a new counselor in here now. I'm hoping that at the end of this semester, I can have an actual snapshot. I can tell you that just from stepping in here in August, and seeing the numbers of students that have trickled in here from then to now, I can see the growth but the numbers, and the data, and that real information, I hope to have that at the end of the semester because we have an

> actual tracking system that is taking place now with student contact. I've got every single counselor tracking that information now. (Joy, 238-257)

Access to Success provided an overview of how two Midwestern universities have begun to identify the deficiencies in programs and services for FGCS. The participants' involvement with the Access to Success initiative was contingent upon their actual role and or job duties at their institution. The participant's shared how Access to Success has helped shape some of the discussions that involve how to address issues that impact low-income, minority and FGCS. These perspectives on Access to Success are important to this study because they provide intricate details about how a system wide initiative is implemented quite different on two college campuses that serve under the same governing board. The differences in approach or neither good are bad they just call attention to how universities interpret the premise of how to develop, implement and evaluate programs and services.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the narratives of nine study participants, which includes the researcher, all higher education administrators, who collectively and individually, in their own words, offered insight about successes and failures of programs and services for FGCS on their college campuses. The data collected from their interviews were analyzed and factors critical to access, persistence and retention of African-American FGCS, were identified. These factors were discussed within each of the following themes: Participant personal and educational experiences; Participant definitions of First Generation College Students; FGCS as specific subpopulations; Institutional Support; Best Practices for making connections; Financial and Social Challenges and Access to

Success and retention initiatives. The findings indicate the lack of FGCS program development, implementation, evaluation and support. Critical Race Theory provided a powerful analysis tool for understanding the marginalization of people of color on college campuses. Chapter five will give a summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, five administrators and four staff members at two universities identified seven factors as critical to access, persistence and retention of FGCS. This chapter provides a summary of the findings, highlights the essential conclusions and offers recommendations for future research. The information discussed in this chapter directly reflects the data analysis presented in Chapter four. The perspectives expressed by administrators and staff, including my own, cannot be generalized to all employees in higher education who provide programs and services for FGCS.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

Choy (2001) contends that African-American FGCS do not persist at the same rate as non-FGCS. Her statement prompted this study. Within the large body of knowledge on FGCS, several studies have been conducted that reveal the perspectives of FGCS themselves. I found minimal data, however, from the perspectives of administrators and staff that are responsible for serving FGCS. As a FGCS and a staff person who serves FGCS, I saw a need to investigate this growing sub population from the perspectives of higher education administrators and staff and to collect data in narrative form.

I chose to conduct this qualitative research study because I am vested in improving services and programs for FGCS. As a FGCS and a staff member working directly with this student population, I am aware of the inadequacy of the support provided by some universities. This study speaks to my past, present and future

aspirations to help student's transition from high school to college with minimal obstacles.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to answer the research question: *What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence, and retention of African-American FGCS?* Specifically, I documented the voices of the administrators and staff whose current positions are related to student programs and services for FGCS. The study investigated what programs and services are provided to meet the needs of FGCS. Although support services exist on all campuses, this study examined what two universities offer to FGCS to help them gain access, persist, and complete a college degree. The voices of administrators and staff in this study offer different viewpoints of FGCS and add to the limited body of literature in higher education on this subject.

Review of the Methodology

This research documented the experiences of nine participants as a measure of personal and professional practices in higher education about access, persistence, and retention of FGCS. Two methods were chosen to answer the research question: case study and autoethnography. The case study methodology provided in depth knowledge about the personal and professional experiences of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Autoethnograhy, as a research method, gave me the opportunity to share my own experiences as the study participant and researcher (Ellis, 2009). Critical race theory was used as a theoretical framework, and served as a lens through which the impact of race, class, gender, and ethnicity in higher education could be seen (Bell, 1995).

Three goals were identified to organize and implement the study. Goal one involved understanding the educational experiences of the participants. Goal two of this study involved participants sharing their stories about intimate institutional details. Goal three of the study involved participants revealing their institution's past, current and future program and service initiatives for FGCS. Through the data collection process all three goals were met.

Conclusions

The seven themes emerging from the data analysis answered the research question: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to persistence and retention of African-American FGCS? The themes were: Participant personal and educational experiences; Participant definitions of First Generation College Students; FGCS as specific subpopulations; Institutional Support; Best Practices for making connections; Financial and Social Challenges and Access to Success and retention initiatives. The most prominent similarities in participant responses were agreement that their institutions should be paying closer attention to FGCS and that students benefit significantly by being connected to campus through peer, faculty and staff networks. Although participants differed in their definitions of FGCS and in their perspectives regarding levels of institutional support, the most prominent difference concerned the use of data to drive decisions about developing and implementing programs and services.

