

ABSTRACT

ARDOIN, MARY SONJA. Learning a Different Language: Rural Students' Comprehension of College Knowledge and University Jargon. (Under the direction of Dr. Audrey Jaeger).

Learning a Different Language: Rural Students' Comprehension of College Knowledge and University Jargon is a descriptive, collective qualitative case study of how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. Research sites included two high schools in one specific school district in rural, south Louisiana from which eight sophomore students and two high school counselors were chosen as participants. In-depth interviews, on-site observations, and document analysis provided insight into the cultural capital and habitus of the area and the processes rural students and counselors use to obtain and comprehend college knowledge and university jargon. Seven overall themes emerged from the data: 1) Ways of Thinking and Being in a Rural Community, 2) Mixed Signals about Educational Choices, 3) Counselors' Crusade of College Counseling, 4) Students' College Hopes, Dreams, and Realities, 5) Step One to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Being Aware, 6) Step Two to College Knowledge and University Jargon: The Ability to Both Recognize and Define Terms, and 7) Step Three to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Finding Processes of Seeking and Understanding Information. Implications and recommendations for assisting high school counselors with college counseling, building students' cultural capital, and encouraging higher education to conduct more inclusive recruitment are presented.

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Learning a Different Language: Rural Students' Comprehension of College Knowledge and
University Jargon

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Research and Policy Analysis

Raleigh, North Carolina

2013

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DEDICATION

To anyone who has broken boundaries or statistics in obtaining an education, who has opened the door for others, or who has sacrificed for their children to have the opportunity.

Thank you.

I know this achievement is not mine alone; rather, it is a collective effort of everyone who has participated in my life. I am forever indebted.

BIOGRAPHY

Mary Sonja Ardoin is a native of a rural, Cajun town in south Louisiana where she attended K-12 public schools and graduated with twenty-two high school classmates. She became a first-generation college student when she attended Louisiana State University in Fall 2000. Sonja received a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education, but through her campus activities found that her real passion was student development at the collegiate level. She followed her new interest to Florida State University where she obtained a Master of Science degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs. Sonja stayed at Florida State for her first full-time role in Student Activities before moving on to serve Student Activities at Texas A&M University. After four years of full-time work, Sonja decided to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Research and Policy Analysis at North Carolina State University.

Sonja's passions in higher education include teaching and learning, growth and development, access and equity, and leadership and service. Outside of her formal roles, she finds fulfillment in volunteering with several national organizations including Zeta Tau Alpha; LeaderShape, Inc.; Mortar Board National Senior Honor Society; the Social Justice Training Institute; and College Summit.

Sonja also enjoys spending time with family and friends, traveling, reading, dancing, playing and watching sports, and laughing. She feels blessed to have both the roots of a rural, small town with lots of culture and the wings provided by formal and informal educational opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give recognition to and express a heartfelt appreciation for:

- My parents, Evelyn and Steve Ardoin, for their continuous support and sacrifice to help to get me where I am today
- My grandparents, Dorothy and Lennis Guillory and Grace and Polly Ardoin, for their example of work ethic and the foundation they set from which we could all build
- My godchildren, Tyler and Morgan Guillory and Julia Downs, for making me want to be a good role model and for reminding me to set the stage for those who will come after me
- My friends, who I also call my chosen family (you know who you are), for their listening ears, constant support, laughter, and helping me find ways to balance my life
- My dissertation chair, Dr. Audrey Jaeger, for believing in me and my aggressive timeline, for pushing me to meet my goals and be better, for being a phenomenal sounding board, for providing expert and timely feedback, and for being amazing at her job
- My dissertation committee, Dr. Lance Fusarelli, Dr. Joy Gayles, and Dr. Paul Umbach, for contributing their time and talents to this study and my graduate school experience
- The study research sites and participants for allowing me into their spaces and lives so that others can hopefully benefit
- My higher education colleagues throughout the years from Louisiana State University, Florida State University, Texas A&M University, North Carolina State University, Mortar Board National Senior Honor Society, LeaderShape, Inc., Zeta Tau Alpha, and many other institutions/organizations, for their commitment to teaching and learning, for

their desire to increase knowledge and access, for supporting students' growth and development, and for contributing to my professional and personal development

- My K-12 teachers and higher education professors for seeing my potential, cultivating my abilities, and pushing me beyond what the statistics said I could achieve
- Those organizations who believed in my abilities and this study enough to provide funding, including Zeta Tau Alpha, Mortar Board National Senior Honor Society, Alpha Lambda Delta, and the North Carolina State University Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

College access and college student choice have been consistent topics in the higher education literature for several decades. Interest in college access and choice is paramount because these topics can relate to the entire K-16 pipeline and to public policy issues. Many families and policymakers in the United States now see postsecondary education as one of the essential elements to personal and socioeconomic success and they want everyone to have access to it and choices within it (Hossler & Palmer, in press). Additionally, high schools are being evaluated for quality based on the number of students they have matriculate into colleges and universities (Hossler & Palmer, in press).

Most college choice models focus on a combination of economic, psychological, and sociological approaches (Hossler & Palmer, in press). These models provide developmental, multi-tiered stage frameworks for comprehending how students' background and family circumstances, socialization, school experiences and opportunities, and academic abilities can influence college aspirations, access, and attendance (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Palmer, in press). Hossler and Palmer (in press) mention noteworthy models of college choice in Figure 1.

Hanson and Litten (1982)	Deciding to go to College			Investigating Colleges		Application, Admission and Attendance	
Jackson (1986)	Preference			Exclusion		Evaluation	
Hossler and Gallagher (1987)	Predisposition			Search		Choice	
Chapman (1981)	Search			Choice			
Kotler and Fox (1985)	Generic Alternatives (college, work, military)	Product Form Alternatives (private or public)	Total College Set	Awareness of Set	Consideration of Set	Choice Set	Decision

Figure 1. Hossler & Palmer’s (in press) college choice models summary.

This study’s background and context focused on Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-phase college choice model because it was best aligned with the nature of the study. A detailed explanation of the model is included in the next section.

Hossler and Gallagher’s College Choice Model

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) created a three-tiered stage developmental college choice model that combines “individual and organizational factors to produce college choice outcomes” (p. 208). The model contains three tiered stages—predisposition, search, and choice. The entire model, including its factors and outcomes, can be seen in Figure 2.

A THREE PHASE MODEL OF COLLEGE CHOICE

Model Dimensions	Influential Factors		Student Outcomes
	Individual Factors	Organizational Factors	
Predisposition (Phase One)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Student Characteristics *Significant others *Educational activities 	*School characteristics	Search for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. College options b. other options
Search (Phase two)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Student preliminary college values *Student search activities 	*College and University search activities (Search for students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. choice set b. other options
Choice (Phase three)	*Choice set	*College and University courtship activities	*Choice

Figure 2. Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) entire college choice model.

Because this study sought to understand how students obtain college knowledge and decode university jargon, which are likely very beneficial sources of information to students' predisposition feelings and search efforts, stages one and two of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model were most relevant. Stages one and two focus on students' predisposition (or aspirations) and search (or access and options), rather than their actual choice (where they commit to enter postsecondary education), which is stage three. Thus, further explanations of the predisposition and search stages are discussed below.

Stage one, called predisposition, focuses on students' aspirations, or lack thereof, to pursue postsecondary education. Individually, students' background characteristics tend to heavily relate to their predisposition, particularly the socioeconomic status of their household, their academic ability, and their parents' and peers' attitudes and encouragement

toward college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Organizationally, high school experiences in extracurricular activities and rigorous academic curriculums, residential areas, and proximity to a college campus were all connected to students' predisposition (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who reside in rural areas and attend rural high schools, and who would be first-generation college students are often less likely to be predisposed to postsecondary educational aspirations. A summary of the predisposition phase can be found in Figure 3.

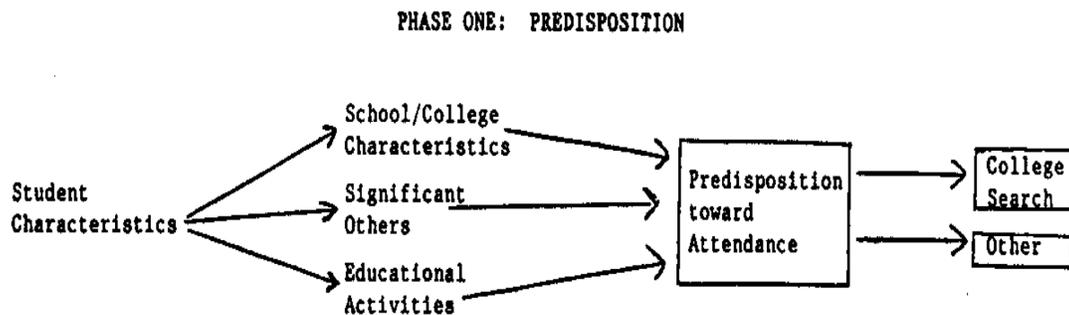


Figure 3: Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) college choice model, stage one—predisposition.

Stage two, called search, concentrates on students' process of seeking information about postsecondary education options. This phase brings in postsecondary institution interaction. Individually, students' values and search activities shape the information they obtain about colleges and universities (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Organizationally, postsecondary institutions promotional and recruitment activities also contribute to students' search phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). During this stage, students "discover the questions

they should be asking . . . the differences between public and private, high cost and low cost, residential and non-residential, research and teaching institutions” and “need accurate information about types of institution” (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 219). Students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and whose parents have less education tend have “longer and less efficient” searches and seek more assistance from their high school counselors (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 214). Lack of information about postsecondary options, institutions, and costs can be heightened for students from underrepresented populations. A summary of the search phase can be found in Figure 4.

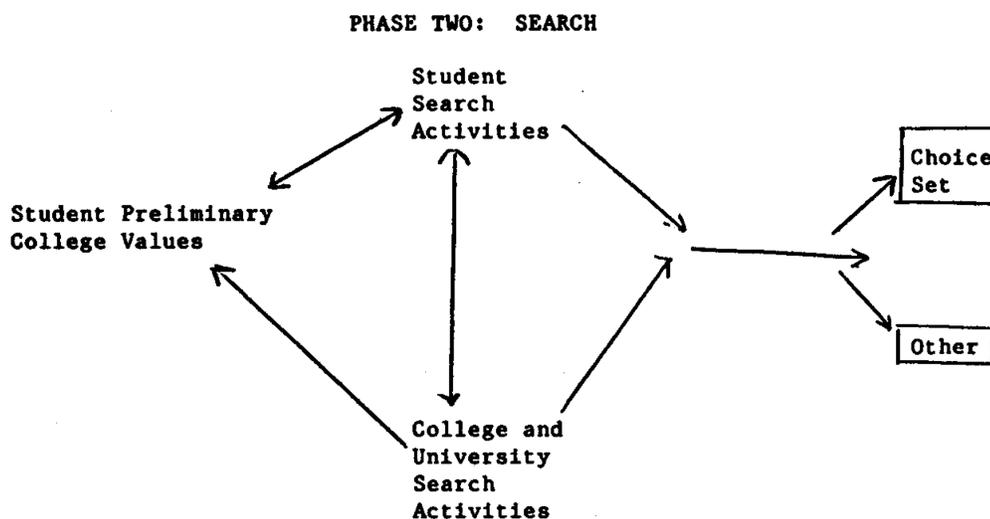


Figure 4. Hossler & Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model, stage two—search.

Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model, particularly the predisposition and search stages, show that individual and organizational factors can produce varying outcomes of

college choice for students. Additionally, the authors mention that students from underrepresented populations, such as first generation, low socioeconomic, and rural areas, often have more concerns associated with their individual and organizational factors and more difficulty moving through the stages to reach the associated outcomes. This model provides a sound introduction for why this study was relevant. If high school students do not possess or do not have the resources to obtain college knowledge and, therefore, decode university jargon, they may struggle with the predisposition and search stages of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, making the final stage of choice limited and less likely to occur.

Recent Research on College Choice for Rural, First-Generation, Low-Socioeconomic Status Students

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) released a research brief in 2007 that provided a profile on first-generation students in higher education since 1971. The brief clearly spells out that, although first-generation students' educational aspirations are rising, their aspirations tend to remain lower than their peers. These differences in aspiration may be rooted in the lack of knowledge first-generation students have about the nuances of higher education, including institutional knowledge and types, degrees, application processes, and resource availability (HERI, 2007). Even when first-generation students are considered "highly qualified" for postsecondary education based on five academic performance criteria, 13% of this population had not enrolled in any type of postsecondary education and 25% had not enrolled at the four-year level two years after high school graduation (Horn & Bobbitt, 2000). Of those first-generation students who do choose to enroll, 25% will drop out after their first year (Horn, 1998). Many first-generation students also possess other identity

characteristics that further complicate their higher education aspirations. Fifty percent of first-generation students come from low-income families and many of them have roots in urban or rural areas (Horn & Bobbitt, 2000).

Students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds also face an uphill battle in educational access. These students are less likely to attend college. If low-SES students do enroll, they are more likely to attend less selective or prestigious institutions and less likely to persist to graduation than their middle- and high-SES peers (Walpole, 2003). Statistics on rural students show similar trends. The gap between college-educated residents in urban and rural areas has expanded during the last decade. Although 29% of urban residents possess a bachelor's degree or more, only 20% of rural residents have such degrees (Brown & Swanson, 2003). Rural students who do seek out higher education often possess a "community college mentality," which means that many of them aspire to attend community colleges rather than four-year institutions due to their desire to remain in the community and ease into their postsecondary education (McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010, p. 199). A study by Hu (2003) found that rural students sought a two-year education more than any other type of college education—"33.1 percent to 28.2 percent four year college and 22.0 percent graduate school"—and they aspired to a two-year education at rates higher than both their urban and suburban peers—"33.1 percent of rural to 27.1 percent of urban and 29.3 percent of suburban" (p. 4). When these educational access and acquisition disparities for first-generation, low-SES, and rural students are combined, the statistics are not promising for students who fall into all three identity groups. Unfortunately, many students do fall into

all three identity groups and they have to face the difficult circumstances of aspiring to postsecondary education as rural, first-generation, and low-SES students.

College knowledge, along with other aspects of college readiness, is a considerable barrier to college access for rural students. *College knowledge* is the information and resources students need to navigate through the college search, choice, and admission process (Vargas, 2004). One distinct aspect of college knowledge is the language, or discourse, that colleges and universities use, including terminology and acronyms such as Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), majors, credit hours, bursar's office, subsidized loans, and degree distinctions such as A.A., A.S., A.A.S., B.A., and B.S. These terms combine to create a unique university jargon. White (2005) notes that the relationship among language, discourse, literacy, and collegiate success should be further explored because differences in language can lead students to feel inadequate and alienated from the college environment. If students, families, communities, and schools do not possess the cultural capital to decode university jargon or acquire college knowledge, rural students may face high levels of difficulty in accessing a college education.

Definition of Terms

Rural Students: The Combination of First Generation and Low Socioeconomic Status

The population of this study was rural students. Although there are a few recent studies that focus on this population, there is not a vast amount of literature pertaining to this specific student population. Much of the literature that explores students who live in rural areas either focuses on their first-generation student status or their low SES. However, the

existing literature was useful to review because rural students tend to be both first-generation students and students who come from low SES families (NCES, 2007). Rarely, however, did a study combine all three characteristics of students' underrepresented identities. Parceling out aspects of students' identity creates a challenge for understanding the holistic experiences of these students. Thus, this study included, as part of its definition of rural, students who were living in rural areas, who were the first in their families to pursue higher education, and who were designated as low SES. Definitions of each aspect of the population are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Definition of first generation. Scholars, practitioners, and the field of higher education have varying definitions to determine who is considered a first-generation college student. Typically, students' parental levels of education determine first-generation status. Some researchers define first-generation as having neither parent attend any sort of postsecondary education while others classify first-generation students as those whose parents never graduated from college. Since there is much debate over the definition of the term *first-generation*, Table 1 represents a sampling of how researchers define first-generation status. The table allows one to compare and contrast the similarities and differences among definitions. For the purposes of this paper, first-generation college students were defined as students who are the first in their families to attend college and whose parents have no college or university experience.

Table 1.

Definitions of First-Generation College Students

Author	Definition
Adachi (no year listed)	• Students who are from families with at least one parent who graduated from college
Billson & Terry (1982)	• Students whose parents have had no college or university experience
York-Anderson & Bowman (1991)	• Students who had neither of their parents, nor siblings, attend college for 1 year
Horn & Bobbitt (2000)	• Students whose parents have no more than a high school education
Ishitani (2003)	• Students whose parents did not graduate from college
Pascarella et al (2004)	• Students whose parents have no more than a high school education
Lohfink (2005)	• Students whose parents had no type/quantity of higher education
Cushman (2007)	• Students who are the first in family to attend a 4 year college
Bryan & Simmons (2009)	• Students who are the first in family to attend college

Definition of low SES. SES can be determined using a variety of factors. Some consider elements such as income and wealth, capital, education, prestige, and occupation, among others, as different ways to define SES or class (Barratt, 2011). Though all of these definitions have merits of their own, this study defined low SES by students' enrollment in the federal free and reduced lunch program at their respective high schools. Additionally, aspects of students' SES such as cultural capital and educational attainment were explored (Barratt, 2011). Low SES students are less likely than their high SES peers to complete steps toward college access and, ultimately, enrollment (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001). The social class of a student has a considerable influence on that student's future (Jencks, 1972; MacLeod, 2009).

Definition of rural. Much like first-generation and low SES, there are multiple ways to define rural or rurality. From traditional, operational definitions of rural that focus on place

and demographics to newer code definitions, such as the rural-urban continuum classification codes, there is no fixed definition of rural (Flora, Flora, Spears, & Sawanson, 1992; Isserman, 2005). Classifications of rural vary by governmental branch and by time period (Flora et al., 1992). Some sociologists use population size and distance from urban centers to distinguish rural, while others focus on homogenous cultures, natural resource economies, or unique identities (Flora et al., 1992). In fact, rural sociologists often waffle between using the terms urban and rural and using the terms metropolitan and nonmetropolitan. Either way, rural or nonmetropolitan is often defined as a residual; in other words, it is everything that is not urban or metropolitan (Brown & Swanson, 2003; Flora et al., 1992).

It is estimated that the U.S. rural population was 59 million, or 21%, in 2000 (USDA ERS, 2007). This study focused on students in a parish in south Louisiana that is defined by both the U.S. Census and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as rural. The USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) nonmetropolitan and urban-rural continuum code maps can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively; the sites for the study are located in one of the pink areas of south Louisiana in the nonmetropolitan map and in the bright green areas of south Louisiana in the continuum map. The U.S. Census also provides statistics that show the rural nature of the study area (see Appendix C). In short, the study sites are defined as rural regardless of the measure used. Rural students are often less academically prepared and less inclined to aspire to postsecondary education due to a variety of factors including low SES, low educational attainment in families, and a limited number of community members with college degrees (Brown & Swanson, 2003).

Definition of college knowledge. College preparation and admission can be a knowledge-intensive and time-intensive task. Requirements for admission can be complicated, and some institutions place additional requirements, or allow exceptions, on top of the typical process. “College knowledge” is a phrase used to describe the type of information that students, particularly rural students, need to access college and navigate through college processes (Vargas, 2004). College knowledge is the overarching concept of one’s acquisition and understanding of all the information regarding the higher education environment. Examples of this type of information include but are not limited to institutional types, application procedures, pricing and financial aid information, and academic options (see Appendix D and N). Rural students are less likely to have the knowledge, time, and support needed to access and attend college than other types of students (Conley, 2005; Vargas, 2004).

Definition of academic discourse. Discourse is a socially accepted way people use language, thought, and behavior to align with a specific identify group, or groups, and express their power (Schwalbe et al., 2000). Gee (1998) considers discourses to be inherently ideological and, subsequently, exclusionary toward marginalized groups. Bourdieu (1965) called academic language, or discourse, “a dead language and no one’s mother tongue, not even that of the children of the cultivated classes” (p. 8). The difference between the language of the family and community and the language of the school creates a barrier and sense of exclusion among students, especially rural students, and an assumption that the education system is an elite environment.

Definition of university jargon. University jargon describes words and acronyms used in academic discourse, which is one aspect of college knowledge. Many of these terms are deeply embedded in both the college admissions process and the daily functioning of higher education institutions. Some examples include institutional type (public, private, four-year, two-year, college, university, Predominantly White Institution—PWI, Historically Black Colleges and Universities—HBCU, etc.), academics (major, minor, credit hours, degree audit, etc.), finances (FAFSA, subsidized loan, tuition, fees, etc.), and degrees (A.S., B.S., etc.). A more expansive list of university jargon can be found in Appendices D and N; these lists are a compilation of terms that one can find in university admission and financial aid documents, course catalogs, and view books.

Jargon ties directly into the overarching concept of college knowledge. For example, a student may know that a four-year degree exists, but they may not know the term bachelor's degree. This indicates that the student has some college knowledge but lacks the ability to decode jargon. This becomes an issue when the student looks at institutional recruitment and admissions materials (both online and in hard copy) because institutions list majors of study under bachelor's degrees not four year degrees; thus, the student may be unable to navigate the admissions process if they do not comprehend the actual jargon.

Definition of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1977) defines cultural capital as the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and belief system that middle- and upper-SES families transmit to their children, such as valuing a college education as a means of obtaining or enhancing economic security (MacLeod, 2009). There are two types of cultural

capital: 1) *static*, which includes “highbrow” activities and practices, and 2) *relational*, which is concerned with cultural interactions and communication between children and parents (Bourdieu, 1977). Cultural capital is further subdivided into forms, including embodied cultural capital, which is the nature of the mind and body, and institutionalized cultural capital, which speaks to academic qualifications.

Definition of habitus. Bourdieu (1977) further explains cultural capital with the concept of habitus. Habitus is a deeply internalized, permanent system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs that individuals obtain from their families, peers, institutions, and social class in their surrounding environment. Habitus operates through people’s “perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (MacLeod, 2009, p. 15). Habitus can be viewed from the individual perspective or from the organizational perspective.

Definition of decoding. Decoding is defined in common terms as the ability to translate from a code form into the original language form or the competence to extract meaning from something. Although decoding can mean other things and has complex uses in the field of linguistics, for the purposes of this study the term *decode* was being used in the common definition listed above. Decoding refers to students’ or counselors’ ability to understand, employ, and make meaning of university jargon and academic discourse as an aspect of their college knowledge.

Purpose of the Study

Rural students—defined here as rural, first-generation, and low-SES students—are often overlooked in the field of higher education, and little is known about how rural students

obtain college knowledge. University jargon as an aspect of college knowledge has also gone largely unexplored. To assist rural students in increasing their access to college, it is important to understand how rural students obtain college knowledge, particularly how they make sense of university jargon. Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) found college knowledge to be one of “the most important problems in rural students’ college decision process” (p. 13). University jargon is often an aspect of the college knowledge that many rural students have trouble deciphering due to their lack of cultural capital and their inherent habitus (Whiting, 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. If students, families, communities, and schools do not possess the cultural capital to understand, employ, and make meaning of university jargon or acquire college knowledge, rural students may face high levels of difficulty in access to and persistence through a college education. Specifically, this study on decoding university jargon and college knowledge for rural students was shaped by the following research questions.

Research Questions

This study focused on a central question with two parts: How do rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon?

Again, decoding referred to students’ or counselors’ ability to understand, employ, and make meaning of university jargon and academic discourse as an aspect of their college knowledge.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

Everyone possesses cultural capital; however, only some groups, such as middle- to upper-SES groups, possess the kind that is valuable and useful in certain contexts like educational institutions (Schwalbe et al., 2000). The acquisition of cultural capital begins at home and involves cultural reproduction (Barratt, 2011; MacLeod, 2009; Schwalbe et al., 2000). Rural students do not naturally inherit the cultural capital that is necessary to seek out or expect certain educational opportunities (McDonough, 1997). At the core of cultural capital are its institutionalized effects. Schools play a prominent role in shaping students' cultural capital and educational aspirations (Schwalbe et al., 2000; Tramonte & Willms, 2009). McDonough et al. (2010) describe how “the use of school-level cultural capital, the high school's college cultures, and the [community] habitus sheds light on how high schools affect individuals' higher education investment practices and strategies” (p. 196). Often, rural students possess a “community-fostered way of knowing and understanding that is at odds with the literacies imperative for university success” (Whiting, 2009, p. 158).

This study used Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus as a framework for exploring students' familiarity or unfamiliarity with college knowledge and how they seek to understand and comprehend university jargon as an aspect of their college knowledge. Bourdieu (1965) named language and communication as the most active and elusive parts of a person's cultural heritage and background. It is not surprising that it is difficult to break the cyclical pattern of cultural capital because educational institutions contain linguistic and cultural competencies that convey the dominant culture (Bourdieu,

1977). Jargon is often an aspect of college knowledge that many rural students have trouble deciphering due to their lack of cultural capital and their inherent habitus (Whiting, 2009). Vargas (2004) suggests that though the college knowledge gap is severe it is not impossible to overcome and he proposes policies for college access that focus on ways to provide underserved students with the information and guidance they need, both early and often.

The interaction of these concepts—cultural capital and habitus, academic discourse and university jargon, and college knowledge—is a dynamic process where concepts feed into and off of one another. Ideally, building on students’ existing cultural capital and habitus will assist students in obtaining more college knowledge and skills to decode university jargon and, thus, increase their access to and success within college. A summary of the theoretical framework for this study can be found in Figure 5.

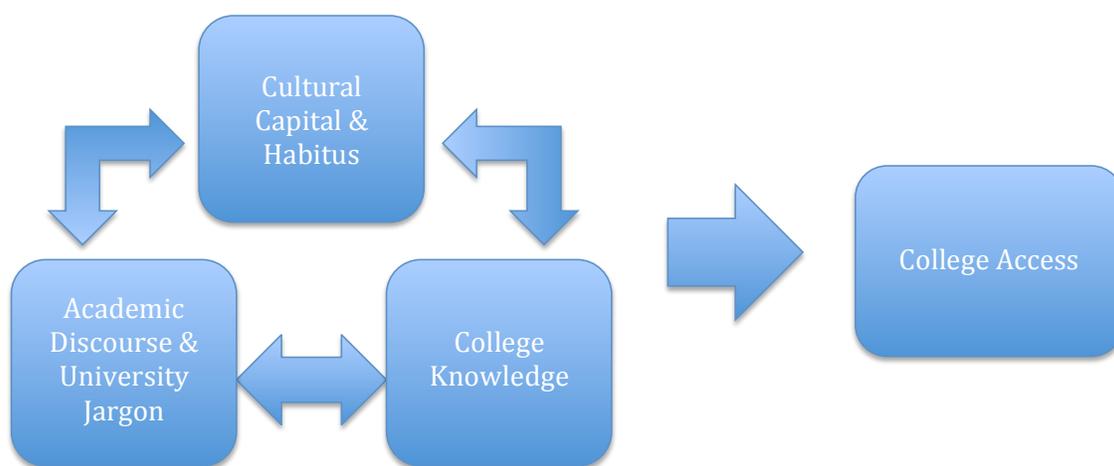


Figure 5. Theoretical framework summary.

The theoretical framework for this study concentrated on cultural capital. I recognize that there are other forms of capital—such as financial, social, intellectual, etc.—however prior higher education research shows that cultural capital is the type of capital that tends to relate to college knowledge most often and rural sociology research acknowledges that rural schools and areas often lack this type of capital (Corbett, 2007; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Flora et al., 1992; McDonough et al., 2010; Vargas, 2004; Willis, 1977). For example, Jencks (1972) describes how cultural attitudes and values about schooling influence rural students' educational aspirations and attainment more than either aptitude or finances.

Significance of the Study

Theoretical and Literary Significance

This study contributes to the literature of empirical work on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as well as builds on the existing literature on university jargon, college knowledge, and college access. It provides a new angle because the focus is on a rural population, which is a demographic that is not often at the forefront of research on first-generation students or low-SES students. Additionally, the study specifically addresses university jargon and college knowledge as a function of cultural capital. The literature generally does not speak directly to these concepts and this study helps shed light on the relationship between jargon, college knowledge, and access. The relationship between these concepts is a potential reason why first-generation students are cited as having lower educational aspirations than their peers with similar qualifications (HERI, 2007). The findings of this study further explored two of the relationships mentioned in Vargas's (2004)

report for TERI, including 1) college-preparatory information and guidance being major components in students realizing college aspirations, and 2) students typically underrepresented in higher education lacking the natural possession of college knowledge because they are members of families with limited or no college experience and attend schools that provide only minimal college guidance.

Practical Significance

At the core of cultural capital are its institutionalized effects; schools play a prominent role in shaping students' educational aspirations (Tramonte & Willms, 2009). The findings of this study inform college and universities, school districts, high schools, and high school counselors about the college information needs of rural students and suggest which processes or resources may best assist with the acquisition of that information. Data from this study provide insight into if rural students need processes or resources that focus more on the individual, family, school, or the entire community. Data also reveal key relationships that are central to students' processes of decoding university jargon. Parents, guardians, and community members may need to be included in the conversations and educational programs that rural students receive about university jargon and college knowledge to help build both the family and community's cultural capital and support students' college aspirations and access. The processes students use to decode university jargon were assessed and led to awareness of whether jargon was a true impediment to rural students' college knowledge or not. Additionally, the study uncovered what is missing from students' processes of decoding university jargon. Students' behavior will be shaped not only by information they have but

also by the information and expectations they receive, or do not receive (McDonough, 1997). Overall, this study helps inform secondary and higher education scholars and practitioners about processes of building cultural capital, which will allow rural students to decode university jargon and increase their comprehension of college knowledge.

Overview of Methodological Approach

This qualitative study used Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and habitus as the framework for exploring how rural students and counselors decode university jargon. A descriptive, collective (or multiple) case study focused on the experiences of eight rural high school sophomores and two rural high school counselors from south Louisiana; the cases, or student and counselors, were bound within a specific high school district in rural, south Louisiana. The district's school board was contacted, initial permission to conduct research was granted (see Appendix E), and key informants participated in the study. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, providing appropriate triangulation for the case study. Participants were identified through purposeful, criterion sampling with the assistance of the high school counselors. Interviews gathered information on the habitus, perceptions of college value, exposure to university jargon and academic discourse, and processes of understanding college knowledge and university jargon of both the participants and the community around them. Observations of guidance meetings centered on college counseling were conducted. Documents provided to students by the high schools in reference to college knowledge and jargon, any available information or statistics from the school district on its students' college attendance rates, and college admissions

literature and Web sites were also analyzed. Individual case analysis and cross-case synthesis was used to analyze the data; open and axial coding were employed to generate codes, themes and, ultimately, findings. Appropriate methods of trustworthiness such as using pseudonyms, triangulating data, and researcher reflexivity, were employed to address credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Implications about how to assist rural students in obtaining cultural capital, navigating college knowledge, and decoding university jargon will be discussed.

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study

This study explored how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. Decoding referred to students' and counselor's ability to understand, employ, and make meaning of university jargon as part of their college knowledge. Rural students were defined in this study as students from a rural area who are also first-generation students and from low-SES households. Statistics show that rural students often lag behind their urban and suburban peers in educational aspiration, access, and attainment. One barrier rural students face in educational aspirations and access is a lack of college knowledge, particularly the ability to decode university jargon. Rural students often do not possess the cultural capital or habitus that would allow them to comprehend or make meaning of university jargon. A descriptive, collective case study was conducted to better understand the processes rural students and counselors employ to tackle university jargon and what individuals, schools, and communities can do to support rural students and

counselors in and through these processes to increase comprehension of college knowledge and, thus, potentially increase college access.

Subsequent chapters frame this study in more depth through use of literature, further definition of the methodological approach that was taken to gather and analyze data, contextual information about sites and participants, and description of the study's findings, conclusions, and implications. Chapter 2 explores the literature on college access, college knowledge, and university jargon. It also explains the theoretical framework of Bourdieu's cultural capital and habitus and how that framework intersects with college knowledge and university jargon for rural students. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study, including the design, site, sample, data, analysis, trustworthiness, ethics, and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 describes the context of both the research sites and the characteristics of the study participants. Chapter 5 conveys the thematic findings of the study using many of the participants' own language and Chapter 6 concludes the study and suggests methods of theoretical and practice next steps.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Rural School Context

Historically, rural schools are characterized by their unique attributes and connections to their communities. Rural schools and communities have many positive attributes. They are known to have low crime rates, natural resources, and a feeling of a close-knit, collaborative community (Theobald & Siskar, 2008). School administrators and teachers are often native to the area, thus they not only believe it is a “special place” but they also provide parents and students with a sense of “continuity, unity, safety, and care” through their “knowledge of students’ families and backgrounds” (Schafft & Jackson, 2010, p. 86). Rural schools are typically smaller in size, which research shows creates better academic and social environments for students (Theobald & Siskar, 2008). They are also viewed as a central component and rallying point of the rural community. These types of schools account for about 33% of U.S. public schools and 20% of public school students (Theobald & Siskar, 2008).

Despite their value in the community, rural schools face many challenges. The socioeconomic status (SES) of rural communities tends to be low, even more so than urban areas, which results in lower tax revenues and lower property taxes for the community. These economic factors impact school funding and often leave the schools with less than adequate financial resources (Theobald & Siskar, 2008). Teachers, counselors, and administrators in rural schools often are originally from the communities in which they work; therefore, it is difficult for rural schools to attract “outsiders” because of elements like lack of interest and

low salaries. A lack of outsiders often creates an insulated environment and limits the range of perspective. Limited access to goods, entertainment, and technological innovation also contribute to K-12 school challenges (Theobald & Siskar, 2008).

Some scholars view rural education in terms of loss. This perspective views rural communities as “places of great loss—of people, natural resources, and any vision of long-term viability” (Kelly, 2009, p. 2). For those who wish to be upwardly mobile, the method of outmigration is used for upward mobility—leaving the community to seek out opportunities (Corbett, 2009; Flora et al., 1992; Kelly, 2009; McDonough et al., 2010). Rural schools, particularly in the twentieth century and since, have become a means of “saving talented youth and sending them on to urban places” where they will be offered what are seen as countless opportunities (Thebold & Siskar, 2008, p. 294). This becomes an issue of “brain drain,” which means that young, talented, and intelligent individuals often depart the community for better education and job opportunities elsewhere (Corbett, 2007; Theobald & Siskar, 2008). These young, talented, intelligent people are encouraged by family and educators to “go far,” which essentially means to leave the community for other places with seemingly better prospects (Theobald & Siskar, 2008, p. 293). In this way, rural schools could be viewed as “a functional meritocracy . . . or alternatively as totalizing social class reproduction machines” (Corbett, 2009, p. 2). Rural schools often teach and support social class reproduction by informing their students of standardized routines, norms, and knowledge that let students know “what they can expect to achieve [or not achieve] for themselves,” particularly if they remain in their community (Corbett, 2007, p.48–49). In

short, success in many rural communities means leaving. However, leaving, particularly to pursue higher education, is often a major financial issue for rural students (Corbett, 2009).

Corbett (2007) explores the issue of rural students' leaving or staying in his book, *Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a [Canadian] Coastal Community*. The study considers "how some rural students 'learn to leave' while others 'learn to stay'" (Corbett, 2007, p. 9). The Canadian province site often associates education with migration and identifies a strong connection between learning and leaving. Rural Canadian youth often face a significant and traumatic decision on whether to remain in the community or pursue postsecondary education elsewhere (Corbett, 2007). The link between education and community departure is "for some students . . . liberating, for others unthinkable, and for most it is problematic and conflicted" (Corbett, 2007, p. 18). This study is a solid representation of the issue of rural "brain drain" and the emotional impact it may generate for both individuals and communities.

