ABSTRACT

WILSON, MICHELLE DENISE. A Holistic Case Study of First-Generation Community College Student Experience in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Implementation and Utilization of Social Capital. (Under the direction of Dr. Tuere A. Bowles).

This research is a collection of essays that examine various aspects of a performance-based scholarship program designed to build social capital among first-generation community college students located in a large mid-Atlantic city in the United States. First-generation community college students, those whose parents did not attend college make up a significant portion of community college enrollment. First-generation community college students often struggle with the social and cultural norms of academia in large part due to the lack of preparatory resources and social capital afforded to continuing-generation students, those with at least one parent who completed a degree.

The overarching theoretical framework shaping this study is social capital, broadly viewed as an accumulation of tangible resources available for personal interests. The three-essay dissertation format presented is a holistic case study using qualitative methodology. This approach allowed for the exploration of the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program designed to address the challenges first-generation community college students encounter while matriculating.

The research questions guiding this holistic study are explored separately through embedded units, each with a nuanced literature focus to reflect an aspect of the phenomenon under study. Essay one, *Environmental Forces Influencing Program Implementation: A Case Study on the Initial Implementation of a Performance-Based Scholarship Program at an Urban Community College*, sought to answer the research question on the environmental factors shaping the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program for first-

generation community college students. Essay two, *The Educational Trajectories of First-Generation Students and their Academic Stories of Resilience in the First Year of Community College* sought to answer the research question on how students experience a performance-based scholarship model by exploring facets of students' educational trajectories and strategies in academic resiliency. Essay three, *A Case Study of First-Generation Students Utilizing Social Capital to Navigate the First Year of Community College*, was guided by the research questions exploring the personal, social, and environmental factors that shape the social capital landscape for first-generation community college students. The study sought to identify basic assumptions of the performance-based scholarship model using descriptive narrative from institutional agents and through exploration of students' use of social capital resources in navigating their academic journey.

The findings from these essays offer a holistic view of an intervention designed to improve outcomes for first-generation community college students. The findings presented here have implications on multiple levels in the community college forum, specifically among practitioners, policy makers, and applied research.

Keywords: community colleges, first-generation community college student, performance-based scholarship, social capital, student experience, qualitative methods, case study

A Holistic Case Study of First-Generation Community College Students Experience in a
Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital

by
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DEDICATION

Growing up it was always "when you go to college"; it was never an option. For my parents,

Marian and Albert Fritts, I dedicate this to you. Thank you.

BIOGRAPHY

Michelle Fritts-Wilson is a native North Carolinian. She was born and raised in Asheville to Marian and Albert Fritts, the youngest of five with an eighteen-year age gap between the first and the last sibling. She was always referred to as the "surprise" baby given that her parents were in their forties.

Growing up, school was always her favorite place to be, and reading was her favorite pastime of choice. While her siblings took different paths post-high school (military, cosmetology school, factory worker), she would be the first in her family to attend college, making her a first-generation college student.   Upon reflection, it is not clear what the expectations were for her siblings, but she can say, without a doubt, that college was never presented as an option, but a foregone conclusion. It was never, "If you decide to go to college…"; rather, it was, "When you go to college…." So, she prepared for it. She took all the right courses; she participated in anything that anyone said would be useful for college. Michelle, along with her parents, thought she was ready until she went off to school at NC A&T and realized that she was not. She struggled, as many first-generation college students did and still do.

Michelle completed her Bachelor's in Sociology with a minor in Cultural Anthropology. She later went on to complete her Master's in Applied Anthropology at the University of Maryland. School is still one of her favorite places to be, and books are still her favorite pastime. She also enjoys hiking, cooking, and spending quality time with her husband, Glenn, and their dog Saffron.

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I'll start by acknowledging my gratefulness for being the luckiest girl in the world to have had Marian and Albert Fritts as parents. I am eternally grateful the Universe saw fit to attach me to them.

To my husband Glenn Wilson, without you, I'm not sure there would be a reason for this. Thank you for your continued love, support and belief in me.

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To my Chair, Dr. Bowles, I don't think I can express my gratitude for having the good fortune of connecting with you. You are simply the bomb!

To my Committee: Thank you for your time, energy, guidance, and support.

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PROLOGUE

"How, on the one hand, can we be such a vital and opportunity-rich community, and on the other, be ranked dead last in the odds that our lowest income children and youth will be able to move up the economic ladder?" (Garmon-Brown & O'Dell, 2017, p.1). "Land of Opportunity? Not by a Long Shot" (Fraizer, 2015, p. 4) was the headline in response to a study released in 2014 by Harvard economist Raj Chetty that ranked Charlotte 50th out of the 50 largest cities for upward mobility for people born and raised in Charlotte. Furthermore, the report indicated a primary factor that contributed to Charlotte's ranking was the lack of social capital available to those in the bottom quintile of the income distribution. Chetty et al. (2014) note that social capital is essentially the mechanism that allows people to interact with others and become a part of extended networks that can lead to job opportunities.

As the city of Charlotte wrestled with how to respond to the challenges revealed in the *Chetty Report*, an unfortunate event unfolded after police shot and killed an African American man. Peaceful protests followed that eventually erupted into violence in which 50 people were arrested, and yet another African American male, a 26-year-old student at the local community college, lost his life. In the days that followed, Charlotte was forced to confront the ugly realities of what was unleashed the night of the violent protests where "long-standing frustrations were finally being aired in the streets" (Garmon-Brown & O'Dell, 2017, p. 2).

Shortly after the release of the *Chetty Report*, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force was formed with support from local foundations to address the economic and social mobility issues facing the city. The Task Force echoed the *Chetty Report,* underscoring the lack of access and social capital available to a segment of young people as a

critical determinant that exacerbates the inequity crisis in Charlotte. While the city debated various tactics to confront the issues raised in the report, a prominent businessman from Charlotte, shocked by the extent of the anger in the community, was compelled to make a difference, stating in an interview, "It made me realize that there are challenges here that we have to deal with. I almost immediately began trying to think of how I could help right at that moment. We need to give people hope" (Price, 2016).

The notion of social capital as contributing to upward mobility makes the reality of Charlotte's ranking even starker. Specifically, the study noted that a child raised in the bottom fifth income level in Charlotte had only a four percent chance of rising to the top fifth. Thirty-eight percent will remain in the bottom quintile, and another 31 percent will move up only one quintile (Chetty et al., 2014). For Charlotte, a city that touts itself as the land of opportunity, this was a dubious honor.

One strategy offered by the Charlotte Opportunity Task Force to address the issue of social capital was to enhance college and career readiness. The report highlighted the value community colleges, given their status as an open-access institution and their history of serving a diverse student population. Community colleges serve "populations where often enrollment is disproportionately comprised of students of color, from low-income families, and who are first in their families to attend college" (Wyner, Witham, & Kelly, 2004). According to a study conducted by The Pew Charitable Trusts (2013), a community college degree increases earnings on average of $7,900 annually, a 29 percent increase over those with only a high school diploma. Community colleges are open access institutions that provide students with an opportunity to overcome the barriers based on their socioeconomic origins and move up the social ladder, reinforcing the social mobility purpose of education.

Beyond identifying strategies, the task force provided specific recommendations for action. In their report *Leading on Opportunity* (2016), they called for increased support of first-generation college students with the focus of support to include several areas: a transition program such as Summer Bridge before the first semester of entry; a mentoring program; academic tutoring; financial assistance; and external partnerships to provide students with services and support.

The Community College responded to the task force's call by creating the Opportunity Scholarship (OS) with financial support from local citizens and foundations. The OS program is a performance-based scholarship program that provides full tuition for two years combined with intensive wrap-around services for first-generation students. The hope is to change the conversation from "What do we do?" to "This is how to do it."

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Although first-generation college students enroll in all levels of postsecondary education, they tend to be more concentrated in two-year colleges (Thayer, 2000). Lack of access to the essential elements required to be successful in postsecondary education puts first-generation community college students at a distinct disadvantage, creating an untenable situation in which first-generation students are unable to develop the necessary capital to move beyond their circumstances. The access issues associated with social capital confronting first-generation community college students require focused research efforts that examine the challenges.

This holistic case-study is a compilation of three embedded studies presented as a collection of essays. Holistic case studies allow for the exploration of sub-units that are situated within a larger case that creates a powerful research tool (Baxter & Jackson, 2008). The research presented here examines the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program designed to build social capital in first-generation community students. The research focuses on how an institution implements its efforts, how students respond, and the ways in which students' access and utilize social capital during their first year of college. Each essay is designed to address one of the following research questions:

1. What are the environmental factors that shape the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program for first-generation community college students?

2. How do first-generation community college students experience the performance-based scholars' program during their first year of college?

3. What are the personal, social, and environmental factors shape the social capital landscape for first-generation community college students?

The introduction presented in this chapter is designed to orient the reader to the dissertation. The overall structure of the study takes the form of five chapters, including this introductory chapter. The prologue, interludes, and epilogue are interlaced between the chapters as a way to weave the chapters together and remind the reader that while the essays can stand alone, it is one story about the journey of an institution and its mission to help students succeed. Chapter One gives an overview of the Opportunity Scholarship program with a focus on the major program components (see Table 1.1). A logic model is presented (Figure 1.1) to provide context for the Opportunity Scholarship program. Additionally, the logic model locates for the reader the researcher's area of interest as it relates to the overall scholarship model. Chapter One concludes with a definition of terms and a list of acronyms that appear in this study.

Chapter Two, *Environmental Forces Influencing Program Implementation: A Case Study on the Initial Implementation of a Performance-Based Scholarship Program at an Urban Community College*, is the first of the three essays in this collection. The focus is on the initial implementation of the Opportunity Scholarship program at The Community College. Organizational ecology and implementation science provide the theoretical frames for this qualitative case study.

Chapter Three, *First-Generation Students and their Academic Stories of Resilience in the First Year of Community College*, is the second of the three essays in this collection. This chapter looks at first-generation community college students' educational trajectories to gain insight into how they successfully navigate the first year of community college. This study is grounded in the literature on first-generation students, academic resilience, and first-year student experiences. The qualitative case study employed here allows for in-depth

analysis of first-generation community colleges students' experience in a performance-based scholarship program using their lived experiences as narrated by them.

Chapter Four, *A Case Study of First-Generation Students Utilizing Social Capital to Navigate the First Year of Community College*, examines social capital with an emphasis on how an institution structures access to it and how a student utilizes it. While social capital frames the overarching purpose of the study, Chapter Four delves into the literature highlighting the work of contemporary influencers: Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993). This qualitative case study uses interview and observational data from Institutional Agents and Scholars to frame the intent of the institution in imparting social capital and the Scholar's use of it.

Chapter Five concludes the collection with a summary of the overall study. Insights and future directions are presented with a focus on policy, practice, theory, and future research.

Program Description

The Opportunity Scholarship program is a performance-based educational and career-training scholarship program designed to provide students from low-income areas with an opportunity to earn a two-year degree in a major that will lead to a wage-earning career. The target population for this scholarship initiative is low-income, first-generation seniors from the five Title 1 high schools in the city. Eligibility for the program requires that students have a 2.6 GPA, acceptable school performance, and a letter of recommendation from a teacher or school counselor. The scholarship covers the full cost of attendance to TCC–tuition, books, and fees for two years. Students selected for the scholarship also receive a notebook computer. To remain in good standing, students are required to participant in all major

program components (see Table 1.1), maintain a 3.0 GPA, and declare a major by the end of

the first year.

Table 1.1
Description of the OS Major Program Components

Component	Description
Summer Bridge	Gives students an opportunity to successfully transition from high school to college in a structured, supervised environment. The purpose is to make students aware of college expectations.
Orientation/ Scholar Ceremony	The official kickoff of the Opportunity Scholars program. Students receive the official welcome to the college by the College President and key members of campus administration as well as the Opportunity Scholar team. Scholars are given their laptops and backpacks. Scholars also attend a meet and greet with their scholarship donor.
Career Services Counseling	Scholars attend career counseling sessions to assist with determining a career focus through personalized conversations with a career counselor. Scholars take part in career assessments and activities.
Real Talk Session	Twice-a-month sessions that are designed to enhance the student socially, academically, and personally.
Academic Coaching	Academic coaching is a personalized, one-on-one meeting with a trained academic coach assists the Scholar in reaching their academic goals.
Mentoring	All scholars are assigned a mentor. Mentors can be an instructor, staff member or administrator who creates a structured and trusted relationship with the Scholar. Mentors offer guidance, support, and encouragement.
Service Learning	Combines community service with classroom instructions, focusing on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility. Service-learning programs involve students in activities that address local needs and deepens their commitment to the community.
Internships	Internships are flexible work experiences that allow Scholars to gain exposure to their field. Scholars work at an employer's site for an extended period, working on projects related to their program of study. Upon successful completion of an internship, Scholars will receive a certificate acknowledging their achievement.

Source: Institution agent interview data and document review of program materials.

Responding to the desires of community funders who want to contribute to improving

the economic mobility of those residing in the poorest sector of the city, the Opportunity

Scholarship requires students to enter a two-year career and technical education program that will prepare students immediately for the workforce. To support the primary stipulation of the scholarship, the OS program is rooted in the institutional practices of career pathways and learning communities. Jenkins & Spence (2006) note the primary goal of career pathways programs is to secure employment within a specific industry or occupational sector, an approach that has been embraced by the philanthropic community such as the one supporting the OS program.

Learning communities, a model that thematically engages cohorts of students in a series of targeted programs that provide both academic and student support, have been shown to help students become more integrated into the campus milieu (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Jehangir, 2010; Scrivener, Weiss, & Teres, 2009). While results are mixed on its ability to improve performance (Scrivener et al., 2009), the model is still seen as a promising practice.

The work of the OS program falls under reform targeting institutional practices and as such encompasses a bundling of best practices identified and described here:

Summer Bridge: A transition to college program for recently graduated high school seniors. Kezar (2000) notes that summer bridge programs often level the playing field for students who are underprepared for college. Summer bridge programs have been known enhance students' self-efficacy and persistence (Evens, 1999). The literature generally supports the notion that summer bridge programs have a positive impact when it comes to connecting and building community in a supportive environment. Summer Bridge has been identified as a key factor to students being able to transition to college successfully (Evans, 1999; Kezar, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Student Life Skills: identified here as the Orientation/Scholar Awards, Real Talk sessions, and Career Counseling. Also known as support or wraparound services, these structures are designed to introduce effective college orientation and management skills. Research has shown that these types of programs generally have a positive impact on student success (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Scrivener et al., 2009; Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007). The OS program has embedded these kinds of services into their performance-based model.

Academic Coaching: conducted by professional staff members who meet one-on-one with students. The purpose is to help students develop action plans and identify necessary steps to facilitate academic success. There is no succinct body of literature on coaching models due to the extreme variation in how it is referenced, operationalized and implemented. Studies show that students who have access to some type of coaching support tend to persist in college beyond the coaching intervention (Bettinger & Baker, 2014).

Mentoring: programs whereby students receive one-on-one support through formal or informal networks with faculty, staff, or community members. Mentoring programs differ in design from institution to institution, but they have a general purpose of assisting students with acclimating to the academic and social culture of college (Smith, 2007). First-generation students are often the target of mentoring support because these students normally have less access to individuals with knowledge of navigating postsecondary education. Given the variety and unique nature of mentoring programs, it remains difficult to assess its direct benefit on student success, but the large body of literature suggests has a positive effect on the student experience (Smith, 2007).

Service learning: an educational approach that combines learning objectives with community service activities that provide a learning experience while at the same time meeting a community need. Service leaning allows students to gain organizational and interpersonal skills in various settings. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life (Kuh, 2014).

Internships: another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member (Kuh, 2014).

Context

Community College Role

Implementation

Outcomes

Low upward mobility ranking for those in the bottom income quintile.

Growing unease among city residents on equity challenges

City struggling to resolve equity issues

Need to find solutions to address equity challenges though support for 1st gen students

Context
Proposal to address low access students from a city task force

Funding from members of the community and local foundations

Scholarship design, management and oversight.

Technical and formal management of scholarship

Securing Funding for Scholarship

Oversight of community relations with funding partners

INSTITUTIONAL AGENT ROLE

-Develop program core components into actionable plan

-Recruit participants

College level organization & program design

Provide student support

Track student progress

Recruitment

Provide oversight

Academic support

Student Experience

Summer Bridge Orientation Workshops Academic Counseling Internships Service Learning Tutoring

SYSTEM OUTCOMES

Increased capacity to prepare low access students for wage earning careers.

Increased awareness of what it takes to serve low-access students successfully.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

-Students enroll in career earning majors

-Increased social capital

Figure 1.1. The Opportunity Scholarship Logic Model
NOTE: Model includes contextual data that supports the driving factor for the scholarship program. The role of the community college identifies the overarching responsibility of the college for the scholarship. The implementation looks at the organizational level and student level activities, highlighted here to show the focus area of the case studies. Outcomes include both system level and student level.

Definitions of Terms and Acronyms

To understand and clarify the terms used in this study, the following have been defined.

 Continuing generation college student. A student with at least one parent who has obtained a college degree (Ifill, Radford, Wu, Wilson, & Hill, 2017).

 First generation college student (FGGS). A college student whose parents have no college experience (McConnell, 2000).

 Institutional agent (IA). An individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

 Performance-based scholarship. Scholarships designed to help reduce the financial burdens on low-income college students while providing incentives for good academic progress. Performance-based Scholarships are innovative financial aid structures designed to boost academic performance among a target group (Patel, Hayes, de la Campa, & Rudd, 2013).

 Summer Bridge. A six-week program that gives students an opportunity to successfully transition from high school to college in a closed, structured and supervised environment (Evans, 1999; Kezar, 2013; Smith, 2007).

 Title One. Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (Department of Education, 2015).

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INTERLUDE I

"It's interesting, because my last presentation with them [Opportunity Scholars] was at the beginning of their second semester. I shared with them some information about not being a good college student my first year. It was particularly for the eight or nine who didn't do well. Several of them came up to me afterwards, and they were talking about them feeling the same way their first semester. They had done all right, but I also thought that they could do better. We talked a lot about how most things are temporary and that if you can get through this little temporary struggle and get back up and the key is to get back up, you then have a roadmap for life."

~ Dr. Charles, Dean of Student Enrollment

CHAPTER TWO: Environmental Forces Influencing Program Implementation: A Case Study on the Initial Implementation of a Performance-Based Scholarship Program at an Urban Community College

Abstract

This essay explores the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program designed to build social capital in first-generation community college students. Using a constructivist framework, this study sought to understand the ways in which programs are influenced by and influence entities within the organization under study. The primary research question that guided this study explored factors—challengers and facilitators—that shape the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program for first-generation community college students. Organizational ecology and implementation theory frame this exploratory case study. Data analysis employed a qualitative methodology that included semi-structured interviews with institutional agents, field notes, document reviews, and observations. Findings from the study suggest micro-level ecological systems were the most consistent structures that facilitated implementation while challenges were situated primarily in the exo- and meso-ecological systems. The essay provides a useful framework for institutions looking to design programs that target first-generation community college students.

Keywords: first-generation, ecological systems, organizations, community colleges, implementation, social capital

Introduction

The community college as an institution is a complex network with multiple missions, targeting multiple stakeholders and requiring multiple performance standards (Wyner, 2014). As open-access institutions, students enter into the system with varying

goals, expectations, and definitions of success (Goldrick-Rub, 2010). More than ever, community colleges are being called upon to deliver on a diverse set of promises that is implicit in the very nature of open-access institutions. To meet the demands of the community college milieu, colleges have had to go beyond the previous practice of operating with the intention of merely increasing access and start shifting towards a more outcomes-driven system (Wyner, 2014). The current focus, driven in large part by the Complete College Agenda, challenges principle assumptions on how community colleges operate (Baldwin, 2014). The emphasis on improving outcomes has necessitated a change in strategies where building effective organizational structures become critical in creating environments that support the intended performance standards (Wyner, 2014).

The urgency in improving outcomes has transferred the focus from increased access to completion and is supported by data that show that by 2020, 65% of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education (Carnevale, 2013). Social capital is one area of interest that has emerged as a crucial element to delivering on outcomes that will meet the demands of the future workforce. Social capital is defined at a basic level as a network of information and resources that benefits an individual (Moschetti & Hudley, 2014; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Social capital has been linked to student outcomes such as access and completion in several ways. Most notably, social capital can provide students with information and resources necessary to navigate college as well as connect students to career opportunities and educational pathways that could lead to wage-earning careers. (Moschetti & Hudley, 2014).

Access, completion, and social capital are concepts that have historically been a challenge for first-generation community college students, students whose parents did not are

the attend college. One estimate shows that first-generation community college students make up 48% of first-time enrolled college students nationally, yet 2011-2012 data shows a three-year completion rate of nine percent (Ifill et al., 2017). Over the years, colleges, foundations, communities, and government efforts have supported programming with the goal of improving outcomes for this population. The challenge is in having enough resources to meet the demand, leaving community colleges in the position of having to develop alternative options. The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2012) note programs like TRIO that serve low-income and first-generation students through tutoring, counseling, mentoring, and other supports can only serve 11 percent of the eligible students.