Davis (2010) advocates that institutions provide the programs and services needed to assure FGCS success. He suggests one of the initial steps to providing services for FGCS is to define who they are so that it can be easily distinguished if a student fits into

the category (Davis, 2010). Davis asserts the need for higher education administrators to establish a universally recognized definition of FGCS and begin accurately counting FGCS. Although each study participant offered a definition of FGCS, none of their definitions were the same. All participants concluded that the university did not have an established definition of FGCS. It can become quite problematic when an institution is not clear about the definition of FGCS.

Identifying as a FGCS could offer a student additional support including financial assistance. For example, one of the Universities used in this study offers a scholarship that gives preference to FGCS. The application (See Appendix D) for this scholarship states, " Preference will be given to FGCS and/or underrepresented students majoring in one of the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering or mathematics)." *My coworker participated in reviewing application process for the scholarship. In a meeting, she brought up a question asked by several applicants, "What is a first generation college student?" Some students that she spoke with shared that at least one of their parents attended college but did not graduate. Another student shared that her mother had an associate's degree, but was told by a friend that she was still considered a FGCS.* The response to these inquiries would be different depending upon whom you ask at the university. Therefore, establishing a universally recognized definition provides administrators and staff with a consistent description that can be shared with students, faculty and staff.

According to Thayer (2000) universities should be intentional in the support services that are provided for FGCS. Parcella et al. (2004) asserts that sharply focused and sustained efforts are needed to impact the academic and nonacademic college

experiences of FGCS. This research study revealed that both administrators and staff feel that intentional programs and services for FGCS will aid in their success. The participants shared a sense of urgency to assist this population but identified different approaches to reach this population. They disagreed about the manner in which the programs and services should be provided. For instance, I asked if FGCS should be an active subpopulation with targeted programming and services. One participant suggested that FGCS were being served through general programming because of institutional financial constraints. Another participant believed the establishment of a FGCS subpopulations should be based on the actual number of students that identify as FGCS. In addition, a participant shared that if FGCS was to become an active subpopulation, then the university should be mindful of what name the program is given to guarantee (FGCS) garner support from students, faculty and staff. And lastly, one participant saw parental involvement as a key factor in the success of any FGCS program.

Although participants mentioned different ways to address FGCS as subpopulations, they all shared the same sentiment that something more could be done to address their needs. The participant who saw institutional financial constraints as a reason for FGCS being served through general programming, did not appear to disagree that FGCS should be an active subpopulation; instead, he spoke about the challenges of making FGCS a viable subpopulation on his campus. Although their approaches differ, the administrators and staff in this study would support FGCS as a subpopulation with programming that would help them gain access, persist and graduate. To that end, skillful development, implementation and evaluation of current services would be required.

In terms of institutional support, participant's responses varied. A few participants

felt there was a lack of support for FGCS on their campus. Institutional support for some participants equated to financial sponsorship. For other participants institutional support equated to how staff and resources were allocated to support initiatives. One participant commented that her university could have provided more support for grant funded pre collegiate programs. She thought that discounts on using facilities and /or not charging the grant for staff members to facilitate workshops could have been given. Another participant shared that in order to gain support, administrators and staff had to be creative in how they packaged proposed ideas. Some participants felt valued at their institutions. Others expressed feeling powerless in making decisions to implement programs and services specifically for FGCS.

Although the two Universities that employ the nine participants in this study offer a wealth of programs and services, neither has programming specifically designed to meet the needs of FGCS. In fact a clear plan to address the needs of FGCS is non-existent. Both institutions participate in the Access to Success (A2S) initiative. The A2S initiative's primary goal is to reduce the college entrance and graduation gaps of low income and minority students. The participants revealed that the institutions are addressing this initiative with a generalist approach. In other words institutions are providing services that will help the general student population rather than providing specific services for low-income and minority students, who also are the students that mostly identify themselves as FGCS.

At the time of this study the only new A2S initiatives for low income and minority students were male and female mentoring programs. Participants acknowledged that A2S has required specific programs and services to be evaluated for their

effectiveness. However, no results were available at this writing. The Access to Success initiative, governed by the Education Trust, has drawn attention to the lack of intentional programs and services geared towards FGCS. Although there have been some discussions initiated through A2S, little change has occurred specific to meeting the needs of low-income and minority students that would help them gain access, persist and graduate. My overall concern with the initiative is that the universities appear to lack interest in facing the problem (Black students graduate at a much lower rate than their white counterparts) head on that hinders low income and minority students from gaining access, persisting and graduating. Instead it appears that they feel that the same services that benefit all students will benefit FGCS. If this were true there would not be a need for A2S and other similar initiatives that voice concerns about how the gap continues to widen for low-income and minority students. It seems that financial constraints are used as one reason not to provide adequate services for this student population.