The numerous challenges rural schools face have given them a reputation of being subpar, particularly in comparison to schools in the city (Theobald & Siskar, 2008). Inequalities exist in rural schools' resources, their lack of "the right kind of students," and their inability to offer certain kinds of curricula such as honors courses, advanced placement, and international baccalaureate (Jencks, 1972, p. 37; McDonough et al., 2010). Rural schools are also less likely to receive information about changes in university admissions requirements (McDonough et al., 2010). Additionally, rural students are often less academically prepared and less inclined to aspire to postsecondary education due to a variety

of factors including low SES, low educational attainment in families, and a limited number of community members with college degrees (Brown & Swanson, 2003).

Inequitable access on the basis of place is a fundamental barrier for rural students' postsecondary participation (Corbett, 2009). The rural location of a school is now being considered as a dimension of unequal educational opportunity; students from rural schools often possess lower levels of educational aspiration, attendance, and choice (Hu, 2003). Consequently, rural students are significantly underrepresented in higher education. College attendance rates of rural students are "6 percent lower than the national average and almost 8 percent lower than urban students" (McDonough et al., 2010, p. 192). Yet, rural college access is often overlooked in research on educational access; instead, scholarly focus tends to be placed on urban and inner-city schools and their students (McDonough et al., 2010). Qualitative studies about this topic are especially lacking and "to explain inequality requires attention to the processes that produce and perpetuate it" (Schwalbe, Goodwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, & Wolkomir, 2000, p. 420). Thus, this study on the processes rural students use to decode university jargon is informative and timely and should assist K-12 and higher education systems in better serving rural communities and their students (McDonough et al., 2010).

College Access Issues for Rural Students

Education is sometimes viewed as a class-based process; different groups of people receive disproportionate amounts of the nation's educational resources (Jencks, 1972). Colleges and universities seem to have varying levels of interest in students based on the

place students call home (Corbett, 2009). Institutions of higher education, particularly those of the four-year variety, often send less information to rural schools and conduct less recruiting in rural areas. Aronson (2008) uses a funnel analogy to describe the increasing lack of access students from underrepresented groups have to education as they move through the ranks. Rural students, defined in this study as a combination of rural, first-generation, and low-SES students, tend to be a part of families and communities that devalue theoretical learning and overvalue practical knowledge and application (Willis, 1977). A middle-class lifestyle does not seem attainable to many rural students. Similar to the urban students in MacLeod's (2009) *Ain't No Makin' It* book on urban students' educational aspirations and attainment, rural students often think about their employment in terms of "blue-collar" or military jobs, most of which do not require a college degree. Thus, rural students often do not see the same worth in formal education, particularly at the postsecondary level, or do not feel they have as much access to it as students from majority groups.

The effects of college application process are most severe on students who lack familiarity with it, such as rural students. They often have unrealistic expectations, particularly about the financial aid they are likely to receive; they gain much of their information anecdotally, rather than through official channels such as school counselors or college admissions offices; and they tend to change their college aspirations, goals, and plans rapidly. These students' choice of institution is subject to considerable compromise and hasty changes (Conley, 2005).

Across all academic achievement levels, students from the lowest socioeconomic groups are less likely to apply to or attend college than their peers (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; McDonough, 1997). For example, among the highest-ability students, 60% of the lowest SES students attended college, while 86% of the highest SES students attended. SES impacts the selectivity of a student's college choice twice as much as race or gender (McDonough, 1997). First-generation students are less likely to have the personal or institutional connections to assist them in obtaining information and support in the college planning process (Vargas, 2004). Underrepresented students do not receive the same information about college choices; are less likely to take college entrance examinations (ACT/SAT); are less represented in courses or programs that often predict college enrollment such as honors courses, advanced placement (AP) courses, and international baccalaureate (IB) programs; and are less aware of courses required for college admission or grant aid programs (McDonough, 1997; Vargas, 2004). Additionally, rural students often assume that their parents would prefer for them not to attend college due to lack of overt support from their family and peer networks (James et al, 1999; O'Quinn, 1999).

A qualitative study conducted by McDonough (1997) examined the ways in which social class and high school guidance operations combine to shape high school students' perceptions of their opportunities for a college education. McDonough found that not all college-bound students face equal postsecondary educational choices if they start out with different family and school resources; these unequal choices reproduce the current disparities in opportunities for various SES groups in society.

Wettersten et al. (2005) explain how barriers and social support impact rural adolescents' self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and vocational interests. Their quantitative study replicated a prior study of Kenny et al. (2003); the initial study focused on urban students, while Wettersten et al. chose to study nine rural schools in Minnesota and North Dakota. Results of the study found rural students' career outcome expectations were predicted by their social support and self-efficacy. Similar to other studies on first-generation and low-SES students, the findings show the powerful role of relationships, particularly those between parents and children. Further research could explore rural students in other areas of the United States and focus on students' educational aspirations instead of their vocational interests.

Studies of first-generation students in Appalachia provide anecdotal testaments about their parents' lack of understanding of college knowledge, the pervasive poverty in their rural hometowns, the overwhelming size of the university campus, and the lack of integration they experienced between their hometown world and academic world (Bickel, Banks, & Spatig, 1991; O'Quinn, 1999; Simmons & Bryan, 2009). Although these qualitative findings somewhat reflect how the identities of being first generation, low SES, and rural interconnect, specific research on the population of students who embody all three identities is rare. Studies often hold one of these three identities constant. To fully understand the experiences of this population, it is important to study their experiences through their holistic identities. Each aspect of these identities affects students' cultural capital and, consequently, their college knowledge.

College Knowledge

Relationship between College Knowledge and College Access

Research conducted by Vargas (2004) on behalf of The Education Resources Institute (TERI) found the following three relationships between college knowledge and students' educational aspirations:

Table 2.

Relationships between College Knowledge and Educational Aspirations (Vargas, 2004, p. 3)

Relationship 1	College-preparatory information and guidance are major components in realizing college aspirations.
Relationship 2	Students typically underrepresented in higher education do not naturally possess college knowledge. Most come from families with limited or no college experience and attend schools that provide only minimal college guidance.
Relationship 3	The knowledge gap for underrepresented students is exacerbated by their limited access to technology and technological innovations in college admissions and recruitment via the Internet.

These findings express the importance of college knowledge and its link to securing opportunities to attend postsecondary education. Lack of information is a crucial element in students' postsecondary planning. Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) found college knowledge to be one of "the most important problems in rural students' college decision process" (p. 13). Students' college planning behavior will be shaped not only by information they have but also by the information and expectations they receive, or do not receive, from their secondary schools (McDonough, 1997). Obtaining the necessary information on these topics

is the most difficult for the students who need it the most—rural students—due to regional isolation that can limit accessibility to college information (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). Rural students' lack of college knowledge is rooted in their parents' inexperience with college, their schools' lack of adequate guidance counselor staffing, and assumptions about students' prior, or inherent, college knowledge. Parents of underrepresented students can generally support the idea of college but could not provide the access to specific information or contacts that more privileged parents could offer their children, nor can rural parents give students firsthand experience with the benefits of education (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Dumais & Ward, 2009). The National Center for Educational Statistics (1999) reported that public schools have an average student-to-counselor ratio of 500:1, which represents the difficulty of seeking time-intensive help from school counselors, and scholars continue to call for the hiring of additional counselors who can make a special effort to provide underrepresented students with the college knowledge they need to turn their educational aspirations into realities (Bickel et al., 1991; Paulsen & Loflink, 2005). Many of the determinants of college persistence for rural students point to transitional issues that could be addressed in the high school environment by counselors. Specifically, counselors could be educating rural students on the academic, financial, and social aspects of their college choices and providing suggestions on how to make informed, rational decisions that could result in higher rates of college persistence (Bickel et al., 1991; Paulsen & Loflink, 2005). Despite this, McDonough et al. (2010) point out that counselors tend to lack knowledge

about and refrain from providing information about colleges outside of the specific rural area or its adjacent areas.

Interventions to Equip Students with College Knowledge

There are institutional, state, and federal programs which attempt to provide underrepresented students with college knowledge. White (2005) performed a qualitative case study of such a program in the University of Colorado at Boulder's Student Academic Services Center (SASC). The study focused on differences in communication styles because sociolinguistic theory and cultural reproduction theory suggest that culture and cultural identity are closely associated with the use of language. Many students are not familiar with the linguistics styles or discourse used at the university and White argued that this caused students to lack the power and confidence that would enable them to be complete participants in the college experience. Participants feared that their peers would judge them for their lack of "college talk" and "big words" (White, 2005, p. 385). The students in White's study also lacked an understanding of how the university system operated and how to work within that system. For example, none of the students could calculate their GPA, some did not know where to get financial aid information, and all misunderstood the university registration system. After the invention of the SASC at UC-Boulder, the participants felt more integrated into the university community and more confident in their language use. White believes interventions such as the one studied show that mediation may enhance students' chances at success.

White's study was limited to four first-generation minority students from lower-middle-SES backgrounds and focused on one institution, which makes his findings less applicable to the entire population of rural students. The study also focused on success in college rather than access to college, so the findings do not contribute to the knowledge base on access issues. White's role as a participant-observer may have limited the study as well. His position as a tutor for the program from which he drew his sample could have affected the data students provided in interviews and journals. Furthermore, the article fails to directly address the issues of dependability and credibility. Despite these limitations, White's (2005) study speaks to the importance of obtaining college knowledge and being literate in university jargon.

Comparable to the UC-Boulder program, the University of California and the California State University, a few local private colleges, county school offices, and high school districts teamed up in 2003 to create a "College Options" clearinghouse intervention for rural California students. The center attempts to "create college cultures, help better prepare students academically, increase direct enrollment in four-year postsecondary schools, increase transfer rates from two-year to four-year institutions, raise family and community awareness of college options, and build infrastructure support for college and financial aid applications" (McDonough et al., 2010, p. 200). Use of the College Options center has quadrupled in the past seven years, which shows the need for such collaboration between K-12 and higher education to provide resources for rural students, families, and communities.

Bryan and Simmons conducted an intervention study in 2009, choosing to focus their research on first-generation students from Appalachia who benefitted from an early intervention program that taught them college knowledge. Students mentioned the lack of knowledge they and their parents had about college “terminology,” specifically citing questions about concepts such as credit hours and section numbers. They attributed their increased understanding of college language and knowledge to the intervention program, calling it a “safe reference place” (Bryan & Simmons, 2009, p. 403).

Universities may or may not provide interventions to aid underrepresented students with acquiring college knowledge and university jargon, and those programs only assist students who have successfully obtained access into higher education. Often, intervention is needed much earlier in the process to increase access for underrepresented populations. Some urban areas have constructed community resources, such as community-based college access centers in Vermont, Philadelphia, and Boston, to remedy the lack of college knowledge available in those areas (Vargas, 2004). This consortium of centers is tied to the National College Access Network (NCAN). NCAN’s Web site contains a member directory that shows that the majority of centers are located in urban or suburban areas. For example, in the state of Louisiana only five such centers exist with four of the five being located in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, the largest cities in the state. Other states, such as Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, and Wyoming, have no NCAN centers (NCAN member directory, 2010). NCAN is just one example of the differing resources offered to underrepresented students in

urban areas versus rural areas. Fewer resources are offered to students in rural areas resulting in rural students often having to acquire college access information on their own.

The intervention examples above fit with the two intervention models suggested by McDonough et al. (2010) to assist rural students in their acquisition of college knowledge. “Model 1 involves a university presence in every high school while Model 2 includes an outreach center or hub that would work with all high schools in an area to provide information and support related to college preparation, planning, and culture” (p. 198). Either model would require collaboration between and commitment from higher education, high schools, and rural communities.

Theoretical Framework Cultural Capital and Habitus

Definition of Cultural Capital and Habitus

Bourdieu (1977) defines cultural capital as the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and belief system that middle- and upper-SES families transmit to their children, such as valuing a college education as a means of obtaining or enhancing economic security (MacLeod, 2009). Everyone possesses cultural capital; however, only some groups, such as middle- to upper-SES groups, possess the kind that is valuable and useful in certain contexts like educational institutions (Schwalbe et al., 2000). The acquisition of cultural capital begins at home and involves cultural reproduction (Barratt, 2011; MacLeod, 2009; Schwalbe et al., 2000). Cultural reproduction means accepting the culture and practices of the dominant culture as normal and “accepting one’s place within existing hierarchies of status, power, and wealth” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p.429). The cultural

capital framework of Pierre Bourdieu has been important in many of the sociological studies that focus on how and why class status plays a role in educational achievement (MacLeod, 2009; McDonough, 1997).

There are two types of cultural capital: 1) *static*, which includes “highbrow” activities and practices, and 2) *relational*, which is concerned with cultural interactions and communication between children and parents (Bourdieu, 1977). Static cultural capital represents the “family’s socioeconomic advantage” and shows if and how the family spends its income on leisure and cultural activities and events (Tramonte & Willms, 2009, p. 201). Relational cultural capital speaks to the competitive nature of the educational system in the United States, because cultural interactions between children and parents give some children an advantage and create barriers for others as they proceed through their educational process. Parents who possess more cultural capital expose their children to people, places, events, and situations that provide the opportunity to gain cultural capital and, thus, better prepare the children for experiences in educational institutions (Schwalbe et al, 2000). Conversely, parents who lack cultural capital often do not have the time, monetary funds, or network capability to assist their children in gaining cultural capital and, therefore, potentially place their children at a disadvantage in educational institutions (McDonough et al., 2010). Additionally, parents transmit cultural capital to children by informing them, or not informing them, of the value, process, and economic outcome of educational attainment. Cultural attitudes and values on schooling influence rural students’ educational aspirations and attainment more than either aptitude or finances (Jencks, 1972). Cultural capital has also

been found to have the most effect on the quality of educational institution chosen by a student (McDonough, 1997).

At the core of cultural capital are its institutionalized effects. Schools play a prominent role in shaping students' cultural capital and educational aspirations (Schwalbe et al., 2000; Tramonte & Willms, 2009). Cultural capital is further subdivided into forms, including embodied cultural capital, which is the nature of the mind and body, and institutionalized cultural capital, which speaks to academic qualifications. Empirical studies often focus on the embodied form and leave the institutionalized form unexplored (Dumais & Ward, 2009).

Bourdieu (1977) further explains cultural capital with the concept of habitus. Habitus is a deeply internalized, permanent system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs that individuals obtain from their families, peers, institutions, and social class in their surrounding environment. Habitus operates through people's "perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (MacLeod, 2009, p. 15). People who share rural identity traits—rural, first generation, low SES—often share a common habitus that traditionally places a higher value on employment than on education and a stronger expectation for one to make money and start a family after high school rather than pursue degrees (Corbett, 2007; Flora et al., 1992; McDonough et al., 2010; Willis, 1977). Education is not viewed as something for "[underrepresented] people like us" (Corbett, 2007, p. 3; Flora et al., 1992). A person in Willis's (1977) study *Learning to Labor* noted, "an ounce of keenness is worth a whole library of certificates" (p. 56).

Habitus can be viewed from the individual perspective or from the organizational perspective. McDonough (1997) defines organizational habitus as the impact of a cultural group or SES on an individual's behavior through an organization, such as a high school, or a community. Organizational or community habitus shows the relationship between high schools' organizational culture and the community's SES, which mutually shape one another (Corbett, 2007; McDonough, 1997). Due to their habitus, non-first-generation students see college as a place where they belong, while first-generation students do not have a natural inclination for college or its admission process and will often choose to forgo a college education (Dumais & Ward, 2009). McDonough et al. (2010) stated, "college is outside the habitus of many rural students" (p. 203). Habitus often serves as a "regulator between individuals and their external world" (Corbett, 2007; MacLeod, 2009, p. 15). In the case of rural students, their habitus often discourages their participation in postsecondary education.

Significance of Cultural Capital and Habitus in Access to Higher Education

Education and SES are two of the variables used to explain cultural divides and are closely connected to cultural capital (Kim & Kim, 2008). Social mobility and economic opportunity are often connected to education. Bourdieu's argument for cultural capital ties into educational access for rural students in three ways: 1) their parents may or may not possess cultural capital, 2) their parents may or may not devote time to conveying this capital to the students, and 3) the students may or may not engage the capital to use it toward educational success (Jaeger, 2009). Middle- and upper-SES parents transmit cultural capital by informing their children about the college admissions process (McDonough, 1997), while

low-SES parents often they lack the skills, habits, and knowledge needed to effectively assist in their children's educational aspirations (Tramonte & Willms, 2009). Thus, inequities in college knowledge may result from families' inexperience or unfamiliarity with college processes. Rural students do not naturally inherit the cultural capital that is necessary to seek out or expect certain educational opportunities (McDonough, 1997). Dumais and Ward (2009) assessed cultural capital and first-generation college students in their study. They found that family cultural capital, cultural classes, and parental involvement in the college admissions process were all significant to underrepresented students' enrollment and persistence.

Communities and institutions also contribute to rural students' cultural capital. McDonough et al. (2010) describe how "the use of school-level cultural capital, the high school's college cultures, and the [community] habitus sheds light on how high schools affect individuals' higher education investment practices and strategies" (p. 196). Often, rural students possess a "community-fostered way of knowing and understanding that is at odds with the literacies imperative for university success" (Whiting, 2009, p. 158). Further exacerbating the issue, the kind of cultural capital that students bring with them to educational institutions "will limit what [cultural capital] is acquired there" (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 431). What rural students know is different from what is needed for a good fit in the higher education culture; thus, students feel unprepared for and foreign in the collegiate environment (O'Quinn, 1999; Whiting, 2009). Even when rural students are educationally knowledgeable and academically successful, they often find themselves on the periphery,

never being fully accepted because their cultural capital is acquired rather than naturally derived from their home environments (Corbett, 2007; Schafft & Jackson, 2010).

School structures tend to stimulate underrepresented students' belief that they are less likely to succeed academically (MacLeod, 2009). The educational system reproduces the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among classes since these systems generally represent the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1977; Flora et al., 1992; MacLeod, 2009). The "adult [stratified] world" is also imitated in the informal parts of schooling such as students' social cliques and extracurricular activities (Flora et al., 1992; Schwalbe et al., 2000). Schools are known to give advantages, whether intended or unintended, to students' whose cultural capital represents the dominant areas of society; this cultural capital is then turned into additional economic capital, which reproduces social inequality and legitimizes the societal majority domination process (MacLeod, 2009; McDonough et al., 2010). Willis (1977) also found that educational institutions often produce a "circle of unintended consequences which act finally to reproduce not only a regional culture but the class culture and also the structure of society itself" (p. 60).

High schools, colleges, and universities sometimes fall short of their objective to build a bridge between the privileged and the underrepresented. Rather, structural analyses of educational systems reveal that they may actually sort people by underrepresented identities for certain curriculums and occupations to retain wealth, power, and influence with those who already have it and, thus, perpetuate inequalities (Aronson, 2008; Barratt, 2011; Lincoln, 1991; MacLeod, 2009; McDonough et al., 2010). The issue is that "by the definition and

standards of the school [systems],” rural students are often evaluated through means that view their form of knowledge and capital as deficient (Flora et al., 1992; MacLeod, 2009, p. 101). This aligns with the concept of “othering,” which is “collective identity work” that identifies a dominant group and an inferior group “aimed at creating and/or reproducing inequality” and defining “difference as deficient” (Schwalbe et al, 2000, p. 422–423). There is a push and pull in all levels of education, including higher education, between those who support the status quo, or “othering,” and those who strive for social justice (Kempner, 1991). Cultural capital is precisely the knowledge that contributes to privilege and power, yet schools do not teach it.

Academic Discourse and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1965) named language and communication as the most active and elusive parts of a person’s cultural heritage and background. It is not surprising that it is difficult to break the cyclical pattern of cultural capital because educational institutions contain linguistic and cultural competencies that convey the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1977). Students are often rewarded for the cultural capital they bring to an educational environment, which creates barriers for students who lack cultural capital (Dumais & Ward, 2009; Schwalbe et al., 2000). These active and elusive parts of cultural capital often show up in the form of various discourses.

Discourse is a socially accepted way people use language, thought, and behavior to align with a specific identity group, or groups, and express their power (Schwalbe et al., 2000). Gee (1998) considers discourses to be inherently ideological and, subsequently,

exclusionary toward marginalized groups. He believes that control over certain discourses can lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) in a society. There are primary discourses that people acquire through families and secondary discourses that people both acquire and learn by having access to and practice with secondary institutions, such as schools (Gee, 1998). Secondary discourses may be more or less compatible with the primary discourses of different social groups. Rural students often possess low-prestige discourses and their peers may try to prove power and status over them by using exclusionary language or jargon (Barratt, 2011; Gee, 1998).

Discourses can be powerful tools for inequality reproduction when they are considered standard practices; they can normalize thought and emotion, create a system of “othering,” and perform boundary maintenance (Schwalbe et al., 2000). Those who want to belong to the dominant group, in this case “educated individuals,” may feel forced to adopt the discourse, in this case academic language and university jargon.

Bourdieu (1965) called academic language “a dead language and no one’s mother tongue, not even that of the children of the cultivated classes” (p. 8). The difference between the language of the family and community and the language of the school creates a barrier and sense of exclusion among students, especially rural students, and an assumption that the education system is an elite environment. Bourdieu (1965) noted that these linguistics and cultural misunderstandings would affect higher education.

Impact of Cultural Capital and Cultural Transition on Rural Students

There is often a significant cultural transition for all students who enter the collegiate experience; the transition can sometimes be more difficult for rural students due to their unfamiliarity with the culture and language they encounter in a college or university setting. Changes in culture, such as the transition to college, often require changes in language use (O'Quinn, 1999; White, 2005; Whiting, 2009; Zwerling & London, 1992). The participants in White's (2005) qualitative study provided anecdotal accounts of feeling like outsiders at their institutions due to their lack of college knowledge. One student noted that he didn't talk like his peers and worried that they would judge him based on his language; another student attributed her academic difficulties to differences in language use and a lack of understanding of the university system (White, 2005, pp. 374–375). Cushman (2007) observed that differences in income, social styles, and language use may cause many underrepresented students to feel like outsiders, and Dumais & Ward (2009) noted that underrepresented students find themselves learning a new culture and kind of vocabulary.

Students, particularly rural students, are often challenged to remain true to themselves in an environment where they may be outside of the norm. Underrepresented students struggle with the cultural conflicts between their new college-oriented world and the world of their friends, families, and rural communities; they must negotiate between the different sociocultural worlds in which they participate (McDonough, 1997; Whiting, 2009; Zwerling & London, 1992). Kempner (1991) defined cultural conflicts as a situation in which one's own beliefs, values, and symbols clash with what is significant for another group. Keeping a

balance between their multiple identities and the multiple environments in which they spend time means changing, but it also means remembering their roots. Some students continually move in and out of different cultures (Cushman, 2007). Students in White's (2005) study discussed their tendency to shift their language based on to whom and in what cultural context they were speaking, particularly in their home community versus the university community. Similarly, in Simmons and Bryan's (2009) study of family involvement and impact on first-generation Appalachian college students, participants expressed feelings of being two separate people—one at home and one at school. This cultural tension is rooted in the cultural attributes and language that these individuals bring with them to the college environment and how their cultural beliefs and values fit with those of the university. Although the concept of linguistic style shifting may apply here, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the complexities of style shifting. College access may be "open for all," but full participation may be granted only to those who identify with the dominant culture. People must first understand an educational or institutional culture before they can recommend any type of transformation or change (Kempner, 1991).

University Jargon and College Access

Jargon, College Knowledge, and Cultural Capital

Higher education institutions have their own culture and social context and rural students are challenged to find meaning and values in this unfamiliar setting (Whiting, 2009). Specifically, colleges and universities have established their own jargon as part of their academic discourse. This jargon is often an aspect of the college knowledge that many rural

students have trouble deciphering due to their lack of cultural capital and their inherent habitus (Whiting, 2009). Vargas (2004) suggests that even though the college knowledge gap is severe it is not impossible to overcome and he proposes policies for college access that focus on ways to provide underserved students with the information and guidance they need, both early and often.

Existing studies of educational attainment emphasize individual attributes as the key determinants of inequalities and do not address the role of educational institutions; studies often leave institutionalized cultural capital unexplored (Dumais & Ward, 2009; McDonough, 1997). Scholars recommend that college advising focus on resources for students and families with the least knowledge of the system, who need extra support in choosing colleges, applying, and getting financial aid (Cushman, 2007). The relationship between language, discourse, and literacy to collegiate success should be further explored because differences in language can lead students to feel inadequate and alienated from the collegiate environment (White, 2005).

Chapter Summary

The literature speaks to the importance of increasing rural students' cultural capital and reframing their habitus to enable them to better comprehend college knowledge and university jargon—two knowledge bases that could assist in increasing rural students' access to college. However, we cannot increase students' ability to decode university jargon unless we first understand which processes and resources they currently use to decode university jargon and which processes and resources could be expanded or created to further foster

knowledge acquisition and comprehension. The study's theoretical framework and its potential connection to the broader issue of college access for rural students is represented graphically in Figure 5.

Figure 5 shows how the interaction of the theoretical framework and the study's purpose—cultural capital and habitus, academic discourse and university jargon, and college knowledge—is a dynamic process where concepts feed into and off of one another. Ideally, building on students' existing cultural capital and habitus will assist students in obtaining more college knowledge and skills to decode university jargon and, thus, increase their access to and success within college.

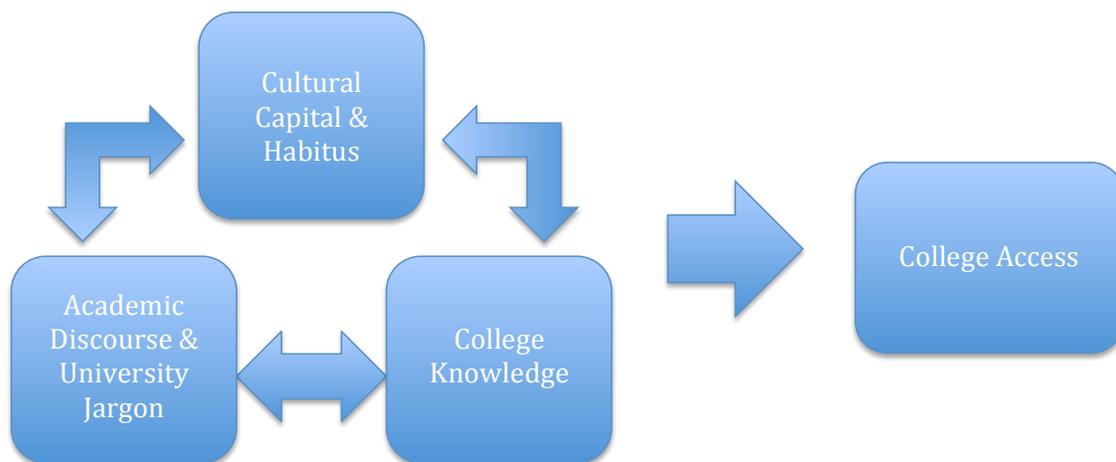


Figure 5. Theoretical framework summary

A descriptive, collective qualitative case study of six to eight high school sophomores and two high school counselors in south Louisiana will further explore this topic. The next section describes the methodological plan in depth.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. This study used qualitative case study methods to explore how eight rural students and two counselors, for a total of ten participants, in two public high schools in south Louisiana decode university jargon. Decoding referred to students' or counselors' ability to understand, employ, and make meaning of university jargon and academic discourse as an aspect of their college knowledge. The study involved interviewing eight high school sophomores, interviewing two high school guidance counselors, observing counseling sessions and college fairs, and analyzing documents related to college knowledge and university jargon provided by the high school, available college enrollment data for students from the area, and local college and university admissions materials. These data sources provided insight into the study's research question about how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. Findings from the study should allow both the K-12 and higher education systems to better understand what processes and resources rural students and counselors use to decode university jargon, why they rely on these processes and resources, and how these students and counselors may be better served in their acquisition and comprehension of college knowledge.

Researcher Paradigm, Role, and Subjectivity

My personal view of research aligned with the constructivist worldview. I believe that multiple realities can exist and that each individual's experience is unique and valuable (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). When considering college access, each student has a distinct experience that can only be understood by examining the experience through that student's point of view. The constructivist paradigm allowed both the researcher and the participants to be authentic and social justice can be incorporated. Furthermore, this paradigm created a partnership between the researcher and the participants, encouraging interaction, reflection, and rapport (Mertens, 2010).

As a qualitative researcher, I assumed the role of research instrument, constructing the questions and probes for interviews, creating the observation protocol, and obtaining and analyzing all necessary documents (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Principally, I served as an observer-participant. I made the purpose of my presence known to participants and interacted when necessary but did not attempt to disrupt or fundamentally alter any situations (Gold, 1958, as cited in Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). This stance, along with my familiarity with the area, allowed for me to obtain insider information while maintaining some outside perspective (Yin, 2009).

As the primary research instrument it was important for me to recognize the subjectivity I brought to this study (LeCompte, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Being a rural student myself and having attended high school in the same area as the one used for the sample, I brought important insights into the study, such as knowledge of the community,

school district, local dialect, and customs. However, I also brought some biases into the research study due to my connections. I may have had biased expectations of what I found during data collection. I shared many of the same sentiments expressed by the participants and had to be careful about not leading the participants during interviews. I experienced a bit of conflict about shedding light on the negative, or disadvantaged, aspects of the school district as I could receive unpleasant reactions to critiques of the community or its school system from people in the area who likely know my family or me. I recognized these potential biases and conflicts and continued to examine them throughout the study by using a self-reflective journal. I also recognized that biases can operate beyond one's conscious awareness and sought feedback from my dissertation chair to provide a more objective perspective on my potential biases and conflicts.

My connection to the area created a situation where I was possibly considered a “friend” or “mentor” to the participants (Mertens, 2010). Rural students potentially saw me as someone they could befriend because I am from the area and may appear younger than I am. They also may have seen my educational experiences as something they would like to emulate and could seek information from me about how to pursue such education in the future. Power differences might have also come into play (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Mertens, 2010); the high school students may have perceived me as having power over them because I am pursuing an advanced degree at an out-of-state university, which is a rare occurrence for people from the area being studied. Additionally, participants might have had

anxiety about me judging them based on their experiences or opinions. I kept these possible role concerns in mind as I collected data for this study.

Research Design

Qualitative methods were chosen for this study because the purpose was to understand how and why rural students use various processes and resources to obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. The study sought to examine how rural students and counselors in two high schools within a specific school district in south Louisiana construct college knowledge and deconstruct university jargon. This aligned well with qualitative research's purpose of understanding how people construct, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences in context (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). The goals of qualitative research were to focus on a certain group, such as rural students and counselors, and to discover "how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world," to "delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making" and to "describe how people interpret what they experience" (Merriam, 2009, p.13–14).

Additionally, qualitative research intends to give voice to underrepresented students and this study did that by giving voice to rural students, who are particularly underrepresented in higher education (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative studies about this topic were especially lacking and "to explain inequality requires attention to the processes that produce and perpetuate it" (Schwalbe, Goodwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson,

& Wolkomir, 2000, p. 420). This design incorporated fieldwork, observations, subjectivity, analysis and synthesis, and researcher consciousness (Stake, 1995).

Case Study

This study used descriptive, collective case study methodology. A case study is an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system [or multiple bounded systems]” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Descriptive case studies seek an “end product of ... rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Case studies allow for more selective sampling strategies, employ multiple methods of data collection, and provide a richer understanding of the topic (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). They focus on both the particulars and the complexity, the uniqueness and commonality, of cases within certain circumstances (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). Case studies use stories to explain and understand a concept and represent unique perspectives through these stories (Stake, 1995). This method also encouraged paying attention to what information students and counselors do or do not have, how students and counselors receive the information, and why the information may or may not impact their college knowledge (Bell et al., 2009).

Case studies are not meant to generalize; rather they are conducted to know a particular case well, with the main focus of understanding that specific case (Stake, 1995). Applied fields, such as education, often utilize case study for research (Merriam, 2009).

Advantages to case studies include the ability to:

- “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2009, p. 4),

- answer “how or why questions” (Yin, 2009, p. 9), and
- use “a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (Yin, 2009, p. 11)

Specifically, this study was a collective case study. Collective case study is another term for multiple-case study. The advantage to collective case studies is that they are “often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust” (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009, p. 53). In collective case studies, each individual case study is deemed its own study; the individual cases are analyzed first, then the cases are synthesized collectively in a cross-case format (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

This study focused on ten holistic, individual cases, or individual rural students and their high school counselors, which were bound within a specific high school district in a rural area of south Louisiana. Students and counselors were each their own individual unit of analysis, showcasing their unique perspective about how they comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon using their cultural capital and habitus. The cases were then synthesized together to see if any commonalities existed about how students and counselors from this specific rural area built cultural capital and reframed habitus to further understand college knowledge and interpret university jargon. Yin (2009) points out that “analytic conclusions independently arising from two [or more] cases . . . will be more powerful than those coming from a single case alone” (p. 61).

Case studies develop knowledge differently in four important ways: “1) more concrete, 2) more contextual, 3) more developed by reader interpretation, and 4) based more

on reference populations determined by the reader” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 44–45). This case study aligned with Merriam’s points as follows:

1. concrete knowledge—participants in the study and readers who share their identities will better resonate with participants’ stories because they will be explained in a more lively, realistic, and relatable manner;
2. contextual knowledge—participants’ stories will be rooted in context, which allows for more practical knowledge and application;
3. interpretive knowledge—readers will see their own experiences in their participants’ stories. They will add their own data to the research study’s data; and
4. reference population knowledge—readers will likely take the case study data and apply it to a reference population in their own life or context.

In this sense, case studies allow for multiple realities to exist, even when those realities of the same concept are contradictory (Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995).

The ebb and flow of case studies aligned well with my constructivist viewpoint. I believe that we, as researchers, cannot anticipate everything we will encounter during fieldwork or how our participants will react to our questions. Therefore, the ability to progressively focus on emerging issues in case studies appealed to me and suited the topic of this study (Stake, 1995). Because the processes and resources I presuppose rural students and counselors use to decode university jargon may not be the ones they actually employ, it was key that the method I used was open to exploring other processes and resources that emerged through data collection.

Research Questions

Again, the purpose of this study was to explore how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. This study focused on a central question with two parts. The question guiding this study was: How do rural students

obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon? Decoding referred to students' or counselors' ability to understand, employ, and make meaning of university jargon and academic discourse as an aspect of their college knowledge.

Yin (2009) states that case study has a distinct advantage when research questions are asking about how or why something occurs. The above questions are both how questions; this makes them well suited for case study research.

Site Selection, Sampling Procedure, and Participants

The population of this study was students who possess three specific identity groups—rural, first-generation, and low-SES statuses—and the high school counselors who work with these students. Literature showed that students in one or more of these identity groups have decreased chances of attending postsecondary education and often lack the college knowledge needed to obtain college access (Aronson, 2008; Brown & Swanson, 2003; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; HERI, 2007; Horn, 1998; Horn & Bobbitt, 2000; McDonough, 1997; McDonough et al., 2010; Vargas, 2004). This study focused on the combination of all three identities to present a holistic picture of these students' experiences and learn about how they decode university jargon and comprehend college knowledge.

The sites and sample for this study were chosen based on criterion and purposive sampling strategies (Creswell, 2007; Krathwohl, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Patton, 2002). Site selection criteria for the sample included the high school's location in a rural area, the U.S. Census data on the town in which the high school is located (see Appendix C), accessibility of the school, and the school district and high schools' willingness

to participate in the study (Krathwohl, 2009; Mertens, 2010). These criteria were important because “time and access for fieldwork are almost always limited . . . we need to pick cases which are easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry” (Stake, 1995, p. 4). The two high schools chosen for this study are located in a rural area where only 66% of the population has a high school diploma and 11% have a bachelor’s degree in contrast to national averages of 81% and 21%, respectively (U.S. Census, 2010). The median household income is \$30,897 compared to a national average of \$42,460, with 27% of families and 22% of individuals falling below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 2010). Selecting two high schools in one area helped to contest alternate explanations that could occur across districts. I was connected to key informants in the area and had informally visited the sites (Mertens, 2010). Initial permission to conduct research had been obtained in writing from the school district superintendent (Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995); Appendix E is a copy of the permission letter. The two high schools’ principals and counselors, the participants, and the guardians of the participants were contacted once Institutional Research Board approval had been obtained.