This essay takes an exploratory look at a community college's effort to implement one such initiative through a performance-based scholarship (PBS) program designed to build social capital in first-generation community college students. PBS programs are designed to help reduce the financial burdens on low-income college students while providing incentives for good academic progress. The performance-based scholarship is an innovative financial aid structure designed to boost academic performance of a target group (Patel, Hayes, de la Campa, & Rudd, 2013).

Of interest with the OS program is which environmental factors challenge and facilitate the implementation process. Using the theoretical frameworks of organizational ecology and implementation science, this study explains how external forces influence the implementation process of the program.

Literature Review

The Role of Organizational Ecology in Implementation

The success or failure of a program can often be traced to the ecosystem or organizational culture that it is situated within (Clugston & Calder, 1999). The importance of understanding contextual factors that underlie program implementation is crucial given the complex nature of educational systems. More and more, institutions and organizations are embracing a systems approach to understanding and implementing programs given their dynamic nature. In fact, Johnson (2008) notes that systems approaches are becoming increasingly popular in lieu of oversimplified linear models that fail to account for the complex and dynamic nature of educational outcomes.

Ecological systems theory simultaneously focuses on interpersonal and environmental factors and the dynamic interplay between these factors (Eriksson, 2018; Johnson, 2008; Stokols,1996). Bronfenbrenner's (1994) original ecological systems theory explored human development within the context of the system of relationships that forms a person's environment. Specifically, he defined ecological systems theory as "the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life course between active, growing human being and changing properties of the immediate setting in which the developing person lives" (p. 38). Bronfenbrenner's model takes into account the interactions between and among ecosystems and is often used in higher education organizational studies (Johnson, 2008). The four ecological systems are defined here.

The microsystem layer is the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by a developing person in a particular setting with distinct physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of

temperament, personality, and systems of belief (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Johnson (2008) extends this theory to organizational development identifying the unit of interest as the organization. This layer is comprised of structures that are directly connected to the organization. The influences between the organization and these structures are bidirectional. In other words, the organization is influenced by and influences the microsystem.

The mesosystem includes the connections between microsystems. As with the bidirectional nature of the microsystem, the mesosystem operates in the same manner. An example of this could include the interactions between two microsystem structures such as students and institutional agents. The exosystem incorporates a larger social system that includes events, policies, or procedures that go beyond the influence of an organization, making it a unidirectional influence. Macrosystem, identified as the social blueprint of a given culture, contains the overarching pattern of values, belief systems, lifestyles, opportunities, customs, and resources embedded into the fabric of the ecosystem.

Implementing Programs in Postsecondary Education

Implementation science is the scientific study of variables and conditions that impact changes at the practice, organization, and systems levels. The aforementioned changes are required to promote the systematic uptake, sustainability, and effective use of evidence-based programs and practices in typical service and social settings (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, & Friedman, 2005).

Hoing (2006) writes on the importance of implementation science to education noting that as a practice, education warrants a high level of scrutiny given its propensity to serve a significant lever of change in an institution. Durlak and DuPre (2008) echo this with their assertion that the potential value of new interventions cannot be determined without

attending carefully to the process of implementation. The National Institute of Research

Network (NIRN) (2015) defines implementation as the study of factors that influence the full

and effective use of innovation in practice. The goal is not to answer the factual questions

about what is, but rather to determine what is required.

The stages of implementation framework asserts that implementation is an iterative

process that happens in multiple phases and can take two to four years to complete a cycle

(Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009). The literature identifies four key stages of

implementation—exploration, installation, initial implementation, and final implementation.

Those stages are identified below along with a description.

The exploration stage involves assessing the organizational readiness and preparation

for implementing innovation. Stage two is the installation stage, which is about acquiring the

resources needed to deliver the innovation or services. This includes the hiring, training

staff, and program preparation. This stage is consistent with the core components

framework.   Stage three is the initial implementation phase; it is here that program services

or innovations are delivered using and implementing new policies, practices, and procedures.

This is the most fragile stage where innovations are met with old ways of working.

Successfully negotiating between old and new ways of working can be critical to program

success (NIRN, 2015). The NIRN identifies the final stage as full implementation. During

this stage, innovations become standard ways of working and the program is providing

services at a level that is producing desired outcomes.

Research Methods and Selection of Research Site

A qualitative case study was employed for this study that was designed to elicit rich,

thick descriptions that take into account context, detail, emotions, and social relationships

(Ponterotto, 2006). Case studies have a long history in the field of education research and are particularly useful in understanding process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Merriam & Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015). Yin (2014) notes case study design is appropriate in a research setting where separating phenomenon from context is impossible as with programming designed for a specific population. A purposeful sampling strategy was chosen for its practicality and the allowance for an inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon. A well-chosen purposeful sampling strategy requires information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). The unit of analysis for this study was the program staff responsible for implementing the performance-based scholarship program, identified in this study as Institutional Agents (IA).

Site Selection

The site for this study was an urban community college located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Critical case sampling strategy was chosen due to the college's implementation of the newly-developed performance-based scholarship program and its focus on first-generation students. Critical case sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, allows for careful logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases (Patton, 2002). Critical case was also chosen for site selection given the strategy's usefulness in exploratory research in understanding the phenomenon under study; in this case, a performance-based scholarship program for first-generation community college students. The Community College developed the scholarship program in response to a national study conducted that determined their city ranked at the lowest end of the 50 largest cities for upward mobility. The Scholars program is unique in that it bundles wraparound services already available at the college such as service learning, tutoring, skill building

workshops, and more (see Table 2.1) into the scholarship program as a requirement upon the student's acceptance. The performance-based scholarship guarantees two full years of scholarship funding in addition to keeping any Pell grant funding. Historically, students had to choose either Pell or scholarship funding. The first cohort of Scholars began in the Fall semester 2017. The Community College is located in a large mid-Atlantic city and has six campuses and serves over 60,000 students.

Table 2.1

Required Components and Activities of the OS Program Model

Program Components	Description
Summer Bridge	Supports the transition from high school to college in a structured and supervised environment. Students learn to navigate the college environment and earn college credits during 8-week session.
Opportunity Scholars Orientation/ Awards Ceremony	Students are inducted into the Opportunity Scholars program prior to the first day of the fall semester. Students and their parents have an opportunity to meet with Scholar donors, receive their schedules, backpack, and laptops.
Academic Coach Meeting	Students are required to meet at least once a month with the academic coach for a one-on-one session.
Real Talk Sessions	Bi-weekly seminars designed to enhance social, academic, and personal skills through a variety of timely topics with speakers from a broad spectrum of the community.
Career Services Counseling Mentor	Scholars meet regularly with assigned mentor.
Service Learning	Combines community service with classroom instruction, focusing on critical reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility. Scholars engage in service projects that address local needs while developing their academic skills and commitment to their community.
Semester GPA 3.0	Students are required to maintain a 3.0
5 study halls weekly	Students are required to block out 5 hours a week for study hall.
Group Me participant	Scholars are required to participate
Apply to Internships	Scholars must prepare and apply to 3 internships
Select program of study by end of first semester	
Join a campus organization	Campus engagement
	Probationary requirements
If GPA is 2.5 or less, must attend mandatory study session in Academic Learning Center	

Participant Selection

Participant selection for this study employed a mixed purposeful sampling strategy that allowed for triangulation and flexibility to obtain a maximum amount of information-rich data (Patton, 2002). The primary criterion used for selecting interview participants was their status as an institutional agent responsible for implementing some portion of program

activities in the Scholars program. Interviews were conducted with six institutional agents each with distinct responsibilities within the program.

Data Collection and Analysis

Patton (2002) notes that collecting multiple forms of data provides a critical triangulation of information that can strengthen qualitative research. For this study, four types of qualitative data were collected and analyzed—semi-structured interviews, field notes, observations, and document reviews.

Participants were invited via email to participate in the interviews, which were scheduled based on their availability. Interviews were held in reserved study rooms at the library or in the researcher's office based on the participant preference. Each participant completed a consent form and a brief questionnaire prior to the interview. Field notes were completed immediately after each interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Once transcribed, the interviews were reviewed for accuracy and cleaned up to remove any identifiers. The original audio was reviewed to clear up any inaudibles identified by the transcriptionist which turned out to be slang or colloquialisms used by the participants. Cleaned and completely de-identified transcripts were emailed to participants with an invitation to review and provide feedback, corrections, or clarifications as they saw fit. All were satisfied with the content in their transcripts.

All data—interviews, observations, field notes, and document reviews—were entered into MAXQDA (an electronic coding software program) for coding and analysis. MAXQDA was chosen based on this researcher's review of available software programs and recommendations from professors and colleagues. Coding is a "researcher-generated

construct that symbolizes data and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection" (Saldana, 2016, p. 4).

Analysis consisted of first and second cycle coding structures. The first cycle included an amalgam of coding methods that align with the research questions posed in this study identified as attribute, process, and structural coding. Attribute coding was used as a descriptive log for the data and characteristics of participants as a reference source. Saldana (2016) suggests that attribute coding is useful in most qualitative studies with multiple participants and a variety of data forms. Process coding uses gerunds and is primarily used to signal action in the data, providing a foundation for identifying emerging themes. Structural coding allowed the researcher to segment the interview data to align with the research question under study. Saldana (2016) notes that structural coding is appropriate when multiple participants, semi-structural data-gathering protocols, or exploratory investigations are involved.

The final step in the coding cycle was a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis or "theming the data" (Saldana, 2016) gives meaning and identity to observed patterns. Second cycle coding methods allowed the researcher the opportunity to reorganize and reanalyze data coded in the first cycle coding process.

Institutional Agent Profiles

The Institutional Agents that support the Opportunity Scholarship program hail from various backgrounds in the student services arena, yet each offers complimentary skillsets (see Table 2.2). IAs for the OS program were all African-American, and two interviewees were female. IAs had varying lengths of employment at the college ranging from nine months to thirteen years. The educational levels fell along the continuum of bachelors to the

doctorate. Three of the IAs identified as first-generation college students. Table 2.2 presents

a profile of each IA interviewed for the case study.

Table 2.2
Institutional Agent Demographic Profile

Institutional Agent	Position	Ethnicity	Gender	First-Generation	Highest Level of Education	Years at Institution
Dr. Lee	Academic Coach	African-American	Male	No	Ed.D	1 1/2
Joya	Program Coordinator	African-American	Female	No	Masters	9 mos
Audrey	Advisory Council Member	African - American	Female	Yes	Masters	3
Justin	Associate Dean Mentoring and Bridge	African-American	Male	Yes	Masters	5
Fred	Recruiter/Service Learning Organizer	African-American	Male	Yes	Bachelors	2 1/2
Dr. Charles	Dean of Enrollment Services	African-American	Male	No	Ed.D	13

Dr. Lee. Dr. Lee began working at The Community College in the office of

Mentoring and Bridge which now houses the Opportunity Scholars program. He worked

with students on developing academic plans and later moved into the Academic Coach

position for the Scholars program. Dr. Lee has an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. He is

not a first-generation college student and readily notes the awe in which he regards the

Scholars, in large part is due to his respect for their perseverance as he's never had to

experience what these students have. His biggest hope for the program is for the Scholars to

see the relevance of the program and understand the value added to their lives. He states that

if they aren't able to see that, "it's an issue or a problem. It means we've failed someplace in the implementation phase."

     Joya. The part-time Academic Coordinator for the Opportunity Scholars program is also a full-time high school teacher at one of the five Title I schools located in the city. Joya was introduced to the OS program while completing a grad school practicum. Joya said she was invited to apply for the part-time coordinator position after she graduated and said she was eager to work in the program. Joya's view on education, in general, can be summed up in the following statement she made on teaching:

> I was more than ready to work in this program. With my background in education, I feel like if you can teach sixth, eighth, and high school students, you can pretty much conquer the world. I'm able to connect with the students and understand that students come from all walks of life. I've only taught at Title I schools. I understand what these students go through financially. I understand what they go through emotionally. I've seen them at a point in their life where the odds might be against them.

     Joya's entire teaching career has been in Title One schools, giving her a unique perspective on working with this population.

     Audrey. An admittedly deeply spiritual person, Audrey says working with the OS program has reconnected her to the social justice and equity roots that she's passionate about. Audrey supports the OS program as a member of the OS Advisory Council. Audrey has worked at The Community College for three and half years. Prior to taking on the role of Coordinator for the Presidential Scholars program, she worked in the Office of Outreach and Recruitment. Based on her work developing the Presidential Scholars Program, she was identified as someone who could be beneficial in a supporting the implementation of the

Opportunity Scholars program. Audrey has much to say about the OS program, and while fiercely loyal and devoted to its success, she candidly acknowledged that she struggles with how much has been given to the Scholars in the way of financial support. Her response, when asked what the institution needs to do less of, was simply this, "not give them [Scholars] everything."

Fred. Fred, whose official title is "student recruiter," also supports the OS program as the coordinator for service learning projects. Fred started as a non-traditional student at The Community College and was introduced to the office of Mentoring and Bridge as a work-study student and participant in the MAN UP program. After completing his Associate of Arts, Fred transferred to a small university nearby and completed his bachelor's degree. Fred notes that he makes himself an asset to the college by positioning himself as a jack-of-all trades and his willingness to take on tasks outside of his role as a recruiter.

Justin. Justin, Associate Dean of the Mentoring and Bridge program, proudly identifies as having been a first-generation college student. Justin relocated from the Midwest to take on a new role as coordinator of the Summer Bridge program at The Community College. As the program expanded, Justin was soon promoted to the director of Summer Bridge and the MAN UP programs prior to his current role as Associate Dean. Justin notes that his area of interest in student success has always been with minority populations. He believes that it is important to give these students a greater sense of independence, noting that the OS students are "students who typically have outperformed the opportunity that they have been given and this is a chance to set a high bar that will demand greatness from them." He expects them to bring their A game, further stating, "It's simple in my eyes. We know they can do so, therefore, we hold them accountable to what we know they can do."

Dr. Charles. Dr. Charles is the Dean of Enrollment Management for The Community College and has worked in a number of positions in Student Services during his thirteen-year tenure at the college. Dr. Charles expressed that his aspirations for the students to do well is somewhat connected to his experiences as a college student. Dr. Charles readily admits that he was not prepared for college and he flunked out during his initial first year in college. He relays this story to the students he interacts with to say "anything is possible." His hope for the students is that they understand how much people care about them:

> I hope that they feel like someone cares about them. Just cared enough to help them with learning, with connecting to others, with feeling good about themselves. Being able to self-navigate for themselves, advocate for themselves. Have the tools that they need to survive. Not only while they're in class, but when they move from class to a work environment or a shadowing environment. Or that this program gave them an opportunity to do something that they would not have had a chance to do. They felt like they had some lifelong connections.

Findings

The study sought to identify the factors that shaped the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program for first-generation community college students and to understand how Institutional Agents negotiated the implementation process. The findings presented here identify five themes that challenged and four themes that facilitated the implementation process. Challenging themes included (a) meeting program expectations, (b) struggling to participants, (c) identifying appropriate resources, (d) addressing student-centered issues, and (e) administrative issues. Facilitating themes included (a) institutional

agents' job readiness, (b) high level of program readiness for implementation, (c) leveraging campus resources, and (d) community building.

Challenges that Shaped Implementation

Theme 1: Meeting donor expectations. All new programs have performance expectations or benchmarks, and the OS program expectations were defined in large part by the donor community funding the initiative. Donors to the OS program were responding to a culmination of community events that included being named as a low-performing city for economic mobility and a recent community crisis that resulted in riots. Most of the institutional agents were quick to point out the looming presence of the high-profile nature of the OS program. Dr. Lee likens the experience to "lifting a heavy weight." There were two stipulations from donors supporting the OS program: 1) students must come from the poorest high schools in the city, and 2) students must major in a two-year career and technical education program that would allow them to move into the workforce upon graduation and become wage earners immediately. Presumably, from the donor perspective, if the program is successful, it could prove to be a model that could begin to address economic mobility issues. Audrey summed up the challenge with the donor expectations:

> As an institution, as it pertains to this program, we need to be transparent about their [Scholars] experience and what the struggles are. Just letting them know expectation-wise, "These are some of the challenges that our students are dealing with." Parents who think that their sons should be working in the construction business instead of going to school and getting his education. Parents who are relying too heavily on students to help them pay the rent and pay the bills and do this. These donors don't really know anything about that. Our board doesn't know what that life is like. They

were hustling for beer money in college; they weren't hustling for life money. That's what one of the board members said, just jokingly, when we did a presentation to him, and he also said openly, "Wow! I didn't know the depths of the issues amongst this population. That was not my college experience." If he's openly expressing that, then how much more does he really not understand about what it's going to take for this Opportunity Scholars to be successful even in an environment that has all of this support? So, I think that if that transparent conversation could happen, it would lessen some of the weight on the shoulders of the institution to perform, perform, perform, and just keep driving rather than taking a pause and saying, "Let's reconfigure. Let's keep the base foundation that we've got going on, but let's tweak some important things so that we can make sure we're really doing this right."

The distance between donor awareness and the realities of the students' lived experience put institutional agents in the position of moderating program expectations. When asked about strategies used to accomplish this, Justin replied that there is "no strategy. It is what it is."

Theme 2: Difficulty in recruiting the targeted population. A document review of Opportunity Scholars meeting minutes suggest early on that recruitment would be a potential challenge for the Scholars initiative. Originally, the Scholars program had secured full funding for forty-five students. Donors stipulated that recipients of the scholarship must be graduates of a Title One high-school from the city. Additionally, donors were only interested in funding students who were planning to enter a Career and Technical Education pathway that would allow them to immediately move into the workforce upon completion of the two-year degree.

The document review suggests that in the final weeks leading up to the kick-off, only twenty-two of the forty-five slots had been filled. Another indicator that recruitment could pose challenges to the program was the timeline of the development of the OS initiative. OS program staff and The Community College had six months from the initial notice of funding to the official kickoff of the initiative which started with Summer Bridge. During this six-month period, IAs were responsible for fleshing out the components of the program and recruitment.

Internally, building out program components was a matter of coordinating the wrap-around services already in place at the college into a bundled packaged geared toward the needs of the Opportunity Scholars. Externally, the recruitment process continued to be a challenge that had the potential to alter the program. OS institutional agents noted that high school principals and counselors were reluctant to refer students who met the 2.6 GPA criteria to a community college. Instead, high school institutional agents were more interested in referring students with 2.6 GPAs or above to four-year institutions. OS staff suggested the rationale for the preference is connected to bragging rights on the number of students the high school put through to four-year colleges. Institutional Agents also cited misguided perceptions of community colleges as another challenge to getting high school IA support according to Dr. Lee:

> We were ready for the programs. It was just some of the things we couldn't anticipate
> like most minority high school students who have a 2.6 or better are encouraged by
> their guidance counselor to go to a four-year college versus a two-year college. What
> we weren't ready for initially, probably was the fact that the pool was a little smaller
> than we thought it would be. We were targeting five low-income schools. We had an

idea of there being X number of students at that school that would be a target number.

When you're 2.6 or above, you're either pushed to go to a four-year, or you're pushed

to go to a community college, but you're pushed to do college transfer. Our challenge

became, "Wow! We've got to identify the student who is a 2.6 or above that actually

really wants to go straight into the career and technical field with an Associate's

Degree." That was a challenge.

Audrey had a different take on the recruitment process with respect to finding the

right student. She did this while simultaneously reflecting on her own experience in

implementing a very different performance-based scholarship program at the college.

Wondering out loud Audrey asked:

What's the right student? I think that for me the right student might look like, *Do they*

want an opportunity? Do they want to succeed? Are they already striving for more

and they'll recognize this as a way to get there? To me, that's the right student. The

belief in oneself and the hunger. Because I think that then when you put a full plate of

food in front of them, they're going to be like, "Yes! I'm ready to go." But then

there's also the students that they may not have performed as well. They might not

have been doing well leading up, but all the needed was somebody to believe in them.

You will see that student that was disruptive, delinquent, and whatever else, put into a

different environment where they are showered with love, support, care, and interest,

and they'll flourish. That's the right student. So, it's hard to know and it's hard to

pick. We just have to take a chance, give them a chance, and see what they do with it.

Theme 3: Identifying appropriate resources. The Opportunity Scholars program

was fortunate enough to have a wealth of resources at the front end of program development.

Resource challenges centered around having the right or most appropriate services in place for students. Most of the institutional agents discussed finding speakers that would engage the students in the Real Talk sessions; mentors that would actively support students; and having enough activities that would entice a student to engage in campus community events on a regular basis. The concern about program resources was presented in a manner that would allow to them adjust the program based on what they've learned from the inaugural cohort and looking ahead to the next cohort for which they will need to provide programming services, mentoring, and activities for over eighty scholars.