Administrators and staff in this study inferred that institutions strive to implement services from which the entire student population might benefit. When institutions start to do programming for specific subpopulations, sometimes leadership or even faculty and staff don't support those types of programs adequately. The multicultural office has typically been referred to as the designated office to serve FGCS although it's not part of their mission. On the surface these universities appear to provide support for FGCS, however digging a little deeper you discover that their programming efforts lack collaboration and cohesion. When programming is disjointed, students don't get served properly. There needs to be one or more persons responsible for making sure that FGCS are making connections and staying on track. National data shows an unprecedented

number of minority students entering college over the next ten years and a majority of them will be FGCS. We are aware that a majority of FGCS at these institutions are also minority. Preparation for this increase is important to assure student success both in and outside of the classroom.

Participant interviews unveiled students might find comfort in higher education administrators and staff who come from a similar ethnic background. All post-secondary education employees should be prepared to help FGCS navigate the terrain of higher education, whether it is advising a student, forming a mentoring relationship or participating in curricular and co-curricular activities. Addressing the needs of FGCS should be a campus wide initiative that warrants investment in programming efforts to help them gain access, persist and graduate.

Unexpected Findings

This qualitative research study discovered two primary assumptions that are made about FGCS: 1) FGCS are only low-income and minority students 2) multicultural offices support services are parallel to services provided for FGCS. These assumptions neglect to consider the FGCS that come from different ethnic and socio –economic backgrounds. Although there is overlap in students who identify as low income, minority/ multicultural and first generation, not all FGCS fall into those categories.

Even though my research question inquires about the factors that higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence and retention of African American FGCS, I am now concerned about the FGCS that are not low-income or African American. When institutions assume that “first-gen” is an African American and/or low income and minority issue they fail to adequately serve this student

subpopulation. *How are White and/or high income FGCS being served?* Should I dare assume that because they have White privilege that they will be taken care of by the system that was built for them to succeed. *Do 'white privilege' and elevated income automatically equate to adequate service and success for them?* All students pay for administrators and staff to provide the necessary resources to be successful. Making assumptions has left an untapped market of students who might need higher education administrators and staff assistance. Students who do not fit the assumptions are overlooked. Initially, several participants identified the multicultural office as the primary office charged with providing services and programs for FGCS. As interview discussions progressed and participants spoke of the need for university wide approaches to serving FGCS, it was with the understanding that FGCS meant minority students.

I was not expecting to discover the importance of naming programs and services to gain student buy-in and institutional support. One participant saw strategically naming programs for subpopulations as a means to gain university support. Although, I know there should be a purpose behind the name of programs, I had not considered the effect that a name might have in gaining program support.

There were dynamics in the research that were surprising. The participants, for the most part, were straightforward and provided authentic information that contributed to the depth of my study. Additionally, I was initially concerned about trustworthiness, which prompted me to take every step in the study with care. Those steps ranged from my tone in both email and phone conversations to showing respect for participants positions. I truly enjoyed learning about the participants' personal and professional journeys.

Implications for Practice

This research clearly revealed that the institutions that employ the study participants should pay closer attention to the growing population of FGCS starting with defining FGCS and continuing with program planning, implementation and evaluation. After defining FGCS, the institutions should consider an extensive assessment of FGCS. The assessment will allow the university to be intentional in providing targeted programs and services that meet FGCS needs. Part of the process of assessment would involve establishing a tracking system that measures FGCS access, persistence and retention rates. I know that the universities have a large "first gen" student population based on the preliminary findings in this study (See Appendix B). If the numbers are significant, the next course of action should be training.

Hopefully, the findings from this study will motivate administrators and staff to seek training to help them learn more about implementing programs for FGCS in general and African American FGCS specifically. Through a comprehensive training program, faculty and staff can address the needs of subpopulations in general and FGCS specifically. Training will be an opportunity for professionals to share best practices and dispel myths/assumptions. Comprehensive training that reaches beyond characteristics of FGCS and incorporates discussions about policies and practices that benefit FGCS, might yield beneficial results.

Instead of unfocused approaches to meeting the needs of FGCS, I recommend that both institutions develop administrative, faculty, staff and student positions dedicated to FGCS. If budgetary issues do not allow for establishing new positions, the institutions should determine how current positions can be enhanced to meet needs. The voice of the

administrators and staff in this study spoke to the lack of current policies and practices that assure the success of FGCS. To make the change that is necessary to adequately meet the needs of FGCS will involve a change in the dynamics of campus cultures and the willingness of individuals to change their behaviors.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study generated three additional inquiries that could be studied and add to the current body of FGCS literature. I focused on the factors that administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence and retention of African-American FGCS. My recommendations for future research are in no particular order of importance.