Participants in this study were students and counselors in two high schools in a rural parish school district in the southern part of Louisiana. Criteria for student participation included students living in the rural area, status as a potential first-generation student, status as a low-SES student (based on free/reduced lunch participation), designation as a high school sophomore, and intent to pursue some type of postsecondary education. All students in the parish were considered rural students based on USDA ERS and U.S. Census definitions of rurality; thus, that criterion was automatically met. I worked with the high

school counselors to recruit eight student participants who met the other criteria through the use of a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F), knowing that there would be some attrition. The final eight student participants were chosen by who returned both student participant and guardian consent forms first (Yin, 2009). Student and guardian consent forms can be found in Appendices G, H, and I. Using the counselors ensured that I did not have access to any of the students' sensitive academic or financial information. Criteria for the counselor participants was not necessary because there is only one high school counselor at each site; the sole high school counselor at each site participated in the study. The counselor consent form can be found in Appendix J.

I attempted to include eight student participants who are representative of the school and parish demographics, while recognizing that representativeness might be unable to be obtained based on participants' and guardians' of those participants willingness to contribute to the study. Student participants were in their sophomore (tenth grade) year of high school because postsecondary options are typically highly considered at this time (Choy, 2001). The remaining two study participants were comprised of the counselors from each of the two high schools. A summary of the sites and participants is found in Figure 6. The bottom row of the table highlights all of the participants—individual cases for units of analysis—in this study.

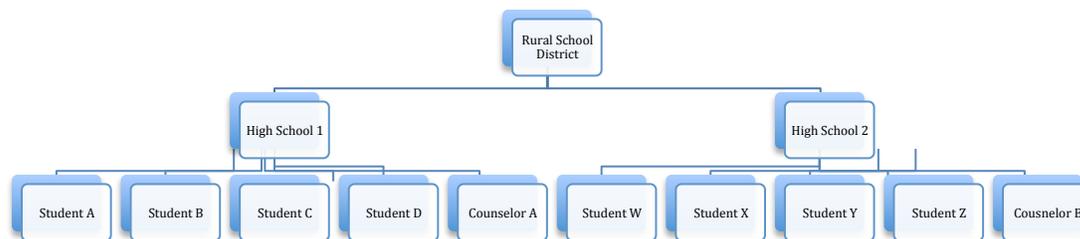


Figure 6. Study sites and participants.

Sources of Data

Since multiple methods of data collection are encouraged and considered a strength of case study methodology, the study used interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Krathwohl, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Asking, watching, and reviewing are considered central to qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews

Interviews are considered the most fundamental data source in case studies (Krathwohl, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009). Two semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted with the ten participants; prepared questions and probes guided the interviews (see Appendix K, L, M, & O) but allowed flexibility for the participant to contribute to guiding the conversation. Interviews were, ideally, “conversations focused on questions related to the research study” (DeMarrais, 2004, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 87). Interview questions were sometimes altered based on the usefulness to the study and the

participants' understanding of questions. This aligned with the concept of progressive focusing that encourages altering the design if questions are not working or if new issues arise (Stake, 1995).

I met with the ten participants prior to interviews to discuss the purpose of the study, participation requirements, and the concept of confidentiality. Participants chose their own pseudonyms to assist with confidentiality and I turned over control of interviews to participants, allowing them to not answer specific questions or end the interview at any time (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009). The location of interviews was chosen by the student participants, based on their comfort level and availability of space at the high school. In addition, I interviewed the guidance counselor in each high school twice; the counselors also chose a pseudonym and interview location. Initial and secondary interviews were both up to one hour in length. Interviews were audiotaped to help with transcription; I also took field notes during the interviews (Merriam, 2009). Tapes were labeled by pseudonyms and date only and kept separate from the pseudonym list. The protocol for the initial and secondary interviews can be found in Appendices K, L, M, and O; secondary interview questions were framed by information missing or needing elaboration from the initial interviews but still focused on topics surrounding cultural capital, habitus, university jargon, college knowledge, and college aspiration.

Field Observations

Observations were conducted of any guidance counseling meetings on college knowledge or aspiration. I asked for a schedule of any one-on-one meetings counselors had

with participants and any meetings or assemblies held for all students that refer to postsecondary planning within a three-month time frame (October—December 2012). This time frame was chosen because it covered most of the fall semester, which is when students typically explore postsecondary options, and counselors have a bit more time for postsecondary conversations because standardized testing occurs during the spring. Overall, five independent observations of guidance counseling meetings about college were conducted, two of which occurred at HS1 and three of which occurred at HS2. These meetings were not set meetings; rather, they were informal and unplanned interactions between counselors and students about topics such as ACT registration, TOPS (the state tuition assistance program), majors, campus visits, and students' general educational paths. Observing these spontaneous meetings led to some insights into how and what kind of college counseling occurred at each high school. I learned what kind of college knowledge and university jargon students were exposed to through guidance counseling, what questions students asked about college knowledge or university jargon, and how counselors typically interacted with students around college counseling, which was through student-initiated, impromptu interactions.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was performed to the extent that I obtained or was sent the appropriate and pertinent documents. Documents were used to substantiate other data sources (Yin, 2009). I requested any documents the high schools provided to students regarding college and analyzed what college knowledge and university jargon the high schools

described for students (Mertens, 2010). HS1 provided me with the three pages of information they provide to students during their set eighth and twelfth grade “college meetings.” I did not receive any documents from HS2. I also requested hard copy recruitment and admissions information for all the four-year colleges and universities in the state, along with the community colleges in proximity to the sites to analyze the amount of university jargon incorporated into recruitment and admissions materials. Seven of the institutions actually sent the materials requested through the mail. The seven colleges and universities that did send materials were not consistent in institutional type; they were located throughout the state, were both public and private, represented both two-year and four-year colleges, and varied in size. The institutional responses varied in return time as well. Two schools sent electronic replies within one week of the request; the five other institutions opted for regular mail that took between one and two weeks. The majority of the institutions sent only one communication (either electronic or mail); however, two institutions continue to send information periodically. The institutions that supplied information sent it in a variety of formats. There were full-size glossy brochures, small postcards, odd-sized packets, applications, and even simple emails. The rationale for focusing on local institutions was rooted in literature such as McDonough et al. (2010), which points out rural students’ community college mentality and tendency to stay within a certain radius of their hometowns and counselors’ lack of knowledge about schools outside of the area. I used the documents provided by HS1 and the respondent higher education institutions in conjunction with the

interviews and observations to determine what processes rural students use to decode university jargon.

Field Notes and Self-Reflective Journal

Finally, field notes and a self-reflective journal were used to record my own thoughts, feelings, experiences, and insights as the study occurred. Field notes were taken throughout the collection of all three sources of data, including interview notes in conjunction with the protocol, observation notes in conjunction with the protocol, and notes taken during documents analysis. I designated a specific space on the protocols for my own questions and insights, in addition to the notes being taken on the participants' perspectives. A self-reflective journal was also used to detail my thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and discoveries throughout the study (Merriam, 2009). The journal had already been started and was kept in a blog format to make it easily accessible for both my dissertation committee and myself; however, it was password protected and maintained confidentiality through the use of participant and site pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Data review and reflection was an ongoing, cyclical process with data collection (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Krathwohl, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). I had interview audio tapes transcribed by a transcriptionist service called Verbal Ink, which was recommended by a faculty member, as interviews took place. Transcriptions were verified through researcher field notes and listening to audio tapes again; they were labeled by pseudonym and date only. Information from demographic questionnaires, observations,

and document analysis also contributed to data. Observation and document analysis data were also compiled from both field notes and expanded notes as they occurred to create consolidated pieces from which data were analyzed.

Coding, theming, and comparisons were the three core steps to qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2007). I used memoing and journaling to record my thoughts about the data and, in conjunction with the actual data, I began to first form codes and then themes. Coding is the process of creating labels for parts of text to capture meaning and facilitate understanding (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Open and axial coding were employed to generate codes, themes, and ultimately findings. Open coding is the process of making notes directly on the data and allowing things to emerge as interpretation occurs (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Axial coding is the next step in the process that calls for grouping open codes into patterns, which will eventually become categories or themes (LeCompte, 2000; Merriam, 2009). Coding was used to both classify entire passages and to extract passages used as illustrative quotes (Stake, 1995). A codebook was created to define common codes and helped to organize data and themes (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010). Initial codes and themes were continuously reviewed and allowed to dissolve or solidify based on new data. New codes were also incorporated where necessary. Codes and themes were reviewed with three additional, outside qualitative researchers to ensure accuracy.

Individual case analysis and cross-case synthesis were used to analyze the data (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Each case, or individual participant, was analyzed to determine

how students and counselors construct college knowledge and decode university jargon, what processes they employ, and why they choose these methods. Then, analysis was synthesized across cases to interpret similarities and differences and determine patterns of how rural students and counselors, as a whole, deal with college knowledge and university jargon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Cross-case techniques are “especially relevant if a case study consists of at least two cases” (Yin, 2009, p. 156). Thus, this study’s ten individual cases aligned well with cross-case synthesis.

Thick description of the participants’ perceptions was used to illustrate the study’s themes or findings; portrayals of the context, sites, participants, and data were also used (Creswell, 2007; Krathwohl, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). Quotations are a common way of exercising thick description.

Trustworthiness

Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, and Transferability

It is critical to maximize accurate representation of participants’ perspectives in the study (Stake, 1995); this makes the study trustworthy. Appropriate methods of trustworthiness such as using pseudonyms, triangulating data, and researcher reflexivity, were employed to address credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Time in the field was significant because I relocated to the site of the study to immerse myself in data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010). Data collection and analysis occurred during a three-month period. Journaling was employed to document my own developing constructions throughout the study. Triangulation addressed

both credibility and dependability through the use of multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Krathwohl, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Interviews, observations, and document analysis allowed for comparison of data through different collection methods and at different time periods. I also employed the skills of other qualitative researchers to ensure that coding and themes were well aligned with data (Creswell, 2007; Krathwohl, 2009). These researchers consisted of three of my peers in doctoral programs at NC State. Reflexivity was used through a researcher journal; this also created an audit trail (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). In this journal, I was able to document any “biases, dispositions, or assumptions” that I had about the study and any changes that occurred in research design or implementation (Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

Although transferability may have not seemed promising at first because this study only focused on eight students and two counselors in two high schools within one specific rural area, other rural high schools and areas can benefit from the findings because knowledge from a particular case, or cases, can be applied to similar, rural situations (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). The study provided adequate rich, thick descriptive analysis to assist readers in transferring the findings to their own unique context (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Transferability is about “fittingness,” or the process of applying the cases in one study to understand other similar, congruent cases (Lincoln & Guba, 2000a, as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 262).

Ethical Considerations

I was aware that there might have been ethical concerns when working with minors, particularly those who are considered underrepresented populations in postsecondary education. Thus, I met with the NC State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the dissertation proposal and discussed possible ethical considerations and how to effectively plan the study to ensure that risk was managed appropriately (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009). The IRB draft can be found in Appendix M.

IRB personnel did not identify any initial or subsequent concerns with this study. I used the high school counselors to recruit participants to ensure that I was not privy to any of the students' sensitive academic or financial information and I obtained consent from both participants and their guardians before collecting any type of interview or observation data. Another consideration was privacy (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Participants may be able to be identified in the study, even with the use of pseudonyms, due to the low participant numbers and the small, rural nature of the sites (Merriam, 2009). I made this consideration clear on the student, guardian, and counselor consent forms and made sure it was part of the introductory conversation I had with participants, which were both suggestions from the IRB (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009). Finally, "going native, or accommodating to the viewpoint and valuation of the people at the site" was something of which I was aware (Stake, 1995). Because I grew up in a similar area to the sites and participants it may have been natural to accommodate to the viewpoint of the

participants. The use of a researcher journal and communication with colleagues and my dissertation chair served as means of combating this issue.

Limitations of the Study

All research studies have limitations and this study was no exception. The theoretical framework for this study concentrated on cultural capital. I recognize that there are other forms of capital, such as financial, social, intellectual, etc.; however, prior higher education research shows that cultural capital is the type of capital that tends to relate to college knowledge most often and rural sociology research acknowledges that rural schools and areas often lack this type of capital (Corbett, 2007; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Flora et al., 1992; McDonough et al., 2010; Vargas, 2004; Willis, 1977). For example, Jencks (1972) describes how cultural attitudes and values for schooling influence rural students' educational aspirations and attainment more than either aptitude or finances.

Because this case study focused on eight students and two counselors within two high schools in one rural parish in south Louisiana, it may not be widely transferable to other rural areas or students. Additionally, this case study focused on college access through the narrow lens of college knowledge and, even more specifically, university jargon. Therefore, though the study will contribute to the understanding of rural students' processes of decoding university jargon and constructing college knowledge, it was not designed to answer the larger question of how to increase overall access to postsecondary education for rural students.

In terms of methodology and data collection, I acknowledge that I did not observe all the various meetings that were conducted with counselors and that the study does not include any observations of conversations students may have had with family or friends about university jargon or college knowledge. This was partly due to my specific research interests and also a result of my status as a doctoral student who has both fixed financial means and academic timelines that limit the time and resources that I had to conduct the study.

Chapter Summary

This descriptive, collective qualitative case study sought to understand the processes that rural students and counselors use to obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. My constructivist paradigm suited using case study to understand multiple college knowledge strategies and experiences. Two high schools in one rural south Louisiana school district were used as research sites from which I explored the perspective of ten participants, or cases, eight of which were rural high school sophomore students and two of which were rural high school counselors. Initial access to the sites was granted early (see Appendix E). Participants were identified through purposeful, criterion sampling with the assistance of the high school counselors. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, providing appropriate triangulation for the case study. Interviews gathered information on participants' personal and the community's habitus, perceptions of college access, exposure to university jargon and academic discourse, and feelings about university jargon. Observations of guidance counseling meetings on college access were conducted. Documents provided to students by the high schools in reference to

college knowledge and jargon, any available information or statistics from the school district on its students' college attendance rates, and college admissions literature and Web sites were also analyzed. Individual case analysis and cross-case synthesis were used to analyze the data; open and axial coding were employed to generate codes, themes, and, ultimately, findings. Appropriate methods of trustworthiness such as using pseudonyms, triangulating data, and researcher reflexivity were employed to address credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Implications about how to assist rural students and counselors in obtaining cultural capital, navigating college knowledge, and decoding university jargon will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4: SITE AND PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This study focused on two high school sites in one specific school district in rural, south Louisiana. The two high schools chosen for this study are located in a rural area where only 66% of the population has a high school diploma and 11% have a bachelor's degree in contrast to national averages of 81% and 21%, respectively (U.S. Census, 2010). The median household income is \$30,897 compared to a national average of \$42,460, with 27% of families and 22% of individuals falling below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 2010). Selecting two high schools in one area helps to contest alternate explanations that could occur across districts.

Within each high school, four students and one counselor were chosen as participants; this resulted in a total of 10 participants, eight being students and two being counselors. Criteria for student participation included students living in the rural area, status as a potential first-generation student, status as a low-SES student (based on free/reduced lunch participation), designation as a high school sophomore, and intent to pursue some type of postsecondary education. All students in the parish were considered rural students based on the USDA ERS and U.S. Census definitions of rurality; thus, that criterion was automatically met. The high school counselors helped to recruit five to ten student participants in their school who met the other criteria through the use of a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F). The final total of eight student participants were chosen by who returned both student participant and guardian consent forms first (Yin, 2009). Student and guardian consent forms can be found in Appendices G, H, and I. Using the counselors ensured that I

did not have access to any of the students' sensitive academic or financial information. Criteria for the counselor participants was not necessary because there was only one high school counselor at each site; the sole high school counselor at each site participated in the study. The counselor consent form can be found in Appendix J.

A summary of the sites and participants is found in Figure 6. The bottom row of the table highlights all of the participants—individual cases for units of analysis—in this study.

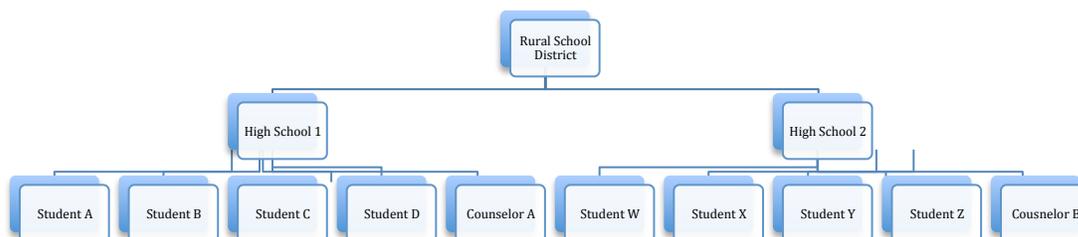


Figure 6. Study sites and participants.

To offer further insight into the study sites and participants, profiles of the school district, each high school, and each participant are provided in this chapter.

Rural School District

This study focused on one specific public school district in a rural part of south Louisiana. The rural school district (RSD) is situated within a small, rural parish that has been losing population over the past ten years (U.S. Census Data, 2010). The population is

approximately 70% White and the largest underrepresented group is Black/African American (U.S. Census Data, 2010). The Louisiana Department of Education ranks the RSD near the middle of its sixty-two school districts, making it an “average” public school district in the state (LA Department of Education, 2011).

The RSD consists of five public high schools. Four of the public high schools are typical high schools that offer students two academic paths—the college-bound path and the career path—through which they can earn their high school diploma (LA Department of Education, 2012). The fifth public high school is an alternative high school that is not counted by the state in the parish graduation rates because the school only grants students the general education development certificate (GED). Academically, the four traditional public high schools in the RSD do not offer any specialized programs or courses, such as international baccalaureate (IB) degrees and advanced placement (AP) courses (LA Department of Education, 2011). The 2011 school performance letter grades given to public schools in RSD range from B to D (LA Department of Education, 2011). The two public high schools used in this study fall in the middle of the RSD school performance letter grades.

The RSD four traditional public high schools vary in their total enrollment, ranging in number from 400 to 850 students in total enrollment (LA Department of Education, 2011). The two high schools used in this study fall in the middle of the enrollment range. Diversity of the RSD public high schools also varies widely. One of the four public high schools is 75% African American and has the lowest graduation rate at 59.6%, while one of the majority White public high schools has the highest graduation rate at 92.7% (Parish School

Board, 2010). The two public high schools chosen for this study are more representative of the RSD and its graduation rates at 67.2% and 74.5%, respectively (Parish School Board, 2010). The majority of the student population at each school in the RSD is considered “at-risk” based on students’ participation in the federal free/reduced lunch program, ranging from 66% at the lowest to 92% at the highest (LA Department of Education, 2011).

High School #1

High School #1 (HS1) is located in one of the larger towns in the RSD, which consists of 55% White residents and 43% Black/African American residents (U.S. Census Data, 2010). HS1 has been in operation since approximately 1924 and currently enrolls 380 high school students. Specifically, HS1 enrolled approximately 90 students in its Sophomore classification in 2012–2013 (T. Smith, personal communication, October 9, 2012). There are twenty-one teachers at the school and one counselor. HS1 typically graduates 70–80 students each year. The dropout rate hovers around 2–3 students each year (T. Smith, personal communication, October 9, 2012). The state of Louisiana ranks the school in the middle range on its school performance letter grade. Within the RSD, HS1 falls in the middle range for its enrollment numbers, graduation rates, and “at-risk” student percentage (LA Department of Education, 2011). The counselor at HS1 lists the following as the central issues for students at HS1: lack of resources (of all kinds), lack of transportation for opportunities like dual-enrollment with the local community college or any kind of postsecondary education, lack of support at home, and lack of exposure to outside opportunities and perspectives (T. Smith, personal communication, October 9, 2012).

HS1 Participants

HS1 has five total participants—one counselor and four students of Sophomore classification. The HS1 participant demographics are represented in Table 3.

Table 3.

HS1 Participant Demographics

HS1 Participant Demographics	White	African-American or Black	Biracial
Female Students	1	1	0
Male Students	1	1	0
Female Counselor	1	0	0

Counselor—Tobi Smith. Mrs. Smith is a native of the parish. She attended the parish’s only private high school before going to a public state university to pursue a degree in education. She waffled between elementary and secondary education as a major and ended up choosing elementary education. Mrs. Smith has spent her entire career employed in this RSD. She began her work as an elementary teacher. Through her teaching role she noticed that students seemed to need an advocate yet no one was available. She went back to graduate school to pursue her degree in counseling in hopes of becoming the first counselor

at the K-12 school where she was employed. Her plan worked and she served as the sole counselor at the K-12 school until 2004 when the high school portion of the K-12 school was closed due to consolidation. Mrs. Smith was relocated to HS1 where the high school students from her former K-12 school were also reassigned. Mrs. Smith is the mother of four children, all of who attended a public school in the RSD.

Student—Autumn. Autumn is a local girl, having grown up in the city where HS1 is located. She is the oldest of three siblings and tends to spend quite a bit of time with her family. Autumn is highly interested in design, particularly designing clothes. She enjoys math but does not like biology. She is known around HS1 for being loud and boisterous. Autumn likes to spend her free time on social activities with friends such as going to parties and watching movies.

Most of Autumn's family is employed in law enforcement or the lower ranks of the medical field (licensed practical nurses or technical jobs). Specifically, her dad is a detective for the local police force and her mom is a teacher's aide at a school; one of her grandmothers worked as a clerk at the City Hall and her other grandmother was a nurse. Autumn has two people in her life with college experience—her godmother who attended a state university in one of the state's largest cities and her grandmother who attended a state historically black college or university (HBCU).

Student—Bobby. Bobby is a middle child; he has one older brother and one younger sister. He transferred to HS1 after graduating from his K-8 experience at another local, public

elementary school. Bobby explained that HS1 has “more people” than his previous school. In his free time Bobby enjoys hunting and going out with his friends.

The majority of people in Bobby’s family find work in careers with oil or agriculture. However, his dad is a welder, his mom is a nurse, and his grandparents worked at a local bank. The only person in Bobby’s family who completed college was one of his grandfathers, who obtained some type of agriculture degree and became a local farmer. Bobby’s brother did begin to pursue a college career with the intent to become a registered nurse, but later dropped out and found work in the oil field. Bobby has interest in being a pilot of some kind, potentially a crop duster pilot.

Student—Craig. Craig is the oldest child in his family and the only boy; he has five younger sisters. Craig began his schooling at another public school in the parish. He attended kindergarten and first grade at the other school before transferring in the second grade to the elementary school that is tied to HS1. Craig noted that the only real difference between his two school experiences is that his first, prior school was a bit more difficult academically. He is not a fan of biology but he enjoys math, English, and his computer classes. Craig is an athlete for the high school; he spends much of his free time playing for both the football and basketball teams.

The majority of Craig’s family have careers that involve manual labor and local businesses. His dad and one grandfather work for the same local lumber store, his mom serves as a local beautician, his stepmother is a clerk in a local furniture store, and his other grandfather works in the oil field. No one in Craig’s immediate or extended family has ever

been to college; however, he does know the brother of a friend who is currently pursuing a degree at a public university in the northern part of the state. Craig enjoys playing football for HS1 and hopes that he can continue his athletic pursuits after high school. If football does not pan out, Craig wants to pursue a career in the field of technology.

Student—Emily Anne. Emily Anne lives with her mother, father, and three brothers. Emily Anne enjoys her role as a cheerleader at HS1 and spends time reading books about vampires and the apocalypse. She also enjoys spending time with her friends.

Her mom is a pharmacy technician who attended a local technical school; her father is a former military serviceman who now owns part of a large company that operates out of the state capital. Her grandmother cares for the local elderly. Emily has two people in her life who have collegiate experience—her godmother who attended a nearby public university and her mother’s godchild who attended a public university in the state’s largest city. Emily Anne is unsure of her future plans but hopes to attend college.

High School #2

High School #2 (HS2) is located in one of the mid-size villages in the RSD, which consists of 70% White residents and 30% Black/African American residents (U.S. Census Data, 2010). HS2 has been in operation since 1921 and currently enrolls 445 high school students. Specifically, HS2 enrolled approximately 94 students in its Sophomore classification in 2012–2013 (A. Soileau, personal communication, November 16, 2012). There are twenty-seven of teachers at the school and one counselor. HS2 typically graduates 90% of its students each year; subsequently, the dropout rate hovers around 10% (A. Soileau,

personal communication, November 16, 2012). The state of Louisiana ranks the school in the middle range on its school performance letter grade. Within the RSD, HS2 falls in the middle range for its enrollment numbers and graduation rates (LA Department of Education, 2011). The counselor at HS2 lists the following as the central issues for students at HS2: money, students' and parents' lack of college knowledge, both the local and national employment and economic cycle, and poor academic qualifications (A. Soileau, personal communication, December 14, 2012).

HS2 Participants

HS2 has five total participants – one counselor and four students of Sophomore classification. The HS2 participant demographics are represented in Table 4.

Table 4.

HS2 Participant Demographics

HS2 Participant Demographics	White	African-American or Black	Biracial
Female Students	0	1	1
Male Students	2	0	0
Female Counselor	1	0	0

Counselor—Allie Soileau. Mrs. Soileau is a native of the parish. She attended the one private high school in the RSD before becoming the first person in her family to go to college. She attended a local, public state university where she obtained her bachelor's degree in elementary education. After five years of teaching, Mrs. Soileau went back to her alma mater to pursue a master's degree in counseling. She then moved into the counselor position at the school where she was teaching, which was a K-12 school at the time. After consolidation in 2004, HS2 became an elementary and high school while the middle grades were moved to another school. Mrs. Soileau has spent the entirety of her career at the same school in the RSD. She said she chose the field of education because it was both "easy" and a "good fit" for her.

Student—Brittney. Brittany lives in an even more rural area than the one where she attends school. She has a five-year-old sister who has medical issues and is frequently in the hospital. Brittany has always been a student in the HS2 system. She enjoys most of her subjects but French is not her favorite. Brittany spends a lot of her time playing and watching sports and she is a member of the HS2 basketball and track teams.

Brittany's family gravitates toward work in the medical and trade fields. Her dad works as a sandblaster at a local business and her mom serves as a stay-at-home mother. Her grandfather owns his own air-conditioning and pressure-washing business. Brittany's dad and brother attended the same technical/trade school, which she calls "college," and she has an aunt and uncle who both attended universities. Her uncle is actually a professor in another state in a different part of the country. Brittany's interest in athletics carries over into her

future plans; Brittany plans to seek a career in orthopedic sports medicine. She has qualified for the parish's dual enrollment program and plans to obtain her certificate in pharmacy tech in the next two years so she can work while she attends college, hopefully at the state's flagship institution.

Student—Gibbs. Gibbs is a hometown guy who resides in the village where HS2 is located. His family consists of his mother, father, brother, and two sisters. Gibbs is number three in his line of siblings. At school, Gibbs enjoys math but has a strong distaste for social studies and science. For fun, he claims he likes to “act the fool” and spend a lot of time hunting and fishing; his favorite animal to hunt is ducks. Gibbs also has a job at the grocery store in his town where he works after school.

Gibb's family tends to gravitate toward clerical and business fields or the oil field. His mom and one grandmother work in the office at the local nursing home, his dad owns a lawn care business and drives a school bus, his other grandmother does clerical work for a local lawyer, and his uncles work offshore. His grandfathers are retired from the oil field and armed forces. Gibbs's sister recently enrolled at a local community college and she is the only person in his life to have done so. After high school, Gibbs hopes to attend college, regardless of where, but he is split between his interest in careers in education and physical therapy.

Student—Joslyn. Joslyn is a fifteen-year-old member of a large, blended family including one brother, five half-sisters, and one half-brother. She lives with seven of the members of her family. Her schooling has occurred throughout the parish and by the time she

graduates high school she will have attended four of the parish's schools. Joslyn does not find much difference between the various schools she has attended though. Her academic preferences include subjects in math and science; she does not favor the social sciences. She spends her free time in athletic pursuits including dance and gymnastics, basketball, track, and softball.

The majority of Joslyn's family members have careers in business, nursing, and law enforcement. Her stepfather owns a finance and furniture store as well as several rental houses, while her mom, grandmother, and aunt are licensed practical nurses. She has several members of her dad's side of the family who are police officers. Joslyn has two aunts who attended college and became registered nurses. Joslyn hopes to continue her academic endeavors after high school to seek a career in radiology, which she became interested in after a doctor's visit with her brother. When asked why she is drawn to radiology, she says that it looks like an easy career and makes "good money."

Student—Rodger. Rodger is a self-proclaimed "simple guy" and likes to spend a lot of time outdoors. He is from an even more rural area than the town in which he attends school. He has four siblings who all live with his father in a different town. He began his schooling in a different parish for pre-kindergarten but came to his current school after that. Academically, he is not a fan of his agriculture, history, or geography classes but enjoys his time in theatre and biology, and he hopes to become a veterinarian. Rodger spends his free time outdoors or sleeping.

With the exception of his mom, most of the people in Rodger's life have careers in the oil field or with prisons. Both his dad and his stepdad work on oil rigs and his grandfather, aunts, and uncles have had careers working in state penitentiaries. Rodger's brother is the only person he knows who has attempted college; his brother is currently enrolled, although he could not name where. Rodger's attraction to veterinary medicine derives from his mother's work as a veterinary tech and his ability to assist at the veterinary office on weekends. Rodger is concerned that his C-average grades will narrow the pool of colleges to which he can apply. He hopes to attend any branch of the state's flagship university system.

Chapter Summary

Each individual, or case, in this study exhibits unique attributes of what it is like to be a counselor or student in a rural high school district in South Louisiana. The individuals, or cases, also share some common characteristics and themes in their experiences, such as their cultural capital, habitus, and access to information about college. The following chapter will discuss the findings of across cases to share information on how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This qualitative case study explored how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. Decoding refers to students' and counselor's ability to understand, employ, and make meaning of university jargon as part of their college knowledge. Rural students are defined in this study as students from a rural area who are also potential first-generation college students and from low-SES households. Statistics show that rural students often lag behind their urban and suburban peers in educational aspiration, access, and attainment (Brown & Swanson, 2003; Corbett, 2007; Hu, 2003; McDonough et al., 2010; Theobald & Siskar, 2008). One barrier rural students face in educational aspirations and access is a lack of college knowledge, particularly the ability to decode university jargon (Chenoweth and Galliher, 2004). Rural students often do not possess the cultural capital or habitus that would allow them to comprehend or make meaning of college knowledge and university jargon (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Dumais & Ward, 2009).

A descriptive, collective case study was conducted to better understand the processes rural students and counselors employ to confront college knowledge and university jargon and what individuals, schools, and communities can do to support rural students and counselors in and through these processes to increase comprehension of college knowledge and, thus, potentially increase college access. The specific research question that guided this study was: How do rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon?

“College knowledge” is a phrase used to describe the type of information that students, particularly rural students, need to access college and navigate through college processes (Vargas, 2004). College knowledge is the overarching concept of one’s acquisition and understanding of all the information regarding the higher education environment. University jargon describes words and acronyms used in academic discourse, which is one aspect of college knowledge. Many of these terms are deeply embedded in both the college admissions process and the daily functioning of higher education institutions. Some examples include institutional type (public, private, four-year, two-year, college, university, Predominantly White Institution—PWI, Historically Black Colleges and Universities—HBCU, etc.), academics (major, minor, credit hours, degree audit, etc.), finances (FAFSA, subsidized loan, tuition, fees, etc.), and degrees (A.S., B.S., etc.). Jargon ties directly into the overarching concept of college knowledge. For example, a student may know that a four-year degree exists, but they may not know the term bachelor’s degree. This indicates that the student has some college knowledge but lacks the ability to decode jargon. This becomes an issue when the student looks at institutional recruitment and admissions materials (both online and in hard copy) because institutions list majors of study under bachelor’s degrees not four year degrees; thus, the student may be unable to navigate the admissions process if they do not comprehend the actual jargon.

Two high schools (HS1 and HS2) in one rural, south Louisiana school district were used as research sites from which I explored the perspective of ten participants, or cases, eight of which were rural high school sophomore students and two of which were rural high

school counselors. Profiles on the sites and participants can be found in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, providing appropriate triangulation for the case study. Interviews gathered information on the habitus, perceptions of college value and access, exposure to college knowledge and university jargon, and processes used to obtain, comprehend, and decode college knowledge and university jargon of the participants and the communities in which they live. Five independent observations of guidance counseling meetings about college were conducted. Documents provided to students by the high schools in reference to college knowledge and jargon, college admissions literature, and Web sites from both public and private state institutions were also analyzed.

Individual case analysis and cross-case synthesis were used to analyze the data; open and axial coding were employed to generate codes, themes and, ultimately, findings. Open codes resulted in approximately 90 individual codes from which I began to synthesize and cluster into code groupings. Code groupings were further compiled into larger groups that represented similar topics and became themes. Seven overall themes emerged from the coded data and their order as findings were chosen based on the study framework and flow. I started with the theme that spoke to the theoretical basis of the study, which was Bourdieu's cultural capital and habitus, followed by the main topic of the study, which was educational choices. I then focused on the theme that dealt with the main person at the high school sites who assist with educational aspirations, which was the counselors, and then turned to whom they were assisting, which was the students. Finally, I grouped counselor and student

knowledge and interactions into a three-step process for college knowledge and university jargon, including being aware, the ability to recognize and define terms, and finding process of seeking and understanding information. Appropriate methods of trustworthiness such as using pseudonyms, triangulating data, and researcher reflexivity, were employed to address credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Findings about how to assist rural students and counselors in obtaining cultural capital, navigating college knowledge, and decoding university jargon are discussed in this chapter.

The interviews, observations, and documents offered many insights into rural students' and counselors' pathways to awareness and understanding of college knowledge and university jargon. Seven overall themes emerged from the data: 1) Ways of Thinking and Being in a Rural Community, 2) Mixed Signals about Educational Choices, 3) Counselors' Crusade of College Counseling, 4) Students' College Hopes, Dreams, and Realities, 5) Step One to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Being Aware, 6) Step Two to College Knowledge and University Jargon: The Ability to Both Recognize and Define Terms, and 7) Step Three to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Finding Processes of Seeking and Understanding Information.

Ways of Thinking and Being in a Rural Community: Cultural Capital and Habitus

Bourdieu (1977) defines cultural capital as the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and belief system that families transmit to their children, such as valuing or not valuing a college education as a means of obtaining or enhancing economic security (MacLeod, 2009). There are two types of cultural capital: 1) *static*, which includes

“highbrow” activities and practices, and 2) *relational*, which is concerned with cultural interactions and communication between children and parents (Bourdieu, 1977). Cultural capital is further subdivided into forms, including embodied cultural capital, which is both acquired consciously and unconsciously through socialization and speaks to language, and institutionalized cultural capital, which is about institutional recognition and speaks to academic qualifications.

Bourdieu (1977) further explains cultural capital with the concept of habitus. Habitus is a deeply internalized, permanent system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs that individuals obtain from their families, peers, institutions, and social class in their surrounding environment. Habitus operates through people’s “perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (MacLeod, 2009, p. 15). Habitus is fundamentally interrelated with cultural capital. It is the internalized beliefs and perceptions people establish from their families during childhood that manifest distinctively for each individual, while cultural capital is the social resources that provide potential social mobility and could influence change in one’s habitus. Habitus can be viewed from the individual perspective or from the organizational perspective. Cultural capital and habitus can be major guiding forces in how individuals and communities view and value educational opportunities. The area and sites for this study provided insight into how cultural capital and habitus can be influential.

The rural parish in which HS1 and HS2 are located reports that only 66% of the population has a high school diploma and 11% have a bachelor’s degree, in contrast to national averages of 81% and 21%, respectively (U.S. Census, 2010). These facts suggest a

potential lack of both static and relational cultural capital among residents and individual and organizational habitus that may not value education or view it as a realistic option for themselves or people in their community. The statistics also imply that many people in the area engage in careers or jobs that do not require much formal education and, thus, may be associated with lower incomes or longer workdays.