The internship, a key component in the OS program, is slated to take place during the summer between their first and second year. Institutional agents acknowledged having difficulty in developing the appropriate pathways for student internships. Specifically, Dr. Charles stated, "What we could not have anticipated was probably the challenge with internships and co-ops, because real early we found out that the office [of internships] served the whole college. Their ideas of how to support the program didn't run as deep as ours." Upon more reflection, Dr. Charles offered the following: "The thing that we were a little challenged with is, 'Are we staffed enough to coach every kid on how to apply for internships?' that next level."

Theme 4: Addressing student-centered issues. During the inaugural awards ceremony for the Opportunity Scholars program at the start of the Scholars' first semester, Dr. Lee ended the ceremony with the following: "Let us be your safety net. Our job is to support you as you accomplish great things. And if you'll allow us, if or when you don't accomplish everything that you want immediately, we'll be there to support you, and watch

you, and pick you up, and dust you off and send you on your merry little way. But, you have

to allow us to be that for you. I ask of each of you, is to let us be your safety net."

Observation of the awards ceremony revealed the sincerity of the institutional agents.

Dr. Lee said his remarks were not planned, but he felt it was something the students needed

to hear. According to Dr. Lee, for the OS team to be able to do their jobs with maximum

impact, students must trust them.   Building trust with the Scholars has been something the

entire team has worked at; however, several of the IAs noted that a small number of students

remain skeptical about believing in people. Dr. Lee thinks that a large part of the distrust is

rooted in their backgrounds and in not recognizing when someone has their best interest at

heart. Dr. Lee explained:

> Once you establish that trust with the students, if they struggle academically or they
>
> struggle socially, they'll bring it to you. The issues or the biggest challenges have
>
> been those students who have struggled, either academically, socially, emotionally.
>
> Those students who've had those problems but did not trust enough to share that
>
> information with you or anyone.

Institutional Agents Audrey and Fred identify the mindset of the students as one of

the more pressing challenges. This is particularly true for Audrey, who believes in the end,

the amount of money and resources will do little in helping students to reach their maximum

potential if attention is not given to the mindset of students who come from low resource

backgrounds. Audrey explained her perspective:

> I wanted to bring in for the students; there's a group that's called Engage to Educate,
>
> and it doesn't have to be this group. But, they do come in and do workshops with the
>
> students around privilege, oppression and recognizing how we are oppressed

internally and bringing that self-awareness to it in helping individuals, but they'd be

helping students find language around emotion and creating language for experiences

and creating language for desires and fears. I think that's important because if we're

not doing that for our students, then our students are basically just coming in, getting

a whole lot of money thrown at them, being told to succeed, being pushed and pushed

to succeed, but their storm underneath is not being calmed. It's like basically you'll

have someone coming in and getting all of this education and help and then being put

out into the world and they've never had, I'll say therapy, because it can come in

many ways, it doesn't have to be on a couch, the therapy to heal and address what is

keeping them where they are to begin with. Because they have this mentality and it's

going to be pervasive in whatever they choose to do. So, they don't understand how

to grow themselves up out of something and then invest that or use that wisely to

support their success.

Fred echoed these sentiments and shared that for him, a vital part of his work is

"selling to the capable but unwilling" the importance of getting beyond the mental blocks and

challenges so they can do what they came to school to do. Fred, who identifies the mental

blocks as mental oppression, believes it is important to talk to OS students about this but

acknowledges that at times he may go overboard. He's aware when the students have

reached their limit: "They call me pops, old man, uncle. *(belly laughter)* I know that they

mean, 'You know what, we like you.' It's love, yes, but I know they've had enough and need

to digest what I'm saying."

Theme 5: Administrative issues. Implementing a program that supports high-need

students can be labor intensive, evidenced by Dr. Lee noting that he often works twelve-hour

days. Currently, the OS program is staffed with one full-time Academic Coach and a part-time Program Coordinator for forty-five students. Dr. Lee and Joya who occupy those roles both see a need for the part-time coordinator position to be a full-time position. Each of the Institutional Agents, with the exception of the Dean, expressed a need to increase the staffing for the OS program as they gear up to take on another cohort of forty-five students in the fall. Justin notes, "Every year we're bringing in 40-plus students at our current staffing level. Bringing in another 40 students is not practical. We can do it as long as we recognize that the staff needs to grow with the additional students." The Dean, Dr. Charles, has a different perspective; he believes that as the current cohort moves into their second year, they will not need the same level of oversight, which will allow the OS staff to focus on the incoming cohort. He readily acknowledged that it's not his preferred approach but rather a manageable approach should funding not allow them to increase staffing.

Factors That Facilitated Implementation of the Scholars Program

Theme 1: Institutional agent job readiness. Institutional agents used different tactics to prepare for their roles in the Opportunity Scholars initiative, yet they acknowledged while they were ready, they did not know what to expect. Joya described her preparations, saying, "Not to gas myself, but I was prepared. In a sense, I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know how the students would act. I didn't know if the students would be receptive to what our expectations were. It was pretty much just going in head first, hoping everything would work out."

Others took a more spiritual approach to prepare themselves for the program. Dr. Charles stated, "I just go back to prayer, because I pray about everything." For Justin, it was connecting with himself mentally and physically: "I prepare by making sure that I'm

physically and mentally ready to deal with what might come my way." Dr. Lee relied on his previous experience in implementing programs, saying that "for me, it was going to some of the strategies I used previously in K through 12 as a teacher, and just trying to recognize the difference between 17 to 18 versus 18 to 20-year-olds."

Theme 2: Program readiness for implementation. Collectively, IAs identified a high level of readiness for the Opportunity Scholars initiative. Institutional agents spent time reviewing other scholarship programs; several noted they introduced scholarship models from their previous work experience. Having secured the financial resources for the initiative early on, agents focused on building an embedded network to support the program. Having the financial backing from members of the community who personally finance the program has provided the OS program a level of comfort in preparedness.

Staffing. As mentioned earlier, the OS staffing model includes one full-time Academic Coach and one part-time Program Coordinator whose sole purpose, according to the Academic Coach Dr. Lee, is to "fall in love with each student in the program and support them in their academic journey." Dr. Charles, the Dean who oversees the Opportunity Scholars initiative, insists that having a dedicated Academic Coach for the program has been key. Reflecting on what makes the program work, he said:

> It's the Academic Coach, having that position in place. We lucked out this time.
> When I say that, we have both. We have a person that's great, but I think just the
> position in itself for 42 or 43 students just adds value. Many times, when you're
> working in an office, you're pulled in so many different directions. If your focus is
> totally on those 43 students, you're going to be thinking of things to do with that

group that maybe the person who has two or three things on their plate may not think of.

Spacing. Identifying a space for the OS program to operate from was an important aspect of program readiness. College administration decided to house the OS program within the Office of Mentoring and Bridge. According to Audrey, "The office of Mentoring and Bridge already serves marginalized communities and students. They were a perfect place for that because they already do mentoring, they already do the extra support for students. It seemed like a natural fit."

Program structure. Innovation in higher education is typically thought of as an idea, product, or service that changes the game in education is some capacity. For the OS program, one of the more innovative features may very well be their approach to programming. Institutional agents discussed how they used a "theming" approach to design the Opportunity Scholars initiative. Dr. Charles' reflection on how theming approach was very matter-of-fact, which suggested an organic process that was used rather than a prescribed approach rooted in a methodology:

> The first project was to put a two-year strategic plan together for the student. The idea was, what would be the theme of the first semester? What would be the theme of the second semester? What would be the theme of the summer, third and fourth? That helped us frame the type of programming and the type of resources for each semester. The first frame was connecting to resources. The whole first semester our focus was making sure that they were connected to the resources. In all our workshops, we would bring in the people that provided the advising, the counseling, the financial aid,

the personal counseling, and the internships. All of those pieces that really connect

them that first semester.

Dr. Lee said that for him, the idea of creating themes was about creating a structured

approach for keeping students engaged: "We wanted the students to feel actively engaged in

the process of their education, so we wanted to try to do as many things to get them involved

early."

Theme 3: Leveraging campus resources. The most obvious facilitator of the

Opportunity Scholars program was the existence of financial resources made available for the

scholarship program. Institutional agents implementing the program speak with awe and

admiration of the community investment towards this initiative. Joya describes the

connection between the institution and the donors:

> People invested their personal money. People invested money that they've made from
>
> businesses. This isn't something where I can just come here and chill all day. I have
>
> to make sure that these students are doing what they're supposed to do. I think it's
>
> amazing and I think it's amazing because it's people that don't look like me and you.
>
> It's amazing because they don't look like me and you, but then I'm like, "Why did
>
> they do this? Why? Why do they care so much?"

Beyond the financial support from donors, The Community College was able to

leverage its considerable resources already in place at the college to provide Scholars with

bundled wrap-around services aimed at supporting the program. Additional resources

available to the students included TRIO services, tutoring, the Academic Learning Center,

Career Services Office, and the mentoring programs housed within the Office of Mentoring

Bridge such as Man Up, and Positive Community for Women, among a host of other campus resources available to the students.

Theme 4: Community building. Internally, the OS team intentionally sought to engage and embed the program within a number of layers within the college. While the OS team is a team of two, the entire Mentoring and Bridge office engages in program activities, whether they are leading them or supporting the OS program. Observations of program activities revealed the OS and Mentoring and Bridge team huddle together after each event during which time they would debrief on the activity and share praise for colleagues on what went well as well as make quick decisions about how to approach things differently in the future. Interviews conducted with Institutional Agents identified a high degree of cohesion among and between the IA colleagues. When asked to comment on the group dynamic, Joya explained the strength of her relationship with Dr. Lee:

> [It is] a really good thing because a lot of times people that have to work so closely, they hate each other. I think that's why we both enjoy… I don't overstep, he doesn't overstep and we both share ideas. No one knows more than the other person. We're both just going at it. Again, I think because the students are the focus. I don't have a big ego. I don't think I know everything. I think our personalities just mesh in that way.

The proximity of the OS program office to other support program services at the college allows OS staff to connect students to resources that are centrally located and are in a direct pathway of a Scholar participant. One way they engaged the internal campus community was the creation of the OS Advisory Board. Dr. Charles expressed the intentionality that was used in creating the advisory board:

In our initial meeting and when we were theming out the whole year, we looked at all the places, the offices and people that we felt would touch the student from the beginning to the end. We looked at all of those offices and we said, "If we could go to the council and ask for a designee from each of departments, it might serve us two purposes." One, we would meet monthly to flush out what the students are getting throughout the semester. It could be our go-to person, but it also could be, by the end of the semester as a group, you might be able to look back and say, "This worked, or this didn't work for the next group that's going to come in the next year." They became really the go-to resources for us for advising or financial aid. Sometimes at colleges and universities, if you don't have a go-to person, it takes a little bit longer to get things done. If you have a go-to person, that person will work real hard to get back to you within a couple of hours, or if the IM comes up, they may go ahead and answer it right then and that's helpful.

The interviewed IAs each believe the advisory board is essential to the success of the OS program. Audrey notes, "The people who come are engaged for that hour and hour-and-a- half that we're meeting, and really invested in offering real solutions and backing that with the support of it or whatever that ends up needing to be." Dr. Lee shared his account on how the board supports the program beyond the monthly meeting: "Case in point, if I have a financial aid issue, a student is having problems with their financial aid, then a member that's on our team, I'll reach out to them and ask them a question like, 'I have this student, the student ID number, and I'm just trying to figure out what's going on with their account.' Then that individual will send me information back."

Externally, the OS program team sought to engage the community by using external community members as speakers for the Real Talk sessions and as Mentors for the Scholars. IA saw this as a way to expose students to people resources while also gaining external community support for the program. An observation of a Real Talk session with students on establishing career provided a chance for students to see a range of professionals with degrees in the same majors as the Scholars and discuss the various options within their professions. During this Real Talk session, students were invited to serve as interns and/or engage with the professionals to learn more. A police officer on the panel went so far as to say that he would personally mentor any criminal justice major interested in a career in law enforcement.

Discussion and Implications

The discussion presented here is anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) along with an exploratory overview of the challenges and facilitators as they were identified within the stages of implementation. This study sought to understand the obstacles and facilitators that factored into the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program. This study does not provide nor was it designed to conduct a full implementation analysis using the Stages of Implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005) framework, only to offer for consideration an alternative lens to view the findings. The findings suggest that organizational ecology is a useful framework for locating and addressing obstacles and facilitators in program implementation efforts aimed at first-generation community college students.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory posits the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life course between an active entity—in this case, the Opportunity Scholars

program—and the changing properties of the immediate setting in which the entity is situated. A total of eight themes were identified—four challenges and four facilitators--as environmental influences on the OS implementation. Each theme was mapped on to an ecological contextual model (Figure 2.1) (Johnson, 2008) based on the Opportunity Scholars program. The discussion provided here situates each of these themes within one of the four primary layers of Bronfenbrenner's original ecological model: micro, meso, exo, macro.
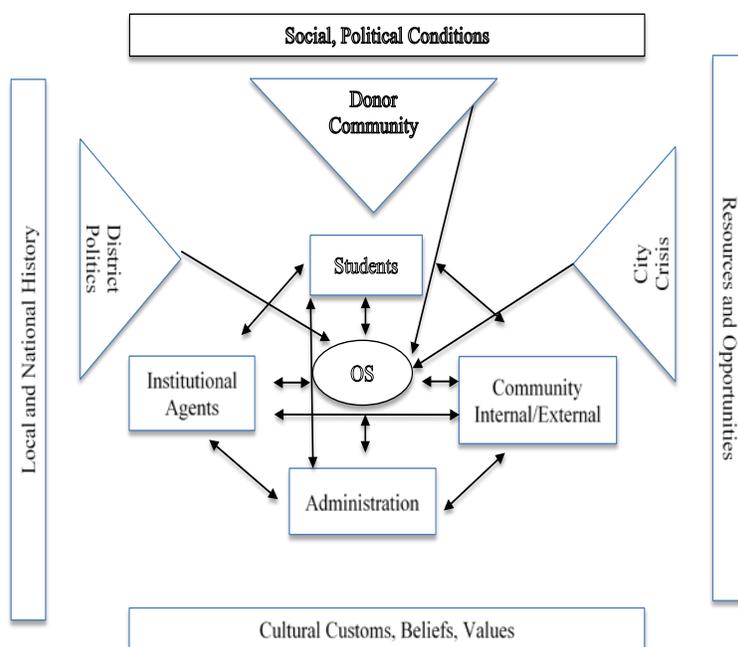
Figure 2.1. Ecological Model for Opportunity Scholarship Program

Microsystem

The results of this study indicate that relationships at the microsystem level are the biggest facilitator of the OS program. As mentioned in the literature, the bi-directional nature of the microsystem creates a high degree of influence over the entity (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Johnson, 2008). Institutional agents' personal level of preparation and overall

commitment to the program provides a foundation conducive to implementing a high-profile, high-stakes program such as the Opportunity Scholarship. The administrative structure that encompasses program readiness and preparation via staffing, locating or spacing for the program, and resourcing the program also contributes to the positive functioning of OS. The microsystem level analysis suggests that organizations developing programs should consider or evaluate the strength of the micro-level influences.

Mesosystem

The interrelations of the microsystems comprise the mesosystem layer in Bronfenbrenner's model. Like the microsystem, the mesosystem holds bi-directional influences. For the OS program, most of the challenges to implementing the program were located in this system. Bronfenbrenner believes that effectiveness in this arena requires an understanding of the interrelations between two or more microsystems where each contains the entity (Hong & Espelage, 2012). For the OS program, not having the most appropriate resources needed to impact student performance (such as having the right speaker for Real Talk sessions) was not something known going into the program; this challenge was only discovered through the bi-directional nature of the structures operating within the mesosystem. The same is true for the student-centered issues identified in study; here again, an awareness of student trust issues and the importance of institutional agents' understanding the need to create trust in order to make progress is crucial to the program. This suggests that organizations looking to develop programming for community college students could benefit by focusing on developing strategies specific to mesosystem relationships.

Exosystem

The exosystem contains those structures in which the larger social system is responsible for decisions and policies that impact the developing organization in a uni-directional capacity (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Johnson, 2008). For the OS program, the challenge of recruitment is located in the exosystem, given the school district politics that created recruiting obstacles that impacted Institutional agents' abilities to meet the expectation of the donor community, another ecosystem layer. Identified as a unidirectional influence, institutions encountering challenges in this arena could develop appropriate strategies to ameliorate the impact to the entity.

Macrosystem

Known as the cultural "blueprint" that supports the social structures and activities that occur, the macrosystem has an overall effect on the entire system (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This layer of the ecological system includes the cultural beliefs, opportunity structures, customs, and resources that ultimately impact processes that occur at the microsystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Paquette & Ryan, n.d.). The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all the other layers (Paquette & Ryan). For the OS program, beliefs about the quality of a community college education impacts district school politics and where they choose to refer graduating seniors. The social unrest in the city coupled with the city receiving a low ranking for upward mobility contributed to the city's search for solutions that ultimately led to the development of the Scholars program. As with the exosystem, this unidirectional influence suggests a need for an awareness of which challenges and

opportunities reside in this layer of the ecological system and their potential impact on the entity.

Stages of Implementation

Implementation as a science examines the factors that influence use of an innovation (NIRN, 2015). This study identified factors that challenged and facilitated the implementation of the OS program and located each of these factors within one of the four stages of implementation (See Table 3) as described by Fixen et al. (2005). The results indicate recruitment challenges were present during the exploration stage and continued through the installation stage. Challenges identified during the initial implementation stage included institutional factors in the way of internships opportunities and appropriate resources, both of which are key components in the OS model. Student issues that created a challenge for the program, but not necessary the OS model, included students' mental preparedness for postsecondary study. Identification of these challenges provides an opportunity for IAs to make adjustments for future cohorts.

Table 2.3
OS Challenges and Facilitators in the Stages of Implementation

	Challenges	**Facilitators**
Exploration	Recruitment	Funding; Personal Prep; Spacing; Stakeholder Support
Installation	Recruitment	Staffing; Funding; Leveraged Campus Resources
Initial Implementation	Internship/ Employment Opportunities; Appropriate Resources; College Readiness	Program Structure; Teamwork
Full Implementation	N/A	N/A

Facilitators to implementation were strong. Funding, staff and program readiness, program location, stakeholder support, and campus resources were all identified in the exploration and installation stages. Program structure and a high level of teamwork were facilitating factors during the initial implementations stage. It's possible that the strength of the factors that facilitated the implementation of the OS acted as protective factors allowing the IAs to focus more heavily on identifying and finding solutions to the challenges identified.

Conclusion

Given the demands for improved performance outcomes among community colleges, it is important to identify the structures within each layer of the ecological system. An ecology framework offers researchers and practitioners an opportunity to explain performance outcomes while also providing a roadmap to creating solutions based on ecological needs that take into full consideration the totality of the ecological system.

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INTERLUDE II

Being an Opportunity Scholars is…

~ Rewarding. I'm learning so much about myself and about the college experience.

~ Like a dream come true.

~ Like heaven.

~ Like having the support of the world at your hands.

~ Like being a whole different person. I can see growth, if I look back when I started to where I am now.

~ It's like coffee for me because it gives me energy like, "Yes, I can do this." They gave me an opportunity, I'm going to get it, I'm going to grab it, and I'm going to do what I want to do, and what I need to do.

~ Probably the best thing ever.

~ Like opening the door to new opportunities and a real future.

~Like being yourself. It changes you a lot as a person. You definitely see yourself change from the beginning when you started until probably the end. I already know I'll be a different person but in a good way.

CHAPTER THREE: First-Generation Students and their Academic Stories of Resilience in the First Year of Community College

Abstract

This essay examines first-generation community college student scholars' educational trajectories and their lived experiences during their initial year of college. The article delves into the student experience to explore resiliency factors that undergird their academic journeys. The study is grounded in the literature of first-generation college students, student experience, and academic resiliency. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study sought to triangulate findings using semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes. Findings from the study show first-generation community college students enter college with a multitude of protective factors that, when combined with a supportive postsecondary institutional climate, create a highly engaging experience in the students' continued educational trajectories.

Keywords: qualitative methods, performance-based scholarship, resiliency, lived experience, first-generation community college student, community colleges

Introduction

There is a growing body of research on first-generation college students and, to a lesser degree, research on first-generation community college students. Data on enrollment trends among first-generation community college students show that in 2011, 38 percent of first-time enrolled community college students were first-generation (Ifill, Radford, Wu, Wilson, & Hill, 2017). First-generation community college students are more likely to come from impoverished households; to be women; to be older than the traditional-aged college student at entry; to be employed full time; to take fewer credit hours per semester; and to be a key financial support to the family system. First-generation students are also less likely to be

in a position to receive financial support from their parents, resulting in their need for financial aid to attend school (Callanta & Ortiz, 2009; Green, 2006; Nomi, 2005).