The first recommended inquiry would compare the perspectives of administrators and staff in historically White institutions with those in the same positions in historically Black institutions in providing services to FGCS. What kind of difference exist in services and programs offered? The comparison might allow for sharing best practices in the field.

The second would explore the impact of socio economic status on the "first gen" college experience. How does socio economic status impact the success or failure of low-income students and FGCS? Do these double risk factors present even more challenges? Income could hinder being able to take advantage of some services and support programs.

My final recommendation is to inquire into cultural differences that impact the experiences of first generation college students. What roles do cultural experiences play in the needs of FGCS? Are there differences between first generation rural and first generation urban students?

Personal Implications

What surprised me most about the results of this research, and the entire doctoral process, was how much it confirmed my outlook on higher education. I know that in order to secure adequate programs and services for African-American FGCS, I need to be among the university's decision makers and among the ranks of those who can make change happen on college campuses. University decision-making groups should be more diverse. The voices of administrators and staff in this study confirmed that change happens at institutions when top leadership supports them. Lower level administrators and staff might dream of doing more for FGCS, but the actualization of dreams requires the approval of University Chancellors and/or Presidents, Provosts, Deans and others in high ranked post-secondary positions. So, through this process I strive to be amongst the ranks of those that can make change happen on college campuses.

This dissertation journey has drawn my attention to the depth of my own uncertainties… uncertainties that began at a young age about my ability to achieve academically in comparison to my White counterparts. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, I have become more aware of who I am, and how to identify systemic barriers in higher education that have historically been unfavorable for Black students, Black faculty and Black staff (Hilraldo, 2010). Although I have been aware of race and racism as it relates to education, exploring education through a CRT lens gave me the context in which to frame my feelings of less than and my lived experiences of inherent oppressive behavior.

Growing up my role models were people I saw on television and characters I read about in books. When I was younger I did not understand the hardships that plagued my

community. As an adult I have a newfound respect for the single black woman who raised me in an impoverished neighborhood, my mother. At the age of 14, I could not believe how numb my family and friends were to me being shot. In my neighborhood getting shot appeared to be an unspoken rite of passage. Instead of empathy, I received praise as if I had earned my street credibility. These were stripes I cared not to earn.

In the midst of my dysfunctional family structure, I found solace in education. Unfortunately, I had instructors that trampled on my dreams and employers that oppressed my assertiveness because they had the positional power to do so. I challenged my oppressors and felt the strife of the negative discourse I received in return. I am a first generation college graduate who chooses to reach and teach the next generation. Being first in my family to graduate gives me much pride on the one hand but on the other hand, is burdensome. With no map to follow I have relied on educators at every level of my education to help me navigate the terrain. I know how it feels to walk into a classroom and see no one that looks like you, no one that can identify with your cultural experiences, and no one that even cares to get to know you. I know how it feels to be the only Black employee in meetings, to be considered the official Black voice, and to be treated differently because of discriminatory beliefs. In all that, the one thing I know for sure is that being a FGCS has strengthened my character by forcing me to step outside my comfort zone, engage in controversial discussions and explore the world with an open mind and guarded heart. I am honored to be the first in my family to obtain three degrees, a Bachelor of Science, Master of Arts and a Doctor of Philosophy in Education! But I am even more grateful that most of my siblings turned their lives around for the greater good of our family and community.

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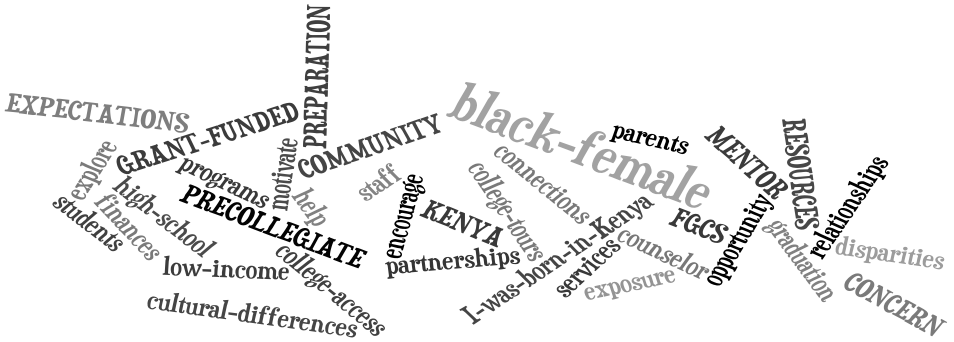
Appendix A: Word Clouds

Word cloud that displays excerpts from Frederick's interview transcripts.