Interviews with students and counselors in the high schools further explained the local belief systems, financial climate, exposure or lack thereof to other ways of thinking or being, occupation examples and role models, and any advantages or resources available to students.

Local Belief Systems

The rural Louisiana parish prescribes to some common belief systems that comprise the community habitus and influence individual habitus. Sentiments on education and exposure to ways of being and thinking outside of the isolated area seem to shape people's life paths and principles.

Views on educational value. The value of formal schooling opportunities vacillates between community members who believe a formal education is essential and those who think formal education is a complete waste of time because it takes time away from working and gaining income. With approximately 40% of residents having not completed high school and 90% having not attended college, the views on education range from encouraging to antagonistic. To many of these rural residents, education is “more trouble than it's worth.”

Tobi Smith, counselor at HS1, stated:

Some people, they just don't value education enough to really sacrifice to help their kids get to school. It's like if it's going to give them any trouble, just don't even bother to do it. I've known parents that wouldn't even give their kids access to their income tax for them to finish filling out the financial aid. It depends on the person. We have many parents that don't value education at all. And then we also have some that really do and really push their kids. At [HS1], I would say the majority [of parents and students] don't value education as much as they should.

HS2 counselor Allie Soileau agreed:

We still have a lot of kids who are the first people in their family to graduate high school. Education in a lot of the families is not a priority. In some, there are, but for a lot, it's not . . . a lot of the kids do go straight to work.

Students see how the adult mentality bleeds into their own mentality. If parents, other family members, or community leaders do not care about education, students seemed less likely to have academic success or pursue further education. Alternatively, if people significant to them supported educational acquisition, students seemed more motivated to strive for academic achievement and aspirations. Gibbs described the negative end of the spectrum this way:

Some kids care less and some kids actually care. It's the same with the adults. Some just walk around and act like they don't care about life and never want anything to do with it. No school and drop out when they're 16. That kind of thing.

Rodger, however, adhered more to the positive messages from the community: "I think a lot of people around here would say you should go to college, try to make a better life for yourself; because most people around here didn't go to college and they wish they would have."

Types of knowledge. Viewpoints on the importance of school, or book, knowledge and practical, or hands-on, knowledge were also wide-ranging. Most students believed that

an individual should have some of both kinds of knowledge to lead a balanced career and life. They associated school/book knowledge with being “smart” and practical/hands-on knowledge with having “common sense.” Gibbs put it this way: “Well, if you ain’t book smart, you can’t do much. You’ve got to learn first and then . . . you’ve got to have hands-on knowledge where you actually know what to do [with what you learned].” Rodger expressed a similar sentiment:

You can’t do it all in a book . . . you don’t know how it’s actually going to happen in the real world because things change . . . and if you’re all common sense knowledge then, you know, you don’t really know much. You just know enough to get by.

Converse to the students’ claim to value both types of knowledge equally, both counselors believe that the majority of their students tend to gravitate toward obtaining practical knowledge. Allie Soileau at HS2 also sees the why students may place more value in practical/hands-on knowledge and describes how it has played out in her own family:

You’re far more likely to get a job if you have a skill, especially in the last several years with the economy like it is . . . my son has a degree from a trade school and he makes more than me [and I have a master’s degree] and my husband combined.

The counselors’ perspective aligns with prior research findings that rural students tend to be a part of families and communities that devalue theoretical learning and overvalue practical knowledge and application (Willis, 1977). The varying perspectives on education and theoretical knowledge often leave students with mixed messages about whether or not the pursuit of a college education is valuable.

College value. Students may receive positive encouragement from parents and family members, but they also hear negative attitudes from the overall community. Autumn explained:

I mean, some people say college isn't for everybody. It's true, but I think, you know . . . I'm gonna go. Some people tell you, "You should go, you know, find out what you're doing." Especially my parents, they always want you to better yourself. And I believe that too. I think we should go to college.

HS1 counselor Tobi Smith also hears messages on both ends of the spectrum; she described:

[Parents] think [kids] should all go, really. And, occasionally, you have a parent say, "I just want him to finish and get a job." Or they don't even want them to finish; they would like them to drop out of [high] school.

Other students associated the value of college with the economic return or "easier work" that they assume is associated with a college degree. "It's a good thing to get your education instead of working hard your whole life," Bobby said. Brittney expounded: "Around my area, college is majorly important because right now the way the economy is going down, it's going to be a lot harder to get a job without being educated."

Finally, a few students saw college as something that was reserved for only the elite. Emily Anne described: "You can't just be anybody and go to college; you have to complete high school and all that stuff." Some students suggested that "people like them" do not often enroll in or graduate from college. They were also cognizant that the people that do attend and/or graduate from college often have to deal with the community viewing them as elite or "too good" for their home area. A college education, or degree, often results in rural students not being able to find jobs in the area because the majority of local jobs do not require such education. Additionally, college is seen by the community as a place that opens up the mind

to new, or different, ideas and ways of being that may not be congruent with the way of life in the rural area. In short, being college-educated often educates students out of their home community, both literally and figuratively.

Peer groups. Despite the community's habitus and viewpoints, students detected a sense of educational aspiration among their peers. Brittany, Bobby, Craig, Emily Anne, and Joslyn discussed how most of their peers planned on going to college and how some students even had intentions to attend specific institutions together. However, a few students mentioned how they perceived ambivalence among their peers when it came to post-high school plans. "Some plan on going straight to college and some plan on going straight to work," Gibbs explained. Autumn agreed: "Some of my friends, you know, my peers, they want to go to college. And some of them think, 'Well, you know, I'm gonna go to technical school.' And some just aren't gonna go." Rodger was even more specific, stating: "I think about half of them want to go. Half of them—I know a lot of them want to go straight to like the oil field."

Occupational Paths

Cultural capital is often reflected in people's jobs or careers, corresponding salaries and vacation days, and access to people who may serve as role models for them. This rural area is no different. The typical occupations of the residents and their access to anyone who can serve as a role model of being or thinking outside of the norm are both molded by and influential to the community and individual cultural capital and habitus.

Counselors and students at both HS1 and HS2 acknowledged that the majority of residents in the rural area tend to occupy particular fields. Typical occupations include but are not exclusively limited to the oil field, medical field, small and local business, clerical work, law enforcement, farming, and K-12 education. Residents' roles in these occupational fields tend to classify their jobs as lower ranks of employment with more manual labor, higher risks, lower incomes, and less necessary training or education. Tobi Smith at HS1 noted:

The oil field is big around here. A lot of people used to work at the [local] hospital but it's been cut back a whole lot and they are talking about closing it . . . and some people work at Wal-Mart and Piggly Wiggly."

Allie Soileau, HS2 counselor, also described similar occupations in the area: "Education. Medical field, mostly nursing, x-ray tech, respiratory tech, more common medical careers, oil field. People that work in factories or labor . . . a lot of manual or skilled labor." Students mentioned similar fields in their accounts of occupations around the community. They tended to label fields by gender, noting what they felt were the female designated careers—nursing/medical field and K-12 education—and the male designated careers—oil field, manual labor, or small, local business. Emily Anne spoke to the female label: "Usually the medical field . . . that's most what everybody does—or like teachers," while Rodger represented the men: "Most people go into the oil field. That's mainly what everyone does around here."

“Brain drain.” “Brain drain” is the concept of young, talented, and intelligent individuals departing their community for better education and job opportunities elsewhere

(Corbett, 2007; Theobald & Siskar, 2008). These young, talented, intelligent people are encouraged by family and educators to “go far,” which essentially means to leave the community for other places with seemingly better prospects (Theobald & Siskar, 2008, p. 293). This often comes to fruition in this rural area when individuals are seeking a career or education outside of the typical occupational paths. Autumn can already see this happening as she looks into her future: “[Success] is like me getting out of here, you know, just not staying here. There’s like nothing for me here besides family and friends, but I want to like see the world and do all that I can.” Some students see their rural community as limiting and isolating, and they grasp that many occupations that require a college education will ultimately educate them out of the occupational choices in their home area. A few students sounded hopeful and excited about the idea of leaving the community, while others had a hint of regret that their definition of success would result in having to depart their home.

Role models. Because of the narrow focus of the occupational examples in the rural community and the concept of brain drain, students often do not think creatively about their own career paths. However, a few students like Autumn do. Then, it becomes a challenge to find “someone like them” who has blazed the trail in a different occupation of whom they can ask questions or seek mentoring. Both counselors explained how they try to use their personal contacts to provide students with a role model in the field to which they aspire. Allie Soileau, HS2 counselor, admitted:

Well, there’s very few [role models]. There’s not a lot of job opportunities here, especially this little town. But, I have a senior this year that wants to be a veterinarian, so I called and spoke to a friend of mine that’s a vet and set up for her to do some volunteer work there. [If] people are interested in pharmacy or especially if

it's something kind of outside the box or engineering or attorney, I try to think of someone I know personally and say, "Hey, would you mind talking to this kid? Is it okay if they call you or do some job shadowing or something like that?" We don't have a permanent thing set in place, but I do something like that, even if it's just a telephone conversation.

HS1 counselor Tobi Smith has a similar approach to Mrs. Soileau:

I have referred kids to like go talk to a veterinarian, or we've arranged shadowing at the hospital . . . if they come and talk to me about a field and want to know more about it than I know, I will refer them to someone in that field.

It is apparent that the community's lack of role models corresponds with the lack of cultural capital in the area and the habitus that most people possess. However, it seems that the counselors try to do the best with what they have, and the "everyone knows everyone" aspect of the rural area contributes to finding a few role models for students interested in "out of the box" occupational paths.

Financial Climate

Based on the typical occupations, the rural community lags behind much of the nation in its financial situation. The median household income is \$30,897 compared to a national average of \$42,460, with 27% of families and 22% of individuals falling below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 2010). Approximately 80% of the students in the two high schools participate in the Federal Free or Reduced Lunch Program, which further illustrates the dire financial situation in the parish, particularly for those students who attend the public schools (LA Department of Education, 2011; T. Smith, personal communication, October 9, 2012). Students recognize that they reside in a low socioeconomic area; Emily Anne bluntly stated:

“I mean, nobody’s rich. Nobody has a lot of money around here. It just depends on who [what family] you’re from . . . I guess.”

Because their families tend to have modest incomes, many students already work. They serve in part-time capacities as babysitters, clerks in local stores, and in manual labor roles to have spending money, participate in school activities, and finance their communication and transportation. “A lot of kids have to buy cars themselves. They provide their own insurance, their own gas . . . they pay their own cell phone bill . . . so they have to work,” explained Allie Soileau, HS2 counselor.

Students and counselors also mentioned the impact of the national economic downturn on the rural community. A reduction in jobs and services at the local hospital and rumors that the hospital will close for good have many individuals and families concerned about their personal finances and the well-being of the community at large (T. Smith, personal communication, October 9, 2012). One student even talked about how her brother had to drop out of technical school because “the economy is so bad . . . he decided to go offshore [in the oil field].” Students also realize that expenses will likely continue to increase in the future. “All the prices and stuff are gonna be even higher when we’re older,” Joslyn said. The students see their families and community members struggling and they recognize that one way to reduce their own potential struggles may be to further their formal education.

There was no data on students’ failing to pursue college to contribute to family finances, which is often seen in low-SES urban communities or within Hispanic/Latino families. The rural students that go straight to work, in the oil field for example, do so to

make their own money rather than contribute to the family's income. There is not a community expectation that kids will financially assist parents, although there is a common practice of children caring for aging parents. Students do not believe they have to leave the rural community to "survive" but there is a view that you have to leave to thrive—to lead a "better life."

Exposure or Lack Thereof to Other Ways

All of the participants in the study were born and raised in the rural area or one that was strikingly similar and within a two-hour radius of the research sites. Although the counselors have since attended college and done some traveling, it was apparent that the students have remained relatively isolated either in the rural area or in the South. "The students here don't get a whole lot of exposure to people outside of Louisiana. It's rural and most of them just don't," explained Tobi Smith, HS1 counselor. Allie Soileau, HS2 counselor agreed, "Not a lot [of exposure]. A lot of kids have not left the state at all."

The students who have had some exposure to people, places, and ideas outside of the rural area have done so for three main purposes—to attend an extracurricular activity, to go on a family vacation, or to visit family in other states. However, even in the cases when students get out of the state, they tend to remain in the Southern region of the United States, which cultivates similar ways of being and thinking. "Texas, Florida, Mississippi and that's it," Craig described about his journeys outside of Louisiana. Gibbs listed a similar region that he has explored: "Tennessee, Texas, Missouri, Alabama, and Florida." HS2 counselor Allie Soileau recognized these patterns—"[students go on] family vacation; some do things related

to school organizations whether it be sports . . . or if they win at the state level and get to compete at a national level for school clubs.” Students briefly mentioned traveling out of state to participate in or attend extracurricular activities in which they, or their family members, were engaged. “My brothers usually have travel baseball,” explained Emily Anne, “I went to Florida, Tennessee, and Texas.”

Typical U.S. vacation spots. Students described how their families tend to take vacations during summer and winter breaks. Many discussed summers spent traveling to typical vacation spots in the United States, including but not limited to the beach and amusement parks. Autumn explained that her family has been to “Florida . . . Texas—not too many places” to visit attractions such as “Disneyworld [and] Schlitterban [a water park].” Bobby ventured a bit further west, having visited Colorado to go “skiing and stuff.”

It may seem odd that rural families, many of whom are low SES, take a summer or winter vacation. The reality is that this does occur frequently. People are poor, yet they tend to spend money on one “big vacation” per year, often to a location in driving distance such as Florida’s Disneyworld or Texas’s Schlitterban. It does not mean rural people are not poor; rather, it means that they see value or, even more likely, status in these vacations. The trips focus more on fun than anything else and students often gain little to no cultural capital from the ventures.

Family visits. Students also tend to get out of town to travel to visit family who reside in other areas of the state or out of state. Autumn talked about visiting relatives in Texas over Christmas and in California over the summer, Brittney referred to spending

Christmases with her relatives in Ohio, Rodger described spending a portion of the summer with his grandfather in Florida, and Joslyn mentioned going to “Texas a lot because we have family there. That’s about it.”

Further exposure. Counselors believe that students would benefit from additional exposure to other ways of being and thinking. Allie Soileau stated:

Definitely, they would benefit . . . broadening their stereotypes, seeing different cultures, [learning] what’s expected in other areas of the world or United States, the emphasis put on education in other areas . . . not to be so simpleminded or [have] tunnel vision.

HS1 counselor Tobi Smith expounded: “It would just open up their world and they would get to know other cultures and their view of the world wouldn’t be so narrow.” She even suggested specific activities that could be useful: “If they could experience more museums and the arts and just getting out of [this town] and going to cities that are more urban, it would be wonderful.” Allie Soileau, had similar recommendations for exposure: “[They need to] try to talk to people . . . visit other areas . . . do university campus tours . . . exposure to different cultures . . . museums.”

Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Soileau’s ideas align with “highbrow” activities and cultural exposure that Bourdieu and other scholars, such as Tramonte and Willms, claim contribute to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Tramonte & Willms, 2009). Static cultural capital represents the “family’s socioeconomic advantage” and shows if and how the family spends its income on leisure and cultural activities and events (Tramonte & Willms, 2009, p. 201). Relational cultural capital is rooted in cultural exposure and interaction (Schwalbe et al., 2000). Based on their descriptions of their exposure outside of the rural area and how family

time is spent on weekends and during break periods, participants in the study lack exposure to “highbrow” activities and cultural interaction. Thus, both their static and relational cultural capital are limited. Students would benefit from further exposure to places outside of the state, people who do not share their identities, and activities that focus on culture, arts, and science to build more cultural capital. Similar to their exposure to outside entities, students also vary in their experience with school or academic-related extracurricular activities and hobbies. Some activities and hobbies facilitate learning that corresponds to higher education and others are not generally valued by colleges and universities.

Potential Extracurricular Advantages and Disadvantages

Although students dwell in a rural community with less cultural capital and with a habitus that does not necessarily value formal education, some students create potential advantages for themselves through their school extracurricular activities and personal hobbies. Emily Anne described her inherent interest and enjoyment in reading and her membership on the school’s cheerleading squad. Autumn explained that she “went to Australia over the summer of 2011 as a People to People ambassador.” Craig, Joslyn, and Brittney described their involvement with school and community athletic teams. These affiliations have allowed the students to travel to competitions around the state, nation, and, in Autumn’s case, internationally. Their involvement has also put them in a position to visit colleges, for events like cheerleading camp, and resulted in them ending up on listservs of university admissions offices.

For other students, their interests do not align as well with college going. Bobby's hunting and fishing hobbies, Rodger's time spent outside and sleeping, and Gibbs's after-school job do not necessarily parallel activities that universities desire or that give students access to cultural capital that is useful in college. What many of these rural students know is different from what is needed for a good fit in the higher education culture; thus, students may feel unprepared for and foreign in the collegiate environment (O'Quinn, 1999; Whiting, 2009). The issue is that "by the definition and standards of the school [systems]," rural students are often evaluated through means that view their form of knowledge and capital as deficient (Flora et al., 1992; MacLeod, 2009, p. 101).

Mixed Signals about Educational Choices

Inequalities exist in rural schools' resources, their lack of "the right kind of students," and their inability to offer certain kinds of curricula such as honors courses, advanced placement, and international baccalaureate (Jencks, 1972, p. 37; McDonough et al., 2010). Rural students are often less academically prepared and less inclined to aspire to postsecondary education due to a variety of factors including low SES, low educational attainment in families, and a limited number of community members with college degrees (Brown & Swanson, 2003).

These research findings list a host of factors that shape HS1 and HS2 students' beliefs about their life choices after high school. The educational considerations of the study participants include but are limited to students' academic ability, finances, support systems, and self-efficacy and motivation.

Academic Ability

HS1 and HS2 do not offer any specialized programs or courses, such as international baccalaureate (IB) degrees and advanced placement (AP) courses, and their school performance letter grades imparted by the state tend to be in the C range (LA Department of Education, 2011). Both HS1 and HS2 lack cultural, financial, and human capital resources, although HS2 is doing a bit better since its town passed a tax to renovate the school several years ago (A. Soileau, personal communication, November 2, 2012). The majority of students are average or below average in their academic aptitude. Graduation rates hover around 67.2% and 74.5% for HS1 and HS2, respectively (Parish School Board, 2010). The majority of the student populations at both schools are considered “at-risk” based on approximately 80% of the students being enrolled in the federal free/reduced lunch program (LA Department of Education, 2011).

The State has three academic tracks and diploma or certification options for its students: 1) Core 4+ Academic Diploma Endorsement, 2) Core 4 Career/Technical Diploma Endorsement, and 3) Basic Core Certificate. All students are automatically placed on one of the Core 4 academic tracks their first and second years of high school. However, after their sophomore year, students and guardians must decide if the student will remain on a Core 4 track, shift to the less rigorous Core 4 track, or move to Basic Core track based on their overall academic performance and post-high school aspirations. The timing of this decision makes the sophomore year even more crucial for students at HS1 and HS2 because their academic track choice will determine if they are even eligible for college admission in their

home state. Louisiana colleges and universities only accept students who obtain a Core 4+ Academic Endorsement diploma.

Despite the statistics and even their personal academic credentials, counselors find that many students believe they are going to college, at least in the earlier years of high school. Tobi Smith explained:

Just about every kid initially wants to go to college. But realistically they aren't all prepared because . . . their study habits are not good. They don't attend [school] well. They have no clue what kind of dedication that [college] takes and what kind of study habits and study skills. Now, we do have some [students] that are on target [academically].

HS2 counselor Allie Soileau has similar experiences with students; she illustrates:

When they are freshmen, they are all going to college . . . still, as seniors, I have a lot that are just so not grounded as to what it takes [academically]. I think a lot are unrealistic. They have a 1.8 GPA and they're still insisting they're going to be a doctor or a veterinarian. There are a lot of low ACTs. They just don't have the study skills or the discipline. If you have no math skills, don't try to be an engineer. They don't always think about that. Reality will eventually slap them in the face. It's just not academically feasible [for everyone]. I mean, you've got to be really bright [to go to college]. Not everybody is really bright. I'm not really bright. Even if I tell them or try to explain it to them over and over again, it doesn't always sink in. "I [the student] want to take advanced math." You can't tell somebody, "Baby, you have a 12 on your ACT." I can't do that. [So I put them in the class.] Then, the advanced math teacher gets mad—"Why you put that kid in here? They can't do this!" Well, I can't tell them they can't do it. Maybe they've suddenly matured.

Most students did not talk about their personal academic abilities or grades, but Rodger provided a bit of insight: "They [my family] just keep trying to push me to get better grades. That's one of the main issues, got to make better grades, better grades, that's [current grades] not going to get you into any college." Craig also mentioned: "They [my family] tell me I have to get my grades up first."

Student Finances

Leaving the community, particularly to pursue higher education, is often a major financial issue for rural students (Corbett, 2009). McDonough (1997) found that not all college-bound students face equal postsecondary educational choices if they start out with different family and school resources; these unequal choices reproduce the current disparities in opportunities for various SES groups in society. This is demonstrated in both HS1 and HS2. Allie Soileau, HS2 counselor, clarifies:

I would say money [is the most prevalent barrier] because a lot of these kids' parents never graduated from high school, much less college. [But] how much will they support them [financially]? Once you have to move away from home, who's going to pay your rent and your food and your clothes? I have some that are academically capable, but the cost is . . . too much.

At HS1, finances are also a concern. This was characterized in an occurrence one afternoon in Mrs. Smith's office. Three students were at the computers in the office trying to complete the application for the upcoming ACT test but could not do so because the counselor had run out of ACT fee waivers. The students were antsy to learn that fee waivers were currently unavailable because the deadline to register for the upcoming test was the following day and they could not afford to pay for the test fee themselves. Later that afternoon, the counselor had obtained the additional fee waivers and, once the announcement was made over the intercom, students immediately rushed into Mrs. Smith's office. It was obvious that the students' ability to take the ACT was contingent on having access to fee waivers, which illustrates the impact finances can have on rural students. Tobi Smith notes: "They worry. They [students] all know that it'll take money to go to college and their parents know that

too. It's an awareness they already have." Autumn was one of several students who noted that "paying for college" would be a barrier for her, and Brittany foresaw the "challenge of working and going to college at the same time . . . having time for each."

Support Systems

Wettersten et al. (2005) explain how barriers and social support impact rural adolescents' self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and vocational interests. Their study found that rural students' career outcome expectations were predicted by their social support and self-efficacy, which represent the powerful role of relationships, particularly those between parents and children.

Students at HS1 and HS2 seem to have some confidence in their ability to pursue postsecondary education and motivation and overcome the factors, or barriers, that may hamper those opportunities. However, the students do recognize that it will not be easy because many "people like them" have struggled or failed in their own attempts to obtain an education. HS1 counselor Tobi Smith highlighted: "Some are really determined and they will just keep plugging at it [college] until they figure it out. But some, when reach a certain frustration level . . . they just want to quit."

Other research finds that rural students often assume that their parents would prefer for them not to attend college due to lack of overt support from their family and peer networks (James et al, 1999; O'Quinn, 1999). However, despite concerns, the environments at HS1 and HS2 and within study participants' families seemed to be relatively supportive of educational aspiration and attainment.

Family concerns and fear of departure. These young, talented, intelligent people are encouraged by family and educators to “go far,” which essentially means to leave the community for other places with seemingly better prospects (Theobald & Siskar, 2008, p. 293). Leaving can be difficult for students who have grown up in such a tight-knit community surrounded by their immediate and extended families. Brittany explained how her five-year-old sister has kidney issues that take up a lot of the family’s time and finances and it would be a challenge personally and financially to leave her town. The link between education and community departure is “for some students . . . liberating, for others unthinkable, and for most it is problematic and conflicted” (Corbett, 2007, p. 18). Emily Anne talked about how her family is not eager for her to go to a “city” because they fear the environment she may face there. “I’m not afraid of it, but they are,” she explained. Many other students discussed how they planned to begin their educational pursuits close to home at local community colleges. Bobby stated: “I’m going to try to stay around here.”

Support: without pressure. The majority of students feel they have adequate emotional support from their families regarding their educational choices. Brittney, Joslyn, Craig, Rodger, Autumn, and Bobby feel very emotionally supported by their families. “They think I’m on the right track for my future. They think I’m doing the right things,” Brittney explained. Bobby agreed: “They think I should [go to college], but if I don’t want to and I want to go straight to work, they’d be all right with it.” Craig noted: “They [my family] say I can do anything I want as long as I put my heart into it.” And, Autumn added: “I know for

sure they want me to go [to college] but it's my choice, they always tell me it's my choice." These students feel supported yet able to make choices about their future on their own terms.

Support: with pressure. Other students feel forced by their parents or families to choose postsecondary education. This could be viewed as either overwhelming support, a burden, or both. Allie Soileau pointed out: "I have kids that will say they have to go. 'My mom's not giving me a choice.'" This is the case for Emily Anne; she describes:

My dad and my mom don't even give me a choice. I have to go to college because my dad didn't go to college. And my mom had trouble too [because she didn't go]. [They say life] will be easier once—like I get out of high school and just go straight to college. That's what they want. I'd rather take a little break. Like not [go to college] right away after [high] school, but that's what they want so I guess I'll do it.

Rodger feels a bit of pressure from his family too; he explained:

I mean they want me to go of course. I mean doesn't every parent? But they're trying to get me to go to a college. They say, "You need to go, it'll be good for you. You can do stuff we never got to do."

Peers. The choices and support, or lack thereof, of their peers can often influence students' educational and life choices as well. The parish has a history of teenage pregnancy and youth crime. Students know critical choices will decrease their peers', and sometimes their own, chances of furthering their education. "I think [this] parish has a record of people getting pregnant, like teenagers, so that makes [going to college] complicated," Emily Anne described. On the other hand, Allie Soileau at HS2 notices the positive sway students can have on one another. She notes:

Some classes [groups of students by graduation year] are better than others. I find that they feed off of each other, too. Like, this group [Class of 2013], I have a lot more [interest in college]. If they're friends do it, they'll do it. They'll go "Let's go see

Mrs. Allie” or “Let’s sit and do them [applications] right here.” I find that they feed off of each other. If my friend is going to do it, well, I’m going to do it too.

Whether or not students have support systems at home or with peers, they tend to seek support through their high school counselors. This is both an endorsement of the counselors’ work and a battle of competing interests.

Counselors’ Crusade of College Counseling

Many of the determinants of college aspiration and success for rural students indicate transitional issues that could potentially be addressed in the high school environment by counselors. Specifically, counselors could be educating rural students on the academic, financial, and social aspects of their college choices and providing suggestions on how to make informed, rational decisions that could result in higher rates of college entrance and persistence (Bickel et al., 1991; Paulsen & Loflink, 2005). However, McDonough et al. (2010) point out that counselors tend to lack knowledge about and refrain from providing information about colleges outside of the specific rural area or its adjacent areas. Both of these scenarios can be found in HS1 and HS2; the counselors are simultaneously attempting to provide as many services, including college counseling, as they can for students while trying to obtain college knowledge and navigate university jargon themselves.

Counselor Mentality

HS1 counselor Tobi Smith and HS2 counselor Allie Soileau are both natives of the rural area. They attended high school together at the parish’s one private school and after obtaining bachelor’s degrees in elementary education in the 1980s, they both immediately returned to the rural parish to work in the public school system. Allie Soileau admits that she

“went into education because it was one of the easier majors to get into and it was a good fit anyway since I didn’t care for foreign language and statistics.” The counselors being “homegrown” exemplifies findings of Theobald & Siskar (2008) and Schafft & Jackson (2010) that show teachers, counselors, and administrators in rural schools are often originally from the communities in which they work.

As teachers, the now counselors saw that the students seemed lack an advocate. “I saw these children who really needed someone to talk to or someone to help advocate, and they had no one,” Tobi Smith said simply. Both women decided to pursue master’s degrees in guidance and counseling at a public state university within an hour of the parish. Once they had master’s degrees in hand, they both assumed roles as counselors in the schools where they had been teaching in the early 1990s. “I was teaching here [at HS2], but there was no guidance counselor so I just rolled into that slot,” Allie Soileau explained. Tobi Smith had a similar experience: “I was hoping to be a counselor at the school where I worked at the time, which it did so happen that I did become a school counselor there.” Mrs. Soileau has remained at HS2 for her entire career, while Mrs. Smith was relocated to HS1 after a school consolidation plan was implemented in 2004.

Counselor Role(s)

It should not come as a surprise that the rural counselors are expected to perform a host of various roles for their high schools. Tobi Smith illustrated: “I have a lot of hats. Test coordinator. I have to see about attendance issues. I counsel the kids. I help with all kinds of paperwork for the kids and for the [main school] office.” Allie Soileau mentioned similar

roles with the additions of “personal counseling, career counseling, and academic guides and schedulers.” These numerous roles each come with expectations of how much time and effort counselors should be spending on each job duty. Much of the time counselors feel overwhelmed by their multiple roles and the corresponding expectations. Allie Soileau explained:

It’s too many expectations, especially with the number of high school students that we have. Before consolidation [in 2004] we didn’t have the computer work and paperwork that we have today. Now’s it’s just more and more and more. You used to have one diploma track and last year we had four and now we’re back to three again. It’s keeping track of all that. You didn’t have all these pathways that they [students] have to meet. You didn’t have required ACT testing. I had to give the ASVAB [military] test this morning. I only had two testers and we needed three. It’s just constant.

Tobi Smith feels the pressure too: “I have more to do than I can possibly do well. And the personal/social counseling is probably the most important part and it is the part that gets the most neglected. I’m strapped for time.” Both women described how what they spend their time on fluctuates daily and with the time of year, but they did note that paperwork takes up more time than they like and way more than most people realize.

College counseling. As one of the many roles that counselors have to provide, the amount of college counseling that counselors offer their students varies by school. Tobi Smith at HS1 said she spends “maybe five percent” of her time on college counseling while Allie Soileau at HS2 noted:

[I spend] a lot of time [on college counseling], especially with the Juniors and Seniors . . . sometimes I’ll have two or three kids in here and I can’t sit at my computer because they are doing their [college] stuff. A lot of them do their applications in my office because they panic. Yesterday I had two [students] come on all flustered. “I don’t know how to do it. I don’t know what to do first. I tried to do it

last night and I couldn't." I said, "Go to the website, get on it, click prospective students, admissions, fill out your application. It's easy." She [the student] did it all right here. I said, "Why couldn't you do all of that at home last night? You didn't even ask me any questions." It's like they panic and they can't do it. They really can. I would say academic and career and post-secondary [counseling] takes a lot of my time.

Tasks that comprise college counseling include but are not limited to holding meetings with students and parents, (particularly eighth graders and seniors); providing resources such as Web sites; assisting students with standardized testing, college applications, scholarship applications, and financial aid forms; explaining university jargon; interpreting careers and occupational duties; scheduling campus visits; and connecting students with career role models. Allie Soileau explained:

I can't tell you how many parents send me their envelope from H&R Block and I do all of their FAFSA's. I do a bunch! I also . . . I've probably scheduled about eight kids already this year for individual campus tours at local community colleges; I find they do much better with those [personal tours].

Overload: Ratio and Short-staffed

The National Center for Educational Statistics (1999) reported that public schools often have an average student-to-counselor ratio of 500:1, which represents the difficulty students have in seeking time-intensive help from school counselors. HS1 and HS2 contain similar ratios. HS1 has a student-to-counselor ratio of about 400:1, while HS2's ratio is a bit larger at 450:1. Tobi Smith commented that the ratio at HS1 is "a little bit high but it's not too bad." Conversely, Allie Soileau at HS2 believes the ratio is "high with all the stuff [roles] we have to do now."

The counselors can also be called on to serve students outside of the high school at times. Tobi Smith demonstrated: “I am a full-time high school counselor but they only have a part-time junior high counselor so Tuesdays and Thursdays, I’m the counselor for the whole student body of 800 kids.” This ratio is much higher than the NCES numbers and shows that many rural schools are short-staffed in the counselor role. For this reason and many others, scholars call for the hiring of additional counselors who can make a special effort to provide underrepresented students with the counseling and college knowledge they need to turn their educational aspirations into realities (Bickel et al., 1991; Paulsen & Loflink, 2005).

Local community colleges are beginning to realize the staffing issue in the high schools that surround them and are creating positions called College Coaches, whom the community colleges assign to go into specific parishes or high schools for one or two days a week to help students with college preparation and ease the burden of the one high school counselor. HS1 received assistance from one of these College Coaches during this study; however, she was not available to provide further explanation of the new program or her experiences with the students at HS1.

Students’ College Hopes, Dreams, and Realities

Students from rural schools often possess lower levels of educational aspiration, attendance, and choice (Hu, 2003). Consequently, rural students are significantly underrepresented in higher education. College attendance rates of rural students are “6 percent lower than the national average and almost 8 percent lower than urban students”

(McDonough et al., 2010, p. 192). Rural students do not naturally inherit the cultural capital that is necessary to seek out or expect certain educational opportunities (McDonough, 1997). Despite these research findings, at least half of all the students at HS1 and HS2 and all of the study's participants intend to pursue some sort of postsecondary education whether that is a four-year college, community college, or technical/trade school.

Academic/Career Interests

Students participating in the study were at different points in the determination of their future academic and career interests. Some of them could only name various subjects that were strengths or struggles for them, while others could articulate occupational fields that they intended to pursue.

Emily Anne was very distinct in her lack of clarity about her future. "I'm not sure what I want to go to college for," she stated simply. Bobby seemed to share the typical community habitus, specifically interest in the area of farming. He talked about "going to school [to be] a crop duster pilot" which he believes is "about a two-year degree." His uncle serves in that job, but never got a degree to correspond with the job. Bobby "always thought it was cool" which is why he intends to seek education and employment that allows him to become a crop duster pilot.

Gibbs shared interests similar to those he has seen exemplified in the community, focusing on the education and medical fields. "I have two choices—either education or physical therapy. I just like being at [high] school, I guess. My cousin got me started with [physical therapy] because she's a physical therapist. Big difference," he declared. Brittany

wanted to explore the medical field too, but also desired to obtain a degree in a higher ranking medical position than most in the community: “I hope I’ll be in college and working part-time as a pharmacy tech . . . [then] I want to get my degree in orthopedic medicine.”

Joslyn was also drawn to the medical field:

I wanted to be a doctor, but like all the surgery and all the blood and all that, I can’t really do that. So my brother was with a doctor one time getting x-rays, the doctor was telling him stuff, and it’s something really easy and you get paid a lot of money for it. So, I plan on going straight out of high school into college. I’m going for radiology so it’s like eight years.

Medicine was Rodger’s occupational choice as well, but his version involved animals rather than people:

I like biology because I want to be a vet. I really want to be a vet. Ever since I was five I always wanted to be a vet. What really helps is that my mom is a vet tech so I can go . . . Wednesdays and Saturdays, I go over there and go help out the vet clinic over in [a town in a nearby parish]. I wanna be a vet, I wanna be a vet I wanna be a vet [so] . . . I gotta go to college, I gotta go to college, I gotta go to college.

Autumn was able to think even more outside of the typical occupational paths in her community: “I like to design, like design clothes and illustrate. That’s what I want to go to school for. I plan to be in college. I plan to start right away [after high school].” Craig was more interested in college as a means of leaving the area and continuing his participation in sports; his career choices were in the background:

I want to move away from Louisiana and go to college [at an out of state school]. I want to play football over there, but if I don’t make college football, then I’ll just work on computers and all that technical stuff . . . or I’ll make a restaurant.

“Better Life” and Financial Gain as Success

During discussions about their college aspirations, students kept bringing up the same reason about why they planned to pursue a college education—to have a “better life.” The phrase seemed to be a mantra that the students adopted from their families and from the community habitus. In almost every interview, the concept of a “better life,” if not the exact phrase, arose. Craig explained:

Most people want to go to college and stuff and do better in their life. I want to go to college because I want to be successful in life . . . to be able to [meet] the needs of your family and stuff, make sure that you, like, how do you say that, like if you could put food on the table.