Research suggests that first-generation community college students encounter a number of challenges in their post-secondary academic careers. The adjustment to college life alone can cause difficulty for students who are the first in their family to attend college. First-generation community college students often have little awareness of how to navigate their way to and through college, starting with the college application process, including applying for financial aid, and being able to continually handle the day-to-day bureaucracy that comes with campus life (Banks-Santill, 2015; Chen 2005; Everett 2015). Stuber (2011) suggests that first-generation community college students are challenged in critical areas of college "know how," including a lack of familiarity with higher education culture and difficulty engaging with the campus community. The issues identified by each of these authors have some level of overlap; however, it should be noted that in each case, the focus is deficit-based, an approach that other researchers have found problematic. Kim (2016) discusses the prevalence of deficit-based research and states that researchers have begun to challenge this focus by exploring protective factors that include personal, familial, and institutional forces that foster resiliency in students. Others, such as Green (2006), believe that focusing on the deficit model mitigates the benefits of programs and policies put in place to support this population.

Whichever approach is taken to look at the issues facing first-generation community college students, the fact remains that across the board, students in this population are less likely than their continuing-generation peers to persist through college to completion. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), the three-year completion

rate among 2011-2012 first-time enrolled, first-generation community college students was nine percent. As noted earlier, there has been extensive research conducted on the challenges facing first-generation students in postsecondary institutions (Boggs, 2011; Engle, 2007; Engle et al., 2006; Green, 2006; Harlow & Bowman, 2016; Majer, 2009; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Nomi, 2005; Padron, 1992; Pascarella, Terenzini, Pierson, & Wolniak, 2003; Riggs, 2014); however, there is very little research on how students respond to supportive efforts by academia to address this issue, particularly community college initiatives (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015a).

This study is an illustrative case study with the aim of shining a light on the lived experiences of 10 first-generation community college student scholars in a performance-based scholarship program by analyzing their stories of resilience. Understanding how students respond to initiatives targeted to improve student outcomes is critical to policymakers and program implementers. Green (2006) writes that assisting first-generation students should be of particular importance to community colleges given their large representation, and given the community colleges' distinct goals, motivations, and constraints. An understanding of first-generation students will allow for better recruiting, program development, retention, and graduation efforts.

Literature Review: First Generation Community College Students

While no universal definition of a first-generation college student exists, it is generally defined as a student whose parents do not have a college education. The term traces back to the 1960's, when it was first used to identify students eligible for federally-funded educational support, specifically aid for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Everett, 2015). There are variations and considerations to what it means to be a "first-generation"

student. In her article "What Community Colleges Should Do to Assist Students?"

McConnell (2002) identifies several ways studies have defined a first-generation student.

Two of the more restrictive definitions suggest a first-generation student is one whose

parents did not earn a four-year degree (Banks-Santill, 2015) or neither parent has completed

a degree (McConnell, 2000). The next most common definition identifies a first-generation

student as someone whose parents did not attend college or earn a post-secondary degree

(Engle, 2007; Everett, 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Majer, 2009; McFadden, 2016; Redford,

Hoyer, & Ralph, 2017). Not as commonly used but widely familiar is the term "first in

family" (Green, 2006; McConnell, 2000).

Perhaps the most useful and common definition looks at parental college experience

as a marker for first-generation status. McConnell (2000) identifies a number of

researchers—Billson and Terry (1982); Brooks-Terry (1988); McGregor et al. (1991); Pratt

and Skaggs (1989); Riehl (1994); Terenzini et al. (1998); and Williams (1998)—who define

a first-generation college student as someone whose parents have no college experience.

Everett (2002) notes that the distinction between "attended" and "obtained" is not as

significant if the term is used as a marker for providing guidance and advice to the students

concerning the college experience. Students with college-educated parents are at an

advantage when it comes to successfully enrolling in and completing college. This study

defines a first-generation community college student as one whose parents do not have

college experience.

First-Generation Resiliency and Lived Experience

Educational trajectory as a concept is based on the life course perspective towards

education and refers to a set of transitions between educational levels and institutions that

lead to varying levels of educational capital (Aro & Walther, 2018). Institutions looking to develop strategies that align student expectations to the lived experience requires contextualization of the first-generation community college student trajectories (Jehangir, 2010).

First-generation community college students bring with them a range of expectations (Nadelson et al., 2013) that often lack the guidance of individuals with experience in post-secondary education settings (Jehangir, 2010). This can create critical differences between student expectations and the experiences that are available at the student's chosen college (Nadelson et al., 2013). Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, and Hunsberger (2011) underscore the importance of colleges' understanding student expectations when predicting their ability to adjust to the reality. In fact, Crisp (2009) suggests that students with unrealistic expectations during the critical first year will experience misunderstandings about the institutional culture that creates a misalignment between expectations and their experience, ultimately resulting in unsuccessful outcomes (Jehangir).

Within the educational trajectory is the concept of academic resilience, broadly defined as the ability to bounce back or overcome adversity (McCubbin, 2001). Morales and Trotman (2004) define academic resilience as process and outcome that are part of the life story of a student who has successfully matriculated where others of similar circumstance have not been able to succeed. Osofsky and Thompson (2000) describes resilience as the phenomenon of surviving and thriving in the face of adversity typically predictive of adverse outcomes, noting that resilience improves conditions affecting an individual's ability to cope. This study uses the definition articulated by Yaeger and Dweck (2012) wherein they define resilience as any behavioral, attributional, or emotional response to an academic or social

challenge. The responses are typically positive and beneficial for development (such as seeking new strategies, putting forth more significant effort, or solving conflicts peacefully), and any response to a challenge that is negative or not beneficial for development (such as helplessness, giving up, cheating, or aggressive retaliation) as not-resilient.

Kitano and Lewis (2005) identify four factors that influence resiliency at varying risk levels: compensatory, risk, protective, and vulnerability. Compensatory factors such as supportive family structures or high educational aspirations tend to have beneficial consequences regardless of risk level. Risk factors such as a low a social economic status can have a potentially harmful effect at any risk level. Protective factors, self-esteem, positive coping strategies, and social skills have a buffering effect at high-risk levels but no impact on low-risk levels. Vulnerability factors such as low self-esteem, negative coping strategies, and poor social skills tend to have little effect on low-risk levels but detrimental effects on high-risk levels.

Building resilience is a developmental process whereby experience in successfully navigating obstacles, over time, increases self-efficacy and belief in one's ability to influence their environment (Werner, 2000). For first-generation community college students, understanding the factors that support resiliency is key to institutions looking to develop strategies for the population of first-generation community college students who are at risk for not meeting intended goals.

Methods

Site Selection

The site for this study was an urban community college located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, which was chosen using critical case sampling strategy because

of the newly-developed performance-based scholarship program and its focus on first-generation students. Critical case sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, allows for careful logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases (Patton, 2002). Critical case was also chosen for site selection given the strategy's usefulness in exploratory research meant to understand the phenomenon under study—in this case, a performance-based scholarship program designed to build social capital among first-generation community college students.

The Community College developed the scholarship program in response to the city's desire to increase upward mobility options for first-generation students residing in the lowest quintile of the socioeconomic scale. The Community College is located in a large mid-Atlantic city, has six campuses with the main campus located downtown in the heart of the city, and serves over 60,000 students.

Participant Selection

Participant selection for this study employed a typical case sampling strategy. Typical case was chosen as a sampling strategy to reflect the average student experience (Merriam, 1998) in the Opportunity Scholars program. The primary criterion was that students were enrolled in the Opportunity Scholars program. The second criterion required that the Student Scholar be willing to participate in a one-hour interview. The researcher introduced the study at a Scholar's program meeting and followed up with an email invitation. Those selected to participate in scheduled interviews were chosen based on their availability.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection included semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes. Interviews have been called conversations with a purpose (Gerard, 1959), and interviewing is

a critical method for capturing qualitative data. Qualitative interviews begin with the

assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made

explicit (Patton, 2004). One-time, semi-structured interviews with ten students from the

Scholar's Program provided an opportunity to gather in-depth information on how students

experienced the program from their vantage point as participants. Students received a $20

Subway gift card at the conclusion of their interview.

Observations of the program were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the

student experience. Bernard (2006) notes the importance of using observation as a data

collection method, explaining that it allows the researcher to get closer to understanding the

participants' point of view. Field notes, a process of writing down regular, systematic

observations and understandings, is another highly useful tool in qualitative research

(Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

All data—interviews, observation logs, and field notes—were entered into

MAXQDA (an electronic coding software program) for coding and analysis. Coding is a

"researcher-generated construct that symbolizes data and thus attributes interpreted meaning

to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection" (Saldana, 2016, p. 4).

Analysis followed a first and second cycle coding structure. The first cycle included

an amalgam of coding methods that aligned with the research question posed in this study.

Scholar profile narratives were constructed by re-listening to each audio recording while

reviewing the field notes written immediately after each interview. This allowed the

researcher to see if any additional insights were garnered.

Two types of coding methods were used in constructing the profile narratives. The

first was attribute coding, used as a descriptive log for the data and characteristics of

participants. The second was structural coding, which is a coding method that captures content-based data related to a specific question. Saldana (2014) notes the usefulness of this coding approach for studies employing multiple participants using semi-structured data gathering protocols.

To further explore the student experience, affective methods coding that includes coding for emotions, values, and evaluative coding provided insight into how the Scholars described their lived experiences. Saldana (2014) explains that affective methods coding is useful in understanding the human experience through the investigations of subjective qualities such as emotions and values. The next level of coding including a pattern coding, which is useful in second cycle coding practices when the researcher is interested in identifying emerging themes. Saldana (2014) identifies pattern coding a type of meta-code that consists of grouping summaries into meaningful themes.

Scholar Profiles

Ten scholars were interviewed out of the total cohort of forty-five (see Table 1). Although the scholarship does not have a minority status requirement, the entire Fall 2017 cohort was comprised of African-American, Asian, and Latino students. The participants for this study included four males and six females; five African-Americans, two Asians, two Latino, and one Latino/Caucasian. All but one student met the criteria of being a first-generation student as operationalized in this study. Half of the Scholars reported seeking a career and technical education degree while four Scholars had plans to transfer the completion of their Associates Degree; only one student remained uncertain of her plans at the time of the interview. Only five of the Scholars were recruited from the original targeted high-schools. Three of the Scholars were already enrolled at TCC.

The profiles presented include song lyrics chosen by the student. Each was given the opportunity during their interview to share a song, a lyric, rap bars, or a poem that most closely speaks to who they are or what inspires them. Table 3.1 summarizes the participants' demographics.

Table 3.1

Demographic Characteristics of Opportunity Scholar Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	GPA	Major	First Gen	Transfer
ALEXIS	19	F	AA	3.5	TECH THEATER	MO*	YES
MICHAEL	19	M	ASIAN	3.4	BIOLOGY	FO*	YES
NICKY	19	F	ASIAN	3.4	AA ARTS	Yes	YES
JOHN	19	M	AA	2.6	GRAPHIC ARTS	Yes	NO
JIM	19	M	AA	3	ECON/ POLISCI	Yes	YES
ALEX	18	M	LATINO	4	SIM/GAM DEV	Yes	NO
MARIA	19	F	WHITE/ LATINO	3.2	MED ADMIN	Yes	NO
JENNY	20	F	LATINO	3.7	ART/CONST MNGT	Yes	UNSURE
YAMEYAH	19	F	AA	3	NURSING	Yes	NO
FROSTY YANG	18	F	AA	3	IT	Yes	NO

NOTE: * indicates that one of the participant's parents had exposure to postsecondary education

Michael

> *"One-X"*
> *Do you think about*
> *Everything you've been through?*
> *You never thought you'd be so depressed*
> *Are you wondering*
> *Is it life or death?*
> *Do you think that there's no one like you?*
> *We are, we are, we are*
> *We are the ones*
> *We get knocked down*
> *We get back up, and stand above the crowd*
> ~Three Days' Grace

Michael is 19 years old and in his second semester at The Community College. Raised by his father alongside his older sister, Michael says his early educational experiences were difficult. His family moved several times, and, as a result, he went to many different schools; the adjustment to each new place took a toll on him. Michael presents as a shy but confident individual and describes himself as being intelligent, passionate, and focused with plans to become a biologist. He is particularly interested in pre-microscopic organisms and is looking forward to transferring State University to continue his academic career. He acknowledges his shyness is a challenge, but he's eager to engage, so much so that he has set as a goal to meet new people and explore every opportunity presented to him. I had an opportunity to witness Michael putting this into practice when I saw him a week later at a campus event. He came up to me with a big smile and said, "Hello, do you remember me?" I assured him I did.

Michael is grateful for the opportunity to be in the Scholars program; he likens it to having a second family that cares about him. As for his primary family, he's unsure of his father's educational status but believes he may have gone to college in his home country, which he does not reveal. Michael says his father's only expectation of him is that he is

successful in whatever he chooses to do. Michael is reserved when discussing his family and simply states of his mother that she lives in another state and he does not communicate with her nor his older sister now that she has moved out of the house. Michael says his biggest motivator is to be better than his parents.

John

"Icon"
I am just an icon living
I am just an icon living, living
I-I-Icon living
I am just an icon living, living
I am just an i-i-icon
~Jaden Smith

John, 19-year-old graphic arts major, is a first-generation college student who describes himself as "very calm, always chill, creative and a little antisocial" except for with people he knows. His parents met in high school; his mother graduated but his dad did not. John says of his dad, "He was a little gangster, he got locked up his senior year and when he got out, they had me." His mom is currently going back to school and his dad supports the family by hanging drywall. John has two younger sisters. He describes his family as being very close, stating they are his biggest motivation: "They keep me on track, being there, staying on me, keeping it real."

Education is important in John's family, and he says his parents encourage him to take advantage of whatever educational opportunities that come his way. His dad tells him to find something that will "put you out there in the workforce and whatnot, but mostly learning to benefit yourself, as in entrepreneurship, having your own business and whatnot." John takes his dad's advice to heart. He says of his future, "My plan is to be an entrepreneur. I want to have my own business. I'm a photographer."

Jim

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"Might Not Be OK"
Mommas been cryin' and they gon' keep cryin'
Black folk been dyin' and they gon' keep dyin'
Police been firin' and they gon' keep firin'
The government been lyin' and they gon' keep lyin'
Propaganda news channels, that shit is all for show
Camera phone videos is like all we know
Diluting what an eyewitness might really say
Because the whole world saw a murder yesterday
Now your account ain't what it used to be
According to them your eyes can't adjust to the violence you ain't used to see
Police brutality is all in your mind
And the tactics that they use only look worse in rewind
And people die every day, you should get used to it
~Big K.R.I.T.

</div>

Jim is 19 years old. He is a confident and impressive young man who is majoring in political science. He describes himself as someone who has "always been a hard-working guy." He identifies his mother and younger brother as his primary family unit noting that his mom suffers from a mental disability leaving him as the primary caretaker. He does not know who his father is. Jim lives in a house that he identified as having three other families, who, along with his mother and brother, are his support system. He says this of his family:

My family has supported me ever since I was younger. They always knew that I was made for bigger things. They always put me on this high pedestal of wanting me to achieve more. I want to say go for 100. They want me to go for 1,000. That's how they always put me as, especially with education because they've always believed in me no matter the circumstance. I have got uncles, cousins, some, even cousins who call me from jail who say, "Hey how's school going?" "Is everything all right?" "Do you need a hand?" "Don't work too hard." "Always make time for yourself, always have time for that."

Based on his comments, it appears Jim's protected status extends to his friend network as well. That's not uncommon in a lot of low-income neighborhoods, where members of the community see potential and talent in a young person and the community surrounds him with support. He acknowledged that his circle of friends is not necessarily the most positive, and can even be dangerous at times, but, according to Jim, they push him to do what he loves, which is learning. He says their support is what motivates him:

> The biggest motivator I would say is probably the people that are around me really, not just family but mostly friends because I came from not the best, I came from, and I can say personally, not really the best set of friends and probably not the best set of people to be around. What I love about them, they're always accepting of me, and of course, they may go a different path but me, I'm still going to stick on my path. They see that I'm not going to change, and they see that I'm going to keep striving and keep prospering, while also still sticking true to my roots…When we all came up we didn't all have the same opportunities, we all struggled, we all had to do this… There were a couple of times where this and that happened but, at the end of the day really, I would say we took different paths… I'm just a kid who has responsibilities and it's the same way with them.

Jim says he is at a point in his life where he's just trying to discover who he really is. His journey to self-discovery led him to choose The Community College for a more intimate college experience than what he believes was possible at a four-year college. He is happy with his choice. Jim says the Opportunity Scholars program has been the most rewarding opportunity of his life to date.

Alex

"The River"
To the praying mother
And the worried father
Let your children go
If they come back, they'll come home stronger
And if they don't, you'll know...
I heard that evil comes disguised
Like a city of angels
I'm walking towards the light
Baptized in the river
I wanna be delivered
I confess I'm a sinner
I've seen a vision of my life
And I wanna be delivered
~Good Charlotte

Alex is an 18-year-old first-generation college student majoring in simulation game development. Alex proudly identifies as a first-generation Latino American who describes himself as someone who is motivated to achieve. He's the oldest of three and says that his family is relying on him to make a better life for them all. When reflecting back on his earlier educational experiences, Alex laments over his grades, stating, "I wish I could have done better than C's. I stepped up though in high school and started getting better grades." Whenever he becomes frustrated with school, his family tells him how much they believe in him and encourage him not to give up. This motivates him to stay the course. He understands how important it is to be a role model for his two younger siblings: "No one in my family ever finished college. I'll be the first one." Alex is certain that without the Opportunity Scholars Scholarship, he would be at home and/or working somewhere trying to save money to take a class or two as he could afford it. Aside from his family, Alex is deeply involved with his girlfriend Maria who is also in the Scholars program. According to Alex, they do pretty much everything together except for their academic pursuits. In fact, Maria sat

beside Alex—per his request—during his interview as he tends to get anxious when he's in unfamiliar settings, and Maria helps to calm his nerves.

Maria

<div align="center">

"God's Not Dead"
My God's not dead
He's surely alive
He's living on the inside
Roaring like a lion
God's not dead
He's surely alive
He's living on the inside
Roaring like a lion
Roaring, He's roaring, He's roaring like a lion
He's roaring, He's roaring
~Newsboys

</div>

Maria is a 19-year-old first-generation college student who is majoring in medical administration. Maria, in her second year at The Community College, learned about the Scholars program through her boyfriend Alex who is in his first year and also a Scholar. Maria lives with her parents and younger brother. She says her mom supports her by taking her to school and making sure she has what she needs and checking in to see if she's staying on top of her school work. She says her family has taught her that education is her only option to providing a future for herself, which is why they encourage her to take up a steady career so that she won't have to struggle in the future. Her little brother is what motivates her to keep pushing forward:

> My brother, he has a learning disability, and he's in high school right now. It's a struggle to get him to go [to school] completely. I'm trying to show him an example because he thinks that since my mom and dad didn't go to college, he's like, "Well, we're not supposed to go because college, it's not in our genes." So I'm trying to show him you can become something.

Maria describes herself as an extremely hard working and dedicated person. She currently works in a medical office as an appointment scheduler in addition to being a full-time student. She believes she's too soft-hearted to ever be a nurse or a doctor, so she wants to be a secretary in a hospital.

Jenny

"It's Your Move"
I don't understand it 'cause you won't say yes
But you don't say no
Sayin' no shouldn't you keep holdin' out
But you don't let go
I'm givin' up on trying
To sell you things that you ain't buying
It's your move
I played all of mine
Time is running out
Make your move
Or we can't go on
Till you understand
It's all in your hands
It's your move
~Diana Ross

"It's Your Move" by Diana Ross is Jenny's "go-to" motivation song. She says it's her reminder that the ball is always in her court when it comes to getting what you want in life. Jenny is a 20-year-old first generation college student with plans to one day own her own construction management company: "It would be nice to be the boss of my own firm. I don't think there are a lot of Latino ladies who own their own construction firm."

Jenny describes herself as a very driven person, noting that she did not take a break after graduation. She says she spends her time doing school work and school-related activities, stating, "School is just a big part of who I am." She says her family wants the "best of the best" for her and believes that education should be the most important thing in her life right now. Jenny says she wasn't always a fan of school; according to her, it all

kicked in when she started high school. She said the less interested she became in school, the more her parents would encourage her to give it a chance. She says her parents were always telling her that she had to get involved in order for her to like school. At some point she listened and started to get involved in various clubs and school programs. and now she says. "I live for school."