Word cloud that displays excerpts from Joy's interview transcripts.

Word cloud that displays excerpts from Scott's interview transcripts.

Word cloud that displays excerpts from Hope's interview transcripts.



Word cloud that displays excerpts from Spencer's interview transcripts.

Word cloud that displays excerpts from Malcolm's interview transcripts.

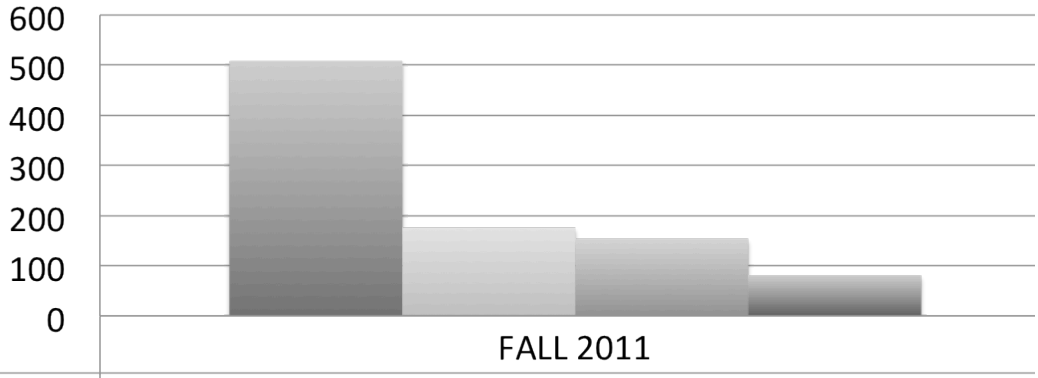
Word cloud that displays excerpts from Destiny's interview transcripts.

Word cloud that displays excerpts from Faith's interview transcripts.

Appendix B

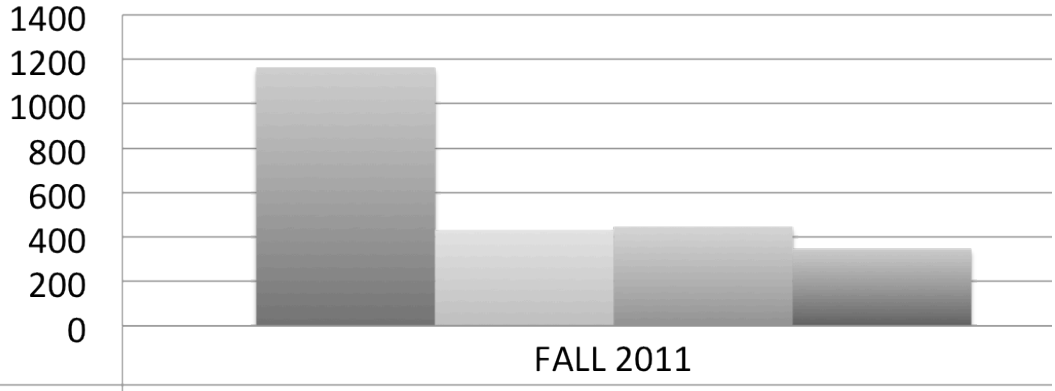
Fall 2011 Enrollment Data

University 1-First Time College Students (FTC)



Total Enrollment	508
Minority	176
First Generation	154
Minority and First Generation	81

University 2-First Time College Students (FTC)



Total Enrollment	1161
Minority	431
First Generation	446
Minority and First Generation	346

Appendix C: Responsive Reading

Responsive Reading
#96- "Black Colleges"
African American Heritage Hymnal

Leader: African Americans have long valued education as the key to greater achievement. No sacrifice was too great for our parents to make for our education.

Congregation: They told us: "Education is the key. No one can take that away from you."

Leader: Many black parents didn't have the means to send their children to college. Some of these children worked their way through college washing dishes in the cafeteria, mowing lawns, working as maids, pumping gas, scrubbing floors and performing other menial tasks.

Congregation: Thank you Lord for making a way out of no way.

Leader: We thank God for people who bestowed institutions of higher education to their children. There are over one hundred historically black college and universities in the United States. Cheyney State is the oldest black college, founded in 1837.

Congregation: We also cherish Lincoln, Shaw, Virginia Union, Fisk , Howard, Hampton, Morehouse, Tougaloo, Clark-Altanta, Alcorn, Houston-Tillotson, Spelman, Tuskegee, Harris-Stowe and Arkansas Pine-Bluff as well as other unnamed institutions which we now call out. (Pause)

(Silently remember the black college which you attended and call out its name if it does not appear above.)