Brittany agreed: “[I want to go to college] so I can have a career and be set, have my family sitting well.”

“They [parents, community members] always want you to better yourself . . . a better life, you know, better things. And I believe that too. I’m doing something with my future. I want more for myself,” Autumn expressed.

Rodger described both the “better life” concept and the need to get a job and make money: “People are trying to better themselves [with college] because they’re trying to get good jobs, good stuff; because, now lately, you can barely get anything without a college degree, because a high school degree barely cuts it.”

Other students viewed success solely in terms of income. Bobby believed people go to college “‘cause of the money and—that’s it, I guess.” Emily Anne concurred:

Money usually [drives people to go to college]—to get money, because that’s what everybody’s worried about these days. [I want to go to college] to get a good job and to live a good life without having to struggle [financially].

Joslyn admitted that income was important to her too: “A lot of people are spoiled I guess you can say, so they’d have to go after good jobs to buy the things they want. The same reason [is why I want to go to college].”

When asked about the “better life” concept, the counselors provided their own definitions for the phrase. Allie Soileau, at HS2, believed the concept was more about income:

I think a lot is financial, because most say ‘I want a job that I’m going to make money.’ And I’m always pushing the opposite way. You need a job that you can enjoy . . . you don’t want to be miserable at your job no matter how much you make; it’s not going to make you happy. And money is good. And we need enough to sustain ourselves and have some leisure activities.

HS1 counselor Tobi Smith had a slightly different opinion: “I think it just means for them to strive to get more education than their parents got so that they’ll have more opportunities, more job opportunities, more opportunities for living away [outside of the parish].”

Although this study focuses on cultural capital, it is important to note the prevalence of the idea of human capital in this portion of the study data. Both the students and counselors explanations of the “better life” concept, and the financial gain as success idea, associate with investment in human capital. Paulsen (2001) describes *investment in human capital* as spending time and money on education and other activities to develop one’s “knowledge, understandings, talents, and skills” (p.56). Specifically, rural students’ desire for a better life ties into the human capital notion that there will be monetary, nonmonetary, or both types of return on their investment in higher education (Paulsen, 2001). Students will decide to pursue higher education if, and only if, they believe “a college education is

worthwhile,” which means that they would assume the expected benefits of pursuing a higher education would outweigh the costs of attending (Paulsen, 2001, p.56). However, human capital is not the sole determinant of students’ decision to aspire to or attend college. Rather, factors that are directly explored in this study such as “socioeconomic status, background, academic ability, and access to information about postsecondary opportunities” (i.e. college knowledge and university jargon) also contribute to students’ decision-making regarding higher education (Paulsen, 2001, p.60).

Aspirations vs. Reality

The students’ aspirations of being physical therapists, veterinarians, and designers are not a surprise to the counselors. They have each spent over thirty years in this parish facilitating the dreams of high school students. The issue the counselors face is helping the students to have realistic plans without suppressing their aspirations too much. Allie Soileau discussed the delicate balance:

You can teach someone to draw something, but true artists are just gifted. It’s a natural talent. There are just certain things some people are gifted at and some aren’t, or some just don’t have the personality [for the job]. I never wanted to be a nurse because I can’t take the blood and guts. You have to think about what you’re capable of and what you like, because if you don’t like what you are doing, I don’t care how much money you make, you’re not going to be happy. The people who make the big bucks don’t work eight hours a day. That’s some 14- or 16-hour days ... it’s not about money. Yeah, money is good. It’s [also] got to be something you enjoy. If you like to be inside, don’t go to school for something that you have to work outside all day. If I had to be in a cubicle by myself, I’d be crazy. So you never know and it’s scary. They [students] take so much [of what you tell them] literally when you may say it just in passing. It’s scary how much they take what you say not with a grain of salt, especially when you’re in a bad mood or something.

Tobi Smith, HS1 counselor, noted that some students do not even really have specific academic or career aspirations:

Many of them just want to go to college because they think it's the thing to do or the fun thing or just the next step in life. Some really want to go because they have a goal in mind, an educational goal.

It is apparent that, during their formal and informal interactions with students, counselors try to balance out aspirations and realities. One afternoon in the HS2 counselor's office, there was a discussion between two students about Harvard and how they could never get into that institution. Allie Soileau explained to the students that they needed to focus on passing their graduation exit exam first and remember what academic track they were on [Core 4 vs. Basic]; she also mentioned that the students should not worry about Harvard not wanting them because Harvard would not have wanted her either. The exchange between Mrs. Soileau and the students showed both Mrs. Soileau's encouragement of the students while also giving them realistic, attainable goals on which to focus.

Community College Mentality

Rural students who do seek out higher education often possess a "community college mentality," which means that many of them aspire to attend community colleges rather than four-year institutions due to their desire to remain in the community and ease into their postsecondary education (McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010, p. 199). A study by Hu (2003) found that rural students sought a two-year education more than any other type of college education—"33.1 percent two-year to 28.2 percent four year college and 22.0 percent graduate school"—and they aspired to a two-year education at rates higher than both their

urban and suburban peers—“33.1 percent of rural to 27.1 percent of urban and 29.3 percent of suburban” (p. 4).

HS1 and HS2 students often cannot think of college beyond institutions that are under an hour’s drive from their towns. The majority of the students who aspired to college mentioned two local community colleges that are branch campuses of the state flagship institution as the most prevalent, or sole, options for institutional choice. One institution is approximately a twenty-minute drive from the parish while the other institution is approximately a forty-five minute drive from the parish. Joslyn explained, “I’d like to start back at home just to get up on my feet and then transfer to another school.”

The counselors recognize, and sometimes even encourage, the community college mentality. HS1 counselor Tobi Smith illustrated:

I think location is pretty much taken for granted. We rarely, if ever, have any kids that go out of state. Most of them start at [the local community college 20 minutes away] and then we’ve had more going to [the other local community college 45 minutes away] in the last couple of years.

Similar to their restricted view of institutional types, rural students and their counselors lack awareness and comprehension of most college knowledge and university jargon.

Step One to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Being Aware

Underrepresented students do not receive the same information about college choices; are less likely to take college entrance examinations (ACT/SAT); are less represented in courses or programs that often predict college enrollment such as honors courses, advanced placement (AP) courses, and international baccalaureate (IB) programs;

and are less aware of courses required for college admission or grant aid programs (McDonough, 1997; Vargas, 2004). The effects of college processes are most severe on students who lack familiarity with it, such as rural students. They often have unrealistic expectations, particularly about the financial aid they are likely to receive; they gain much of their information anecdotally, rather than through official channels such as school counselors or college admissions offices; and they tend to change their college aspirations, goals, and plans rapidly (Conley, 2005).

This accurately describes the situation in both HS1 and HS2. As previously discussed, finances are a barrier to students trying to take the ACT; the schools do not offer AP or IB options; and students may not realize their curriculum choice of Core 4+ Academic, Core 4 Career, or Basic Core at the end of their sophomore year determines whether or not they can even apply to college. Their aspirations have a history of not matching their realities and they, their families, and their communities lack the cultural capital to possess or pass on college knowledge.

Students are acquainted with college knowledge and jargon at varying levels. Some students have little to no information about college and its corresponding jargon, several students retain a common understanding of the material, and very few students possess substantial comprehension of college knowledge and jargon. Emily Anne's response about what, if any, college information she had received spoke volumes: "I mean, not really. I don't know." Students' levels of identification and understanding are often shaped by their parents and families, their ability to associate college information and jargon with things they already

know, the terminology universities choose for recruitment efforts, students' access to anyone who has attended college, and their own sentiments about obtaining and comprehending college knowledge.

Access to Information and Resources

Parents and guardians. Inequities in college knowledge may result from families' inexperience or unfamiliarity with college processes. Parents and guardians of underrepresented students can generally support the idea of college but cannot usually provide the access to specific information or contacts that more privileged parents could offer their children, nor can rural parents give students firsthand experience with the benefits of education (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Dumais & Ward, 2009). The study participants illuminated these challenges.

All of the students in the study were first-generation students per the study's definition—students who are the first in their immediate families to attend college and whose parents have no college or university experience. Students may have had grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or friends of the family who attended and/or graduated from a college or university, but none of the students' parents or direct guardians had collegiate experience. This confused some of the students, as they believed one or more of their parents had attended college; in reality, the students were referring to technical and trade schools as “colleges.” This study defined college or university as a two-year or four-year college or university. This misnomer hints at students' misperception of university jargon and their insufficiency of college knowledge.

Students discussed if and how they talked about college with their parents and guardians. Many of them described how they had talked about “going to college” with their parents, but never had a real conversation about what it takes to get there—academic qualifications, applications and corresponding documents, financial aid, etc. “Never really talked about it,” Gibbs explained. Joslyn portrayed a conversation with her mom:

My mom [has given me information], really my mom talking about how it’s [college] like and stuff and what’s a good college to go to—like [the state flagship institution]. She [suggests] like starting off back home [at a community college] though.

Bobby described his interactions with his parents: “Just talking about where I want to go and see where I could find places that would accept what I’m going for.” Brittany had similar exchanges:

We talk about it. It’s talked about like what I should go for, what’s the best choice, what’s the best college for me to go to. They don’t want me to go to college and like waste my time, they want me to go there and be focused and pick the right college and not go there just to party and stuff.

Allie Soileau, HS2 counselor, recognized that parents may not be the ideal source of information due to their lack of personal collegiate experience:

They [students] don’t know a lot because either their parent’s don’t talk to them about it or the parents don’t have a clue. So, if the parents don’t know the difference between different degrees, then where are the kids going to get it? It’s not something that’s taught in class. I mean those people that are more educated are more diligent about trying to learn stuff. They know the difference; you know what constitutes going to college. What’s a bachelor’s degree. What it takes to get it. But those [parents] that didn’t go are not often real inclined to learn. But there are some that do. I think a lot [of parents] are [talking about college]. Is all the information correct? Or do they know a whole lot? No, a lot don’t. But at least if they are speaking about it at all, that’s a start.

HS1 counselor Tobi Smith gives some parents credit for asking for assistance though:

Many of our parents have never been to college, so they don't know a whole lot about it at all. And some of them will come and tell me, "I don't know anything about it. Can you please help?" Which I am happy to do. But they [parents and students] need to learn a whole lot, like how to fix a schedule and where to look for information when you don't know something, how to get financial aid. Every year we have a financial aid meeting for seniors and their parents and only about, oh, 25 to 30 percent of the people come.

Families and friends as "experts." A few of the students had people in their lives that had attended and/or graduated from college. The students saw these people as "experts" because they had experience that the students and their parents lacked. Students often mentioned these "expert" family members or friends when they discussed what, if any, information they had received about college. However, the information these people provided to students was mostly in the form of a pep talk or support rather than actual college knowledge. Autumn described information her aunt shared:

My aunt went to college for a long time and now's she an orthopedic surgeon. She talked to me about college and things and how you have to have your head in the books and how hard it is, but that you should never give up and try your hardest.

Rodger looked to his brother for information. "My step-brother is going to college for computers and stuff. And one thing I learned that you have to take that I'm not so happy [about] is speech. Like I said, I'm not good in front of crowds," Rodger expressed. Bobby discussed what his friend's brother imparted about college:

The most I've heard is that they have a lot of courses over there. They give you a variety of things you can do at some colleges. Others have certain things in particular. You just do one thing [because] it's just made for one thing.

Gibbs received even less helpful information; "I just heard it was fun from my sister," he said.

High schools. Students' college planning behavior will be shaped not only by information they have but also by the information and expectations they receive, or do not receive, from their secondary schools (McDonough, 1997). Many students in the study responded with a resounding “not yet,” “not really,” or “nope” when asked if they had been introduced to any college information by their high schools or counselors. A few students did comment on hearing some university jargon from the counselor, during their class lessons, or when talking to high school or district personnel. However, the majority of the information they did recall getting from their schools mostly involved the three academic tracks and academic options such as dual enrollment.

The HS1 and HS2 counselors would disagree with the students' statements. They described how they have meetings with the students and their parents during eighth grade and prior to the senior year. They provided instances of the presentations they give to classes about high school schedules that also include some college information. They also recalled the occurrences of one-on-one conversations they have with students about college; however, they recognize most of those conversations happen with students who are seniors. There seemed to be some disconnect between what the counselors feel like they are providing and what the students seem to be taking away.

Colleges and universities. Based on the potential advantages and disadvantages discussed earlier in the chapter—such as students participation in extracurricular activities and their contact with people who have been to college—students' access to information and resources about college fluctuates. Students like Autumn and Emily Anne have received

electronic and mailing information from universities based on their organizational affiliations. Autumn explained:

I received some [stuff] in the mail from [an out-of-state art & design university]; they send me stuff all the time in the mail. I also received some from [a state university]. I think it's because I looked into the [art & design university] online and because I went to [the People to People in Australia] and, you know, I guess my name was on some mailing list.

Emily Anne had a similar experience with a different state university: “[I got mail] from [a state university]. We went to cheer champ there and they sent us all papers [recruitment materials].” Other students have not received anything at all from a college or university.

College Knowledge and University Jargon

Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) found college knowledge to be one of “the most important problems in rural students’ college decision process” (p. 13). Obtaining the necessary information on these topics is the most difficult for the students who need it the most—rural students—due to regional isolation that can limit accessibility to college information (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). The counselors at HS1 and HS2 recognized their students’ lack of college knowledge. Tobi Smith commented:

They [students] have a lot to learn. For instance, they have no idea how to plan a schedule in college, how it's not like high school where you just do the same thing every day ... they don't know about night classes and online classes and interim courses, they don't know any of that. And they don't understand what 12 hours means.

Allie Soileau expressed similar sentiments:

I think the majority of them [students] need to learn a lot. And even though I have some teacher's kids, they still don't tell their kids a lot. They expect me to do it . . . they rely a lot on the school or me to do their stuff. Their financial aid. They think if you're going to college you should have a scholarship. Well maybe one percent of the

people get a scholarship. They don't realize that everything is so far and few between in terms of scholarships. They think almost everybody goes and finishes college, which is far from the truth. Or everybody should get a grant. College should be paid for. They say on TV that everybody can go to college.

Students were even less familiar with specific jargon than they were with general college knowledge. Most of them, when asked, could not name any university jargon off the top of their heads. Emily Anne brought up one of the only terms; "I mean, I've heard a lot about sorority life," she offered. Brittany recognized that there were academic designations. "The only thing would be different degrees," she suggested. Gibbs's comment seemed the most illustrative: "I might hear an adult say words [about college] that I don't know what they mean. I'm not too good with words." Counselors witness students' unfamiliarity with jargon frequently. Tobi Smith explained:

Like for instance when they are registering for the ACT or trying to enroll in university, they won't know what a Bachelor's or an Associate—you know, they'll ask about those terms. And then financial aid, they always ask, "What is this work study?" They have no clue what that is. They understand room, board, scholarships, fees, TOPS [the state tuition opportunity program] (they are all familiar with TOPS), semester, certificate, full-time, part-time, college, university. But there's a lot of things they don't know. Like I said, major, minor, they don't know what that is. Liberal arts, the different degrees that they can aspire to, they don't know what that is. They think that they pay tuition but they don't realize they have to pay all kinds of fees. Syllabus—I don't know if they know—they've never asked me about that but I don't know if they would know what that is.

Allie Soileau has similar interactions with students at HS2:

When we do [high school] schedules, I'll say, "Okay, 2 years is an Associate's. 4 years is a Bachelor's." But if you hear it once a year and you're looking at your friends and [focusing on] the [high school] classes you're going to take, you're not even paying attention to me [and the college information]. When they come in here [to the counselor's office], probably 90% will ask me again, "What's the difference between this? Why do I have to have that one [class] instead of this one?" Then they'll ask me about all kinds of careers. I don't know exactly what they [all the

careers] do. They do not understand lots of it. As I said earlier, there are some things [jargon] I wasn't too sure of either. We do talk about it. They find it very confusing. Credit hours. Okay, in high school, it's one credit per class. In college, you're there almost three hours, so you get three credit hours. That still blows their mind. They don't know a lot of this. Most of the terms they probably would not know unless their parent or sibling has talked about it. They'll say, "A 4-year degree or a 2-year degree," instead of saying "A bachelor's degree or an associate degree." And now everything is called a college. So they say, "yeah, I'm going to college." And they mean a technical school.

Application processes. Overall, students are very unacquainted with college application processes. "I really don't know much," Bobby admitted. Rodger was even more blunt; "I honestly can't [tell you anything about it]," he disclosed. They did not seem to know where to locate applications or what corresponding documents they would need to submit with the applications. Autumn seemed the best versed in the process; she gave the following details about the application process:

I know that you have to submit like a resume. You have to put your GPA down, your ACT score. You have to put, I mean, what you want to do. Like what year you're graduating, what year you plan on attending, your age and stuff, birthday. [You can find applications] online or if you—if we have Career Day—we get some from Career Day, or if you visit the college yourself. And, I have heard about letters of recommendation. You basically ask someone you know to send a letter of recommendation to the college.

However, Autumn did not know anything about personal statements and neither did many of her peers. They also struggled with the concepts of letters of recommendation; most students had no clue what letters of recommendation were or their knowledge was similar to Emily Anne's description: "Don't your teachers write them or somebody you know write a recommendation?" The students did not seem confident in their college knowledge and most of the time they either responded to questions about the application process with their own

questions or a version of “I’ve heard it, but I don’t know what it is.” This does not surprise the HS1 and HS2 counselors. Tobi Smith said:

A lot of them will come and ask me, “How do I register for college” because they don’t have a clue. And I’ll show them the website or whatever. They have very few paper applications anymore. It’s almost all online. Just like the ACT is all online now. They didn’t send me one paper [ACT] application this year. You have to make sure that the college you choose has the program you want. Because they don’t understand that either. They think they [institutions] all have everything.

Allie Soileau commented: “[Students tend to ask] ‘Where do I find an application? How do I fill it out? Can you do it for me?’”

Financial aid. Students were more aware of financial aid than any other aspect of college knowledge. This is likely tied to their concern about paying for college and their recognition of their family’s and the community’s financial situation. Tobi Smith explained:

They know about financial aid but they really don’t understand what all it involves like that you can get a campus job or what subsidized and unsubsidized student loans, what’s the difference, they don’t understand a lot of that. But they do know financial aid means money to go to school. A lot of them come and, like in September, even say “When can I do my financial aid?” Well, they can’t do it until January 1st. They’ll also ask me “How do I apply for TOPS?” [the state tuition assistance program] And I’ll say you have to do the FAFSA. That’s all you have to do is do the FAFSA.

Allie Soileau added:

They’re ready to do their financial aid. ‘I need to do that paper to get my grant.’ Well, you can’t do that right now. ‘My momma said I could.’ Well, sorry, you have to have your income tax first. We talk about TOPS [the state tuition assistance program] a lot . . . they get a checklist. So they see that word a lot and hear that word a lot.

The students spoke generally about the financial aid process. “I know that you have to apply to get it [financial aid] and [that it is] money to pay for college,” Autumn noted. “I guess the government, they help you through school, pay semesters.” Bobby said. “It’s like a

loan I think and it helps you pay for your college, like your books and stuff,” Joslyn offered. Brittney seemed to have a bit more depth in her knowledge: “That’s whenever you have a low income and you don’t have enough income to support yourself monthly and they’ll help support you, and then whenever you get yourself set you could pay it off monthly.”

Institution/location. Students’ knowledge of institutions was entirely framed by location. Every student in the study was focused on institutions within a two-hour radius of the rural parish. Though they did occasionally name the state flagship institution, the main campus of the other state university system, and a couple of private state universities, students tended to concentrate on the two community colleges that are closest to the parish. The two community colleges are both branch campuses in the state flagship system; one campus is a twenty-minute drive and the second campus is forty-five-minute drive from the parish. There were two exceptions to this. One student in the study—Autumn—did mention her interest in an out-of-state art and design university and another student mentioned Harvard as a witticism during a counselor meeting.

University recruitment materials. Colleges and universities tend to assume students’ level of college knowledge and familiarity with university jargon based on the terminology they use in their recruitment and admissions brochures and on their Web sites. Information was requested from all the state public and private colleges and universities to analyze the amount of university jargon incorporated into recruitment and admissions materials. Seven of the institutions actually sent the materials requested through the mail. The seven colleges and universities that did send materials were not consistent in institutional

type; they were located throughout the state, were both public and private, represented both two-year and four-year colleges, and varied in size. The institutional responses varied in return time as well. Two schools sent electronic replies within one week; the five other institutions opted for regular mail that took between one and two weeks. Five of the institutions sent only one communication (either electronic or mail); however, two of institutions continue to send information periodically.

The institutions that supplied information sent it in a variety of formats. There were full-size glossy brochures, small postcards, odd-sized packets, applications, and even simple emails. Each communication tool contained at least one and at most twenty-five jargon terms based on the study's jargon lists (see Appendices D and N). Even a small quad-fold brochure from one of the two community colleges most referenced by the HS1 and HS2 students and counselors used twelve jargon terms. The most prevalent jargon represented the categories of financial jargon and degree designation jargon, although general university and academic jargon did appear periodically. Table 5 lists examples of the jargon used in the university recruitment materials.

Table 5.

Jargon Examples from University Recruitment Materials

Type of Jargon	Example Terms Used
Financial Jargon	Financial Aid, FAFSA, Tuition, Fees, Scholarships, Grants, Loans, TOPS, Work

	Study, Merit-Based, Need-Based, Subsidized, Unsubsidized
Degree Jargon	Certificate, Certifications, Associate Degree, Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Bachelor's Degree, Baccalaureate Degree, B.S., PhD
General Jargon	Faculty, College, University, Semester
Academic Jargon	ACT/SAT, AP, IB, Full-Time, Part-Time, Major, Minor, Liberal Arts, Accreditation, Credit Hours

The widespread use of jargon in university recruitment, admissions, and financial aid material and the general inexperience rural students have with jargon combine to create a convoluted situation for students who are trying to navigate college processes. Counselors even mention their frustrations with managing university Web sites and online documents; Allie Soileau articulated:

They [universities] are all some tree-huggers now. I guess it's too expensive, you know? Try and print that [college catalogs]. I have some binders [with information] for the more popular schools that I have printed. I can't stand to look online. It's hard to find. You scroll and scroll and scroll. It's much quicker the other way [with hard copies]. I could just pull out a paper, go copy it, and bring back the kid their curriculum.

Knowledge, command, and the ability to locate any type of information can often stir an emotional or cognitive reaction in people. This holds true for understanding higher education and its corresponding terminology. People often have some type of reaction to their expertise, or lack thereof, regarding colleges and universities and how those institutions function. However, people are not always open to displaying or reflecting on their personal reactions.

Emotional or Cognitive Reaction to Awareness

Students shied away from discussing their emotional or cognitive reaction to not possessing a lot of college knowledge or recognizing much university jargon. Many students, when asked, said they did not have any reaction to their lack of familiarity or knowledge. This may be the result of not realizing that many students who are their age and classification in other parts of the state and country do have this knowledge—a case of “you don’t know what you don’t know.” Joslyn was a prime example of this absence of reaction; she paused for a while before stating: “I don’t know. I don’t really know.”

Students may think and feel like it’s normal not to have this knowledge because most people in their rural community do not have it and do not try to obtain it. Gibbs explained: “I don’t know. Not really [I have no reaction]. I just know what some of them [jargon terms] are and aren’t.” Emily Anne put it this way: “No [I have no reaction], not really. I think it’s normal.” Rodger was more pragmatic about his lack of knowledge:

It really doesn’t make me feel anything. It’s just something that I’m going to end up having to do [learn] anyway. I mean if I want to go [to college] for anything I’m going to have to know how to do an application.

A couple of students were willing to express their reaction though. “I just—well, I do feel like I need to know more about going to college,” Autumn acknowledged. Craig had a similar response: “It makes me feel like I should know a lot more about it so I can like have more of a chance to get into college.”

Whether or not the students want to admit having reactions, the counselors at HS1 and HS2 believe they are attuned to students’ reactions. “Sometimes they’ll be overwhelmed and frustrated,” Tobi Smith at HS1 acknowledged. Allie Soileau further illustrated:

It makes them panic. I think that’s what they do. Case in point—the little girl that was in here [the counselor’s office] yesterday. “I couldn’t do it [college application]. I didn’t understand it. I didn’t know what it was. It was new to me.” Well, yeah. It is new to you, but you can do it. Take a breath. Everything’s going to be new to you when you get to college. Your momma can’t come and say, “She needs an A, not a B.” I find that they panic. A lot of them, but not all. They get nervous and feel insecure. I had probably eight of them [students] drop out of a Western Civilization dual enrollment class [this Fall]. There were too many kids in the class and the professor scared them. Those that stayed loved it. They panic. Some need to panic.

It is unclear why students claim to have no reaction when their counselors attest that they do, indeed, have both emotional and cognitive reactions. The issue in sharing could be attributed to many things including the students’ lack of comfort in sharing personal feelings with a new person, “not knowing what they don’t know,” or normalizing the situation based on the community’s level of knowledge. Whether or not a lack of reaction is positive or negative is also open to interpretation. Some would say that students’ not having a reaction allows them to feel “normal” and not realize that their lack of knowledge could be detrimental to college aspiration and access thus allowing them to break barriers. Others would suggest that

students' lack of reaction exemplifies their lack of cultural capital, habitus, and motivation and could result in less ambition to learn what they need to know to access higher education.

Whether or not students opted to share or reflect on their reaction to knowing or not knowing college knowledge and university jargon, students' immediate reactions were apparent through body language and other nonverbal communication. When they had the opportunity to apply their ability to recognize university jargon during the initial interview, they seemed anxious about circling terms that they may later have to define and inquired about the parameters of "knowing a word." Then, during the defining jargon portion of the second interview, there were many exhalations of what appeared to be anxiousness or frustration. Students seemed nervous about guessing definitions incorrectly and remorseful about not being able to define more terms. So, despite their claims to not have a reaction to their knowledge, or lack thereof, the students' nonverbal communication relayed a reaction that often matched how the counselors described students' responses to dealing with college knowledge and university jargon in an everyday setting.

Step Two to College Knowledge and University Jargon: The Ability to Recognize and Define Terms

Students were given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to recognize and define university jargon from prepared lists (see Appendices D & N) on two different occasions. The lists contained jargon within four different areas of college knowledge—1) general jargon, 2) academic jargon, 3) financial jargon, and 4) degree designation jargon. The first time they were asked to circle any term that they recognized and thought they could

define; the second time they were asked to write the definition next to each word that they thought they could define. The students' knowledge is exhibited in the next sections.

Recognition of Terms

In their initial screening of the university jargon list (see Appendix D), students were asked to circle any term with which they were familiar and thought they could explain. There were fifty-four total jargon terms on the list, with a certain number of terms in each category. Table 6 represents how many terms were included in each categorical type.

Table 6.

The Number of Jargon Terms By Category

Category	General Jargon	Academic Jargon	Financial Jargon	Degree Jargon	Total Jargon
Number of Terms	14	22	10	8	54

All participants circled five of the terms—faculty, staff, semester, scholarships, and TOPS, which is the state tuition assistance program. This means that all eight students had heard of or felt they could define those terms. No participant circled the following fifteen terms—PWI, HBCU, HSI, AANAPI, IB, degree audit, prerequisite, syllabus, FAFSA, TRiO, A.A.,

A.S., A.A.S., B.A., or B.S. This means that no students had heard of or felt they could define those terms.

Table 7.

Students' Total Jargon Term Recognition during Interview #1

Student	General Jargon	Academic Jargon	Financial Jargon	Degree Jargon	TOTAL JARGON
Autumn	9	15	7	3	34/54 = 63%
Bobby	5	14	7	2	28/54 = 52%
Brittany	5	14	6	0	25/54 = 46%
Craig	7	9	5	2	23/54 = 43%
Emily					
Anne	6	4	5	1	16/54 = 30%
Gibbs	6	7	5	1	19/54 = 35%
Joslyn	8	8	6	3	25/54 = 46%
Rodger	6	11	5	3	25/54 = 46%
TOTALS	52/112 = 46%	82/176 = 47%	46/80 = 58%	15/64 = 23%	

Table 7 represents each student's awareness of the jargon within each category; the numbers designate how many terms the students circled in each category. Overall, the students most readily recognized terms in the financial jargon category. It was not surprising that students were most familiar with this category. This ties into their socioeconomic background, the rural community habitus, and their largest concern about and barrier to college going. It was also not surprising that students were least familiar with degree jargon because these terms are rarely, if ever, discussed on the high school level.

Definition of Terms

In their subsequent screening of the second university jargon list (see Appendix N), students were asked to write the definition that corresponded with any term with which they were familiar and thought they could describe. There were fifty-four total jargon terms on the list, with a certain number of terms in each category (see Table 6).

This time there were only two terms—ACT and semester—that all eight participants could define. No participant attempted to define the following twenty-five terms—Public, PWI, HBCU, HSI, AANAPI, IB, accredited, liberal arts, general education, degree audit, prerequisite, section, drop/add, syllabus, FAFSA, work study, TRiO, A.A., A.S., A.A.S., B.A., B.S., master's, doctoral, and professional.

Table 8 represents each student's definitions of the jargon within each category; the numbers designate how many terms the students' accurately or semi-accurately defined in each category. Again, overall, the students were best able to defined terms in the financial jargon category.

Table 8.

Students' Total Jargon Term Recognition during Interview #2

Student	General	Academic	Financial	Degree	TOTAL
Autumn	4	3	2	0	9/54 = 17%
Bobby	2	3	3	0	8/54 = 15%
Brittany	4	13	4	0	21/54 = 39%
Craig	4	4	3	0	11/54 = 20%
Emily Anne	7	3	2	0	12/54 = 22%
Gibbs	4	5	4	0	13/54 = 24%
Joslyn	4	7	3	0	14/54 = 26%
Rodger	0	5	4	0	9/54 = 17%
TOTALS	29/112 = 26%	43/176 = 24%	25/80 = 31%	0/64 = 0%	

Once more, it was not surprising that students were most proficient with financial jargon. This ties into their socioeconomic background, the community habitus, and their largest concern about and barrier to college going. Overall, the students' definitions were completely accurate, accurate enough to be counted as correct, or completely inaccurate. For example, correct definitions for scholarship could be listed by students as "money for college," "a

reward that is given to pay for school,” “money given to a student to pay for their education,” or “where a college or university pays for half of your college funds.”

The majority of the jargon students decided to define were obviously terms they felt relatively confident defining. They tended to leave jargon terms blank if they did not know them rather than taking a guess at the definition, although a couple of students did take that approach once or twice. It was clear that students preferred leaving jargon definitions blank over submitting speculations or incorrect answers. A discussion of how students learned the terms they could define will occur in a subsequent section of this dissertation chapter.

Counselor Notions

HS1 and HS2 counselors thought it made sense that students were most capable of both recognizing and defining financial jargon and least capable of both recognizing and defining degree designation jargon. Tobi Smith described why she thought this was the case:

[Financial is the most] Because they worry about financial aid. They all know that it'll take money to go to college and their parents know that too. So, it's an awareness they already have and they'll start asking me, “When can I apply for financial aid?” They'll start asking me that at the beginning of their senior year.

Allie Soileau at HS2 agreed:

[It is] from society and their parents. The sophomores [say], “I need to do my financial aid. I need to apply for a grant.” Well, baby, you need to wait until your senior year and after your parents do their taxes. So, we're looking at February.

The counselors also had theories about why students were least adept with terms regarding degree designations. Allie Soileau explained:

I think a lot [of the lack of knowledge is] because their parents don't have that conversation to answer those questions. Or they [students] don't pay attention. I have tried to [have the conversation] and I will try even more now [that I know they are

least adept]. I do tell them that [degree terms], but when we discuss college and schedule requests and what you're going to school for and career plans. They get a lot of information in a short amount of time. So they might hear me say it one time, once or twice a year, but that's really not enough to have it stick in your mind. They get a checklist for TOPS [and other financial aid]; they don't get a checklist for associate degree, bachelor's degree. You know what I'm saying?

Tobi Smith further clarified:

I guess they don't know enough people that they're close to that have gone through the degree programs and like [students] have no idea what kind of degree they [teachers] have. And people don't just say, "I'm a nurse. I have an associate degree. I'm a nurse, but I have a bachelor's degree." It's not part of everyday conversation.

Overall, the counselors are mindful that their students do not likely rate well compared to their peers in their understanding of college knowledge and university jargon. HS1 counselor Tobi Smith ranked her students' knowledge of college and jargon "average in terms of the parish; a little below average state-wide; and below average nationally." Allie Soileau at HS2 categorized her students' college and jargon comprehension as "hopefully above average in terms of the parish, but I don't have a clue; below average state-wide; and definitely lower nationally." The main attribute both counselors accredited for their rankings was the rurality of the area. Tobi Smith simply stated: "[It's] because it's so rural." "I would think a lot of it [lower amounts of knowledge] is the rural [aspect]. If you live in a college town you're gonna hear and see more [about college] and there's usually more educated parents in a college town," Allie Soileau reasoned.

Awareness vs. Comprehension

Having the students complete exercises of recognizing jargon from a list and defining jargon from a list provided insight into their levels of awareness about and comprehension of

jargon. It was apparent that having to actually provide a definition for the jargon was more challenging for students. In fact, during the first instance of seeking only recognition of jargon, Emily Anne even asked self-consciously, “Do I have to tell you what they mean?”

It appears that the students may have overestimated their knowledge of jargon in the initial screening of the jargon list, because their overall knowledge of jargon decreased by almost half between the first instance of recognizing jargon and second instance of defining jargon. As with most preservation of knowledge, it is easier to recall seeing something, like jargon, than it is to be able to properly define it.

Another idea is that students may identify the term but have difficulty translating their understanding into words. Rodger was an example of this: “I know what they [the terms] are, I just can’t get the definition out . . . I can say what they are, it’s just I can’t get [write] the definition out.” “I don’t know how to explain these [as she pointed to some terms],” Joslyn expressed similarly. Autumn’s comments showed that she really was trying to recall all the college knowledge she possessed. While completing the second instance of defining jargon, she commented: “I know some of these but, I don’t know [how to explain] . . . I don’t want to give up . . . I will be racking my brain all day, all week.”

Step Three to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Finding Processes of Seeking and Understanding Information

Regardless of whether students and counselors have any specific reaction to or justification about their acquaintance, or lack thereof, with college knowledge and university jargon, it is evident that additional information needs to be acquired. There are several

processes that rural students and their counselors can, and sometimes do, employ to seek and understand college knowledge and university jargon.

Processes

Although students “don’t know what they don’t know,” students and counselors do have some ideas about how they would go about acquiring additional familiarity and comprehension of college knowledge and university jargon. Specifically, students and counselors discussed using association and common sense; asking counselors, other high school personnel, family members, “experts,” and peers; using the media and internet; and going to the source—colleges and universities.

Association and common sense. A couple of participants believed that college knowledge and university jargon were concepts they could grasp through common sense or by associating the concepts with others they already knew. Rodger was a strong proponent of this process. “Off the top of my head most of the words [jargon] aren’t really that hard,” he asserted. Rodger further emphasized his perspective:

Most of them are like common sense—part-time, full-time—I mean, like I said, they’re most—certificate, and major, minor, like I can’t honestly get them to explain but I know [what it is]. Yeah, all the letters [acronyms]. Some of those letters can be confusing. A.A., A.S., A.A.S ... I know what B.S. means, just not by these [jargon] terms! I know a semester is longer than a quarter. I know full-time job from part-time job. I mean if you go by like common sense what it [financial aid] has in the name—I mean if you’re getting aid financially, you’re getting a little bit of money just to help out.

Emily Anne also believed in the use of common association. She offered: “Some of them [jargon terms] are common sense and some of them I’ve heard before.”