Jenny was raised in a multi-generational household with her parents and grandparents along with her two younger brothers. When asked about her motivation for moving forward as a college student, she says that it is being in a position to share what she learns:

> I'm the type of person that I'm always going to always share whatever I have. I'm very open to sharing, so if something good happens or a I get a little achievement, or I find a parking space on the first floor, I'm going to share with others, "This cool thing happened today" and they're always like "Oh yes," and they just respond positively. They're like, "You can do it. You can keep finding that first floor parking if you just dream hard enough." *(laughter)* That's a big motivator. It's just people pushing me to continue and giving me the positive vibe that is needed.

Nicky

<div align="center">

"Firework"
Do you know that there's still a chance for you
'Cause there's a spark in you
You just gotta ignite the light
And let it shine
Just own the night
Like the Fourth of July
~Katy Perry

</div>

Nicky enters any space she's in with a 100-watt smile and an outstretched hand: "Hello, I'm Nicky, and I'm running for student body president." Nicky is a 19-year-old student who moved to the United States just six years ago from the Philippines. She

describes herself as someone who loves life: "I love sports. I love interacting with other people, I love knowing other people, learning about them, and I go for the gold." On the day of our interview, Nicky had just declared her candidacy for student body president.

Nicky lives with her parents and two brothers and says that adjusting to school in the U.S. took some time. She's always been a top-performing student, but she did not become focused on her education until high school. She's the first in her family to attend college in the United States; her mom received an IT certification back in the Philippines and currently works in the IT field. Nicky says her family prioritizes education in her house as she launched into an exaggerated accent that she says is her mother: "We can't give you anything expensive. We can't give you money when we die. Education is the most important thing that we can you while we're living, so study hard." She laughs, but at the same time is quite serious about how much her family—her mother in particular—means to her. She says her family members are her biggest fans, not just in education, but in life too. She becomes emotional when she thinks about how her uncles told her she would never get into college in America because her family couldn't afford it. Indeed, getting into The Community College was a challenge for Nicky due to state eligibility requirements; she was able to establish state residency requirements on the last eligible day to enter the Opportunity Scholars program. Nicky recounts the call she received from Dr. Lee, "He called me in the morning, 'Hey, you're in! It's the last day; do you want to go to the orientation meeting?' I didn't even shower, I was already there. *(laughter)* Yes, that's why it was hard."

Frosty Yang

"Don't Stop Me Now"
I'm a shooting star leaping through the sky
Like a tiger defying the laws of gravity
I'm a racing car passing by like Lady Godiva
I'm gonna go go go
There's no stopping me
Don't stop me now I'm having such a good time
~Queen

Frosty Yang is an 18-year-old first generation college student who moved to the area two years ago during which time she went to two different high schools. She loves puzzles, crime dramas and sci-fi fantasy novels. Frosty describes herself as "nice, very caring, and very smart." Frosty presents as being very poised, articulate and mature but also struggling. She identified herself as smart, but she also acknowledged that she has not done well academically. Frosty received Ds in both of the courses that she took during Summer Bridge. Somehow, she didn't seem to think the Ds were that bad because she worked really hard in those courses. The fact that she didn't fail and actually got Ds she thought was good. Frosty continued to struggle during her first semester, sharing that she received a zero in her psychology class because she couldn't find information about mental health issues on the internet.

She lives with her mom, step-dad and eight-year-old sister. Frosty says that all of the adults in her life (mom, dad, and step-dad) think education is important, especially since they didn't go to college. She says they encourage her to follow her dreams even if it means moving somewhere else in order to do it. She's not sure what she wants be when she grows up; her head says information technology so she'll have a steady job, but her heart says library science because she loves books so much. Frosty worked all through high school and was able to help her family financially but stopped once both parents found a job. With the

Opportunity Scholarship, Frosty says she is able to focus on school without having to think about work.

Yemaya

> "I am Not My Hair"
> *I am not my hair*
> *I am not this skin*
> *I am not your expectations, no*
> *I am not my hair*
> *I am not this skin*
> *I am the soul that lives within*
> ~India Arie

Yemaya is a soft-spoken, 19-year-old first generation college student and a native of the city. She's the middle child of twelve siblings and acknowledges that having such a large family has its good points and bad: "I always have someone to hang out with but it's also tough. My dad was a rolling stone. We don't all live together." Her chosen pseudonym, Yamaya, is an African goddess known as the mother of all, which is befitting of Yemaya, the student who talked about wanting to create a legacy for her younger siblings, in particular for her baby sister who she says is her responsibility: "My baby sister is nine. Academically, I have to do this for her, because I'm the only one she's looking up to. If I'm not doing what I have to do academically, she's not going to have anybody to look at for help or anything." In fact, on several occasions during the Real Talk session observations, Yemaya was often seen with her baby sister in tow.

While Yemaya comes from a big family, she asserts that she's in this world alone, especially when it comes to making her way through college. With a hint of resentment in her voice, Yemaya laments her struggles:

My dad. I was never around him. He was always in jail, so I couldn't get any

knowledge from him. I was just told to do my best. He didn't go to college, but he

was supposed to, but he got put in jail. He knew education was important but he couldn't reach out to us to tell us about it. My mom didn't go to college, so she wasn't into education. Education is just not a big part of my family. My brothers and I mostly have to motivate ourselves and each other…that's just how it is.

It's clear that Yemaya has struggled through school, and she speaks to that. She's acutely aware of the opportunity she's been given through the Scholars program; however, her difficulty in navigating college makes the opportunity seem more like an albatross than a pathway to freedom. Of her collegiate journey so far, she notes, "At this point, I feel like I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing. My grades aren't looking like they're supposed to, so I need to do better or I'll lose everything. Me getting recognized [with the scholarship] is unfair to some people who deserve it more. I try not to knock myself down."

In discussing her particular struggles, Yemaya says she procrastinates and her pride won't allow her to seek help. She says, "If I get a zero on one of my tests, I'm not going to run to my mentor. That's not how I was raised. You have to do things on your own." When asked if this had anything to do with her early educational experiences, Yemaya shared the following:

It has everything to do with it. In elementary school, I struggled badly. I don't feel like academics was my thing. I never felt like I knew what the other students knew. During my fourth-grade year, I had straight A's in the classroom, but I took the EOGs, and my teacher told me I was going to flunk. Fortunately, I got into the fifth grade, but it was a lot. It crushed me. I didn't know how to be a scholar student. For me, it made me feel like I wasn't a fit. . . . It crushed me.

Alexis

<div align="center">

"Still 18"
Woke up a little too late this morning
But I think I'll be okay
I'll be okay
Damn, my car still smells like marijuana
My mom is gonna kill me
Gonna kill me
Traffic's backed up from corner to corner
So I guess I'll hit the highway
The highway
Shake away all the stress off my shoulders
Gonna have a good day
A good day
~Khalid

</div>

Alexis is a 19-year-old technical theater major who describes herself as a carpenter that found her passion in building theater sets when she was in high school. She also states that growing up, she was always the kid in the class that was always "doing the most… I would add sparklers to my poster presentations." Alexis identifies her mother and sister as her primary family unit. She says her family has always expected her to go to college, emphasizing the following: "It's always been expected that we make sure it's something that we want to do, not… Don't go into something that you don't really want to do and then when you are finished college, you're stuck because you never really had a passion for it." Alexis said that some people have questioned her choice of a major but she's quick to point out her options: "With technical theater, you can do anything…you can be a director, a writer, you can paint, you can do a lot." According to Alexis, her family has always shown support for theater work noting that her grandmother goes to every show that she works on: "She likes to see, to know that I've build it and I've been a part of it."

Findings

On Entering College

Most of the Scholars interviewed learned of the OS program either from their advisor or were introduced directly to Dr. Lee who met and recruited them into the program. Three of the ten Scholars that participated in interviews were already enrolled at TCC, while one Scholar described being "given" the scholarship without applying for it and being notified by email.

Yemaya had this to say:

How did I learn about this? My teacher in high school, her name was Ms. Chism. She would always talk to us about TCC, and I'm like, "I'm not going there. That's a community school." She would always say, "Don't keep up with the Joneses. Go to TCC. It's a good school. You'll be saving money." Some people aren't fortunate. Some people don't have $30,000 to go to college. TCC was brought up then. One day, I applied to TCC because it was my only option left to go to school because I had to go to college. After I did that, I got a phone call from Dr. Lee, and he was like, "If you complete this application, you get a free scholarship." I'm like, "Whatever," so I did it. I did it just to do it. My teacher helped me out, Mr. Watson, who was my theater teacher. After that, the next day he called me. I was like, "I'm free for two years?" He was like, "Yes." I said, "Yes, right. I don't believe this." It just happened. That's what happened. That's how I found out about it. He called me out of the blue. I don't even know how they got my number.

Alexis spoke about her initial concerns with attending a community college, a reflection of a societal view of community college that is held by many:

They [high-school advisor and Dr. Lee] actually took some of us into a room and told

us that they wanted some of us to apply for it, and my mom heard about it as well.

She definitely wanted me to apply to this. TCC always gets this reputation that

they're bad and you don't want to go there. That's what I heard the whole time I was

at Lance [high-school], so I didn't want to go there, but it's different than what people

think it is. If everyone would just go to the campus, they'll realize it's like a real

college campus.

Scholars also expressed a mixture of excitement and disbelief about their acceptance into the

Scholars program. Nicky's comments represent this range of emotions:

First they said it was two years free ride. I didn't believe it at first because all my

uncles from Virginia and different states told me, "You're not going to college. You

guys don't have money and even though you have a scholarship. They won't really

pay all of it." And I'm like, "Okay." Then when I heard those words, "You're in."

and I was like, "Is it true? Is it real?" and then, "Yes, they're going to help you

transition from high school to college and then we'll be there for you, and keep you

on track, and help you pay for your---" And then, "We have laptops and bags." I'm

like, "Okay, this is great. This is great."

Alternate Plans

Interest in the Scholars program initially seemed to be opportunistic more than desire a

to attend TCC. Some students expressed attending The Community College as a last resort

plan or "in the meantime" plan. Listening to the Scholars describe their alternate plans post-

high school, or, for the Scholars who were already enrolled, what their plans were if they had

not received the scholarship, suggests they were planning to piecemeal their college

education bit-by-bit as they could afford it. For Yemaya, there was no plan B. For her, college was her only choice, stating emphatically, "Yes. I was going. Period. Whether it was to TCC or wherever, I was going to go. It wasn't an option for me to not go to college. I didn't have any other plans. I just knew that that's what I wanted to do. I would be the first one to go, so I had to."

Still others like Alexis saw TCC as an affordable option to the unaffordable dream of attending to school in NYC. Seemingly resigned to TCC, she had this to say: "Well, The Community College has theater so I could just do that. I can still get an education and experience." Jim's reasons for applying were rooted in the opportunity to get what he believed would be a strong academic foundation that would propel him forward. Jim explained:

> Really, the support that I knew that I would be able to receive from the whole
> program, in general, from the fact that I can get this community service background
> as well as getting my education at the same time while also having this group of
> coordinators behind me who are going to be with me every step of the way but won't
> hold my hand at the same time and won't put me under this hold but will also push
> me to go further.

On Why They're Here

It's not clear whether the Scholars' current beliefs about the purpose of the OS program was something they entered into the program with or a cultivated belief having completed one full semester at TCC. Observations of the OS program reveal that institutional agents place a strong emphasis on communicating with the Scholars about the purpose of the program activities and what they hope the Scholars can gain from each

experience. However, when analyzing the Scholars' beliefs regarding the purpose of the Opportunity Scholars program, two primary themes emerged.

First, the Scholars definitely see the OS program as a structure that is designed to support their academic endeavors. As Jim put it, "I look at it as more of training kids like myself. They're trying to build us up to this level of success by giving us that feedback and guidance, and that knowledge. I say it's really about growth." Frosty has similar thoughts on the program: "They help put us in the right position to actually learn new things, especially with the seminars because not everyone knows that slacks aren't a real term or that you have to wear certain things to an interview." Second, the Scholars believe the OS program was put into place to train young people "who need help" getting what they need to become leaders. As Michael noted, "The goal is to help us succeed so that we can give back to our communities."

Lived Experiences—The Good

The Scholar interview participants were asked to share stories about their best experience as a college student. Each of the participants responded with enthusiasm, with a few taking the time to think through which experience they want to share. Michael contemplatively responded, "Best experience. Hmmm. That's a hard one to answer with just one. There's so many." Nonetheless, with time, each student shared the best experience. Self-discovery was the overarching theme that provided students with their best experience.

Having their value recognized. Throughout the interviews, students had overlapping responses to the events and experiences they have encountered during their first semester of matriculation at TCC. With regard to positive experiences, a couple of students discussed how being recognized had a positive impact on how they saw themselves. Jim discussed his

encounter with a particular faculty member whom he felt treated him as an equal made him feel worthy of occupying the college space:

> First semester of college, I had American History. What I liked about it was I had a teacher who pulled me aside after class one day and we had a short little discussion about worldviews and how it looked and everything about it. That really sparked my whole interest with the whole economic field and it opened my eyes a little bit and having that one on one conversation with an instructor. He does not talk to you like you're a kid. He does not see an age limit. It's like he sees me as someone who is going on to do great things and that's what he saw in me.

The notion of others recognizing their worth was also experienced by Nicky who had a chance to participate in a week-long leadership conference retreat with other students from across the country. Nicki said she was still beaming from the fact that someone outside of herself saw her leadership potential, but it also put her in a place of self-discovery:

> Actually, just this weekend, Student Leadership Conference up in the mountains, only 44 students, and I was one of them. Great. I learned about myself. I learned about how to be a leader. I learned a lot about other people, and what they're going through, and to not judge people. I think that was the best experience. Yes, changed my life. It was just this weekend.

Understanding the value of support for personal growth. Several of the students reported that their best experience came from adversities where they chose to seek help. It was during these help-seeking experiences where students identified having moments of self-discovery and growth. Jenny, who acknowledged that pride prevented her from seeking academic support in the past, decided on the advice of the academic coach to give it chance:

Let's see. I think it would be taking tutoring. I never took tutoring; it's just a pride

thing. I did tutoring, just out of curiosity, because Dr. Lee said, "You can benefit from

tutoring. You're doing ok in your classes, so take tutoring." I did it and I was actually

struggling in one of the subjects. *(Laughs.)* I was proud of myself for doing

something I don't do, and then getting results that I wasn't… Obviously tutoring

helps but I wasn't expecting such a leap in my test score.

Frosty's best experience took place during a planned group outing with her peers in

the Opportunity Scholars program:

The best experience that I've had was the ropes course. *(Laughs.)* I signed up for it

thinking that I would go on the first level of ropes because I'm terrified of heights. I

went through it, and we're going up the net and it's just too high for me. I start

panicking and I'm like, "I can't do it." The people there and the people who were a

part of my group, they were encouraging me to keep going. I kept going even though

I was scared to actually do the second level. I was doing it because they were

encouraging me. They felt that I could do it, and that made me feel like I could do it,

even though I was terrified…My takeaway was that even though you might not feel

strong enough, it's the people around you that make you feel stronger.

Being valued for academic accomplishments. Many of the students discussed the

impact of being recognized for their academic accomplishments. When asked to describe

what that felt like, Alex said, "Great. Just great, you know?" For Michael, getting inducted

into the honor society was his best experience. He beams with pride as he talks about the

honor society: **"**I got inducted to Phi Beta Kappa, the honor society and it's been great. They

have a place that I can hang out, people I can talk to and they even do a lot of events too,

which I like."

Lived Experiences and Resiliency

By far the biggest challenge for the Scholars was transitioning to college life. Many of them expressed their inability navigate the academic environment which created significant stressors in their day-to-day life. Jim said it was a lack of awareness about the rigors of college that led him to believe that he could maintain the same three jobs he held during high school:

> This is a story that's still going on at the moment still… I mean I'm still paying for it. Doing Summer Bridge before the first semester of college, I was just jumping straight in. I jumped straight into college and this was two weeks after graduation and this was at a time when I was working three jobs at the time and I was taking a math and a science at the same time and I ended up failing both of the classes. It wasn't because of the tests or anything. It was because of the homework and I was always getting home late all the time and then that's when Dr. Lee called me in for a meeting. He said, "What happened?" This and that. Then I explained the situation and he was like, "It's all right sometimes, it happens." He gave me that criticism, which was necessary. I knew it was necessary. I felt it was needed. At the same time, I knew I had to do better because I was always one of those kids who put education before anything no matter the job. Now, I'll call out of work if I have to do a homework assignment if I need to. I felt like I let myself down at that moment. Right now, I'm already planning on taking those two courses in the summer so I can take those again. I can come back with a vengeance and go even stronger than I was before.

Several of the Scholars mentioned how their pride often interfered with their ability to

seek help. For many of the students, working multiple jobs was a necessity given their considerable role in supporting their family financially. For Maria, finally letting go of pride and opening up to the Scholar staff about her challenges put her in a position to accept a work-study job that allowed her to remain in an academic environment close to her studies. For Maria, this was the difference between going part-time and being able to stay on track to completion:

> My parents are going through a divorce and I needed to get a job, but I also needed school. The OS support…Miss Joya helped me find a work-study program and be able to get a job within a week. That let me stay on campus and help out at home because before I was taking online classes and at the beginning I was struggling a lot, because my mom couldn't drive me to school a lot, so I only had one class a semester at the campus, and the rest I've been doing online. Biology online, math online, English online. I've been doing the hard subjects online. Now I can go to tutoring, and the tutoring helps a lot. I asked friends for help, and I've been in group chats with people helping with homework and stuff like that, and that's what helped me get through it.

For others like Alex, whose scholarship and Pell grant funding were enough financial support that he did not have to work, the transition challenge was about time management and creating a workable schedule to manage college life: "Transitioning was hard because like I said I only had a 10-day vacation and then I jumped straight into college. I had to create a whole new schedule. Every homework that I would receive I would write dates down and things like that. It was a struggle, and then after a few weeks, I started getting the rhythm to it."

Nicky's challenge was steering clear of a negative circle of people that she believes did not have her best interest at heart. Nicky's ability to recognize this early on allowed her to make choices that supported her needs:

Overcome as a college student? My goodness. People. People, in general. Not about academics but they see you on top, so they try to bring you down. Haters. A lot of haters, trust me. I just got over it, the last two weeks. They stopped the last two weeks ago. And then the fact that since I have my family, and I have my recreation leader, staff, and student life. I talked to those people and they talked to the people that talk about me, and they know them, and they cleared everything. So that was the most stressful that I've gotten, actually.

It's All About a Supportive Community

Observing the Scholars during program activities, campus events and seeing them around campus reveal a true comradery among the group. According to the Scholars, the connections they have made within the OS program have been a sustaining force in supporting their academic efforts. Jim appreciates being around like-minded peers, stating, "What I like most, not only the support but the fact that I also can meet peers like myself who also have the same problem with self-discovery, while also doing what's right for their community and also going to school at the same time. It's nice to be surrounded in that environment."

Others commented on the support and "getting to know other people that you previously did not know." As John put it, "It's the people, the staff, the teens. It's good thing to have somebody impacting your life and you impacting theirs." This notion of being of value to a community resonated solidly throughout the interviews with the students as well,

as they felt like they were embedded in a community that cares. Nicky calls it, "a family," while Yemaya sums it up this way: "I like the mentors, like Dr. Lee and Mr. Wilson and Ms. Joya. I like how they care. A lot of people don't. That's probably the main thing I like about it, that somebody else cares about me as a student." In addition to the supportive community the students have credited to being vital to their success, Nicky keenly observed that the OS program did not present the support in a way that seemed charity-driven. Nicky explains:

> Yes, and it's not like, "You do this because we gave you money." No, they're like, "Do you need anything?" because like your life is important. Your overall being is important, too. It's not just--- And they're very supportive. They're very fun. I love all of them. And yes, it's like you have sisters and brothers going around like, "Hey." It's really, really good.

The overall experiences of the Scholars who participated in the interviews were positive. In fact, Scholars were hard-pressed to come up with anything that they considered a deal breaker in their individual experiences. However, they did consistently comment on their struggles with transitioning into college life. At one point in the interview with Jim, he paused to reflect on this before commenting:

> I would say it's more on me, on my behalf is that the fact that, like I said, I come from a history of hard workers, and the fact sometimes I don't always manage my time and do what I want to do. In the sense where they have all these opportunities they give us, like such as the community service work and things of that nature. I wish I could do that to some extent, I wish I could do all of them. I know in my mind, as well as Dr. Lee as well, that I have a busy work schedule and that I'm just trying to get things moving for me as well. I would say that's more my time I'd say that's more

on me than the program in my opinion.

The Real Talk sessions occupy a "love-like-ughhh" space among the Scholars. While many saw the benefit and appreciated having access to the information provided, they were quick to point out that not all sessions were relevant to them. In cases where they believe the information was not useful, they felt their time would be better spent on other school-related tasks like homework.