Leader: We remember the founding of black fraternities and sororities and their contribution to our communities. We remember professors and administrators of vision. They filled us with knowledge and they taught us black history.

Congregation: A people without knowledge of their own history is like a tree without roots.

Leader: In 1943, the President of Tuskegee Institute, Dr. Frederick D. Patterson, initiated the United Negro College Fund to raise money to support black colleges.

Congregation: The saying, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste," draws national attention to the educational needs of black students.

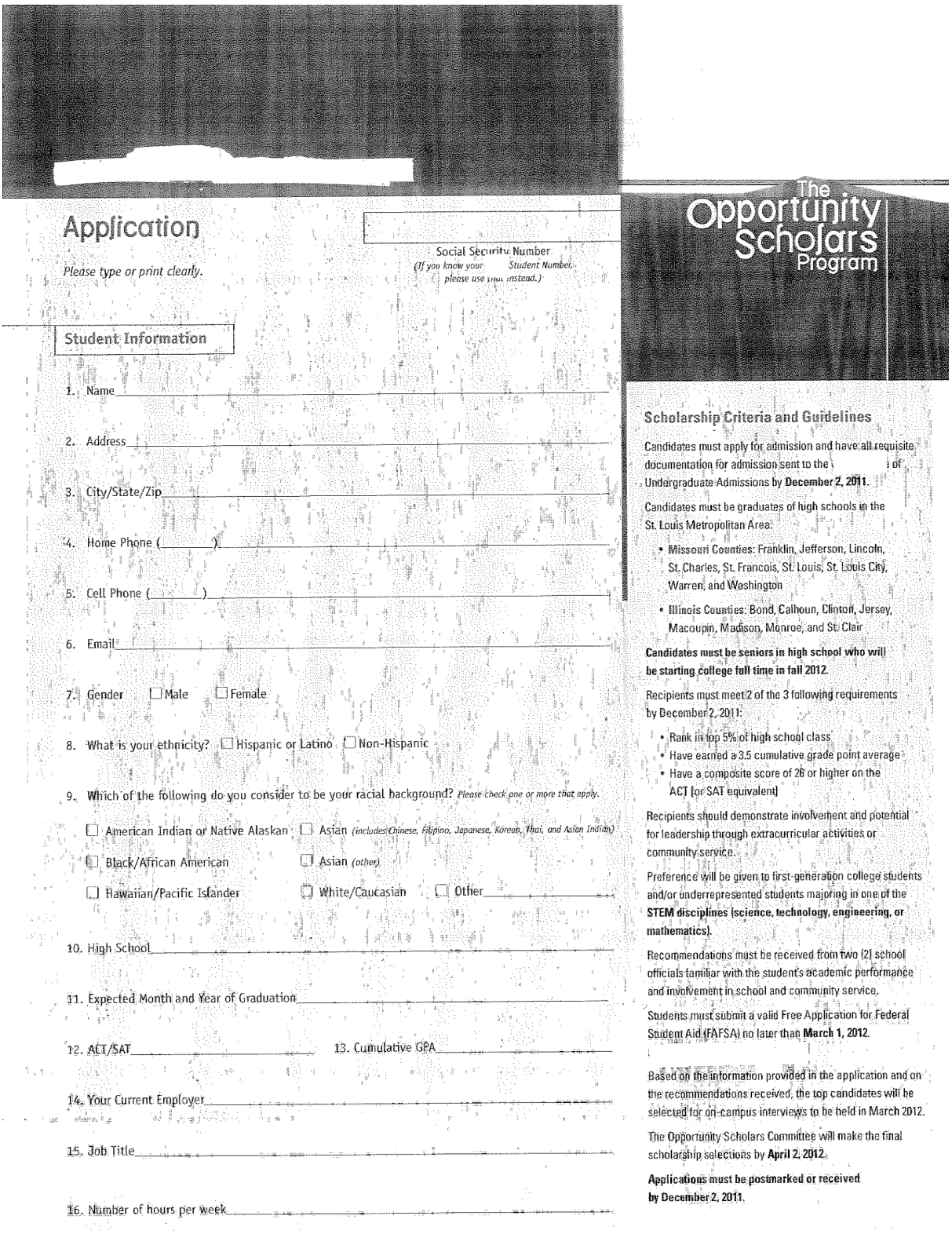
Leader: The majority of black college graduates have attended historically black colleges and universities. Often these students were the first members of their families to attend college.

Congregation: People are destroyed for lack of knowledge and perish where there is no vision to light the way.