Inquiring/asking. The majority of students believed that the most prevalent method of assisting them in obtaining and comprehending college knowledge and decoding university jargon would be asking someone, or checking the internet, about it. “It depends on what they are doing at the time and who’s around. They’ll ask their peers, maybe their teachers, me [the counselor], a parent. And some of them just won’t ask,” Tobi Smith explained. Bobby was one of the unsure students Mrs. Smith described. “I really don’t know [who or what is going to be my source of college information]. I guess [I’d start] with a person . . . just anyone in general, probably,” he acknowledged. Other participants had solid ideas about who they would ask or to what resource they would turn, including but not limited to their counselors, other high school personnel, family members, “experts,” and peer groups.

Counselor. A primary resource that students declared useful to them was their high school counselors. Counselors believed this was the case as well. Students specifically named Tobi Smith and Allie Soileau as chief information sources about college knowledge and university jargon. HS2 students did bring up their counselor more often though and with greater confidence than HS1 students. This is likely tied into the counselors varying approaches to their multitude of roles; HS2 counselor Allie Soileau assessed that a lot of her time was spent on college counseling while HS1 counselor Tobi Smith evaluated that only about five percent of her time was spent in that area.

Outside of one-on-one conversations, counselors also provide “career centers” in their offices for students to browse at their own leisure. Tobi Smith explained:

I have a career center with some pamphlets and stuff. I have a page with the URL's of all the universities in Louisiana, private and public. And it also has scholarship searches, financial aid URL's. It has a lot of information they can look up online. Some of them [students] take advantage of it.

High school personnel (teachers, principal, etc.). Students and counselors also mentioned other high school personnel as potential sources of college information. The students discussed these people, particularly teachers, more generally. They talked about having individual conversations with teachers and other personnel and they recalled having a few class discussions about college knowledge and university jargon. Allie Soileau illustrated: "Some will ask some [questions] of their teachers . . . teachers here are close to the kids. Some are very resourceful." The new state mandate that all high school students take the ACT as part of graduation requirements also helps facilitate some college conversations around the schools.

Students in HS2 did distinctively name their principal multiple times. They saw her as a willing and able resource. It seemed that HS2 students also felt they had more access to and were comfortable in approaching their principal. HS1 students never mentioned their principal.

The school district also hosts a Career Day each year for all of the junior and senior students in the parish. The district invites all types of postsecondary providers to attend, including but not limited to two-year colleges, four-year colleges and universities, various military branches, technical and trade schools, and public service organizations (police, fire, etc.). Students have the opportunity to explore various occupational pathways. Tobi Smith described Career Day:

They [students] meet with all the [various recruiters]. They have like three ten-minute sessions where they choose a booth and they go to have a conversation, then they have a browsing period. So they can get a lot of information from a lot of people. The first time [as juniors] they're kind of overwhelmed, but they can get some ideas and narrow it down for the next year [as seniors].

Family members. Many students named family members as people who they would turn to with questions or concerns about college knowledge and university jargon, even though parents and other family members may have never been to college. Bobby referenced his uncle as an informant because his uncle worked in the occupation Bobby was interested in pursuing, although his uncle never got any sort of formal certificate or degree. Brittany also noted uncles and aunts; specifically she named one uncle—"My uncle, who is a professor [in Ohio], he'll talk to me sometimes about it," she explained. Several students identified their mother as their first point of contact about college knowledge and a few also mentioned siblings, whether or not those people had any collegiate experience.

"Experts." A few students talked about people, both family members and acquaintances, who they knew had experience with college; they mentioned these people as resources from whom they could learn college knowledge and university jargon. Students seemed to view these people as experts; however, "expert" very loosely described the level of proficiency these individuals actually had because many of them may have attended technical or trade schools rather than two- or four-year colleges and a number of them did not actually graduate from any postsecondary institution. Rodger described: "I'd probably ask my stepbrother [about jargon] because he is currently in college and should know what some of these [jargon terms] mean. I [also] know a couple of people like went to college for a little

while but really didn't go – really don't go even a year or finish.” Craig explained that he would “ask somebody that was like already attending college or attended college already . . . or someone that is about to [attend college].” He named his friend's brother as a resource expert; however, that individual was only in his own first semester of college. There were a few solid resources in the descriptions though. Autumn discussed using her grandmother as an expert: “I would ask my grandmother [who went to a state HBCU and graduated in the past decade].”

Peer groups. Though not very widespread, a couple of students did name their peers as assets in acquiring and comprehending college knowledge and decoding university jargon. “Some of my friends talk about it,” Joslyn offered. Craig described “some of the senior people [students] at school” as a group to whom he could turn for information. Counselors also brought up the concept of peer-to-peer education about college; however, counselors may think the concept is more used than it is in actuality because students rarely discussed having these type of conversations with their peers.

Media/Internet. Most, if not all, of the participants mentioned turning to the internet for information and college “research.” Emily Anne stated: “[I would] probably like [go] on the internet mostly.” Google, as society's dominant search engine, was an obvious resource for students. Rodger emphasized: “Google has everything, any answer you need.” Students also said they would use online dictionaries and university Web sites. “[I've seen and learned jargon] mostly from books online and things I've looked up,” Brittney offered. Additionally,

a couple of students brought up the fact that they see commercials on television about admissions, financial aid, and other college knowledge and jargon. Craig illustrated:

Mostly all I really saw them [jargon terms] off of was like shows, you know, TV; because they [TV shows] have someone who's like high into college level or, you know, like a professor or something and they like give you [information].

Colleges and universities. As mentioned previously, some colleges and universities are sending information to students in both electronic and hard copy formats based on students' participation in extracurricular activities and, rarely, their academic achievements. Autumn mentioned that a state public university about an hour from the rural community sends her mailings: "They [the state public institution] sent me something in the mail to go to the college and check out a career day thing. And they told like all the programs they have." She also discussed the institution's recruiters and the use of jargon in both documents and conversations:

I see a lot of these [jargon] words on applications, college brochures, information . . . I read a few applications and I've asked questions [to the recruiters] and they told me [what the jargon meant]. Sometimes they tell you what you need [to know]. People tell [me] because I ask a lot of questions.

The counselors also described how colleges and universities, as well as professional organizations, were resources for college knowledge and university jargon. Both counselors noted the Louisiana Association of College Registrars and Admissions Offices (LACRAO) as a source of information. LACRAO hosts a workshop for all state high school counselors every year where counselors can meet with state college and university recruiters and ACT representatives to learn about institutional admissions requirements, degree offerings, student affairs, etc. Tobi Smith also mentioned that local college recruiters would be willing to visit

the school on request: “If you call them, they’ll come and do a presentation. They’ll be glad to,” she expressed. However, it is unclear how often this actually occurs. During the three-month period of the study the only recruiter seen at either high school was a U.S. Army recruiter.

In addition to students and counselors using a variety of processes—people and resources—to gain awareness and comprehension of college knowledge and university jargon, an assortment of formats of teaching and learning higher education information were also employed.

Teaching and Learning Formats

The processes of seeking and understanding college knowledge and university jargon contain a variety of formats for exchanging information. Counselors most often impart information through one-on-one conversations or presentations with students and, less frequently, parents. Some students also seek out the counselors on their own to gain more knowledge. There is also a debate about whether information is most accessible and best articulated in online or hard copy formats.

1-on-1 meetings. At HS2, Allie Soileau hosts one-on-one meetings with all the juniors and seniors at the school. She conveyed:

We make personal contact and discuss grades and yada yada. I met with every single junior and senior one-on-one and as much of the other grade levels as I can, too. [With juniors and seniors] we went over all of their checklists and what kind of diploma they’re getting. We met with parents if they are opting out [of the Core 4 tracks]. We did a TOPS checklist. It took a long time with each student.

Set one-on-one meetings seem to be more rare at HS1. Neither the counselor nor students made any specific mention of having those kind of interactions.

Presentations (classroom or assembly/parent meeting). College knowledge and university jargon tend to be presented to students, and sometimes their parents/families, in two primary formats—classroom presentations and meetings or assemblies that often include both students and parents. Counselors at both HS1 and HS2 host two nights of set meetings about postsecondary options. The first meeting is held during students' eighth grade year when the counselors introduce the three academic tracks the state allows for high school students—Core 4 Academic, Core 4 Career, and Basic Core—and the corresponding graduation requirements. The second meeting is held during students' senior year and covers postsecondary opportunities and financial aid options, including TOPS, the state tuition assistance program. Student and parent involvement and engagement in the meetings varies. At HS1 only a small percentage of parents actually attend, while HS2 sees high interest from parents.

There are also other opportune times when counselors bring up college knowledge and university jargon. “When I give out the PLAN test, which is the 10th grade pre-ACT, I talk to them then about postsecondary and the interest inventory and how we’re going to use it,” Allie Soileau noted. Tobi Smith also capitalized on an opportunity for college counseling while helping recruit students for this study. While the counselor was handing out consent forms in a classroom, the teacher turned the conversation to college planning and the counselor was open to a spontaneous counseling session. Mrs. Smith explained that now,

during their sophomore year, was the prime time to evaluate their postsecondary options, and she brought up the topic of TOPS – the state’s tuition assistance program. She also gave the students space to ask questions, but that space remained silent. It seemed that students were either unprepared or unwilling to ask questions at that time.

Student-initiated interactions. Some students, and even parents, also take it upon themselves to seek out their counselors for postsecondary direction and advice on college knowledge and university jargon. “Students will come in and ask questions. Or parents—parents will come by,” Tobi Smith said. Allie Soileau agreed:

A lot is impromptu. They ask a lot. Some, I can’t get rid of. Some I see once or twice a week. Some never come. Some are trying to get out of class or need some help or a combination of both. It’s kind of up to them [students] now. If they’re going to take the initiative to come get it [scholarship applications, etc.] . . . it also gives me a point of contact. I think they pay the most attention when they’re initiating the contact. But I’m not going to hunt you down. You know where my office is.

Assessment of Resources

Participants in the study felt pretty good about the amount of resources they had available to them and they seemed to believe they had adequate access to those resources. Gibbs noted, “I feel like if I needed information I could get it.” “I think we have a lot of resources available to us. If you don’t want resources, you don’t ask, and you wouldn’t get them. If you go and ask for the resources, then they’ll be available to you,” Brittney clarified. Craig was the outlier of participants. He does not believe there are enough resources and he suggested that “more classes about it and stuff that would teach [us] on it” would be helpful.

Counselors had mixed feelings about students’ impression of resources. They were unsure if students were even aware of all the available resources and they had no idea if

students would deem the resources sufficient. Counselors also had some concerns with their own resources, particularly the format in which they received information.

Online vs. hard copy. Counselors seem to be adapting more slowly to the change in college knowledge formats than students, who tend to seek out online resources. Allie

Soileau at HS2 provided some examples:

ACT used to be easy. I bubbled in parts of their packet and gave it to them. They did it. They emailed it. Easy. Now, it has to be done online. Sometimes I'll have two or three kids in here [my office] and I can't sit at my own computer because they are doing their ACT stuff.

I hate that colleges do not give [hard copy] college catalogs anymore. It was so much easier to find [information]. You want to be a nurse? Okay. Let's look at what you need to have. I would pull out the catalogue and say, "Okay, you need this. What do you need more—physics or biology 2? I would take biology 2," or things like that when making course preparation or career choices.

Process and formats for the teaching and learning of college knowledge and university jargon could be expanded or reshaped to better serve both rural students and counselors. The next chapter of the dissertation will discuss some suggestions for how to increase awareness and comprehension of college knowledge and decoding of university jargon.

Chapter Summary

This study's data offered many insights into rural students' and counselors' pathways to awareness and understanding of college knowledge and university jargon. Seven overall themes emerged from the data: 1) Ways of Thinking and Being in a Rural Community, 2) Mixed Signals about Educational Choices, 3) Counselors' Crusade of College Counseling, 4) Students' College Hopes, Dreams, and Realities, 5) Step One to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Being Aware, 6) Step Two to College Knowledge and University Jargon:

The Ability to Both Recognize and Define Terms, and 7) Step Three to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Finding Processes of Seeking and Understanding Information.

The limited cultural capital and the habitus of the rural parish did not provide the students with a lot of inherent value in or experience with postsecondary education. Although people in the community often tout higher education to high school students, there are some adverse attitudes and most people admittedly hold practical knowledge in higher regard than theoretical knowledge. The rural residents' occupational fields are often in the lower ranks of employment with more manual labor, higher risks, lower incomes, and less necessary training or education. The few people who end up pursuing college typically do not return to the community, resulting in "brain drain" and a limited number of college-educated role models for students. Another aspect of cultural capital that seemed significant was students' lack of exposure to ways of thinking and being outside of the rural area. Because of their isolation, students often face a tough transition out of the rural parish and into academia.

Despite all of this, about half of the high school students, and all study participants, still managed to maintain college aspirations. Participants discussed how they and their peers desire to obtain a college education. Nevertheless, students did recognize factors that they would have to face in their pursuit of higher education including their academic opportunities and aptitude, their own and their parents financial situation, the type of support they received or lacked from their families and friends, and their own self-efficacy and motivation.

Counselors discussed their role in students' educational choices. They revealed their mentality about why they chose their careers and how they try to manage all the assorted and

sometimes conflicting roles they are expected to assume in their high schools. Specifically they discussed their strategies with college counseling and how it often gets pushed aside to compensate for other duties because of the high student-to-counselor ratio and the lack of adequate staffing in the schools.

Students' plans for higher education center around their career interests and desire to create a better life for themselves than most people in their rural community. They defined "better life" mostly in terms of financial income and the ability to become stable providers for their families. Counselors believed students struggle with turning their aspirations into realities, particularly since many students tend to have a "community college mentality," which research shows decreases chances of retention in and completion of college.

Familiarity with college knowledge and university jargon tended to be low and varied with students' access to information and resources. They seemed to depend on their parents, families, high schools, and higher education institutions to help them become acquainted with such information. Students encountered college knowledge and university jargon within application and financial aid processes, in awareness of what institutions exist, and on receipt of university recruitment materials. Though most students claimed to not have an emotional or cognitive reaction to their seeming lack of familiarity with college knowledge and university jargon, a few students acknowledged that they felt they needed to learn more and their counselors disclosed that students often seem to get frustrated with or even panic about processes related to college going.

Students' abilities to recognize and define university jargon were also assessed. Students recognized more terms than they could actually define. It was obvious that their knowledge was most established in the area of financial jargon and most scarce in the area of degree designation jargon. Counselors believed that the results of the assessment derive from students' and parents' concern with the financial aspect of higher education and the lack of intentional conversation around the different types of university degrees.

There were a multitude of processes that students and counselors employed to better obtain and understand college knowledge and decode university jargon. Some students attempted to use association and common sense; the majority found assistance in asking a variety of people in their lives for help; and a few turned to the media, internet, or high education institutions. Within each process, several different formats of providing information occurred including but not limited to one-on-one meetings, class presentations and school assemblies, and student-initiated interactions. Generally, students felt they had an adequate amount of and access to resources. Counselors, on the other hand, were unimpressed with the transfer of many resources from hard copies to online formats.

Overall, rural high school students and counselors seemed to agree that they could be better versed in both college knowledge and university jargon. The following chapter will discuss some recommendations for how to increase the levels of acquisition and comprehension in both areas.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative case study explored how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon. Findings of the study were illuminated in Chapter 5 of the dissertation through seven overall themes: 1) Ways of Thinking and Being in a Rural Community, 2) Mixed Signals about Educational Choices, 3) Counselors' Crusade of College Counseling, 4) Students' College Hopes, Dreams, and Realities, 5) Step One to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Being Aware, 6) Step Two to College Knowledge and University Jargon: The Ability to Both Recognize and Define Terms, and 7) Step Three to College Knowledge and University Jargon: Finding Processes of Seeking and Understanding Information. Based on these thematic findings, I draw the following conclusions, implications, and recommendations about how the K-12 and higher education systems can better support rural students and counselors in acquisition and command of college knowledge and university jargon.

Study Conclusions

Interest in college access and choice is paramount from both research and practical perspectives because these topics can relate to the entire K-16 pipeline and to public policy issues. K-12 and higher education systems involve the majority of society and people see education as a crucial issue in U.S. politics and government. Many families and policymakers in the United States now see postsecondary education as one of the essential elements to personal and socioeconomic success and they want everyone to have access to it and choices within it (Hossler & Palmer, in press). Additionally, high schools are being evaluated for

quality based on the number of students they have matriculate into colleges and universities (Hossler & Palmer, in press).

Hossler and Gallagher’s College Choice Model: Stage One and Stage Two

This study’s background and context focused on Hossler and Gallagher’s three-phase college choice model as it was best aligned with the nature of the study. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) created a three-tiered stage developmental college choice model that combines both “individual and organizational factors to produce college choice outcomes” (p. 208). The model contains three tiered stages—predisposition, search, and choice. This study focused on Stage One and Stage Two of the model, which focus on students’ predisposition (or aspirations) and search (or access and options). Summaries of the predisposition and search phases can be found in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

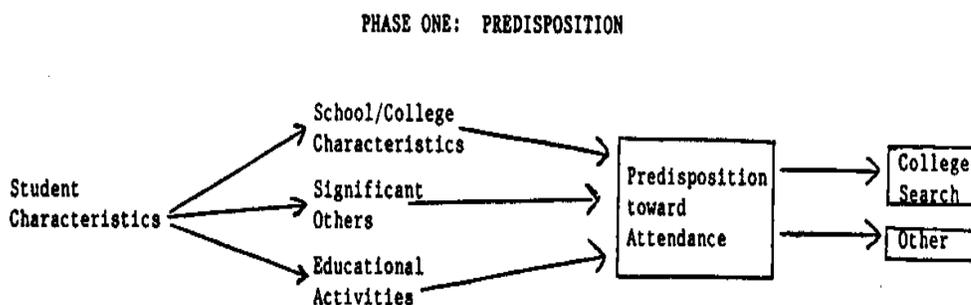


Figure 3. Hossler & Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model, stage one—predisposition.

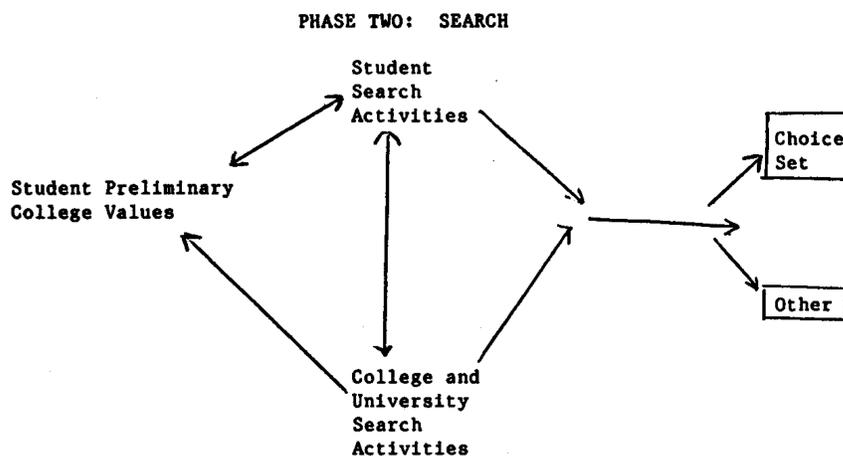


Figure 4. Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) college choice model, stage two—search.

The majority of the students in this study seemed to be in the predisposition phase of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model. They were discerning the value they and their communities placed on education, determining if their financial resources and academic abilities would allow them to pursue higher education, and seeking support and information from people around them. These findings align well with the model. Individually, students' background characteristics tend to heavily relate to their predisposition, particularly the socioeconomic status of their household, their academic ability, and their parents' and peers' attitudes and encouragement toward college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

A few students were further along in the predisposition phase based on the advantages they have from their participation in school sports, clubs, or academic activities and other outside hobbies in which colleges and universities place value. However, the rurality of the area did limit the scope of some of these activities and opportunities. Again, this supported Hossler and Gallagher's model. Organizationally, high school experiences in

extracurricular activities and rigorous academic curriculums, residential areas, and proximity to a college campus were all connected to students' predisposition (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Only a couple of students in the study seemed to have transitioned to the search phase of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model. These students typically had cultural capital from participation in school activities or had someone close to them who could serve as a role model and information source. Overall, students seemed to be stunted in the predisposition phase based on their lack of college knowledge and limited ability to decode university jargon. Many students did not know what questions to ask about college, nor did they know they were actually lacking information about the college choice process. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) point out that during the search phase, students "discover the questions they should be asking . . . the differences between public and private, high cost and low cost, residential and non-residential, research and teaching institutions" and "need accurate information about types of institution" (p. 219). The study participants have yet to discover such questions and, even if or when they do, much of the information they would seek is difficult for them to obtain. Students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and whose parents have less education tend have "longer and less efficient" searches and seek more assistance from their high school counselors (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 214). This matches the study's findings that counselors are a key resource for rural students who intend to pursue higher education.

It would be beneficial to rural students if they could begin the search phase of Hossler & Gallagher's college choice model before or during their sophomore year because research shows that is when most students make postsecondary decisions (Choy, 2001). High school districts and individual schools may need to focus on assisting students in their move from the predisposition phase to the search phase by having intentional conversations and meetings with students in their sophomore year about postsecondary options and where to begin searching for information. The search process, and its dependence on accurate information, is highly connected to the community, school, and individual cultural capital and habitus of the rural area.

Bourdieu's Cultural Capital and Habitus

Everyone possesses cultural capital; however, only some groups possess the kind that is valuable and useful in specific contexts like educational institutions (Schwalbe et al., 2000). Rural students do not naturally inherit the cultural capital that is necessary to seek out or expect certain educational opportunities (McDonough, 1997). This study used Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus as a framework for exploring students' familiarity or unfamiliarity with college knowledge and how they seek to understand and comprehend university jargon as an aspect of their college knowledge. Bourdieu (1965) named language and communication as the most active and elusive parts of a person's cultural heritage and background. It is not surprising that it is difficult to break the cyclical pattern of cultural capital because educational institutions contain linguistic and cultural competencies that convey the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1977). Jargon is often an aspect of

the college knowledge that many rural students have trouble deciphering due to their lack of cultural capital and their inherent habitus (Whiting, 2009). A summary of the study's theoretical framework can be seen in Figure 5.

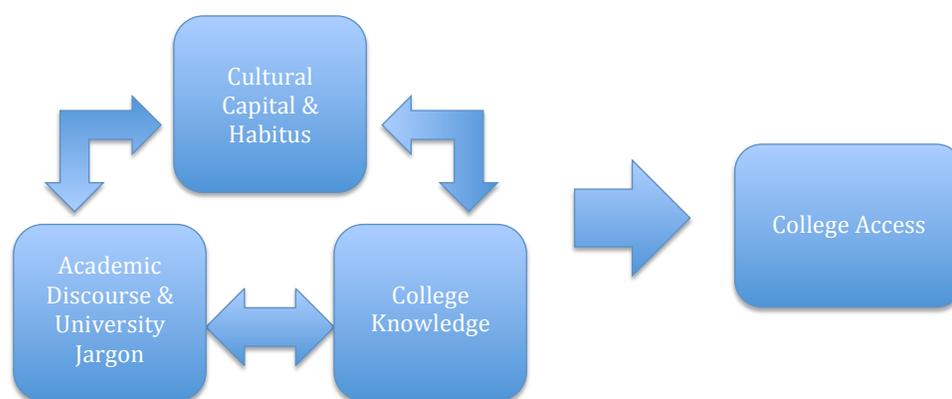


Figure 5. Theoretical framework summary.

Vargas (2004) suggests that even though the college knowledge gap is severe it is not impossible to overcome, and he proposes policies for college access that focus on ways to provide underserved students with the information and guidance they need, both early and often. The findings of the study represent that rural students are currently not receiving that kind of guidance either early or often. It would be beneficial to begin having regular conversations and providing frequent information about postsecondary options to students in eighth grade, when counselors have their first academic track with students, and continue that repeatedly throughout the rest of students' high school careers.

College Knowledge and University Jargon

This study contributes to the literature of empirical work on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as well as builds on the existing literature on university jargon, college knowledge, and college access. The focus on a rural population provides a new angle from which to study first-generation students or low-SES students. Additionally, the study specifically addressed university jargon and college knowledge as a function of cultural capital. The literature rarely addresses these concepts, and this study helped shed light on the relationship between jargon, college knowledge, aspiration, and access.

The relationship between these concepts is a potential reason why first-generation students are cited as having lower educational aspirations than their peers with similar qualifications (HERI, 2007). The findings of this study illuminated two of the relationships mentioned in Vargas (2004) report for TERI—1) college-preparatory information and guidance being major components in students realizing college aspirations, and 2) students typically underrepresented in higher education lacking the natural possession of college knowledge because they are members of families with limited or no college experience and attend schools that provide only minimal college guidance. College guidance is a central component of Vargas's TERI report; it is also a fervent topic among both state and federal legislatures. Louisiana is a prime example of how government and public education are extremely intertwined. Policy decisions made at the state-level often have deep impacts on the functioning of counselors and students' experiences.

Policy Implications

Government has played a central role in K-12 and higher education from the historical *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954) and Morrill Acts (1862 and 1890) to the more recent No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and slashing of federal and state contributions to higher education budgets. The policy decisions made in legislatures can have momentous outcomes on how K-12 and higher education systems operate. Within the past year, the state of Louisiana has made two policy decisions— requirement of ACT testing for all students and proposed elimination of the counselor position—that are having a significant influence on how high schools prepare students for postsecondary options, the ways high schools are assessed, and the role, if any, of high school counselors.

ACT Requirement in LA High Schools

During spring 2012 the Louisiana Department of Education (LA DOE) made a decision to replace the old state standardized testing system—the LEAP test—with the ACT test system (Huffington Post, 2012). The new rule will be implemented in spring 2013 and require all students in public schools in the state of Louisiana to take the series of ACT tests including the EXPLORE and PLAN pre-exams during eighth grade through sophomore years and leading up to the actual ACT test during the junior year (Huffington Post, 2012; Sentell, 2012). The funding will be subsidized by the state for all students at least once and up to two more times for students who participate in federal free or reduced lunch (Sentell, 2012). Administration of the tests will occur during school hours.

This decision is an effort by the state to “change the cycle” because “the state still has the smallest percentage of households in the country where at least one adult has an associate or bachelor’s degree . . . and 17 percent of children live in a home headed by a high school dropout” (Sentell, 2012). Some district superintendents believe this is a good decision because it will force students to take the ACT and, for some students, it could help them see themselves as college material when they might have not otherwise (Huffington Post, 2012).

Based on this study’s findings, the new LA DOE rule will, at the least, make rural students aware of the ACT test and give them access to taking the test, which is a college admission requirement, up to three times for no cost. It may also open the door to starting conversations about postsecondary options, college knowledge, and university jargon beginning in middle school because the EXPLORE exam is first administered during eighth grade. These two advantages may help rural students obtain and comprehend more college knowledge and university jargon and may encourage counselors to spend a bit more time on the college counseling portion of their role.

However, there could be several unintended consequences of this new LA DOE rule. If students’ ACT scores are low they may be even less inclined to pursue higher education than they were before, feeling like they are not academically capable based on a test that is, in some researchers’ opinions, regionally and culturally biased. Even before the LA DOE rule change goes into effect, Allie Soileau, the HS2 counselor, pointed out that “[some students] have a 1.8 [grade point] average . . . there are a lot of low ACTs. They just don’t have the study skills or discipline. I try to explain to them over and over again . . . [but] you

can't tell somebody, 'Baby, you have a 12 on your ACT.'" Making it mandatory that all high school students take the ACT could also drive the state's already low ranking (41st in the nation) in ACT scoring drop even further (Sentell, 2012). Additionally, the LA DOE will now alter its school performance scoring system to include how students score on the ACT as 25% of the overall score (Sentell, 2012). The hope is that the incorporation of the ACT on the school performance score will entice schools to make the ACT a priority and focus.

The ACT requirement adds additional pressure to rural schools because it adds additional responsibilities to the counselor's role, does not take into account the disparity in academic offerings (AP, IB, dual enrollment, etc.) between school districts, and does not account for the amount of students who are enrolled in the Basic Core academic track. The counselors at HS1 and HS2 were highly concerned about their school performance scores dropping even further because of the high amount of students they have who are not even on track to get a diploma, yet are required to take the ACT (T. Smith, personal communication, January 11, 2013; A. Soileau, personal communication, November 15, 2012). The new ACT rule could also discourage some students from aspiring to higher education in earlier grades (eighth grade–sophomore years) if they do not initially score well on the pre-ACT exams.

Overall, the new LA DOE rule has both advantages and disadvantages and the final evaluation on if it is beneficial or deferential for rural students cannot be determined until the rule has been in place for several years and assessment can be done to conclude if the rule has increased college aspiration and attendance for all students, including those in rural areas.

There is a question, now, though about which employee(s) at the high schools would administer the ACT testing system because, though counselors currently serve as standardized test coordinators and administrators, they may not hold that role much longer. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (LA BESE) is currently proposing changes to LA DOA Bulletin 741, which is the Louisiana School Handbook for School Administrators, that would impact the presence and functions of high school counselors.

LA BESE Proposed Policy to Eliminate High School Counselors

In fall 2012, the LA BESE began discussing changes to the LA DOA Bulletin 741—the Louisiana School Handbook for School Administrators. The crucial change being deliberated is whether or not to continue requiring K-12 schools in Louisiana to employ counselors. There was heated discussion across the state on the local news and in local papers about this proposed change, particularly from counselors and even within the LA BESE. Despite the concerns, the LA BESE approved the proposition in January 2013 with the caveat that schools could not completely eliminate the counselor position but could outsource the roles of a counselor to outside entities in lieu of hiring a full-time counselor in the school (Sentell, 2013). Effectively, the changes to Bulletin 741 will diminish the role of counselors in Louisiana public high schools (Sentell, 2013). The state superintendent of education, John White, calls the change “a bid to trim the role of the state on a wide array of mandates and give local educators more authority” (Sentell, 2013). However, there is no direction from the state on where schools could, or should, turn to outsource counseling services nor is there

any accountability that the outsourced services would require the same training and credentials as the current high school counselors possess.

Counselors were infuriated by the LA BESE approval of the change. A quote from one counselor stated: “I beg you, I plead with you, please don’t take a step backwards” (Sentell, 2013). Another implored: “Please don’t fail Louisiana students now” (Sentell, 2013). The counselors recognize the essential role they play in public high schools and the variety of services that could cease to exist or move to other administrators’ jobs should schools opt for outsourcing. For example, the HS1 counselor, Tobi Smith, described how she plays a crucial role in many components of the high school; she explained:

I have a lot of hats. Test coordinator. I see attendance issues. I counsel the kids. I help with all kinds of paperwork from the kids and for the [main] office. I am a full-time high school counselor but they only have a part-time junior high counselor so Tuesdays and Thursdays, I’m the counselor for the whole student body of 800 kids.

Trying to outsource or find other personnel to handle all these various functions—standardized test coordination, attendance, academic scheduling, personal counseling, college counseling, career counseling, administration of paperwork, etc.—would be a major transition for high schools and may even end up costing the high school or district more than the counselors’ salaries.

This new LA BESE policy diametrically contrasts the findings of this study. Rural students are heavily reliant on their high school counselors for a variety of services, including college counseling. They are comfortable with their counselors because they have built a personal relationship with them and because the counselors are natives to the rural area. Their comfort facilitates students seeking out counselors to inquire about postsecondary

options and to request information about higher education. Both counselors and students were clear that the counselor played a central role in students', and even parents', acquisition and command of college knowledge. Allie Soileau at HS2 described how students depend on her college counseling services:

A lot of [students] do their college applications in my office because they panic. I've done a million of them with the kids. It's like they panic and they can't do it. They really can. Not all of them utilize me, but some spend a lot of time [with me in my office]. I can't tell you how many parents send me their envelope from H&R Block and I do all of their FAFSAs. I do a bunch. They expect me to do it. They rely on me to do their stuff.

Tobi Smith, HS1 counselor, also mentioned parents reaching out to her; she illustrated:

Many of our parents have never been to college, so they don't know a whole lot about it at all. And some of them will come and tell me, 'I don't know anything about it. Can you please help?' Which I am happy to do.

Data also show that counselors contribute to students' college access by assisting with the application process and financial aid processes like the FAFSA. LA BESE's change may directly impact if, or how, students receive college counseling. The effect of the alteration in LA Bulletin 741 will not be known until the rule can be applied, likely in fall 2013. Both this policy and the ACT test policy will have practical implications for how both rural counselors and students handle postsecondary preparation.

Practical Implications

At the core of cultural capital are its institutionalized effects; schools play a prominent role in shaping students' educational aspirations (Tramonte & Willms, 2009). The findings of this study inform colleges and universities, school districts, high schools, and high school counselors about the college information needs of rural students and which

processes or resources may best assist with the acquisition of that information. Data from this study provide insight into rural students' need to have choices in processes and resources that focus on the individual, family, school, and, even, the entire community. Data also reveal key relationships that are central to students' processes of decoding university jargon, including students' level of comfort with counselors and access to higher education "experts" or role models. Parents, families, school personnel, and community members need to be included in both the conversations and educational programs that rural students receive about university jargon and college knowledge to help build both the family and community's cultural capital and support students' college aspirations and access.

The exploration of processes students use to decode university jargon were explored and led to an awareness that jargon is sometimes a true impediment to rural students' college knowledge. Students discussed their confusion around jargon; for example, Rodger stated: "All the letters [acronyms]. Some of those letters can be confusing . . . A.A., A.S., A.A.S. I know what B.S. means just not by these terms." Craig offered that when he sees jargon he does not know it "makes [him] feel like [he] should know what they are" but he doesn't feel he has enough resources to find out. Both counselors also added that students "need to learn a lot" about college knowledge and university jargon. Additionally, the study uncovered what is missing from students' processes of decoding university jargon, which included counselors' lack of time and resources, students' lack of cultural capital and college knowledge, students' feeling that not knowing jargon was "normal," institutions' use of university jargon without explanation in recruitment materials, and lack of interest in rural

high schools from higher education recruiters. Students' behavior is shaped not only by information they have but also by the information and expectations they receive, or do not receive (McDonough, 1997). Overall, this study helped inform secondary and higher education scholars and practitioners about processes of building cultural capital, which allows both rural counselors and students to decode university jargon and increase their comprehension of college knowledge.

Assistance for Counselors

This study revealed the struggle counselors have with managing all the various roles that they are expected to fill. College counseling was, and is, not always a priority for the HS1 and HS2 counselors for a multitude of legitimate reasons, including but not limited to a shortage of staff, too many roles, and a lack of all kinds of resources.

Staffing. Both counselors mentioned how they are the sole counselor in their high schools. Yet, they are expected to fill many roles including academic scheduler, test administrator, administrative personnel, personal counselor, college counselor, and career counselor. HS1 counselor Tobi Smith described her situation simply: "I have more to do than I can possibly do well. I have all these other duties like test coordinator that take me away from counseling things. So that's why I'm strapped for time." Allie Soileau at HS2 agreed; she explained: "It's too many expectations, especially with the number of high school students that we have. It's just more and more and more [duties you are expected to perform each year]." It is apparent that the counselors are stretched thin and do not always feel like they are meeting the needs of students because they have to spend a lot of their time on

administrative duties instead of meeting with students. This is particularly true for their college counseling. The HS1 counselor disclosed that she only gets to spend about five percent of her time on college counseling. The HS2 counselor devoted a bit more time to the college counselor aspect of her job, but still noted the struggle to provide adequate information and resources and to give time to younger students. Findings from this study suggest that schools should actually increase counselor staffing, seek volunteer assistance from local college graduates, or request additional support from the new community college program involving College Coaches.

More staffing is in direct opposition to the LA BESE proposed change to eliminate counselors or outsource the functions of counseling. However, findings from this study and other research represent the dire importance of high school counselors and the services that they are trained to provide to students, including college counseling (Bickel et al., 1991; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999; Paulsen & Loflink, 2005). Although the study findings do show that counselors may not have adequate time and other resources to offer comprehensive college counseling to students, what they can and do offer students is essential to students' acquisition of college knowledge and ability to decode university jargon. Data from the study speaks to students' reliance on counselors for college information and support.