The Scholars were asked to reflect on their experience in the OS program and identify anything or experience they would want to change if given a magic wand to do so. Once again, the theme around time management was identified. In the case of the magic wand, however, Scholars would use it create scenarios where the magic wand would allow them to "fit everything in." This included extending the expected two-year completion time of the scholarship. Yemaya had this to say:

> I would extend the timeframe, instead of a two-year--- I know students go here for two years, but some people stay for four. I would extend it the time they paid for you to go. If you still want to be here, they could pay for you. I would extend that…I'm going for nursing. Nurses, they need to be in school for more than two years. I think it takes four years to become a registered nurse, especially here. Even though you're supposed to be on your feet by then, I think they should keep us going even though we're supposed to be adults.

Discussion and Implications

This exploratory case study sought to advance understanding of the experiences of first-generation community college students participating in a performance-based scholarship program and the protective factors that contributed to their resiliency during their first year of

college. This discussion summarizes the finding and implications rooted in the lived

experience of the students and their educational trajectories as told by them.

As defined by Yaeger and Dweck (2012), academic resiliency is any behavioral,

attributional, or emotional response to an academic or social challenge that is beneficial to

development. In these academic stories of resilience, we see powerful examples of students

having to make life-changing choices in the interest of creating a productive future. The

trajectories of these students reveal four themes that contribute to their resiliency: 1) a

supportive community; 2) an internal locus of control; 3) high self-esteem; and 4) motivation

to succeed.

Research on resiliency suggest that students who have a strong supportive network or

more likely to succeed in post-secondary education settings (Crosnoe, Mistry, & Elder, 2002;

Kim et al., 2016; Morales, 2008, 2010). This proved to be true for the students in this study,

all of whom were able to identify a support network. Scholars acknowledged their familial

support system's inability to guide them academically; however, the moral and emotional

support along with their belief in the scholars anchored those students. Yemaya's story

highlights the vulnerability of a student lacking family support which lead her to believe that

she was in it alone. Cases such as Yemaya's underscore the importance of having alternate

support networks in the way of counselors, peers, faculty, and, in the case of Yemaya, the

Opportunity Scholars program staff.

Internal locus of control, the extent to which people believed they have power over

the events in their lives (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliott, & Pierce, 2012), proved to be a

resiliency factor for the Scholars. An internal locus of control has been shown to have a

demonstrated effect on students' abilities to adjust to college life (Aspelmeier et al.).

Interview participants reported situations or events in a manner that displayed personal responsibility. This was evident in both Jim's and Alexis' separate accounts of why they chose to attend TCC. Jenny's decision to attend tutoring sessions on the advice of Dr. Lee as well as Michael's willingness to address his shyness around engaging with others both display the ways in which these Scholars take responsibility for their well-being. Each of the students was able to dig deep in the face of challenges in a manner that aided their personal growth, referred to by several of the Scholars as self-discovery.

The third protective factor identified in this study was self-esteem. Self-esteem, defined as one's positive or negative belief about one's self, has been a long-standing predictor of college adjustment (Aspelmeier et al., 2012). The findings reveal that Scholars' self-esteem did not suffer when faced with defeats such as failing a class; rather, Scholars such as Jim seem to rely on his belief in himself to suggest that he would come back "stronger than ever." Other areas where self-esteem stood out was in the Scholars' identification of their strengths. Scholars reported having "a lot of knowledge," "drive," "confidence," and "leadership skills."

The final protective factor that supports resiliency among Scholars in this study was motivation, defined as intrinsic or extrinsic factors that activate goal-oriented behavior (Petty, 2014) . Aspelmier et al. (2012) report that first-generation students' motivation often differs from that of their peers. Specifically, first-generation college students are more likely to report wanting a degree to help support the family, to gain honor, or earn respect. This was true for the Scholars interviewed for this study. In the case of Michael, his motivation was to be better than his parents. For Alex, it was a combination of family honor and supporting his family. Yemaya explicitly stated that her motivation was rooted in her need to

not only take care of her younger sister, but also to show her a role model that valued education.

This study highlights the importance of community colleges' bolstering protective factors that support resiliency for first-generation students. While each of the Scholars interviewed entered college with a significant level of protective factors that support resiliency along their educational trajectories, institutions can build upon those strengths by developing campus resources that enhance a student's ability through completion. Practitioners looking for ways to bolster support with this population should consider engaging first-generation community college students in activities that allow them to bring their lived experience into their learning process. Jehangir (2010) argues that bringing the lived experience into the learning space builds the necessary bridge to sustain them. Additionally, contextualizing their experience provides an opening for institutional agents to assess and identify those areas in a student's academic journey that need support. Wraparound services such as Summer Bridge, tutoring, academic coaching, mentoring, and skill-building workshops like the Real Talk sessions and ropes courses were identified as valuable auxiliary services by the Scholars in this study.

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INTERLUDE III

Interviewer: How does the Opportunity Scholars program build social capital in its Scholars?

Audrey: I think that being a scholar on this campus and all of the opportunities that they have to be recognized as such, as scholars, builds some esteem in that the filling out of that esteem resonates as something like, "I want to fill this again." So, seeking out opportunities to show up like that in your life more. I think that that helps to build social capital. I think that when they do stuff in the community and they are seen by community members as being a bright young man or woman, or individual that is coming into a space and contributing and giving back, that's also building social capital.

Interviewer: Thinking back over your time as a Scholar, what activities made you feel connected to the Scholars program?

Yemaya: One time, Lance High School where I graduated from came to TCC, and I gave them a tour. That did something to me. I was proud that I could take them on a tour of my college as an Opportunity Scholar and a role model. It just did something to me.

CHAPTER FOUR: A Case Study of First-Generation Students Utilizing Social Capital to Navigate the First Year of Community College

Abstract

This essay examines first-generation community college students' use of social capital to navigate their first year of college as Scholars in a performance based-scholarship program designed to build social capital. Taking a grounded theory approach, the study sought to understand how Institutional Agents framed the social capital building processes and Scholars' access to and utilization of those resources in addition to their own. This study found that the thematic semester-based approach was critical in structuring social capital opportunities for the participants in the program in that they could access appropriate resources when needed. The study provides an analysis of the social capital building process rooted in Coleman's theoretical position on the subject. This study introduces a groundbreaking approach to the creation of social capital among first- generation community college students.

Keywords: support services, college knowledge, first-in-family, college capital, first-generation community college student, community colleges, Coleman

Introduction

First-generation community college students (FGCCS), particularly those who are low-income, enter into college in the unique position of shifting their trajectories that move them beyond their current economic circumstances. However, the National Center for Education Statistics (Ifill et al., 2017) states the three-year completion rate among 2011-2012 first-time enrolled, first-generation community college students was nine percent. In fact, first generation status has been found to be the strongest predictor of students leaving college before their second year (Kopp & Shaw, 2016; Redford, Hoyer, & Ralph, n.d.). Gofen (2009)

notes that educational mobility leads to social mobility, highlighting the critical importance

of education in multiple facets of a student's prosperity. A primary reason cited in the

literature that contributes to the first-generation community college students' struggle is that

low-access, first-generation students require more support to make a successful transition to

college than their continuing-generation peers (Chen, 2005; Chetty, Hendren, Kline, Saez, &

Turner, 2014; Kim et al., 2016; Martin, 2015; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini,

2004; Pascarella et al., 2004). Researchers note that FGCCS enter into college lacking the

requisite amount of social capital necessary to navigate their college experience (McConnell,

2000; Padgett et al. 2012). FGCCS often are not aware of the importance of establishing

relationships and locating resources, two skillsets that are essential to the social capital

construct (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015b).

The accumulation of social capital (SC), or those relationships with others that

provides support and assistance in a given situation (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), has been

identified as a critical component in supporting first generation community college student

success. SC can facilitate FGCCS as they navigate unfamiliar territory (Moschetti & Hudley,

2015b). Given the importance of social capital in student trajectories, institutions looking to

move the needle on outcomes for first-generation community college students have begun to

shift the focus to developing social capital in this population. Researchers contend that social

capital accumulation is critical to achieving positive educational outcomes, and it is believed

that an accumulation of social capital will have an impact on student decision making,

particularly during the early terms of postsecondary education (Pérez & McDonough, 2008).

The college experience is a primary mechanism for gaining and accessing social capital for

FGCCS .

When looking at how social capital is cultivated among students in postsecondary education, the focus is often on the role of institutional agents. Institutional agents (IAs) are those individuals who communicate or facilitate the transmission of opportunities and resources available at the institution (e.g., academic advising, personal counseling, tutors) and can be a source of social capital upon a student's entry into an institution (Moshetti & Hudley, 2015). Wang, Wickersham, Lee, and Chan's (2018) research identified four primary ways in which traditional-aged community college students access and utilize social capital: first, through students' knowledge of institutional agents that could help guide course or program selection; second, through relationships with faculty, staff and student peers— people who could influence how students access assistance; third, through more structured settings such as the classroom and classroom interactions or campus events and spaces that provide a flow of information; fourth, supportive family, friends or community members external to their campus environment—whom students draw upon as they navigate their academic journeys.

Students who can access valuable information, guidance, and support reinforce perceptions that social, physical, and academic environments are negotiable which enables students to cognitively manage their environments (Attinasi,1989; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). This ability ultimately becomes a means of students accessing and utilizing their capital. This study examines how first-generation community college students navigate their first-year of community college in a performance-based scholarship program designed to build social capital.

Conceptual Framework

Social capital as a theoretical framework posits as its central thesis that relationships matter. And, through those relationships, commitments are made to self and others in a manner that weave members into the social fabric of the community, thereby creating a sense of belonging that can be highly beneficial to both the individual and community (Field, 2016). Evidence suggests that social capital can be a factor in creating desirable outcomes, leading researchers to highlight its importance to success among students and the purported value of social capital in its ability to facilitate academic success in students (Goddard, 2003).

The influencers responsible for shepherding in the contemporary view of social capital particularly in the field of education can be traced to Bourdieu (1986), whose work is often cited in literature on educational inequality (Dumais & Ward, 2009); Coleman, noted for his social capital model rooted in structural-functionalism (Dika & Singh, 2002); and Putman (1993). Like most theoretical concepts, social capital does not adhere to any one singular agreed upon definition. Rather, social capital is discussed broadly as social relationships between people that facilitate productive outcomes (Claridge, 2004), a concept that is pliable to various disciplines for operationalization and study.

Bourdieu (1986) frames social capital as having access to institutional resources and relevance as determined by the quantity and quality of those resources (Dika & Singh, 2002). Bourdieu, in his influential piece *The Forms of Capital*, identifies three fundamental types of capital: 1) economic, which is immediately and directly convertible into money; 2) cultural, which can, under certain conditions, convert into economic capital, but primarily is seen as institutionalized in the form of education qualifications; and 3) social, made up of social

connections that also has the potential for economic conversion and can be institutionalized in the form of a title. Coleman, in his seminal work *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital* (1988), identifies social capital as a function of social structures with values that serve as resources to achieve certain interests. Coleman asserts that the value of the social structure is relational and based on the level and type of obligation, expectation and trustworthiness of the structure. Putnam (1993) focuses on social organization that includes trust, norms, and networks that support coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.

Rooted within the influences of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993), others have gone on to offer simplified variations of the three constructs with definitions of their own that are amenable to empirical investigations. This study looks at three such definitions that are applicable to this study on utilizing social capital. First, Burt (2001) defines social capital as a person's connection to individuals or networks that provide access to resources and support that facilitate the accomplishments of goals. Second, Stanton and Salazar (2001) define social capital as the value of a relationship with another person that provides support and assistance in a given situation. Third, Portes (1998) defines social capital as an actor's ability to procure benefits through membership in social networks and structures.

Empirical studies on social capital in community college settings are illustrative of what can happen to students in the absence or presence of social capital resources. Moschetti and Hudley's (2015) study on low-income, White, first-generation community college students exposed the challenges students faced during their tenure in community college. Findings from the study show that students identified a lack of institutional support, difficulty managing personal responsibilities, and financial challenges highlighting the need to develop

support services that meet the need of the population. Furthermore, participants in the study expressed a lack of knowledge in how to access the necessary resources to address the challenges they encountered. In their study on African American and Latino community college students, Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2004) identified relationships with faculty, family support and campus engagement as the primary factors that supported students' matriculation through community college.

Performance-based Scholarships

Performance-based scholarships differ from traditional academic or merit-based scholarships where the primary goal is to lower the cost of college through financial rewards offered based on students' past academic merit. Performance-based scholarships are designed to improve student outcomes by providing financial incentives based on a student's ability to meet ongoing benchmarks (Barrow, Hayes, Rouse, & Brock, 2010).

Low-income and non-traditional students are at risk of not persisting in college, often due to financial pressures in addition to other risk factors associated with inadequate preparation (Callanta & Ortiz, 2009; Kim et al., 2016; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015b; Pascarella et al., 2004). Patel and Hayes (2011) note that financial aid is positively associated with higher enrollment and increased persistence. One solution-focused strategy aimed at improving outcomes for targeted populations such as low-income first-generation students is performance-based funding (PBF). PBF at the student level is often provided in the form of scholarships that stipulate students must meet predetermined benchmarks to sustain funding (Patel & Richburg-Hayes, 2013). While limited research has been conducted on this emerging strategy (Richburg-Hayes et al., 2015), researchers and institutional agents looking for solutions to address low-performing student populations remain hopeful about

the outcomes of programs like the Opportunity Scholars initiative. The Opportunity Scholars program is a performance-based program designed to build social capital in first-generation community college students.

Supporters of PBF tout the key benefits ranging from short-term outcomes to more impactful longer-term benefits. One of the more immediate or short-term outcomes is the student's ability to focus more on their studies absent the threat or worry of financial constraints. The ability to focus on studies supports the mid-level outcome of degree completion, which ultimately supports the more impactful outcomes that are favorable to students entering the labor market. Supporters point out PBF students are five percent more likely to matriculate in college; have better GPAs; and increased year-to-year persistence at a rate of two and half percentage points higher than non-PBF scholars (Jackson, 2015).

Critics of performance-based funding argue that while the concept is theoretically enticing, the results fail to show large sustainable positive outcomes overtime (Hillman 2016). Hillman suggests the fundamental reason performance-based funding programs don't work is that organizations "using outcomes as a measurement tool is difficult because public services are delivered through complex organizations where tasks are not routine and are inherently difficult to define and measure" (p. 2). This critique is aimed primarily at state-level performance-based funding where institutions are held accountable for overall student outcomes. Results on individual level performance-based funding are still emerging. Early findings from a national demonstration grant showed that students improved in areas of credit accumulation, debt reduction, grades, and persistence (Patel-Hayes, 2011).

Research Design

Qualitative inquiry contains a number of elements that are suited to the social capital theoretical framework and research question on utilizing social capital. Qualitative research focuses on in-depth investigation and interpretation of individual experience within a specific context or phenomenon, and its methods of inquiry include components that promote the detailed description necessary for this type of investigation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Merriam (1998) notes the philosophical assumption that underpins all types of qualitative research is the notion that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds resulting in multiple interpretations of reality. The qualitative mode of inquiry for this study was an exploratory case study.

Site Selection

The site for this study is an urban community college located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Critical case sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, was also chosen based on the strategy's usefulness in exploratory research in understanding the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002), which, in this case, is a performance-based scholarship program designed to build social capital among first-generation community college students.

Participant Selection

Participant selection employed a mixed purposeful sampling strategy allowing for triangulation and flexibility that typically yields a maximum amount of information-rich data (Patton, 2002). The investigator recruited students who were accepted into the inaugural cohort of the Scholars program and Institutional Agents that were responsible for implementing some portion of the Scholars program at The Community College.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews and background questionnaires were conducted with ten students enrolled in the OS program and six Institutional Agents (IAs) working with the OS program. Interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes in length and included a range of topics that focused on program readiness, implementation, student experience, and social capital. The data used for this study includes responses from the background questionnaires and the subset of questions that specifically address social capital on both the institutional agent and scholar interview protocols (Appendices D and E). Additional data included observations and field notes.

The semi-structured interviews conducted with Scholar participants was the primary data collection method. The Scholar interview guide was developed using the *Analyzing Social Capital in Context Guide* (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones, & Woolcock, 2006), which was chosen for its focus on developing contextually-appropriate qualitative instruments that address each of the six dimensions of social capital (See Table 4.1). Using this approach to develop the interview protocol insured that participants responded to a broad range of social capital indicators.

Table 4.1

Summary of the Six Dimensions of Social Capital Identified by the World Bank

Dimensions	Description
Groups and Networks	Key resources accessed by students both formal and informal, associates, and networks. Focus on the aim of the exchange.
Trust and Solidarity	The extent to which Scholars feel they can rely on relatives, peers, faculty, staff and others providing assistance to them.
Collective Action and Cooperation	Explores how Scholars work together in their community on projects. It also explores group accountability.
Information and Communication	Access to information as a central component to one's well-being, including how Scholars access and disseminate information.
Social Cohesion and Inclusion	Focuses on activities that strengthen social bonds and the Scholars' beliefs about their networks.
Empowerment	The extent to which Scholars believe they have a measure of control over processes that directly affect their well-being.

Patton (2002) notes the limits of qualitative data given the reliance on what people say; observation is the only qualitative method that allows you observe what is happening. For this reason, observation of program activities was conducted to add a layer of depth to the study. This is consistent with Patton's view, as he suggests that to fully understand the complexities of situations, observation of a phenomenon is a highly useful.

The practice of using field notes, a process of writing down regular, systematic observations and understandings, is a highly useful tool in qualitative research (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Field notes allow for the accumulation of observations and experiences that occurred while engaging in the research setting. Emerson et al. (1995)

further note that contemporaneously written field notes are an "essential resource for writing broader, more coherent accounts of others' lives and concerns" (p. 11).

Interviews were professionally transcribed; completed transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy. Cleaned and de-identified transcripts were emailed to participants for member checking. All data—background questionnaires, interviews, observation logs and field notes—were entered into MAXQDA, an electronic coding software program. Coding is a "researcher-generated construct that symbolizes data and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection" (Saldana, 2016. p. 4).

Analysis

A grounded theory approach was used for the analysis. Grounded theory allows for the emergence of themes through an iterative process of data collection and analysis (Bernard, 2006). The coding structure for the study followed a first, second, and third cycle process. Open coding was conducted during the initial round. This coding process allowed the data to be segmented into groupings about the phenomenon being examined. The second cycle used axial coding to develop themes to structure the data for a more nuanced analysis. The final coding cycle used a selective coding process that allowed for an integration of all the categories that could provide a coherent understanding of how the Scholars in the OS program accessed and utilized social capital.

Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1985) established four criteria to address the level of validity and reliability in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The use of multiple data sources provided a maximum level of data points that ensure a rich, in-depth study that contains the thick description necessary for meaningful

qualitative research. The use of well-recognized research methods and triangulation of data satisfy the criteria of credibility and dependability. Transferability was established through the detailed contextual background information described in the study that allows the reader to establish a comparison. Confirmability is established by clearly articulating researcher bias and limitations in addition to the triangulation of data methods (Shenton, 2004).

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

Researcher bias and subjectivity are part of the research process as is articulating them for the reader to establish transparency. A primary bias that I enter into this study with is my status and experience as a first-generation college student. I am also an employee at the college that is implementing the performance-based scholarship program.

Study Limitations

The small sample size, often typical in qualitative studies, limits the ability to generalize the results. Interviews were conducted mid-way during the second semester of the initial academic year, making it impossible to include student outcomes of a full year of study, thereby limiting the ability to understand the full impact of services.

<center>**Description of Scholar Participants**</center>

Scholars in this study (see Tables 4.2 – 4.4) consisted of a total of ten students: five African-American, three Latino, and two Asian American. Six of the participants were female. The average of age Scholars was 19. The average GPA was 3.3. Nine of the Scholars identified as a first-generation college student. Eight of the ten Scholars were attending full-time at the time of their interview.

Additional background information on the Scholars reveal that seven identified the OS Academic Coach as being the most helpful source of information. Most of the Scholars

(n=8) reported spending an additional one to ten hours a week on schoolwork outside of

class. Eight of the Scholars reported being employed; of those eight, two reported working

more than 30 hours a week. When asked if worked interfered with school, four of the

Scholars reported that it did.

Table 4.2
Demographics

Characteristics	N
Age (in years)	
18	2
19	7
20	1
Gender	
Male	4
Female	6
Ethnicity	
African American	5
Asian	2
Hispanic	2
Hispanic/Caucasian	1
Parental Education	
No college	9
Mother only	1

Table 4.3
Education

Characteristics	N
Credit Hours	
6 -11	2
12 - 15	8
Avg GPA	3.3
Most Helpful Source of Information	
Academic Coach	7
Advisor	2
Instructor	1
Time Spent on Academics (per week)	
< 5	4
6 -10	4
11-15	0
16 - 20	1
> 20	1

Table 4.4
Employment

Characteristics	N
Hours Worked	
1 - 10	1
11 - 20	4
21 - 30	1
>30	2
No job	2
How much does work interfere with school	
N/A	2
It does not	4
Sometimes	3
A lot of the times	1

Description of Institutional Agents

Institutional Agents participating in the study had extensive student services

backgrounds (see Table 4.5) that ranged from direct service to administration. All were

African-American; three IAs were male. Three of the IAs identified as being the first in their families to attend college. Education of IA participants ranged from a Bachelor's to a Doctorate in Education. At the time of the interviews, length of employment at The Community College ranged from nine months to thirteen years.