Leader: We are called upon to sustain institutions of higher education for future generations. Dr. Benjamin Mays believed that the primary task of black colleges is to build character. God help us to remain ever conscious of the quality of fruit our people bear.

Together: Blessed Teacher, African Americans will not perish because we shall continue to support and strengthen black students, black colleges and universities. Thanks be to you!

Appendix D: Scholarship Application



The Opportunity Scholars Program

Application

Please type or print clearly.

Social Security Number
(If you know your Student Number, please use that instead.)

Student Information

1. Name _____
2. Address _____
3. City/State/Zip _____
4. Home Phone (_____) _____
5. Cell Phone (_____) _____
6. Email _____
7. Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female
8. What is your ethnicity? ☐ Hispanic or Latino ☐ Non-Hispanic
9. Which of the following do you consider to be your racial background? *Please check one or more that apply.*
   - ☐ American Indian or Native Alaskan
   - ☐ Asian *(includes Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Asian Indian)*
   - ☐ Black/African American
   - ☐ Asian *(other)*
   - ☐ Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   - ☐ White/Caucasian
   - ☐ Other _____
10. High School _____
11. Expected Month and Year of Graduation _____
12. ACT/SAT _____ 13. Cumulative GPA _____
14. Your Current Employer _____
15. Job Title _____
16. Number of hours per week _____

Scholarship Criteria and Guidelines

Candidates must apply for admission and have all requisite documentation for admission sent to the [redacted] of Undergraduate Admissions by **December 2, 2011.**

Candidates must be graduates of high schools in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area:

- Missouri Counties: Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, St. Charles, St. Francois, St. Louis, St. Louis City, Warren, and Washington
- Illinois Counties: Bond, Calhoun, Clinton, Jersey, Macoupin, Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair

Candidates must be seniors in high school who will be starting college full time in fall 2012.

Recipients must meet 2 of the 3 following requirements by December 2, 2011:

- Rank in top 5% of high school class
- Have earned a 3.5 cumulative grade point average
- Have a composite score of 26 or higher on the ACT (or SAT equivalent)

Recipients should demonstrate involvement and potential for leadership through extracurricular activities or community service.

Preference will be given to first-generation college students and/or underrepresented students majoring in one of the **STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics).**

Recommendations must be received from two (2) school officials familiar with the student's academic performance and involvement in school and community service.

Students must submit a valid Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) no later than **March 1, 2012.**

Based on the information provided in the application and on the recommendations received, the top candidates will be selected for on-campus interviews to be held in March 2012.

The Opportunity Scholars Committee will make the final scholarship selections by **April 2, 2012.**

Applications must be postmarked or received by December 2, 2011.

The Opportunity Scholars Program | Application

Mother's Information

17. Name

18. Occupation

19. Place of Employment 20. Position

21. Mother's highest level of education completed

Father's Information

22. Name

23. Occupation

24. Place of Employment 25. Position

26. Father's highest level of education completed

Please type or print clearly.

Activities

27. Briefly describe your extracurricular activities/interests, memberships or offices held in school organization(s), and any honors or recognition you have received.

Civic or Community Activities

28. Describe any civic/community activities in which you have been involved. Please include the number of hours per month you engage in these activities and any significant positions you may have held within these organizations.

Personal Achievements

29. Please describe any special talents, skills, abilities, or personal achievements you would like to note that you have not had a chance to write about in other parts of your application.

Other Factors

30. Are there other factors you wish the committee to consider in making their decision? If yes, please describe them at this time.

Essay

31. On another piece of paper, please describe why you want to attend [redacted] and your reasons for pursuing your chosen major. Please also address why you want to participate in The Opportunity Scholars Program. Your response should be approximately 500 words.

Applicant Statement

I understand that I am required to submit the following information by the application deadline of December 2, 2011:

1] A completed application for admission and all requisite materials

2] A completed Opportunity Scholars Program Application

3] The essay

4] Two (2) requests for recommendation (sent separately)

In addition I understand that I must submit a valid 2012-2013 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) no later than **March 1, 2012.**

The scholarship is awarded for one (1) year on an annually renewable basis. This scholarship will provide for tuition, fees, room and board, and a book allowance. This scholarship is a last-dollar scholarship. The dollar amount of the scholarship will take into consideration grants and scholarships from all sources.

By submitting this application, I authorize the Office of Student Financial Aid at the [redacted] to share information from this application and my educational record as is necessary for the review and selection of scholarship recipients.