Resources. Data in the study showed a lack of resources available to rural counselors regarding higher education. Counselors would be able to advance their college counseling practices if they had the time and financial support from their schools and the district to seek

out additional resources. HS1 and HS2 counselors suggested several areas where they could learn and grow and assets that would benefit their interactions with students.

Professional development. One way counselors can provide better information to rural students is if they possess better information themselves. Allie Soileau at HS2 described how she would enjoy visiting various institutions of higher education to learn more about what those institutional types currently offer students and conducting shadowing or visits to different career pathways so she can better portray to students what certain careers consist of on a day-to-day basis. Unlike counselors at elite private schools, rural counselors do not have the time or resources to go on many counselor visit trips to colleges and universities. They also have little knowledge about up-and-coming career fields that may not be represented in the rural area, like one student's interest in fashion and interior design. It would be helpful to find methods of professional development that allow counselors to broaden their base on knowledge on higher education institutional types as well as emerging career fields.

Handouts. Counselors mentioned that creating or being given informational handouts containing and deciphering college knowledge and university jargon may be helpful to students. This would allow students to have a resource to which they could immediately refer when they came across a piece of information or term with which they were unfamiliar. Counselors could also leave these types of handouts in specific areas of their offices so students could grab resources at their leisure, should they lose their handout or just want another one. It would also be helpful to provide such handouts to parents, even if only during the existing eighth grade and senior meetings.

Hard copy catalogs and books. In addition to handouts for students and parents, counselors themselves would like handouts, just of a different variety. Both Tobi Smith and Allie Soileau talked about their need to have hard copies of college catalogs and career resource books. Both counselors had copies of such materials but those were dated because most catalogs and resource books now only come in electronic formats. The counselors believe that the hard copy materials allow students to sit down and explore career and college options more effortlessly. Students sometimes get lost, or frustrated, on Web sites when they are unsure of where to look or cannot quickly find the information for which they are looking.

Technology. The use of technology is both a challenge and an opportunity for counselors. Though they want some things in hard copy, counselors do recognize that technology can be a useful tool. Both counselors had two computers in their offices designated for students; neither thought two was enough. They often gave up their own computers for students to be able to use it. Allie Soileau exemplified: “[I need] more computers available to [students] in [my office] because sometimes I have three [students] in here and I don’t even get to use my own computer because they are all using them [the two student computers and the counselor’s computer].” Counselors need additional computer workstations in their offices for students to use to research postsecondary options, complete college applications, and apply for scholarships and financial aid. In addition to the hardware, counselors mentioned that it would be beneficial to obtain software for career interest inventories, have the ability to bookmark Web sites for students to easily access the most

often visited college Web sites and scholarship Web sites, and allow students to watch campus' new 360 video virtual tours. These technological additions would fit nicely into what counselors want in their "career centers."

Career centers. Both HS1 and HS2 counselors had spaces in their office devoted to postsecondary options. Mostly these are hanging or stackable file folders with paperwork for scholarship applications, ACT testing materials, military recruitment information, and fliers from local trade schools. Counselors would like to expand these career centers in both space and scope. They want to offer more information to students and provide space for them to conduct research on possible careers and corresponding schools.

Building Students' Cultural Capital

This study showed students' lack of familiarity and understanding regarding college knowledge and university jargon. Data represented that much of this scarcity of college knowledge relates to rural students having cultural capital and habitus that do not effectively align with higher education. To build more applicable cultural capital and reshape students' habitus, rural counselors suggest that they have further interaction with role models, more engagement with "highbrow" activities, additional and repetitive exposure to college knowledge in their classrooms, and purposeful experiences that put them on college and university campuses.

Role models. From conversations with the students and their counselors, it seems that locating role models who could serve as mentors or even just guest speakers would aid students in gathering information about college and seeing an example of someone from their

area who attended college. These role models could be integrated into the students' course curriculums; for example, the school could invite doctors to come into science classes, lawyers to come into civics courses, journalists to contribute to English courses, accountants to attend math classes, and business owners to attend home economics and shop courses. Having people who have turned academic courses and interests into careers would help rural students make the connection between school and work and could also inspire students to seek further credentials, and possibly college degrees, within their academic areas of interest.

Curriculum integration. It was apparent that students received little to no information about college within their academic curriculum. The only mention of discussing postsecondary options within courses was the “Journey to Careers” course that students take as freshmen; however, this course focuses on students who are not in the Core 4 diploma tracks and, thus, mainly discusses options that are not related to higher education. It would be ideal if there could be a supplemental course established to discuss postsecondary options with Core 4 Academic students similar to the existing “Journey to Careers” course for Core 4 Career and Basic Core students. The “Journey to Postsecondary Education/College” course could be taught by the high school counselor, homeroom teachers, or college-educated community volunteers to introduce college knowledge and university jargon to rural students during their freshmen year and help them through Hossler and Gallagher’s predisposition phase early in their high school careers. It could contain lessons on college knowledge—academic requirements, applications, testing, personal statements, recommendation letters, financial aid, scholarships, etc.—and university jargon of all types using engaging and

innovative teaching methods such as the use of technology (including college knowledge phone and computer applications that are currently being developed), mock college processes, and class competitions. The course could invite guest speakers such as community members who have been to college or higher education representatives like recruiters to provide further information. It could also incorporate campus tours to colleges and universities within an hour or two of the high school. Because the Core 4 Academic curriculum often results in lack of a full day of courses during the senior year, there should be room in the curriculum for such a course in students' freshmen year. It would only require students deferring a physical education or elective course to a later year of high school.

If a supplemental course is not possible to add to the curriculum due to time, staffing, or lack of information, it would be beneficial to build short lessons about college knowledge and university jargon into various academic courses. There could even be an initiative once a week to open up the first five or ten minutes of each class period with a university term of the week designated for that subject for a question and answer session about the teacher's college experience. Another way of integrating the curriculum with college knowledge and cultural capital would be the ability to take students to "high brow" activities or for college campus visits. Regardless of the method, it is imperative that rural students receive information on college knowledge and university jargon early and often.

Field trips and campus visits. Both counselors discussed how they used to have the time and resources to bring students on field trips and/or college campus visits. They both believed learning off campus was valuable for students' overall experience and wished they

could resume these kinds of activities. Counselors think that allowing students to see other ways of being and thinking—to experience museums, historical sites, cities, and colleges and universities—allow them to broaden their mindset and consider new life possibilities. These kinds of activities also build students', and ultimately the community's, cultural capital and could shift the habitus a bit.

University Recruitment

Institutions of higher education often recruit student populations who have shown a tendency to enroll at their colleges and universities. Often, they recruit in areas where students have a high college-going rate and where the institution is likely to see a “return on investment” between recruitment and enrollment. Thus, rural students often receive infrequent or a complete lack of contact from colleges and universities. Even when contact occurs, higher education recruiters and administrators do not take into account that college knowledge and university jargon may be a “language” that rural students do not speak. Materials and conversations about higher education can often be convoluted and confusing for rural students.

Materials. This study requested informational, recruitment mailings from the majority of the two-year and four-year higher education institutions within the state. Only a small portion of the institutions actually sent the materials requested through the mail. This was both interesting and disturbing. If institutions are not filling requests for information, then how are rural students supposed to learn more about colleges and universities and the admissions and financial aid processes? It is important that Admissions Offices at colleges

and universities pay more attention to the information requests of all students but particularly students from underrepresented populations such as rural students. Students often request hard copy information because they have limited access to technology or need something tangible to review with their parents or families.

Additionally, the few materials that were sent all used university jargon to varying degrees and none of them ever explained what the jargon terms meant. That means that even when rural students receive recruitment information from colleges and universities it is not likely that they completely understand the information and it may result in students feeling inadequate to aspire to or pursue higher education. Admissions Offices can eradicate some of these issues by being more aware of the language and terminology they use in their recruitment materials and, if they choose to use jargon, provide definitions or explanations for terms that are not often common knowledge for rural students and other underrepresented student populations.

Recruiter visits. Although the HS1 counselor commented that she felt confident that recruiters would visit her school if they were asked, the only data in this study that showed recruiter interest in the rural area was their participation in the district's Career Day once a year. Recruiters come to the area for half a day to set up a table and have short conversations with a limited number of students, all of whom are either junior or senior standing. There does not seem to be any recruiter involvement with rural students during the earlier high school years, which research shows is the most crucial time for developing college aspirations (Chow, 2001; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Higher education institutions and their

recruitment and admissions office should direct their recruiters to devote more of their time to connecting with rural students, especially those of freshmen and sophomore standing. This would give rural students access to college “experts” who may have more accurate information and would allow students to learn more about institutional types and higher education options.

Theoretical Implications

Theory and prior research not only helped ground and guide this study but also supported the study’s data in most cases. Findings from this study relate to two theories—Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) College Choice Model and Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus. The findings also further explore Vargas’ (2004) study for The Education Resources Institute (TERI), research on counselors from Bickel et al. (1991), McDonough et al. (2010), and Paulsen and Loflink (2005), and research on rural education from Corbett (2009), Flora et al. (1992), Kelly (2009), McDonough et al. (2010), and Thebold & Siskar (2008).

Hossler and Gallagher

Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model attempts to explain how students proceed through the college choice process including both individual and organizational factors. Participants’ experiences and counselors’ methods seemed to align well with the predisposition phase because they seemed focused on individual student characteristics, the high school characteristics, and the opinions of significant others (families

in this case) to determine students' college options. The entire model, including its factors and outcomes, are seen in Figure 2.

A THREE PHASE MODEL OF COLLEGE CHOICE

Model Dimensions	Influential Factors		Student Outcomes
	Individual Factors	Organizational Factors	
Predisposition (Phase One)	*Student Characteristics *Significant others *Educational activities	*School characteristics	Search for: a. College options b. other options
Search (Phase two)	*Student preliminary college values *Student search activities	*College and University search activities (Search for students)	a. choice set b. other options
Choice (Phase three)	*Choice set	*College and University courtship activities	*Choice

Figure 2. Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) entire college choice model.

As expected, students in this study were mostly in Stage One: Predisposition of the model, although a select few students were in a both Stage One and Stage Two: Search. The factors associated with each stage can be seen in the study. For participants in the predisposition stage, students' individual factors of personal characteristics, significant others (families, peers, etc.), and educational activities all influenced their acquisition and understanding of college knowledge and university jargon. For example, those students who were involved with academic extracurricular activities, like Autumn's People-to-People trip, or with other extracurricular activities, like Emily Anne's cheerleading or Craig's football and basketball

involvement, were more apt to receive at least some information about higher education. This allows these students to filter over into Stage Two: Search because they begin to receive attention from college admissions offices. Furthermore, students who had connections, or significant others, with postsecondary experience seemed to acquire a bit more college knowledge and understanding of jargon.

The organizational factor of school characteristics was also represented in this study. Being rural, both schools seemed to lag behind national trends for when they begin to focus on sharing higher education information with students. Both schools also employ only one counselor who is expected to fill a variety of roles of which college counseling is just a small part. Additionally, there was a slight difference in students' college knowledge between HS1 and HS2 due to the amount of time their counselor devoted to college counseling. HS2 students seemed a bit more knowledgeable and named their counselor as a resource more often, and their counselor stated she spent a lot of her time on college counseling. Conversely, the HS1 counselor explained that she only spent about five percent of her time on college counseling and the HS1 students seemed a bit less knowledgeable about higher education and mentioned their counselor as a resource less often.

Bourdieu

Similarly to the alignment with Hossler & Gallagher's model, the findings of this study demonstrated how Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and habitus could be applicable to rural areas and their K-12 to higher education pipeline. Cultural capital pertains to the passing on of knowledge from communities and families to individuals. In this study,

the knowledge is college knowledge and university jargon, the communities and families are rural, and the individuals are rural students. Data from the study show that there is a lack of cultural capital regarding higher education due to a lack of experience with colleges and universities. There is also a lack of cultural capital due to typical occupational paths of the community members and the corresponding socioeconomic situation of families and the community as a whole. The cultural capital framework of Pierre Bourdieu has been important in many of the sociological studies that focus on how and why class status plays a role in educational achievement (MacLeod, 2009; McDonough, 1997). This study shows that Bourdieu's work may also be a way to explore how and why geographical area plays a role in educational aspiration and access, along with achievement.

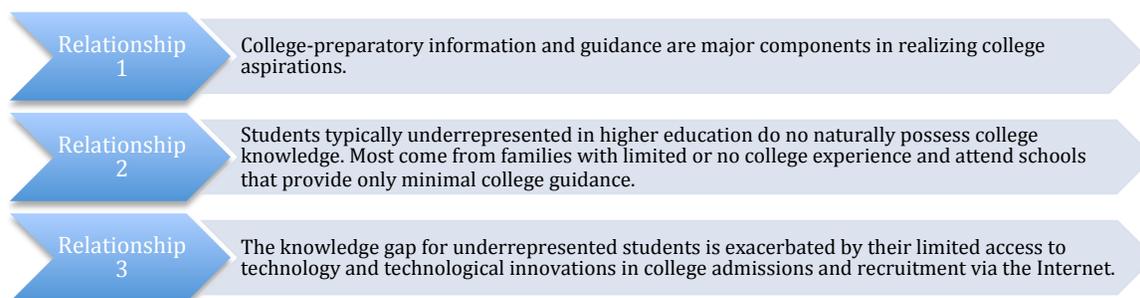
Bourdieu's concept of habitus is also seen in this study. Habitus operates through people's "perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (MacLeod, 2009, p. 15). Findings from this study represent how rural communities and the individuals who reside in them often have an inherent attitude that postsecondary education is not as valuable as others may make it seem. This means both individuals' and organizations' habitus overlap. Participants in the study spoke of how practical knowledge was valued more than theoretical knowledge. They also mentioned how the majority of people in the rural community had very limited college knowledge and believed that was "normal"; thus, students perceived their own lack of college knowledge and understanding of jargon as "typical" and sought no real action to rectify the situation. McDonough et al. (2010) stated, "college is outside the habitus of many rural students" (p. 203). The findings of this study support that idea.

Vargas

Much like cultural capital and habitus influence college knowledge, college knowledge influences educational aspirations. Research conducted by Vargas (2004) on behalf of The Education Resources Institute (TERI) found the following three relationships between college knowledge and students' educational aspirations:

Table 2.

Relationships Between College Knowledge and Educational Aspirations (Vargas, 2004, p. 3)



All three of Vargas's relationships were exemplified in this study. Relationship 1 is seen in students' ability to acquire college knowledge and in the time their counselors devote to their role of college counseling. It is apparent that the first aspect of Relationship 1 is a struggle for students as many of them could not explain collegiate application processes or define a majority of university jargon terms. The second aspect of Relationship 1 varies by high school as each counselor gets to decide how much time she will designate for college

counseling and if she will adapt to students' requests and needs. Relationship 2 is exhibited throughout the study's data. All of the participants are first-generation so their parents lack college knowledge too and the counselor to student ratio of 450:1, or 800: 1 depending on the day, does not lend to counselors giving students a lot of one-on-one attention to compensate for the lack of guidance at home. Finally, Relationships 3 was seen in the study through counselors' struggle with finding information on college and university Web sites and desire to obtain hard copies of information. Additionally, students' constant occupation of the two computers in the counselors' office to conduct college research, searches, and applications shows that students may not have technological access at home or may not feel confident handling such business at home. It is apparent from Vargas's (2004) study and this study that college knowledge and educational aspirations are linked together in a variety of ways.

Research on Counselors

Many of the determinants of college aspiration and access for rural students point to issues that could be addressed in the high school environment by counselors. Specifically, counselors could be educating rural students on the academic, financial, and social aspects of their college options and providing suggestions on how to make informed, rational decisions that could result in higher rates of college aspiration and access (Bickel et al., 1991; Paulsen & Loflink, 2005). This study found that counselors do attempt to provide these services and information within the constraints that they have due to overload and being short-staffed. However, counselors only provide sporadic college counseling until students reach their

junior or senior years and sometimes even infrequently after that depending on students' inquires.

Scholars call for the hiring of additional counselors who can make a special effort to provide underrepresented students with the college knowledge they need to turn their educational aspirations into realities (Bickel et al., 1991; Paulsen & Loflink, 2005). Politicians and state education boards do not seem to agree with, or are ignoring, this research though. Louisiana's proposed changes to LA DOE 41 could eliminate counselors or reduce or outsource counseling services, which is in direct opposition to what scholars believe could help rural students navigate college knowledge and university jargon—MORE counselors!

Despite counselors' possible positive influence, McDonough et al. (2010) point out that counselors tend to lack knowledge about and refrain from providing information about colleges outside of the specific rural area or its adjacent areas. Findings of this study support McDonough et al.'s point. Counselors at HS1 and HS2 seem to only be well versed in institutions in their immediate area and do not seem to have support from the school or district to conduct campus visits to other institutions or seek professional development that could assist them in learning about new institutions, majors, or career fields. If counselors are only as helpful as the information they possess, their limited knowledge may limit students' knowledge and postsecondary options.

Research on Rural Education

Some scholars view rural education in terms of loss. For those who wish to be upwardly mobile, the method of outmigration is used for upward mobility—leaving the community to seek out opportunities (Corbett, 2009; Flora et al., 1992; Kelly, 2009; McDonough et al., 2010). Rural schools, particularly in the twentieth century and since, have become a means of “saving talented youth and sending them on to urban places” where they will be offered what is seen as countless opportunities (Thebold & Siskar, 2008, p. 294). This becomes an issue of “brain drain,” which means that young, talented, and intelligent individuals often depart the community for better education and job opportunities elsewhere (Corbett, 2007; Theobald & Siskar, 2008). In short, success in many rural communities means leaving. However, leaving, particularly to pursue higher education, is often a major financial issue for rural students (Corbett, 2009).

This concept of rural education as loss or leaving was questioned by this study. Although the issue of “brain drain” did arise with student participants and when discussing a lack of role models in the community, students did not seem to believe they had to leave the community to become successful or obtain the “better life” they consistently referenced. Rather, they mostly spoke of educational aspirations at institutions in near proximity to their hometown that would allow them to either continue residing in the area or visit easily and/or frequently. With the exception of two participants, students did not seem to have a mentality of wanting out of rural areas or moving to urban places. Part of staying close to home may have to deal with financial issues, however. Participants did continuously reference their

concerns about paying for college and how attending an institution in close proximity could alleviate some of those issues. Overall, the study did support Corbett's (2007) finding that the link between education and community departure is "for some students . . . liberating, for others unthinkable, and for most it is problematic and conflicted" (p. 18).

This study also supports prior research about rural education in another way. Corbett (2009) found that inequitable access on the basis of place is a fundamental barrier for rural students' postsecondary participation. The rural location of a school is now being considered as a dimension of unequal educational opportunity; students from rural schools often possess lower levels of educational aspiration, attendance, and choice (Hu, 2003). This study expands Hu's findings to show that students' location in a rural area also contributes to their lower levels of college knowledge that further exacerbates their higher education aspirations, attendance, and choice. Further research on rural communities and their education systems would help add to the findings of this study and others (Corbett, 2009; Flora et al., 1992; Kelly, 2009; McDonough et al., 2010; Thebold & Siskar, 2008).

Suggestions for Future Research

All research studies, particularly dissertations, make necessary choices that limit the scope of the study. In this dissertation, I chose to limit the study's theoretical framework to cultural capital because prior higher education research shows that cultural capital is the type of capital that tends to relate to college knowledge most often and rural sociology research acknowledges that rural schools and areas often lack this type of capital (Corbett, 2007; Chenoweth & Gallagher, 2004; Flora et al., 1992; McDonough et al., 2010; Vargas, 2004;

Willis, 1977). For example, Jencks (1972) describes how cultural attitudes and values for schooling influence rural students' educational aspirations and attainment more than either aptitude or finances. However, I recognize that it may benefit future scholars and researchers to expand the study to explore other forms of capital including but not limited to financial, social, and intellectual capitals. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study focusing solely on the issue of financial capital because socioeconomic status seems to be a significant barrier for rural students and ties into the category of university jargon in which rural students are most knowledgeable—financial jargon.

This case study also focused on eight sophomore students and two counselors within two high schools in one rural parish in south Louisiana. This choice was based on research that suggests the sophomore year as the ideal time when postsecondary options are typically highly considered (Choy, 2001). I recognize the study's limited population may not be widely transferable to other rural areas, schools, or students. I think it would be useful to replicate this study in other rural areas both within the state of Louisiana and around the country to determine if the findings are widely applicable to rural areas in general. It may also be beneficial to replicate the study with varying student groups. This study looked at a cross-section of low-SES, first-generation, sophomore rural students who represented the gender and racial demographics of their respective high schools. It would be interesting to narrow students' identities within a study to explore if students' classification in school (sophomore, junior, senior), gender, race, or SES status influenced their acquisition and command of college knowledge and university jargon. I also think future studies could

expand to include participation of students' parents and families to further discover the issues of capital, habitus, and college knowledge.

Finally, I think it may be interesting to focus a study on teachers' and administrators' college knowledge and university jargon. Students often turn to these individuals to assist in their own awareness and understanding of college knowledge and university jargon, and it seems that school personnel are not well-versed in the information themselves. It would be helpful to discover what college knowledge personnel on the state, district, and local levels could identify and define and if, or how, they saw themselves playing a part in students' postsecondary aspirations and access.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative case study on how rural students obtain and comprehend college knowledge and decode university jargon informs both the K-12 and higher education systems of how they can better prepare both rural counselors and students to engage in college counseling. It is apparent that rural students are not receiving college information as early as is suggested in college access literature. The sophomore students in this study seemed to be dormant within Hossler and Gallagher's college choice predisposition stage rather than progressing to the search stage, which is where they should be at this point in their high school careers. Their lack of movement within the model is connected to rural students' and communities' lack of cultural capital and inherent habitus of undervaluing educations. The state, high school counselors, rural students, and institutions of higher education are all

responsible for trying to narrow the gap between rural students and their peers' acquisition and comprehension of college knowledge and university jargon.

The state of Louisiana's Department of Education and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education do not seem to be helping the situation though. Although their new policy of requiring the ACT test may help some students with college aspiration and access, it may also have adverse effects on counselors' already limited time, school performance scores and rankings, and students' habitus about college-going, particularly if they perform disappointingly on the earlier pre-ACT tests. Additionally, their policy proposal to diminish the in-person role of counselors could eradicate services provided to students, including college counseling, which already receives less attention than other duties. Findings in this study show that counselors play a central role in students' acquisition and comprehension of college knowledge and university jargon. If counselors cease to exist on high school campuses, many rural students will have no one to turn to about accurate higher education information. This would create a dire situation for rural students and communities.

With the hope that counselors will remain in rural schools, there are several tactics that could assist them in being even more resourceful to students. Hiring additional staff, which is directly opposite of the LA BESE change, or obtaining volunteer staff for the counselor role would ease their burden of counselors in both time and duty management. If there were someone else who could either take on the more administrative portions of the counselor role, then the counselors could focus on personal and career/college counseling with students. Providing counselors with further resources in terms of professional

development, handouts and other hard copy materials, additional technological hardware and software, and space and supplies for career centers would also allow them to offer more comprehensive college counseling to rural students.

Besides turning to counselors, rural students could benefit from building their own cultural capital through school-provided resources. Having schools locate and invite role models to spend time on campus as mentors or guest speakers could help students translate schooling to career options and provide “experts” to whom they could ask academic and work questions. Integrating college knowledge and university jargon into rural school curriculums would assist students with familiarity of information on a frequent basis and facilitate command of college knowledge and university jargon. Placing college information into appropriate portions of the curriculum or as a spotlight feature during certain points of class would help students see this information and terminology as something all people should and can learn. Finally, encouraging and facilitating rural students’ exposure to new ways of being and thinking through field trips and college campus visits would allow students to broaden their knowledge base about what exists outside of their isolated communities and encourage them to explore new and different opportunities.

The field of higher education is the final piece to the college knowledge puzzle. Colleges and universities need to be cognizant of who—what student populations—are not currently being well served by their recruitment and admissions practices and devote time and resources to reaching those students, like rural students. Developing Web sites and hard copy materials that use less university jargon or define it explicitly would help rural students

feel more confident about their college aspirations and access. It would also be useful to have college recruiters who visit rural areas on a routine basis to make college seem more realistic to students and provide an in-person resource to students regarding admissions, scholarships, and financial aid.

This study aligns with the theoretical framework and prior research on which it is based. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model and Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus are exemplified in the study's findings. Students lack cultural capital and have an inherent perception that education may not be as valuable as most of society believes. Thus, rural students often remain in Stage One of Hossler and Gallagher's model for a longer time period than other students. Vargas's (2004) TERI findings about three relationships between college knowledge and educational aspirations were all exhibited in the data. This study also exhibits similar findings to prior research on the influence that high school counselors and attending a rural school have on students' aspirations and access to higher education.

Finally, it is vital that higher education, rural sociology, and social justice researchers continue to conduct research on rural students. This population does not receive a lot of attention from scholars, but it should. People should study rural students from varying perspectives including lenses of capital, gender, race, SES, family composition, and many others. Rural students are a unique population who should be understood and given voice. Their stories are valid, their experiences are real, and they deserve to have equitable opportunities for learning and development. It is also important to note that the issue of rural

students' obtaining and comprehending college knowledge and university jargon is an enduring issue. I experienced my own struggle with seeking and understanding college knowledge and decoding university jargon as a rural, first generation, low SES student thirteen years ago and now this empirical study shows similar concerns for the same population. This means that both K-12 and higher education need to assess their environments for systematic, structural, cultural, and social stratification issues that could be (or, I could argue, are) creating systemic challenges for rural students in obtaining and comprehending college knowledge and university jargon.

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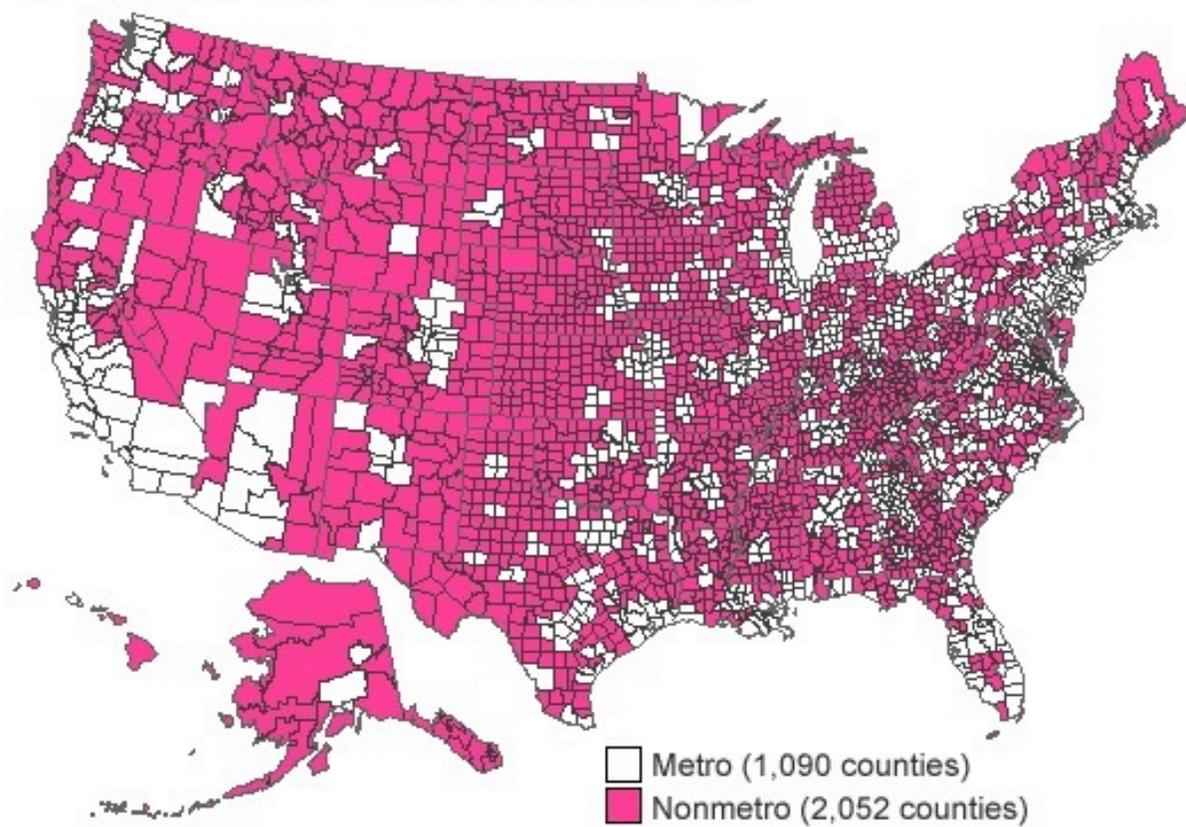
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APPENDICES

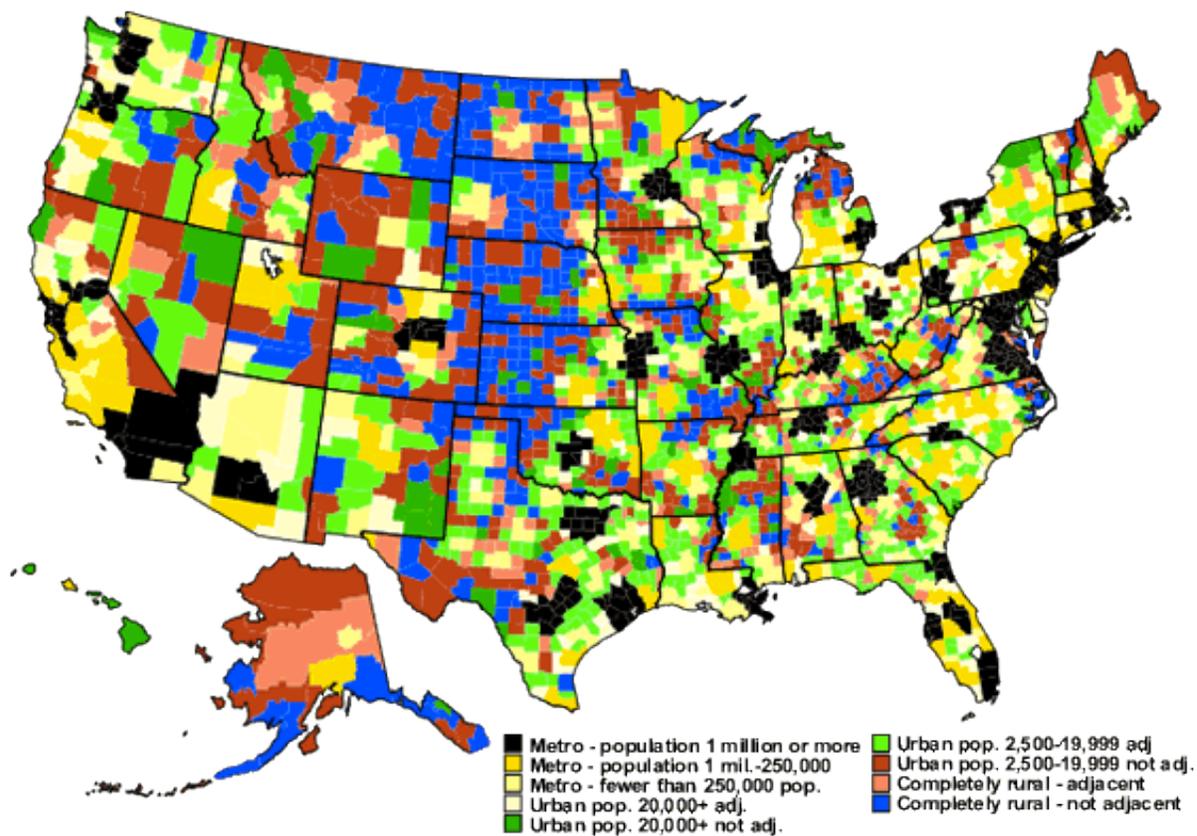
Appendix A—USDA ERS Nonmetropolitan Map (2003)**Nonmetropolitan and metropolitan counties, 2003**

Source: Prepared by ERS using data from the Census Bureau.

Figure 7. *USDA ERS nonmetropolitan map (2003).*

Appendix B—USDA ERS Urban-Rural Continuum Codes Map

Rural-urban continuum codes, 2003



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service.

Figure 8. *USDA ERS urban-rural continuum codes map*

Appendix C—Census Data for a Rural Parish in Louisiana

Table 9.

Census Data for a Rural Parish in Louisiana

Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights:

General Characteristics	Number	Percent	U.S.
Total population	35,434		
Male	17,666	49.9	49.1%
Female	17,768	50.1	50.9%
Median age (years)	33.7	(X)	35.3
Under 5 years	2,813	7.9	6.8%
18 years and over	24,957	70.4	74.3%
65 years and over	4,522	12.8	12.4%
One race	35,271	99.5	97.6%
White	24,951	70.4	75.1%
Black or African American	10,122	28.6	12.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native	81	0.2	0.9%
Asian	51	0.1	3.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	3	0.0	0.1%
Some other race	63	0.2	5.5%
Two or more races	163	0.5	2.4%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	368	1.0	12.5%
Household population	33,662	95.0	97.2%
Group quarters population	1,772	5.0	2.8%
Average household size	2.64	(X)	2.59
Average family size	3.19	(X)	3.14
Total housing units	14,258		
Occupied housing units	12,736	89.3	91.0%
Owner-occupied housing units	8,834	69.4	66.2%
Renter-occupied housing units	3,902	30.6	33.8%
Vacant housing units	1,522	10.7	9.0%

Table 9 Continued

Social Characteristics	Number	Percent	U.S.
Population 25 years and over	21,511		
High school graduate or higher	11,930	55.5	80.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	2,035	9.5	24.4%
Civilian veterans (civilian population 18 years and over)	2,533	10.1	12.7%
Disability status (population 5 years and over)	8,548	27.6	19.3%
Foreign born	224	0.6	11.1%
Male, Now married, except separated (population 15 years and over)	8,250	62.0	56.7%
Female, Now married, except separated (population 15 years and over)	7,180	53.4	52.1%
Speak a language other than English at home (population 5 years and over)	9,047	27.7	17.9%
Economic Characteristics	Number	Percent	U.S.
In labor force (population 16 years and over)	12,022	46.0	63.9%
Mean travel time to work in minutes (workers 16 years and over)	32.7	(X)	25.5
Median household income in 1999 (dollars)	20,532	(X)	41,994
Median family income in 1999 (dollars)	27,243	(X)	50,046
Per capita income in 1999 (dollars)	11,432	(X)	21,587
Families below poverty level	2,523	27.2	9.2%
Individuals below poverty level	10,857	32.2	12.4%
Housing Characteristics	Number	Percent	U.S.
Single-family owner-occupied homes	6,679		
Median value (dollars)	53,000	(X)	119,600
Median of selected monthly owner costs	(X)	(X)	
With a mortgage (dollars)	583	(X)	1,088
Not mortgaged (dollars)	203	(X)	295

(X) Not applicable.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Summary File 1 (SF 1) and Summary File 3 (SF 3)

Appendix D—College & University Jargon/Terms

This list is a compilation of terms used in university admissions and financial aid documents, course catalogs, and viewbooks. These terms/acronyms are not necessarily known by people prior to going to college.

Table 10.