Table 4.5
Demographics of Institutional Agents

Institutional Agent	Position	Ethnicity	Gender	First-Generation	Education	Years at Institution
Dr. Lee	Academic Coach	African-American	Male	No	EdD	1 1/2
Joya	Program Coordinator	African-American	Female	No	Masters	9 mos
Audrey		African - American	Female	Yes	Masters	3
Justin	Associate Dean	African-American	Male	Yes	Masters	5
Fred	Recruiter/Service Learning	African-American	Male	Yes	Bachelors	2 1/2
Charles	Dean of Enrollment	African-American	Male	No	Ed.D	13

Social Capital Resources Accessed

The results of the 15-item background questionnaire focused on social capital resources accessed by the Scholars during their first year in the OS program. The domains for the activities (see Table 4.6) were communication strategies, campus resources, and engaging with others. Categories within the domains were labeled based on the highest frequency of occurrence. Students responded to a four-point Likert scale of very often, often, occasionally, and rare. In the descriptive analysis reported here, "generally" refers to a category that was referenced by all students as very often (n=10); "typical" refers to a

category that the majority of participant referenced collectively as very often or often; "occasionally" refers to a category that the majority of participants referenced collectively as occasionally or rare; "never" refers to a category where all participants indicated they never participated in the activity. For this study, only "typical" and "occasional" appear in the frequency of these data.

The findings from the questionnaire show that Scholars typically feel comfortable utilizing communication strategies to email faculty or peers and discussing their academic programs. Scholars typically reported working harder on assignments as a result feedback from instructors. Scholars reported using campus resources such as the library and tutoring to a lesser degree indicating occasional use. However, Scholars reported typical use of campus lounge areas for relaxing and studying alone. The results of the engaging domain show that students typically engaged with others outside of their normal networks that include others whose interests, family backgrounds and ages were different from their own.

Table 4.6
Domains, Categories, and Frequencies of Scholar Strategies

Domains and Categories	Frequencies
Communication Strategies	
Email to communicate with an instructor or other students.	Typical (n = 9)
Discussed your academic program with a faculty.	Typical (n = 7)
Worked harder as a result of feedback from an instructor.	Typical (n = 10)
Campus Resources	
Used the library as a quiet place to read or study.	Occasional (n = 6)
Used a campus lounge to relax or study alone.	Typical (n = 7)
Used the learning lab or tutoring center to improve academic	Occasional (n = 6)
Engaging	
Met other students at some campus location for a discussion.	Occasional (n = 6)
Contributed to class discussions.	Typical (n = 9)
Worked on a class assignment, project, or presentation with	Typical (n = 6)
Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student	Typical (n = 6)
Asked a friend for help with a personal problem.	Typical (n = 6)
Became acquainted with students whose interests were	Typical (n = 8)
Became acquainted with students' family background was	Typical (n = 8)
Became acquainted with students whose age was different	Typical (n = 7)
Became acquainted with students from another country.	Typical (n = 6)

Findings

Setting the Stage for Social Capital Building

Dr. Charles, Dean of Student Enrollment, believes that a large part of their roles as institutional agents in building capital in the Scholars is structuring their educational journeys. Describing the intentionality of the Opportunity Scholars program design, he stated their team designed each semester around a theme (See Table 4.7) that would fully engage the Scholar in an academic journey that would develop and expand their social capital. He described their initial entry into postsecondary education as the "landing" phase wherein students participate in an eight-week Summer Bridge program that allows them to get acquainted with the college during a low volume period and a chance to earn up to seven hours of community college credit. The "connection" phase takes place during the Scholar's first semester. During this time, the primary focus for the Institutional Agents is on connecting students to the various resources available at the college. Dr. Charles says of the "connection" phase:

> The theme of the first semester was to make sure that they were connected to a person
> or walked down to an office or introduced or mentored that first semester. Whether
> we brought a person in to meet with them as a group, or we walked them down
> individually. That's our big pitch to them is that we're part of their life, but we want
> to make sure that if we're not in our office, they have multiple people that they can
> check in with. That's the key is leveraging everybody on campus that you really can.
>
> The second semester theme centered around career development. In fact, each of the

Real Talk sessions observed focused on some aspect of career services such as job talks from community members in areas of the Scholars major area. It was observed that at the

completion of each Real Talk session, IAs would debrief with Scholars, asking them each to

share something new they had learned along with discussions on ways they could share the

information with others.

Table 4.7
Opportunity Scholars Program Themes

Semester	Theme	Purpose
Summer 17	Summer Bridge	Landing
Fall 17	Student Services	Connecting
Spring 18	Career Development	Career
Summer 18	Internship	Preparing
Fall 18	Peer Mentoring	Giving Back
Spring 19	Transitioning	Future

Institutional agents interviewed were keenly aware of the importance of their role in

working with Scholar participants. As Justin noted, "Having a caring and supportive

academic community has real impact on the students." Audrey says of their highly engaged

role with the Scholars, "They [Scholars] may not be in the mental position of appreciating the

high touchpoint interactions, phone calls, checking in, class visits, emails, but hopefully over

the course of time, they will be able to reflect back and recognize the benefit of having

people in their life who cared."

Institutional agents note that their program works best for students who are able to let

go and engage, but not for students who still have trust issues and will not allow themselves

to let go, for whatever reason. Dr. Charles explains what is meant by "let go:"

For family reasons or their own personal mindset, that they haven't been able to let go of the fact that, "I don't need three jobs," or, "I don't need to help everybody in my family right now, maybe I can just give some and not take care of everybody." Some of them are learning that. Those students have had a little bit more trouble connecting to people on the campus just because they won't allow themselves the time.

Building Capital

Audrey believes the program is designed to give Scholars the space to develop social capital in ways that reinforce behaviors that are conducive to capital building. For example, she discusses the importance of whom students are able to connect with, saying:

I think that being in spaces where you have folks come in of importance to talk to them, like when the [college] president visits or when outside businesses come in to talk about job opportunities and they're interested in you because of your mind. That can't be taken away, that's yours. I think that experiences like that go a long way for helping the students to recognize their value, their intrinsic value. So, all those types of things are built in to the infrastructure of the program and help increase the social capital that is being reflected to them in the spaces that they visit, and also allows them to recognize their broadening and deepening capacity in this world.

Dr. Lee notes the importance of joining campus organizations and participating in service learning activities as capacity-building processes for Scholars. He describes how the program seeks to build students' social capital:

The whole social capital piece is through our Service Learning, and we also try to encourage them to be involved at a variety of different levels within the school. As for clubs and organizations, we have some students who are involved in CIC,

Communities in College, as well as we're making students aware of other mentoring

programs we have, such as the RISE Program for females as well as PCW. As well as

talking to students about engaging in the SGA, and it'll be shown hopefully that they

will complete their two-year degree that they have an ability to immediately enter the

labor market and be successful. I think the one that we'll see the furthest down the

line is the economic development.

Trust & Solidarity

Institutional Agents in the OS program recognize the inherent need of establishing

trust if the program intends to make any headway with students learning to build social

capital from a relational standpoint. Dr. Lee described his experience in developing trust with

Scholars:

I have some students who have different issues that they have to deal with; they don't

feel comfortable around people. For one student in particular, this particular student

was making the transition as far as a gender-type transition. And not a physical

transition, but mentally, that student was going from one particular gender to being

kind of gender neutral. They were just dealing with that situation. For that particular

student, it was just trying to make them aware that I noticed them, and not saying that

"I notice that you're transitioning from one gender to being neutral," but that "I just

notice you." I recognized it because they changed from one GroupMe avatar, and you

can see people's avatar with their name. Initially, when they first started they had a

very gender-specific name, and then they went to a more of a gender-neutral name. I

made sure I recognized that fact, and made sure I asked them, "Which do you prefer

at this point, the first one or now are you more comfortable with this?" Then they

became more comfortable with that, and then they came in one day to my office just

saying, "I'm not having a good day; nobody is listening to me," and we had, to me, it

wasn't a groundbreaking conversation, but it was just a conversation. From that point,

moving forward, I could be at my desk, and that student would come and sit at a desk

in the room and study.

Justin sees that a big part of the program's responsibility in developing social capital

in students is rooted in building their cultural capital:

Cultural capital, and this is one that I share with them a lot, is about finding out about

your peers, who they are. They may have something different to share, their life

experiences. I self-disclose a lot about my college experience and a guy that I met

when I was at the University of Troy. His name was Muhammad. I had no idea who

his family was because he was from the United Arab Emirates and I didn't realize

who he was until the war broke out, or the potential for war with Iran and Iraq. His

dad made him drop out of school and fly back home. He called me from the United

Arab Emirates, his dad is a Prince and I had no idea. But, he shared with me a lot

about his culture. I love tabbouleh, I love Arabic food. Before he left he introduced

me to a lot of his friends so I was able to go a little deeper into their culture and I

absolutely loved it. So, I share that same story with them but I'm letting them know,

"You guys need to engage and learn as much as you can because there's over 160

countries represented here at The Community College. Don't stick yourselves in a

silo.

Building Cohesion

Based on conversations with the Institutional Agents, the entire program is intentionally designed to provide participants in the Scholars program with opportunities to build capital while matriculating. As a function of social capital, Audrey discussed the importance of building cohesion among the scholars, as she describes:

I think that every time that they come together as a community, I think that is the starting point. It's a benefit. I think the conversations that they have when they're in community, if they're able to be vulnerable and real, and they're able to see the humanism in their peers, and they are being able to reflect their own humanism into the group, I think that that builds cohesion, it builds community. I think that being respected as someone who can achieve and being seen that way by their staff members who are working with them, which they are, builds a sense of safety and trust, and builds community and allows them to open more into that space of being.

With cohesion comes accountability for group norms. Dr. Lee said it's important for the Scholars to establish their own measures of accountability within the group. He notes that the IAs do little to regulate how the group member address those areas of accountability beyond requiring that all interactions be respectful. Dr. Lee noted his observations of the group over time:

Anything that is done in the spirit of making this group get smaller and smaller and smaller in terms of how the students feel when they come into it. Whereas before they started, and they might have not known the person two seats down, or three seats down, or sitting in front of them or whatever. Now it's like, "Man, you better take that hat off." I see that sense of community building through accountability.

The Opportunity Scholar experience is designed to have both high touch points and low touch points, each providing a chance for students to build cohesion among the OS group, with program staff, mentors, and TCC. Table 4.8 identifies each of those activities as identified by the Institutional Agents.

Table 4.8
Description of Opportunity Scholars High and Low Touch Point Activities That Build Cohesion

	Service	Empirical Description
High Touch Points	Group me	"GroupMe is a great resource. They can communicate with each other via GroupMe. They can see each other. They can share different events. They can share their locations on campus."
	Weekly contact	"Calling them, just checking to see what's going on. Also, I do calls throughout the week where I'm just checking in with students just to make sure they're doing fine. "How're you doing?"
	Academic Coaching	"…the magic happens is the day-to-day interaction of the academic coach and the students. Within that relationship that's built, there are some really cool things that happen too in terms of this concept of going deeper into building relationships with students."
	Mentoring	"We'll mentor the students who are coming in during the first cohort. That is some capital, too. They reinvest in the program by mentoring students when they come in the next year."
Low Touch Points	Orientation/ Awards Ceremony	"When you have folks come in of importance to talk to them, like when the president visits or when outside businesses come in to talk about job opportunities and they're interested in you because of your mind. That can't be taken away, that's yours. I think that experiences like that go a long way for helping the students to recognize their value, their intrinsic value."
	Socials/ Group Gatherings	"We offer basketball for them after hours. They're attending the basketball games to hang out, socialize for the most part. Not all of them are playing basketball, they're enjoying each other's company."
	Real Talk Sessions	"They do real talk sessions, so they meet a couple of times monthly to gather as their class where they're together and they have different topics that they'll discuss, real top topics that are personal to them about how they're doing, but they also have guest speakers come in from the community if they have an opportunity for an internship, jobs, or just helping them prepare to be successful."
	Service Learning	"The service learning activity, we're having more and more of them signing up for the same one because they enjoy each other's company."

Scholars Utilizing Their Capital

Dimension 1: Groups and networks. Family tended to be the anchor for most of the Scholars that participated in the interviews. Some shared how they support family members, as in the case of Jenny: "I drop all my brothers off and then I drive to campus…At night, I hang out with my brothers before they go to sleep and then I do my homework til 12." Others spoke of their reliance on family members to get them to school or work. Most reported starting and ending the day with family. Jim, whose family lives with two other families, shares how he starts his day: "Yes getting up at 5:30 in the morning every morning, getting dressed, saying good morning to everyone who's already up in my house because usually, that's early because I'm usually the first one up and I'm usually the first one out of the house and then it's usually my aunt who's up with me so it's usually, good morning, good morning see you later and straight to school." It appears that Scholars made time for some self-care in the daily routine as noted by Maria who said, "Around 2:00 I eat lunch. I take as long as I need to because lunch is my favorite part of the day, then I go for a walk."

Scholars discussed their comfort with using or accessing the space in their daily routine to get things accomplished like studying or using space in their schedule for tutoring. All but two of the participants reported being part of a campus organization that was social, sports-themed, or academic. One participant commented that she feels more engaged with the campus community when she's on the main campus located downtown: "I do more social stuff if I'm at Central because it's more social than it is for the other campus."

Scholars appeared to appreciate the value of their networks in advancing their academic goals. Jenny discussed her group, the Architecture club: "We hang out a lot mostly creating designs, helping each other with designs. We go on field trips, exploring other

places to get inspired." Michael says of his involvement with the MAN UP group, "It provides coaching support, leadership support, which is cool." Nicky, an avid sportswoman, appeared to fully embrace multiple groups and networks. When asked about the organizations she belongs to, Nicky shared the following: "Class, homework, meetings, and sports. Never losing in sports… Basketball and volleyball. It's usually intramurals, there's open gyms and I'm the president of the volleyball club right now. You didn't know that? I forgot to tell you that. Yes, I'm the president of the volleyball club." Nicky is also running for SGA president, and had this to say when asked about other organizations she belongs to: "I WILL belong to. *(Laughter.)* The PTK's, and the Honor Society club. I was .04 away last semester, so I am trying to do my best because I only need .04 for next fall. So I'm definitely in, I already know. And, Ruth G. Shaw is a female leadership club, only 10 people. I'm trying to apply to that. So next semester if you ask me that, I will say those two."

Not all of the Scholars were as engaged with groups and networks as Nicky, harkening back to Dr. Charles' comment on students who tend not to fare well because they don't allow themselves the time to engage. Yemaya, who readily acknowledges her struggles with college, stated that she likes to stay busy but does not seek out opportunities: "I don't take the time to go out and look for stuff. I wait for it to come to me, which I shouldn't do. I don't go out to TCC and be like, 'Let me go ahead and sign up for this,' unless I'm told to do it because it's going to be beneficial to me." Alexis states her reasons for not participating: "I have to work, and I need time to do homework and I need at least a little bit of rest. Usually they do meetings when I have classes. They're always around 12:00 and I'm in class, so I can't participate." When asked if she would participate more if she had more flexibility, she answered, "Possibly, if it was around my schedule."

Dimension 2: College support/ trust and solidarity. Scholars expressed feelings of conflict when asked who within the college supported them the most. Many of the Scholars reported there were many, and they could not easily narrow it down to one person. When given only one choice, Scholars reported the program staff, in particular the Academic Coach, as the person that was most supportive at the college. Alexis says of Dr. Lee:

He definitely checks up on me a lot. He'll even call me up if I'm at Olive Garden like, "What's up? How are your grades?" *(Laughs.)* And I'm just like, "Okay, I'll tell you." It's like having another mother, in a way—Father. Just to make sure that I'm on track and I'm not slipping, and if I ever need help, I know I can always call him or talk to him. He's not like someone that's scary, like, "Oh, you're not passing right now? I'm going to kick you out." He'll reassure you everything is going to be okay and what help do you need.

Others also likened their experience with the academic coordinator as a nurturing presence in their lives. Maria stated, "Dr. Lee helps me a lot and he makes sure I am okay physically and emotionally." The Scholars also reported positive encounters with the faculty with some naming them as being the second most supportive resource in the college.

Mentoring, another component of the OS program, appears to provide strong, positive and supportive connections for the Scholars. The Scholars' perception of their mentors includes assessment of them as providing accountability, being accessible, and helping with relationship building. Jim acknowledged that he was not aware of the concept of mentoring prior to his participation in the Scholars program but feels the relationship is a real benefit to him. Jim discusses his relationship with his mentor:

When you first start off on something you don't understand the concept at first until you really sit down and take a minute to think about it. At first, I thought of it like, "Okay, I get it. Alright, I know the deal, yes. I understand, it's a requirement for the scholarship." Then, I realized that's what's needed, mentors can help teach me to be successful. As long as I have that reminder, I will always keep going forward.

Maria discusses accessibility: "My mentor, I can call her. I can message her at 9:00, if I'm having a breakdown or struggle with a class, or struggling because I'm not good when it comes to English and stuff. And I'll message her, and she will reply right away ready to help me."

Jenny discusses bonding:

I got my mentor the first semester, and at first it was a little of rocky relationship because we didn't really know each other. I tried to be as open as possible and she wasn't, so it was awkward at first (laughter). Then one day I walked by the Global Learning room and saw her. I found out we both had a common interest of traveling. Then after that it was like, "You should sign up for this, but you should wait. You should enjoy it nearing the end of your college life, because then it will be the best, because that's what you're going to remember college with." It was always that constant push like, "How many semesters do you have left? How many of this? How many of that? How many classes?" And it's always positive. She had to help me learn how to map out my scheduling for classes which was very helpful and awkward at first but good now because I know how to do it on my own *(laughter).*

Michael discusses how his mentors make him feel accountable, saying, "My mentors, they check up with me. They can see my grades, so they question you if I have any problems and refer to some great resources that can help me with balancing that grade out."

Dimension 3: Collective action and cooperation. Service learning is a key component in the Opportunity Scholars program. The rationale is to provide participating students an opportunity to give back while enhancing their connection to the community, thereby increasing their capital. Scholars admitted to initially being leery about the benefits of service learning, viewing it as a checklist item in exchange for the scholarship. However, according to the participants interviewed, their perceptions of service learning changed dramatically through their experiences. As noted by Nicky, "I thought it was going to be boring and, 'What's the purpose?' but they actually explain why and then I think about the people who need it. Actually, they need this and I'm going to do my best." Alexis offered up similar remarks on how her perspective changed: "I really like the service learning projects because it definitely changes your perspective on volunteer work. It's not always the same type of soup kitchen or the typical type of volunteer work that people think of now."

Scholars identified a sense of responsibility, purpose, and increased knowledge through service learning. Alex expressed his happiness at being in the position to help others: "I've got to help a lot of people and that makes me happy, helping others." Jim discusses service learning experience:

My service-oriented projects? The Opportunity Scholars they give so much to us it

would only feel right we give back to others. I've found those beneficial…there's

the one where we made the PB&Js. It was about 30 of us. We were all gathered up in

the Wilson building in a classroom and we all made PB&Js and made it a little

competitive to see who could make the most. My team came in second place.

Based on the interviews with the Scholars, one of the more enlightening aspects of

participating in service learning was finding out about the various ways one can give back to

the community and making service learning an activity that is accessible in their everyday

lives. Michael said, "Generally I like that I'm able to see that there are places that do

different things that normally you don't really hear about on the news. Organizations, they're

special in their own way. They do certain things that are pretty good for the community."

Michael stated that he sees himself remaining involved with some of his service learning

projects beyond college. In fact, some of the Scholars became so engaged in service learning,

that they now go on their own, as Maria discussed:

> We fed Thanksgiving dinner to these low-income families through the Hola
>
> Academy. We helped them and it was good. This Friday we are going, me and my
>
> boyfriend, are going to the homeless shelter to play board games and stuff with the
>
> homeless people. Then we do bikes for kids, where we clean the bikes so kids will
>
> have something to do on the weekends and low-income families can have something
>
> to look forward to. This the first time we're doing it on our own, and I'm really happy
>
> about it.