Applicant Signature_____ Date_____

Applications must be postmarked by **December 2, 2011**

Send to: The Opportunity Scholars Program

Office of Student Financial Aid

Appendix E: Consent Form

Division of Educational Psychology, Research, and Evaluation
UM-St. Louis College of Education
One University Blvd.
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4400
Telephone:
Fax:
E-mail:

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Higher Education Administrators and Staff:
Striving to Provide Optimal Services and Programs for First Generation College Students

Participant _____

Student Investigator __Latishua Lewis_____ SI's Phone Number _____

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Matthew Davis, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Why am I being asked to participate?

You are invited to participate in a research study about the perceptions of higher education administrators and staff about services and programs provided for first generation college students conducted by Latishua E. Lewis at the University of Missouri-St. Louis for the purposes of doctoral research. You have been asked to participate in the research because your position at the University has a direct impact on first generation college students. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the research. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time, and free to skip any questions you choose, without affecting that relationship.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to gather counter narratives from administrators, staff and the researcher to examine the perceptions of services and programs provided to First Generation College Students. As well, this study might be used to inform as a means to improve higher education administrators and staff practices and protocol as it relates to FGCS.

What procedures are involved?

If you agree to participate in this research, you can expect:

- To be introduced to how the interview will be managed by the interviewer
- To be informed about how to end the interview
- The interview to include at least five main questions
- The interview to be focused not only on your opinions about first generation college students but on the institutional constructs both positive and negative
- The interview to be held in a quiet place away from other people

- The interview to be recorded either with a voice recorder
- The interviewer to take notes during the interview
- The interviewer to write down exactly what you say and review those notes in the future

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

There are no monetary or other compensatory benefits of participation in this research, though it is hoped that participants will enjoy the interview discussion.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The only people who will know that you are a research subject are the interviewer(s) and the committee chair person. Because a pseudonym will replace your name when the interview is transcribed, discussion of my research project will not involve your name or any identifying information. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. No information about you, or provided by you during the interview will be disclosed to others without your written permission, except:

- if necessary to protect your rights or welfare (for example, if you are injured and need emergency care or when the University of Missouri-St Louis Institutional Review Board monitors the research or consent process); or
- if required by law.

All digital audio recordings as well as their subsequent transcripts and any transcript notes will be password protected on a computer to prevent access by unauthorized personnel.

Please specify any contact restrictions you want to request for this study only.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You also may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. If you decide to end your participation in the study, please complete the withdrawal letter found at http://www.umsl.edu/services/ora/IRB.html, or you may request that the Investigator send you a copy of the letter.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The researcher conducting this study is Latishua Lewis. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at Latishua Lewis at _____, or the committee chair for which this research is being

advised under: Dr. Matthew Davis _____. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at _____.

What if I am a UMSL student?

You may choose not to participate, or to stop your participation in this research, at any time. This decision will not affect your class standing or grades at UM-SL. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you participate in this research.

What if I am a UMSL employee?

Your participation in this research is, in no way, part of your university duties, and your refusal to participate will not in any way affect your employment with the university or the benefits, privileges, or opportunities associated with your employment at UM-SL. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you participate in this research.

Remember: Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

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

I have read the above statement and have been able to express my concerns, to which the investigator has responded satisfactorily. I believe I understand the purpose of the study, as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I give my permission to participate in the research described above.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date Participant's Printed Name

_____

1. Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

The purpose of this study is to answer the research question: What factors do higher education administrators and staff identify as critical to access, persistence and retention of FGCS. A total of nine subjects will participate in this study, including the researcher. The subjects will be university administrators or staff at two Midwestern universities.

The responsibilities of the subjects are to give a candid overview of their perceptions of first generation college students and how the university serves this student population. The researcher will protect the identity of participants by using pseudonyms in the transcripts and any other written or recorded documentation. All recordings and transcriptions will be kept on a password protected storage devise stored in a secure location for 5 years then destroyed.

1. Please describe your educational background?
2. Are you a first generation college student? If so, do you recall any experiences that had an impact on your success as a student?
3. What led you to pursue a career in higher education?
4. Please describe your current positions roles and responsibilities?
5. In what capacity does your office/position interact with FGCS?
6. How does the university define first generation college students?
7. How does the university identify first generation college students?
8. How does the mission of your office address the needs of FGCS?
9. Does your office offer specific resources and services for FGCS?

10. How does the university provide services and programs to assist first generation students as they: prepare to enter college (recruit), gain access to college and persist to graduation (retain).
11. What type of professional development is provided to help better understand FGCS on your campus?
12. Is there specific funding for targeting the FGCS?
13. How has A2S impacted how the campus supports first generation college students?
14. Explain how your institution demonstrates or fails to confirm support for services and programs for FGCS?
15. Is there anything additional you would like to add? i.e. your experiences serving or providing services for this student population.