College & University Jargon/Terms

General Terms	Community College Junior College Technical College College University (with Colleges and/or Schools) Public (and/or Land-Grant) Private PWI HBCU HSI AANAPI Faculty Staff Alumni
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Table 10 Continued

<p style="text-align: center;">Academic Terms</p>	<p>ACT/SAT AP IB Accredited Full-Time Part-Time Credit Hours Major Minor Specialization Certificate Liberal Arts General Education Requirements Degree Audit Degree Requirements Prerequisite Section Drop/Add Open/Closed/Waitlist Syllabus Semester Quarter</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Financial Terms</p>	<p>FAFSA Tuition (in-state and out-of-state) Fees Room & Board Scholarships Grants Loans – Subsidized & Unsubsidized Work Study TOPS (other state tuition aid programs) TRIO/Transition Programs</p>

Table 10 Continued

Degree Terms	A.A. A.S. A.A.S. B.A. B.S. Master's Doctoral Professional (Law, Medical, etc.)
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Appendix E—Evangeline Parish School Board Permission Letter

Evangeline Parish Schools

"Our Children, Our Schools, Our Future"

Toni Hamlin, Superintendent

1123 Te Mamou Road, Ville Platte, LA 70586

Tel 337-363-6651 Fax 337-363-8086

<http://www.epsb.com>

November 16, 2011

Sonja Ardoin
4660 Fawnbrook Circle
Raleigh, NC 27612

Dear Ms. Sonja Ardoin:

We are pleased to approve your request to include two of our schools in your doctoral studies. This must be an exciting time for you as you will be returning to the parish in which you completed high school.

Since the data collection, interviews, and meetings will not commence until the Fall of 2012, you will have ample time to confer with the designated principals.

We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Toni Hamlin
Superintendent

TH/sdv

Figure 9. *Evangeline Parish school board permission letter.*

Appendix F—Student Demographic Questionnaire

Full Name: _____

Parent/Guardian(s) Name(s): _____

What grade are you in high school? _____

Where were you born?

- This Parish
- Another Parish in Louisiana
- Another State
- Another Country

How long have you lived in this parish and city? _____

Which groups would you say you are a member of? (Circle all that apply)

- Male
- Female

- Learning Disability/Condition
- Physical Disability/Condition

- Black
- White
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Other: _____ Have one, or both, or your parents/guardians attended any type of college of university?

- No
- Yes

If yes:

Which parent/guardian(s)? _____

Which college/university? _____

Did they graduate? Yes No

If so, when and with what degree? _____

Would you be the first person in your family to attend a college/university?

- Yes
- No

What do you hope, or plan, to do after high school (trade/technical school, college, work, etc.)?

.....
Counselor Use Only – Does this student meet the SES requirements? Yes No

Appendix G—Guardian Introduction Letter

[Insert Date]

Dear Guardian,

My name is Sonja Ardoin and I am a native of Evangeline Parish, graduate of Vidrine High School, LSU, and Florida State, and currently a Ph.D. student at North Carolina State University's College of Education. I am completing my doctoral dissertation research and the Evangeline Parish School Board is graciously allowing me to interview students from their high schools to help me with completing my dissertation and the PhD degree. The purpose of my research is to explore how rural students come to understand the words, terms, and acronyms used at colleges and universities as part of their choice of whether or not to go to college.

I am writing this letter to request permission to interview your child as part of my research study. Your child meets all of the criteria to participate in the study which includes attending a rural school, being a Sophomore student, participates in the federal free or reduced lunch program, has expressed interest in attending college, and would be the first person in your family to attend college. Each student will participate in one, or two, interviews, each lasting approximately one hour. I may contact the student by phone or email to ask follow-up or clarifying questions. Interviews will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy. The names of all students will kept completely confidential and will be changed for any publications or presentations. Each student must have a signed guardian consent form to participate (see attached form). Participation is completely voluntary.

As a rural student myself, who met all of the criteria described above, I have a passion for learning how educators, like myself, can better assist students like me in reaching their educational goals. This study will add to the sparse research on rural students and provide valuable insights for K-12 and college educators on how to assist rural students in obtaining more information about colleges and universities and, hopefully, increase the percentage of rural students going to college. Although this research may not directly benefit your child, it has the potential to directly impact the college aspirations and attendance for future students in the Evangeline Parish School District and other rural areas.

Please review the attached guardian consent form. The last page of the form must be signed

by the student's legal guardian and returned to the school counselor before participation in any interviews. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. I may be reached by telephone at 225-931-6231 (or 337-363-5432) or by email at sonjaardoin@gmail.com.

Thank you!

Sincerely,
Sonja Ardoin

Appendix H—Guardian Consent Form

Principal Researcher: Mary Sonja Ardoin; sonjaardoin@gmail.com; 225-931-6231

This research will be conducted under the direction of Dr. Audrey Jaeger, faculty member in Higher Education at North Carolina State University

Title of the Research Study: Learning a Different Language: University Jargon and College Knowledge for Rural Students.

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study. Your child's participation is **completely voluntary**. This means that he or she can choose whether or not to participate. Whether you decide that your child should participate or not participate, or your child decides to participate or not to participate, there will not be any consequences.

The high school counselor has identified your child as someone who meets the criteria to participate in this study. Before you make a decision about your child's participation, you and your child will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of participating in the study, and what participation requires. Please feel free to share this document with anyone who may be interested or who may assist you in making the decision to participate or not participate. If this document does not make sense to you, please do not sign it before asking the researcher (via phone, email, or in-person meeting) to further explain anything about which you have questions or concerns.

If you decide to allow your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to your child to return to you. Keep this form; in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how students from rural areas decode (understand, employ, make meaning of) the language and acronyms used at colleges and universities (called university jargon). This study is being conducted for a doctoral dissertation (final project).

Why was your child asked to participate in the study?

Your child is being asked to join this study because he or she is enrolled in a rural high school, is a high school sophomore, participates in the federal free or reduced lunch program,

has expressed interest in attending a college or university, and would be the first person in your family to attend college.

How long will your child be in the study? How many other children will be in the study?

This study will take place over the period of Fall 2012 – Spring 2013. Each participating student will be interviewed at least once, but no more than three times, for a time period of approximately one hour each.

There are two schools participating in the study with 3-5 student participants at each school.

Where will the study take place?

Interviews locations will be chosen by the student participants, based on their comfort level, with the options of a private room in the high school, at a local library, or in the student's home. A day/time will be chosen that is most convenient for the student.

What will your child be asked to do?

Each student will be asked to participate in 1-3 interviews. The interviews will involve questions about the students' educational plans, thoughts about college, understanding of words and acronyms used at colleges and universities, and any resources they use to help them understand more about colleges and universities.

The researcher will ask permission to audiotape the interview. The researcher may contact the student via phone or email to ask follow-up or clarifying questions.

Counselors and students will also be observed as they engage in meetings and/or assemblies about postsecondary options/opportunities. Observations will occur as meetings/assemblies are held. Counselors will inform me of when and where these meetings will take place so I can attend them. My role in observation will be an observer-participant; I will not interfere with any meetings unless the counselor (or person in charge) asks me a question. I will be observing for how postsecondary education is discussed among counselors and students, how much information is provided about postsecondary education, how much jargon is used in those conversations and if/how the jargon is explained. I will record data through field notes (no recording device will be used in observation).

What are the possible risks?

The only foreseeable risk is the possibility of a breach of confidentiality due to the small number of participants and the small size of the town(s). To minimize this risk, the researcher will use pseudonyms (fake names) for students in any written documentation; your child will choose their pseudonym (fake name). All written documentation will be kept secured on a password-protected computer. Additionally, the audio files of the interviews will only be saved using pseudonyms and will be kept secure on a password-protected computer. Audio files will be destroyed after the dissertation process is complete and final. Finally, none of the questions being asked to the students should evoke answers that could be potentially harmful.

How will your child benefit from the study?

There is no real benefit to your child. However, his or her participation could help educators better understand how to assist rural students in understanding words and acronyms used at colleges and universities which could lead to more students attending college. This can indirectly benefit not only your child but also other students who share your child's characteristics. In addition, your child may indirectly learn more about colleges and universities and feel better equipped to apply to college.

What other choices does your child have?

The alternative to being in the study is to not participate.

What happens if you do not choose to allow your child to participate in the study?

You may choose to allow your student to join the study or you may choose not to allow your student to join the study. Participation is completely voluntary.

There is no penalty if you choose not to allow your student to participate in the study. Choosing not to participate will have no consequences for your child.

When is the study over? Can your child leave the study before it ends?

The study is expected to end after all students have completed all interviews and all the information has been collected, which is estimated to be Spring 2013.

Your child may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Withdrawal from the study will not affect your child's grades or any other school activities.

If you no longer wish to have your child participate, please contact Sonja Ardoin at 225-931-6231 and let her know that you wish for your child to stop participation.

How will confidentiality be maintained and your child’s privacy be protected?

The researcher will make every effort to keep all the information your child tells her during the study strictly confidential, as required by law. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Carolina State University is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants like your child. The IRB has access to study information. Any documents you and your child sign, where your child can be identified by name, will be kept on a password protected computer. These documents will be kept confidential. All the documents will be destroyed one year after the dissertation (final project) study is complete and final.

Will your child have to pay for anything?

There are no costs associated with participation.

Who can you call with questions, complaints, or if you are concerned about your child’s rights as a participant in the study?

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints regarding your child’s participation in this study or if you have questions about his or her rights as a research volunteer, please contact Sonja Ardoin at 225-931-6231, Dr. Audrey Jaeger at 919-515-6240, or Deb Paxon with the NC State IRB at 919-515-4514.

When you sign this document you are agreeing for your child to take part in this research study and you are also ensuring that you are the legal guardian(s) of the child. If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask. You will receive a copy of this consent document.

Name of Child _____

Guardian’s Printed Name _____

Guardian’s Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix I—Student Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in the following research study:

Title of the Research Study: Learning a Different Language: University Jargon and College Knowledge for Rural Students.

Below is information you should be aware of before signing your own consent to participate:

- My name is Mary Sonja Ardoin; I go by Sonja. I am a native of Evangeline Parish, a graduate of Vidrine High School, LSU, and Florida State, and a current PhD student at North Carolina State University. I attended a rural high school, participated in the free or reduced lunch program, and was the first person in my family to go to college.
- I am asking you to participate in a research study because I am trying to learn more about how rural students decode (understand, use, make meaning of) the words, terms, and acronyms used at colleges and universities.
- If you agree to be in this study you will be asked to participate in 1-3 interviews. During the interviews you will be asked questions about your educational plans, thoughts about college, understanding of words and acronyms used at colleges and universities, and any resources you use to help you understand more about colleges and universities. I will ask your permission to audio-record the interview. I may contact you after the interview with any follow-up or clarifying questions.
- Counselors and students will also be observed as they engage in meetings and/or assemblies about postsecondary options/opportunities. Observations will occur as meetings/assemblies are held. Counselors will inform me of when and where these meetings will take place so I can attend them. My role in observation will be an observer-participant; I will not interfere with any meetings unless the counselor (or person in charge) asks me a question. I will be observing for how postsecondary education is discussed among counselors and students, how much information is provided about postsecondary education, how much jargon is used in those conversations and if/how the jargon is explained. I will record data through field notes (no recording device will be used in observation).
- The only foreseeable risk is the possibility of a breach of confidentiality due to the small number of participants and the small size of the town(s). To minimize this risk, the researcher will use pseudonyms (fake names) for students in any written documentation. Students are asked to choose their pseudonym (fake name) when signing this consent form.

- There may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.
- You will be one of 8-10 students from two high schools in the parish that are participating in this study.
- Please talk this over with your parents/guardians before you decide whether or not to participate. I have also asked your guardian(s) to give his/her permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your guardian(s) says yes, you can still decide to not be in the study. Participation is voluntary.
- If you do not want to be in the study, you do not have to participate. Remember, being in the study is up to you and no one will be upset if you do not want to participate or even if you change your mind and want to stop participating.
- You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you did not think of now or during the interview, you can call me at 225-931-6231 or 337-363-5432, email me at sonjaardoin@gmail.com, or ask me in person next time you see me. You may also contact Deb Paxon with the NC State IRB at 919-515-4514 if you have any questions about being a research participant.
- Signing your name below means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you sign it.

Participant's Printed Name _____

Participant's Signature _____

Participant's Chosen Pseudonym (Fake Name) _____

Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix J—Counselor Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in the following research study:

Title of the Research Study: Learning a Different Language: University Jargon and College Knowledge for Rural Students.

Purpose of the Research Study: The purpose of this study is to explore how students from rural areas decode (understand, employ, make meaning of) the language and acronyms used at colleges and universities (called university jargon). This study is being conducted for a doctoral dissertation (final project).

Below is information you should be aware of before signing your own consent to participate:

- My name is Mary Sonja Ardoin; I go by Sonja. I am a native of Evangeline Parish, a graduate of Vidrine High School, LSU, and Florida State, and a current PhD student at North Carolina State University. I attended a rural high school, participated in the free or reduced lunch program, and was the first person in my family to go to college.
- I am asking you to participate in a research study because I am trying to learn more about how rural students decode (understand, use, make meaning of) the words, terms, and acronyms used at colleges and universities. You suit the study because you counsel these types of students in your work.
- If you agree to be in this study you will be asked to participate in 1-3 interviews. During the interviews you will be asked questions about your counselor role, the community and school attitude and perception around college-going, your experiences with counseling students about college, and any resources you or students use to gain further knowledge about higher education and its jargon. I will ask your permission to audio-record the interview. I may contact you after the interview with any follow-up or clarifying questions.
- Counselors and students will be observed as they engage in meetings and/or assemblies about postsecondary options/opportunities. Observations will occur as meetings/assemblies are held. Counselors will inform me of when and where these meetings will take place so I can attend them. My role in observation will be an observer-participant; I will not interfere with any meetings unless the counselor (or person in charge) asks me a question. I will be observing for how postsecondary education is discussed among counselors and students, how much information is provided about postsecondary education, how much jargon is used in those conversations and if/how the

jargon is explained. I will record data through field notes (no recording device will be used in observation).

- The only foreseeable risk is the possibility of a breach of confidentiality due to the small number of participants and the small size of the town(s). To minimize this risk, the researcher will use pseudonyms (fake names) for counselors in any written documentation. Counselors are asked to choose their pseudonym (fake name) when signing this consent form.
- There may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.
- You will be one of two counselors from two high schools in the parish that are participating in this study.
- Participation in this study is completely voluntary.
- If you do not want to be in the study, you do not have to participate. Remember, being in the study is up to you and there will be no repercussions for not participating or even if you change your mind and want to stop participating at any point.
- You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you did not think of now or during the interview, you can call me at 225-931-6231 or 337-363-5432, email me at sonjaardoin@gmail.com, or ask me in person next time you see me. You may also contact Deb Paxon with the NC State IRB at 919-515-4514 if you have any questions about being a research participant.
- Signing your name below means that you agree to be in this study. You will be given a copy of this form after you sign it.

Participant's Printed Name _____

Participant's Signature _____

Participant's Chosen Pseudonym (Fake Name) _____

Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix K—Student Interview Protocol #1

Table 11.

Student Interview Protocol #1

Date	
Time	
Location	
Interviewer Name	
Interviewee Pseudonym & Email	
Parent(s) Name & Email or Phone	
School Name	
School Contact Person Name & Email or Phone	

Thank you for taking time to meet with me today. My name is Sonja Ardoin and I am a graduate student at North Carolina State University. I am originally from rural Louisiana and was the first person in my family to go to college. For my academic program, I am studying rural students who may become the first person in their family to attend college and the challenges and opportunities that they may face during their decision-making process. Our conversation should last no longer than one hour. During our time together, we will discuss several topics related to college knowledge and access. Everything said during our conversation will remain confidential. This means that your responses will only be shared with the research team and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you. We do not have to discuss anything that you do not want to and you may end the interview at any time. Also, feel free to ask questions at any time. Do you have any questions at this point? Are you willing to participate?

- Describe what you plan, or hope, your life looks like the year after high school graduation.
- Tell me about what people from this area think/believe about going to college.
- Describe the kind of information you have received about college and from whom or where you received it.

Probes:

- Family?
 - Friends?
 - School/Guidance Counselor?
 - Other source?
 - Online? In Person? Hard copy?
- Many terms are used to describe college. Tell me about some terms that you have encountered when looking into attending college.
 - Probes:
 - (using jargon list as prompt) Are there terms on this sheet that you feel you can define?
 - (using jargon list as prompt) Are there terms on this sheet that you feel you cannot define?
- What do you do when you encounter a term you cannot define?
 - Probes:
 - Where or to whom do you turn when you encounter terms you cannot define?
 - Family?
 - Friends?
 - School/Guidance Counselor?
 - Other source?
- How do these terms make you feel?
 - Probe:
 - How does seeing this jargon make you feel about applying to or attending college?
 - How do you feel about the resources you have available to help you with understanding these terms?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time. I appreciate you sharing your perspective and post-high school plans with me.

Again, thank you for your participation.

Appendix L—Counselor Interview Protocol #1

Table 12.

Counselor Interview Protocol #1

Date	
Time	
Location	
Interviewer Name	
Interviewee Pseudonym & Email	
School Name	

Thank you for taking time to meet with me today. My name is Sonja Ardoin and I am a graduate student at North Carolina State University. I am originally from rural Louisiana and was the first person in my family to go to college. For my academic program, I am studying rural students who may become the first person in their family to attend college and the challenges and opportunities that they may face during their decision-making process. Our conversation should last no longer than one hour. During our time together, we will discuss several topics related to your work as a high school guidance counselor and the words and knowledge about college. Everything said during our conversation will remain confidential. This means that your responses will only be shared with the research team and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you. We do not have to discuss anything that you do not want to and you may end the interview at any time. Also, feel free to ask questions at any time. Do you have any questions at this point? Are you willing to participate?

- Tell me about your own educational path and why you chose to become a high school counselor.
- Describe your role as the counselor of this high school. What are the school's and district's expectations of you?

Probe:

- What tasks/items/issues would you say take the majority of your time?
- How much time would you say you spend on conversations and/or meetings about postsecondary education?

- What is the student to counselor ratio here? Do you believe that number is low, average, or high? How does that relate to your work?
- Tell me about what people from this area think/believe/perceive about going to college.
- What do you think are the most prevalent barriers to college aspiration and/or attendance for students from this high school/area?

- How much do you think students in your school know about college? What aspects do they understand? What aspects do they not understand? Where do you think they obtain this information?
 - Probes:
 - Aspects...
 - Applications?
 - Academic programs?
 - Financial aid? Scholarships?
 - Social/involvement?
 - Housing?
 - Information Sources...
 - Family?
 - Friends?
 - School/Guidance Counselor? (aka: you)
 - Internet/Technology?
 - Other source?

- Describe the kind of information you provide to students about college and from whom or where you received information about college to give to students.
 - Probes:
 - ACT/SAT information?
 - Other admissions information (applications, requirements, etc.)?
 - Information about majors, minors, or other academic programs?
 - Financial aid or scholarship/TOPS information?
 - Housing information?
 - Student involvement information?
 - Do students inquire about local, state, or national institutions?
 - Which institutions send information to you (local, state, national, etc.)?

- Tell me about the format(s) of providing postsecondary information.
 - Probes:
 - Do you have assemblies with students and/or guardians about postsecondary options?
 - Do you have 1:1 meetings with students and/or guardians about postsecondary options?
 - Are these meetings planned or impromptu?

- Many terms are used to describe college. Tell me about some terms that students encounter and then have questions about when looking into attending college.
Probes:
 - (using jargon list as prompt) In your experience, are there terms on this sheet that students can define?
 - (using jargon list as prompt) In your experience, are there terms on this sheet that students cannot define?
- What do you believe students do when they encounter a term they cannot define? Where or to whom do students' turn?
Probes:
 - Family?
 - Friends?
 - School/Guidance Counselor? (aka: you)
 - Internet/Technology?
 - Other source?
- How do think these terms make students feel?
Probe:
 - How do you think seeing this jargon makes students feel about applying to or attending college?
 - How do you think students feel about the resources they have available to help them with understanding these terms?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Again, thank you for your participation.

Appendix M—Student Interview Protocol #2

Table 13.

Student Interview Protocol #2

Date	
Time	
Location	
Interviewer Name	
Interviewee Pseudonym & Email	
Parent(s) Name & Email or Phone	
School Name	

Thank you for taking time to meet with me today. Do you have any questions at this point? Are you willing to participate?

Cultural Capital Questions

- What do you do during recess/downtime at school?
- What are your after-school or weekend activities, if any?
- What does your family do on weekends or over breaks?
 - Probes:
 - Travel? To Where?
 - Festivals?
 - Museums/Libraries?
 - Hunting/Outdoor Activities?
 - Shopping?
 - Gaming?
 - Movies/TV?
- What are your parents' occupations/careers/jobs?

- What kind of conversations, if any, have you had with your parents/family about college?
- Name anyone you know that has attended college and how you know that person(s).
Probes:
 - Are these people direct family members?
 - Are these people family friends?
 - Are these people your friends' family?
 - Are these your teachers/people at school?
- What kinds of jobs/careers do most people in your family have?
- What kinds of jobs/careers do most people in this area have?
- Do you believe it is more useful for people to have theoretical/book knowledge or applied/practical knowledge? Why?

Habitus Questions

- What do you believe drives people to go to college?
Probes:
 - "Better Life"
 - Job/Career
 - Get away from home
 - "Natural" thing to do after high school
 - Etc.
- What drives you to pursue a college education?
- Describe for me the attributes you believe a person needs to get to, and be successful in, college.
Probes:
 - Do you believe you have those attributes?
 - Do you believe a lot of people from this high school have those attributes?
 - Do you believe a lot of people from this parish have those attributes?

College Knowledge/Jargon Questions

- Describe for me what you know about the process of applying to college.
Probes:

- Applications – where are they located? How do you access them?
 - Things you need – ACT scores, transcripts, letters of recommendation, personal statement
 - Additional documents – FAFSA for financial aid, Housing application, etc.
- Tell me what you know about personal statements.
 - Tell me what you know about letters of recommendation.
 - Tell me what you know about the financial aid process.
 - How does your knowledge, or lack thereof, of these processes make you feel?
 - Where did you learn about the college application process? From whom?

OR

- Where would you go to learn about the college application process? To whom?
- Please look at this university jargon definition list and write down the definition of the words you know in the blank beside the word. This is NOT a test, nor should you know these words. Rather, it is to gauge what you have learned about university jargon and what future information would be helpful to you.

Probes:

- How do you know the ones you defined?
- Where would you go to find the other definitions?

Appendix N—College and University Jargon List Part II

This list is a compilation of terms used in university admissions and financial aid documents, course catalogs, and viewbooks. These terms/acronyms are **not** necessarily known by people prior to going to college.

Please write in the definition for any terms you believe you know or have seen before. This is NOT a test; rather, it is an assessment to help figure out what information you may need about college

Table 14.

College and University Jargon List Part II

General Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Community College	
Junior College	
Technical College	
College	
University (with Colleges and/or Schools)	
Public (and/or Land-Grant)	
Private	
PWI	
HBCU	
HSI	
AANAPI	
Faculty Staff	
Alumni	
Community College	

Table 14 Continued

Academic Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
ACT/SAT	
AP	
IB	
Accredited	
Full-Time	
Part-Time	
Credit Hours	
Major	
Minor	
Specialization	
Certificate	
Liberal Arts	
General Education Requirements	
Degree Audit	
Degree Requirements	
Prerequisite	
Section	
Drop/Add	
Open/Closed/Waitlist	
Syllabus	
Semester	
Quarter	

Financial Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
FAFSA	
Tuition (in-state and out-of-state)	
Fees	
Room & Board	
Scholarships	
Grants	

Table 14 Continued

Loans – Subsidized & Unsubsidized	
Work Study	
TOPS (other state tuition aid programs)	
TRIO/Transition Programs	

Degree Terms

TERM	DEFINTION
A.A.	
A.S.	
A.A.S.	
Associate's	
B.A.	
B.S.	
Bachelor's	
Master's	
Doctoral	
Professional (Law, Medical, etc.)	

Appendix O—Counselor Interview Protocol #2

Table 15.

Counselor Interview Protocol #2

Date	
Time	
Location	
Interviewer Name	
Interviewee Pseudonym & Email	
School Name	

Do you have any questions at this point? Are you willing to participate?

CULTURAL CAPITAL

- How do you think your students spend their time outside of school? What do they do after school, on weekends, during breaks?
- Tell me about the exposure, if any, your students get to places/people/ways of being outside of Louisiana.
 - Do you think students would benefit from exposure to other things? If so, from what do you think they would benefit the most?
- Through conversations with the students it seems that most people in the area are employed in a few specific fields. In what fields/careers would you say students see most people obtaining/having jobs?

Probes:

- Oil Field?
- Medical Field?
- Small/local business?
- Law enforcement?
- Education?

- Farming?
- Do students tend to want to go into the same careers/jobs as their parents/families? Or, do they tend to desire different careers/jobs?
- To what kind of role models do students in this area have access?
Probe:
 - For example, if they want to become a lawyer, is there someone they can talk to?
If they want to serve in government, is there someone they can meet with to discover the path to that?
- Do you believe people in this area value book/school knowledge more or practical/hands-on knowledge more?

HABITUS

- Why do students at this school say they want to go to college? What is their motivation?
- In your counselor role, what traits, skills, or experiences would you say students need to be successful in accessing and being successful in college?
 - Do students at this school believe they have those traits?
 - Do you think students at this school have, or desire to have, those traits, skills, or experiences? If so, what percentage of them?

COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE/JARGON

- What do you think students or parents know about college? What do you think they need to learn?
- Do you think parents/families are discussing college with their students?
- When thinking about your counselor role, when do you, or when does the school, introduce extensive conversations about college with students and/or parents? Why do you choose that year?

- After interviewing the students it seems that multiple processes are employed for gaining college knowledge and decoding university jargon. Tell me what you think are the top 3 processes/resources students turn to when they want to learn more about college.
- Based on my conversations with the students, they seem to be most familiar with information and jargon related to financial aid. Why do you believe this is the case?
- Based on my conversations with the students, they seem to be least familiar with academic degree designations (B.S., Master's, Doctorate, etc.). Why do you believe this is the case?
- How do you think students in this school rank parish-wide, statewide, or nationally in terms of their college knowledge and understanding of jargon/terms? Do you think students are below average, average, above average?
- What do you think would be the most effective way of informing students about college knowledge and teaching them to decode university terms/jargon?
- Do you think having additional resources would be helpful to you in your college counseling portion of your job? If so, what resources would you want (without restraint of money)?

Again, thank you for your participation.

Appendix P—Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application

North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research SUBMISSION FOR NEW STUDIES GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Date Submitted: <i>August 28, 2012</i>
1a. Revised Date: <i>September 27, 2012</i>
2. Title of Project: <i>Learning a Different Language: University Jargon and College Knowledge for Rural Students</i>
3. Principal Investigator: <i>Mary Sonja Ardoin</i>
4. Department: <i>Higher Education</i>
5. Campus Box Number: <i>N/A</i>
6. Email: <i>msardoin@ncsu.edu</i>
7. Phone Number: <i>225-931-6231</i>
8. Fax Number: <i>N/A</i>
9. Faculty Sponsor Name and Email Address if Student Submission: <i>Dr. Audrey Jaeger; audrey_jaeger@ncsu.edu</i>
10. Source of Funding? (required information): <i>Alpha Lambda Delta Fellowship, Zeta Tau Alpha Fellowship & Federal Student Loans</i>
11. Is this research receiving federal funding?: <i>only student loans</i>
12. If Externally funded, include sponsor name and university account number: <i>N/A</i>
13. RANK: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student: <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate; <input type="checkbox"/> Masters; or <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

Principal Investigator:

Mary Sonja Ardoin

(typed/printed name)

Mary Sonja Ardoin *

(signature)

8/28/12

(date)

*As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the **principal investigator of record**.*

Faculty Sponsor:

Dr. Audrey Jaeger

(typed/printed name)

_____ *

(signature)

(date)

***Electronic submissions to the IRB are considered signed via an electronic signature. For student submissions this means that the faculty sponsor has reviewed the proposal prior to it being submitted and is copied on the submission.**

Please complete this application and email as an attachment to: debra_paxton@ncsu.edu or send by mail to: Institutional Review Board, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (Administrative Services III). **Please include consent forms and other study documents with your application and submit as one document.**

For SPARCS office use only

Reviewer Decision (Expedited or Exempt Review)

Exempt Approved Approved pending modifications Table

Expedited Review Category: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8a 8b 8c 9

Reviewer Name

Signature

Date

Appendix Q— Guidelines for a Proposal Narrative

North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research GUIDELINES FOR A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

The purpose of this research is to understand how rural students decode (understand, employ, and make meaning of) the jargon used in postsecondary education as an aspect of their college knowledge.

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

This research is for a dissertation.

B. SUBJECT POPULATION

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research?
Estimates or ranges are acceptable. Please be aware that if you recruit over 10% more participants than originally requested, you will need to submit a request to modify your recruitment numbers.

8-12 students; 2 high school counselors

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials that will be used.

Students will be recruited with assistance of high school guidance counselors based on criteria established from the study's literature review and U.S. Census Data, including low socioeconomic status (based on participation in federal free or reduced lunch programs), potential first-generation college student status, and students' aspiration or intent to pursue postsecondary education.

The only recruitment material that will be used is a demographic questionnaire (see attached) to determine if students meet the established participation criteria (see above and question #3). High school counselors will use demographic questionnaires to identify qualified student participants. The researcher will NOT see any of the student's academic or personal information other than the demographic questionnaire.

3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.

In order to be eligible for participations, students need to possess low socioeconomic status (based on participation in federal free or reduced lunch programs), potential first-generation college student status, and

have aspiration or intent to pursue postsecondary education.

The researcher will NOT be looking at the students' academic transcript or economic information; rather, guidance counselors will identify students who meet the established criteria.

4. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations.

The sampling procedures will exclude students from higher socioeconomic statuses, those who are NOT the first in their families to pursue college, and those who do not intend on pursuing postsecondary education. These student populations would not match the study's guidelines or population.

5. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student; employer/employee.

The researcher has no direct relationship with participants.

6. Check any vulnerable populations included in study:

- minors (under age 18) - if so, have you included a line on the consent form for the parent/guardian signature
- fetuses
- pregnant women
- persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities
- persons with physical disabilities
- economically or educationally disadvantaged
- prisoners
- elderly
- students from a class taught by principal investigator
- other vulnerable population.

7. If any of the above are used, state the necessity for doing so. Please indicate the approximate age range of the minors to be involved.

College knowledge, access, and choice literature and theoretical frameworks show that college knowledge, access, and choice processes occur during high school. Particularly, students' aspiration to, exploration of, and choice of postsecondary options tend to occur during students' Sophomore year between ages 15-16.

C. PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects. In order for the IRB to completely understand the experience of the subjects in your project, please provide a detailed outline of everything subjects will experience as a result of participating in your project. Please be specific and include information on all aspects of the research, through subject recruitment and ending when the subject's role in the project is complete. All descriptions should include the informed consent process, interactions between the subjects and the researcher, and any tasks, tests, etc. that involve subjects. If the project involves more than one group of subjects (e.g. teachers and students, employees and supervisors), please make sure to provide descriptions for each subject group.

This study will involve high school Sophomores and high school guidance counselors as participants. Counselors will be recruited first; the researcher will approach the guidance counselors from the high schools with demographics that are most representative of the area. Once guidance counselor participants are obtained, the researcher will work with the guidance counselor to identify student participants who meet the established criteria (described in Section B). Consent forms will be obtained from both student participants and their guardians before any data collection occurs. After consent is granted, student participants and guidance counselor participants will engage with the researcher in introductory meetings and hour-long one-on-one interviews. No more than three interviews will be conducted with each participant. Observations of guidance counselor meetings or assemblies regarding postsecondary options will be conducted. The researcher will NOT intervene during any of the observation sessions. Document analysis of any college brochures or other handouts will also be conducted.

2. How much time will be required of each subject?

2-4 hours at most, including introductory meetings and interviews.

D. POTENTIAL RISKS

1. State the potential risks (psychological, social, physical, financial, legal or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

There is little to no risk with this study. The only risk is possible identification as a student participant in the dissertation findings due to the low participant number. Use of pseudonyms will minimize these risks and consent forms will explain both steps to ensure confidentiality and possible risks of identification.

2. Will there be a request for information that subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive (e.g. private behavior, economic status, sexual issues, religious beliefs, or other matters that if made public might impair their self-esteem or reputation or could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability)?

One criterion for participation is having low socioeconomic status; however, students will not be asked about this potentially sensitive issue during interviews. In addition, the researcher will not be privy to any specific economic information since the guidance counselor will use participation in the federal free or reduced lunch program as a benchmark of low socioeconomic status to screen possible participants. Finally, 80 percent of

the student population at the sites participates in federal free or reduced lunch; therefore, student participants will be from the majority of the school's population.

- a. If yes, please describe and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

Again, students will not be asked any interview questions about socioeconomic status and the researcher will not be privy to any specific economic information since the guidance counselor will use participation in the federal free or reduced lunch program as a benchmark of low socioeconomic status to screen possible participants. Also, student participants will come from the school's majority population (80 percent) who use the federal free or reduced lunch program.

3. Could any of the study procedures produce stress or anxiety, or be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading? If yes, please describe why they are important and what arrangements have been made for handling an emotional reaction from the subject.

N/A

4. How will data be recorded and stored?

A digital recorder will be used to record interviews in audio form only. Audio files will be stored on a password protected computer and backed up on a password protected flash drive. Data will not be associated with participant names; only pseudonyms will be used as file names.

- a. How will identifiers be used in study notes and other materials?

Pseudonyms will be used in study notes, audio files, and other data materials.

- b. How will reports will be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described?

Findings and reports will use both individual quotes (by pseudonym) and in aggregate form.

5. If audio or video recordings are collected, will you retain or destroy the recordings? How will recordings be stored during the project and after, as per your destruction/retention plans?

I will retain the audio recordings, by pseudonym only, for one year after the study is completed in case the data are needed for any follow-up. The audio recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on a password protected flash drive. After one year from the study's defense has passed, the audio recordings will be permanently deleted from both the computer and flash drive.

6. Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study? If yes, please describe why it is necessary and describe the debriefing procedures that have been arranged.

No.

E. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

This does not include any form of compensation for participation.

1. What, if any, direct benefit is to be gained by the subject? If no direct benefit is expected, but indirect benefit may be expected (knowledge may be gained that could help others), please explain.

Since rural students are not often research subjects, this study will allow rural students the time and space to share their opinions, concerns, understanding, and methods of decoding university jargon as well as their depth of college knowledge. It will also allow rural guidance counselors to share their thoughts. Additionally, it will likely result in additional understanding of university jargon and college knowledge on behalf of both student and guidance counselor participants. Finally, it will help participants learn where additional resources on postsecondary education can be found.

F. COMPENSATION

Please keep in mind that the logistics of providing compensation to your subjects (e.g., if your business office requires names of subjects who received compensation) may compromise anonymity or complicate confidentiality protections. If, while arranging for subject compensation, you must make changes to the anonymity or confidentiality provisions for your research, you must contact the IRB office prior to implementing those changes.

1. Describe compensation

N/A

2. Explain compensation provisions if the subject withdraws prior to completion of the study.

N/A

3. If class credit will be given, list the amount and alternative ways to earn the same amount of credit.

N/A

G. COLLABORATORS

1. If you anticipate that additional investigators (other than those named on **Cover Page**) may be involved in this research, list them here indicating their institution, department and phone number.

N/A

2. Will anyone besides the PI or the research team have access to the data (including completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed.

N/A

H. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

1. Do you have a significant financial interest or other conflict of interest in the sponsor of this project?
There are no conflicts of interest with this project.

2. Does your current conflicts of interest management plan include this relationship and is it being properly followed? *N/A*

I. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.
 - *Please see attached demographic questionnaire*
 - *Please see attached interview protocol*
2. Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.
 - *Please see attached guardian and participant consent forms*
3. Please provide any additional materials that may aid the IRB in making its decision.
 - *Please see attached consent to conduct research letter from the Superintendent of the School Board of the area in which the researcher plans to collect data.*

J. HUMAN SUBJECT ETHICS TRAINING

*Please consider taking the [Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative](#) (CITI), a free, comprehensive ethics training program for researchers conducting research with human subjects. Just click on the underlined link.