Dimension 4: Information and communication. As a part of the scholarship

package for the Opportunity Scholars program, each of the Scholars received a brand-new

laptop computer to meet their technology needs. For the participants interviewed, this was

the first time they've own their own laptop. Although most of them communicate using their

cell phones, having access to their own laptops has proven necessary for completing assignments and managing their everyday academic journey. Scholars were quick to point out that communication was different based who was on the receiving end of the communication. Students reported using GroupMe, a web-based app, to communicate with other Scholars and OS staff and email to communicate with faculty and the campus community; they communicate via text and phone calls with family and friends. Each of the Scholars expressed a sense of ease and comfort in reaching out to faculty and program staff, noting that most of the times they received quick replies. Most of the Scholars reported learning about campus events through the multiple forms of campus communications. Jenny explains her approach: "Sometimes I look on the website to see if there's anything on the little banner. Sometimes they send out an email saying, 'This is the event that's going to be happening, and you can also follow the link to the actual site,' where it gives you the whole list. And then I try to map out which ones I can go to."

Nicky expressed as an aside her access and delivery of information is a byproduct of her role in various groups. When discussing how she learns about campus events and activities, she commented "I get emails, plus I'm the of leader things so I'm always having that email." For Frosty, having a friend in the SGA is how she gets information outside of email, explaining, "Sometimes I might see one of the event things up to show us what's going on. Also, being that one of my friends is in SGA, she'll tell me when different events are happening."

Dimension 5: Social cohesion and inclusion. Scholars reported that participating in the Summer Bridge program was critical to their transition to college. The ability to ease into college during the summer when it was less crowded was beneficial to Scholars such as

Michael, who explained the benefit of Summer Bridge: "It brought me to a college setting and it provided the transition from high school to college. It wasn't like the fall and spring semesters because it was in the summer, so it wasn't as congested around campus and it was easier because I feel like if I didn't go to Summer Bridge and went straight to fall semester, I would be… Kind of lost."

Nicky believed that without Summer Bridge, emotionally stating that her experience would have been "very different. It was going to be hard because my first semester after Summer Bridge is already hard and I already had the support. But what if I didn't have those, I'm going to cry. I'm going to cry." For others, Summer Bridge allowed them the chance to learn ways to navigate their college experience early in their postsecondary journey. For example, Frosty was able to learn how to manage hiccups in her class schedule: "It prepared me for college because it showed me how simple it was to change a class, because they were going to go give me English 111, but I had already taken the AP class for it. All they did was withdraw me, but I still had that credit. Also, I took College Success. It gave me the feel of what it would actually be like in a college setting, in a college room."

Not all of the Scholars were able to see a benefit from participating in Summer Bridge; Yemaya and Alexis left the experience with a very different view of their college journey. It should be noted that both young ladies admitted to failing the Summer Bridge courses that would have given them up to seven college credits heading into their first semester. Yemaya shared that her performance taught her a valuable lesson: "It made me realize that I was on my own. I wasn't on my own, but I was on my own. My mom wasn't around the corner for me to go to to ask for help or my brothers, not that they could do anything anyways. I knew I was going to be on my own. Other than that, it was like high

school to me." While Alexis had the opportunity to take three courses for credit, she opted for one, explaining, "I only took one class, which was English, but I definitely got to understand how it would be taking a class that was in college. It wasn't really much of a difference as far as work-wise. It wasn't anything that was too hard where I'm like, 'Whoa, this is how college is.' It was basically the same way as high school."

Scholars shared their experiences that made them feel connected to the Opportunity Scholars program and TCC. Generally, activities in which the Scholars were able to spend time as a group connecting were meaningful. Jim expressed that it was being asked to contribute to the greater good of the community by donating bone marrow that made him feel a part of the community:

> When I went up there to go and they came down to do the screening process for the bone marrow thing the screen process was really quick. They were explaining the process of how the bone marrows could benefit someone and how you could save a life and things of that nature. When they sent out the request I jumped into it but at the same time, it felt rewarding in a sense where you could help somebody in need and help somebody and that's rewarding.

For Alex, as much as he is not a fan of the meetings [Real Talk sessions], he relishes the time he spends among his fellow Scholars, stating the "meetings and service learnings" made him feel connected because "I get to talk to my peers." Being able to connect with peers in many ways is part of the OS program structure that has created a cocooning-like network where the Scholars have come to rely on one another for support. For example, Jenny explains how support and communication transpires through GroupMe chats:

Sometimes the group may post pictures of achievements, or something. For example, one of them got a job and was like, "Guys look what I got. I got a job," and we all were like, "That's awesome. If you ever become someone important we'll call you and you can help us out," *(laughter)* and that's always funny. For me when I did that, it was like they expect so much from me even though we don't physically see each other as often as.

Nicky recognizes the power of her peer group in sustaining each other through tough times as well, explaining what she shares with her OS peers:

Positive words. When we see each other it's, "I heard you got an internship" Support them because sometimes, even though you do great, not everybody will have the people that will say, "I'm proud of you." so we are those people, because we have experienced that and we want to tell you, "Hey, you're doing a great job. You're still in here. Great job, keep doing you."

Frosty shared her experience leaning on a fellow Scholar to help her sort out an academic challenge:

We support one another because we push one another and we joke around. One of my friends actually helped me figure out a topic for one of my speeches. I was confused because it was demonstration speech, and I was at a loss, like, "What do I demonstrate in front of a classroom for three minutes?" He helped me look online and he gave me some insight. He was like, "You can show them how to make a character for a story." I'm like, "No, I don't think everyone's interested in making characters in a story," which led to him saying, "What do you like to do?" I'm like, "I like making things." "What else do you like to do?" He helped me with that.

One of the more salient themes to emerge from the Scholars centered around group norms and acceptable behavior. Scholars were asked to describe a situation or circumstance that would upset the OS peer group. All the participants responded by identifying any form of behavior that could shine a negative light on the OS group. Michael explained, "Not meeting expectations. Yes, I think that's one thing that would upset people. Because it effects the name of the Opportunity Scholars. When you've got Opportunity Scholar's you want to think, these are some good students that they recommended. They need to represent! *(Laughs).*" Nicky is keenly aware of the group's minority status and how they may be perceived as well as the high- profile nature of the Opportunity Scholars program. Nicky says, "I'm not sure about other groups, but our group, we try to do as positively as possible because I think we all have that understanding that if we do something wrong, it could probably make not just us look bad, but the whole group look bad."

For Jim, meeting the expectations that have been placed on the group as Scholars is a matter of pride:

> I would say something a peer could do that could upset the group I would say probably not living up to the expectations that they instilled. Opportunity Scholars, when I look at it as a whole we're supposed to be upper echelon. We're supposed to be the top shelf. That's us. That's how I look at all of us. When you don't have that attitude of not being the best that you can be and just going all over the place and doing this and that and really embarrassing the name and showing everyone that the Opportunity Scholars is just really a joke, I find that very unnecessary. They've got to represent us with a little bit of pride. Everyone knows, you see a couple of us wearing our shirts around campus. We got people questioning about who we are and what

we're about…That's that pride that we have. It's when I see someone trying to down that pride it's just like, "Why are you here in the first place?" They're giving us all these rewarding opportunities and yet you still want to act like this. I don't understand that.

Dimension 6: Empowerment. The Scholars expressed that they entered into an environment that was welcoming and non-judgmental that set a standard where students believed their voices occupied an important space in the program. Michael commented on speaking up, confirming, "Yes, I feel I can do that. I can ask them because they're very open. They're willing to listen to anything you might have a question about or concern about."

The Scholars interviewed typically feel comfortable speaking up and negotiating for themselves or for issues they believe are important. When Jim was asked if he felt comfortable advocating for himself, he responded with a confident, "Yes. Of course. Definitely." John noted, with a particular ease and a bit of incredulity, when asked about his comfort level on advocating for one's self as noted in his interview, "If there's something wrong or anything like that, I feel they should be informed." Not all of the Scholars had the same level of comfort but quickly noted it had more to do with them than the program; for example, Alex said he was comfortable expressing his concerns, but his shyness makes negotiating uncomfortable for him.

<div align="center">

Discussion

</div>

Initial analysis identifies the ways in which the Scholars accessed and utilized their capital throughout the six dimensions of the social capital framework. This created a useful intermediate frame that allowed for iterative analysis in understanding the full measure of the social capital-building process of the OS program. This overarching purpose of the study

was to identify ways in which first-generation community college students accessed social capital in navigating their first-year of college. The study was grounded in the theoretical literature of influencers of contemporary social capital, most notably Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993). Empirically, using a grounded theory approach, the findings suggest that the OS social capital model aligns with that of Coleman (1988) in which he posits that "social capital is defined by its function" (p.98). Coleman further notes that social capital is comprised of a variety of entities that have two commonalities: they are all part of a social structure and they make available resources that assist with goal attainment (see Figure 4.1).

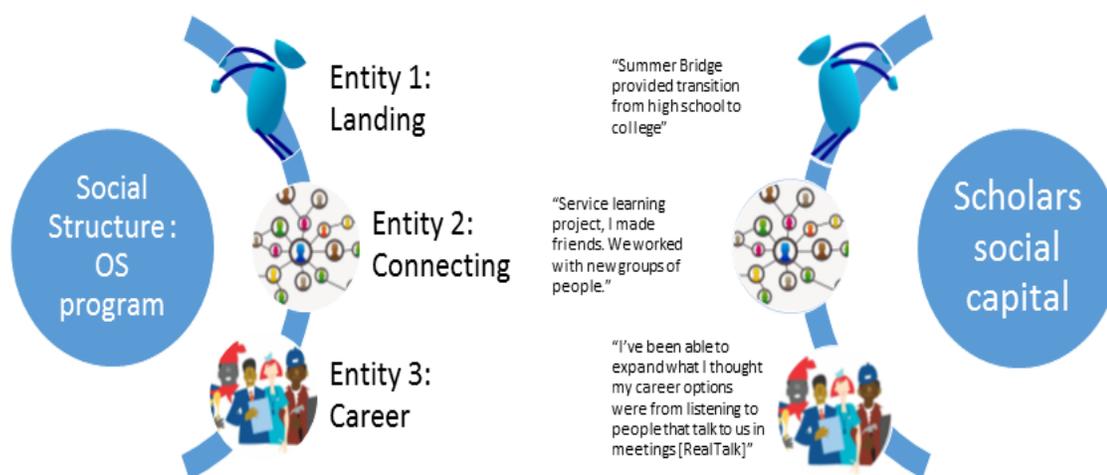*Figure 4.1.* OS Social Capital Model with Scholar Quotes on Experiences

This study sought to contextualize the student experience by describing the ways in which Institutional Agents structured capital building processes. This is consistent with Coleman's position on social capital in which he says researchers should "investigate the details of such organizational resources, to understand the elements that are critical to their

usefulness as resources for such a purpose, and to examine how they came into being" (p. 98). This study was able to discern the intentionality that was employed in developing the program infrastructure to reflect social capital building opportunities.

The findings from this study suggest the social structure of the Opportunity Scholars program includes three primary entities through which the Scholars were able to access resources that facilitate navigating the first year of community college: landing, connecting, and career development. These three were intentionally created thematically by the IAs to facilitate the Scholars' ability to develop the resources that were most beneficial to them. Coleman (1988) notes that individuals' choosing and combining resources to produce individual level outcomes is a key concept in social capital.

The OS program housed each thematic component within a semester, immersing Scholars in the curated social capital content. Within those themes, IAs implemented a series of high and low touch points that provided a broad spectrum of activities for scholars to engage. Through their experience, scholars in the study provided a descriptive narrative that was consistent with the IAs' accounts of the capital-building entities housed with the OS social structure. Further analysis suggests that the intentional design of the Opportunity Scholars program created a network of opportunity in which students were able to rely on established connections such as familial resources in the form of non-material support and access new or extended networks introduced or encouraged through the OS program, all of which are identified by Coleman (1988) as familial and extended social capital.

Implications

This study introduces an important and groundbreaking look at the social capital building process of first-generation community college students. The study shows that

institutions can create structured program models that have an immediate and direct impact on students' ability to access and utilize social capital. The implications of this study suggest that institutions looking to optimize their resources in supporting first-generation community college students consider thematic programs designs that directly responded to the targeted intervention.

Further, this study is important in that it shows how the OS program model provides a pivotal counter-narrative to the first-generation status being a predictor of leaving college by their second year. Immersing students in wraparound services via a performance-based scholarship engaged and exposed students to a variety of activities through networks and opportunities with the OS program, the college, and the community. Community colleges looking to make an impact on this population should examine their funding structures related to this population in conjunction with the institution's wraparound services.

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Interlude IV

Interviewer: What will your life look like this time next year?

~I will keep going forward. I'm going to just keep pushing and there will be no stopping. I'm going for everything they said wasn't possible for me.

~ Traveling somewhere, bringing my creativity out into the universe. Allowing people to see the real me as in my positivity, mentally, my impact on others. Just being that person that I always wanted to be but, when I was younger I didn't have a chance to be.

~ Full grown beard. Walking the stage. Becoming a modeling [gaming] expert.

~ I'll be finishing up my classes to walk across the stage.

~ I will be delivering speeches all over the campuses. Yes, as SGA President, I would be. Because I think it probably will be the last semester. And, I will be preparing for transferring and writing essays. A lot of essays. I might go to State.

~ I will be getting ready to graduate. I could possibly have a job through the co-op.

~ I will be in my nursing uniform, in the nursing school doing nursing stuff.

~ This time next year, I will be getting ready to graduate and I will definitely be prepared for that one.

CHAPTER FIVE: Putting It All Together: Summary and Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

Summary

The collection of essays presented in this dissertation comes with the hope of advancing our conversation on not only what it means to serve, but what it takes to serve under-resourced populations in community college settings. This collection offers a glimpse into an ecological model where the entity, the OS program, is examined in relation to how it gets implemented, experienced, and utilized. The following research questions guided this process:

1. What are the environmental factors that shape the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program for first-generation community college students?

2. How do first-generation community college students experience the performance-based scholar's program during their first year of college?

3. What are the personal, social, and environmental factors shape the social capital landscape for first-generation community college students?

The studies presented here provide new insights about a phenomenon from three different perspectives. Looking to synthesize the findings, the one clear apparent theme that stands out is that relationships matter, which is, in its most simplistic form, the core of social capital. While the impetus for this dissertation focused on first-generation community college students and social capital, it became apparent to me as the researcher that the importance of social capital extended beyond the student utilization of it.

Social capital facilitated many processes that supported the implementation of the OS program as well. One such example from each of the articles presented in this dissertation is the use of social capital through Coleman's (1988) supposition of network closure. Coleman

identifies network closure as densely connected systems that make going unnoticed by others difficult, operationally making it a form of social capital (Burt, 2001). The two primary benefits of network closure according to Coleman are 1) its impact on access to information, and 2) the trust advantage created by the connections and the sanctions involved with violation of those trust norms that modify behavior for the greater good. In Chapter Two, Institutional Agents discussed the role and use of the advisory council, employees who occupy key positions useful in supporting OS interests. As documented earlier, the council member was called upon to assist in resolving issues with an OS financial aid account. In this example, the IA facilitated the connection between the advisory council member and the student. Chapter Three provides an example where John acknowledges the value of his relationship with his mentor was in his mentor's access to his academic progress. This access allowed John's mentor to provide prescriptive advice and support that might not have otherwise been available. In Chapter Four, Alexis discussed her lack of involvement with campus activities while acknowledging that she stays in "the know" through her connection with someone else who is a member of the student government association. In each case, we see the value of social capital through closed networks serving the interests of the Opportunity Scholars.

The study presented in Chapter Two made use of two frameworks to explore the implementation of a performance-based scholarship model designed for first-generation community college students. The first was Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological model that posits that an entity's development is impacted by various determinants located within multiple layers of an ecosystem. The second was the stages of implementation that identify four primary stages that programs encounter during a full cycle of implementation. Both

frameworks looked to identify facilitators and barriers to program implementation. Both

frameworks are suitable for understanding implementation processes; however, as the

researcher, I found Bronfenbrenner's model to be the most instrumental in this study. While

the stages of implementation provided useful information, it lacked the power of

Bronfenbrenner's model to highlight the implications of facilitators and barriers on the entity.

It is also my opinion that the stages of implementation framework is better suited for an

evaluative study, which was not the focus of the collection of work presented here.

Findings from Chapter Three provide insights into student trajectories. It is important

to note that the students who participated in this study exhibited strong self-efficacy in

addition to having the determination and motivation that undoubtedly factor into their

outcomes. Beyond that, the findings suggest each was shaped through their interactions and

relationships with school, family, and peers. It is in examining the relationships where

students struggle that the damaging consequences are seen. Yemaya tells of a painful

educational experience in the fourth grade that haunts her in her current educational journey.

Other students were motivated because of their relationships with their families and their

desire to be role models. Students also said they worked harder as a result of feedback from

faculty. Each one of these stories is exemplary of the power of relationships.

The findings in Chapter Four show students exercising their capital through a

relationship with peers, family, faculty, and program staff to propel them forward. For

example, students spoke of learning new ways to engage with the community through service

learning. The power of the group in supporting one another through the use of technology

like the GroupMe app also explifies relationships. Leaning on and reaching out for support

from the Institutional Agents in the OS program as well as relying on non-monetized familial capital were reported as highly-valued connections by the students in the study.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

Policy

The findings from these studies point to important policy implications. As institutions look to move the needle on increasing student success outcomes for FGCCS, policymakers should give attention to the institution's perception in the community. This study identified student recruitment challenges primarily as a result of perceived notions and negative narratives about community colleges. The results of the study also suggest that performance-based funding programs like the OS model was critical in supporting the participants in their first year of college. While a full implementation study is necessary, the current findings presented here are worthy of dialogue among policymakers about the possibilities of shifting funding structures to align more fully with supporting under-resourced student populations.

Policy leaders should embrace innovative and fresh ideas. The OS program was in response to a community in crisis. The nimble nature of the community college structure facilitated the institution's ability to have the OS program up and running in six months from conception. The OS program chose bold approaches in developing their model by adding an academic coach to the scholarship which is not a typical occurrence in community colleges; in fact, most donors are reluctant to support staff salaries, but as the Dean of Enrollment noted on the importance of their choice, "I believe this is where the magic happens is in the day-to-day interaction of the academic coach and student."

Perhaps the biggest take-away for policy makers can be summed up in the Dean of Enrollments advice: 1) "Be aggressive about listening to best models or best practices." 2)

"Advocate, advocate, advocate." And 3) "Make connections for your staff and teams."
However, at its core, this is an equity issue that requires a willingness to make paradigmatic
shifts that align with the needs of first-generation student populations. Institutions looking to
impact change within this population will also need to engage in cultural shifts that reflect an
investment in an institution's responsibility and capacity to serve first-generation community
college students successfully.

Practice

There were several components implemented in the OS program that appear to be
promising practices worthy of consideration. The findings suggest that institutional agents
play a critical role in facilitating social capital-building opportunities for under-resourced
student populations. An example of this is the use of thematic programming as an anchor for
students to draw from. This is consistent with the research presented by Wangs et al. (2018),
who examined how community college students access capital. First, creating a cohort
experience through learning communities created built-in connections and a support
community for the students. Second, the active and intentional use of social media like the
GroupMe app was a way to stay connected with the Scholars and to connect them with each
other. Lastly, the bundling of services is a recent trend in designing services to meet
population-specific needs. The bundled services used in the OS program are offered
independently or a la carte for all students at TCC as is standard practice at community
colleges, but it can be a challenge for some students to access these services. The decision to
bundle the services that were most applicable to the target population of the OS program and
attach it to the scholarship created an accessible solution.

Theory

This research adds to the literature in three ways. First, it provides a comprehensive look at the phenomenon of a performance-based scholarship for first-generation community college students. As noted in the literature, much is known about first-generation college students regarding academic preparation, transitions to post-secondary education, and progress toward degree, but little about their college experience or development during college (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Second, it adds to the body of literature on innovative approaches used to address a growing segment of the college population. This is important given Goldrick-Rab's (2010) statement on the need for community colleges to embrace a rigorous research agenda to inform and evaluate future actions. Third, this collection of essays expands the limited body of research on social capital and FGCCS. The research presented here moves the conversation beyond the discussion of the deficits of social capital, which is often the theme of higher education literature on social capital and first-generation students (Martin, 2015). Wang (2018) suggests the examination of social capital in community colleges will broaden knowledge of the overall conceptualization and function of social capital across diverse populations.

Future Research

The results and implications of this study provide a foundation for future research—namely, employing a mix methods study on the full cohort of students accepted into the Opportunity Scholars program. Adding a quantitative data study to the qualitative data piece can provide an accounting of program participants' academic performance relative to non-participating first-generation students as well as other sub-populations in the college. A

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longitudinal study is warranted to understand the impact of the OS program as it relates to the

intended mission of economic mobility. Future efforts should focus on expanding

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to include a more in-depth look at the structures

operating in each of the systems for the purposes of developing strategies that strengthen the

ecosystem surrounding the Opportunity Scholars program. In turn, this would necessitate an

evaluation to access effectiveness and relativity.

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EPILOGUE

From the TCC SGA President:

My name is Nicky and this is my second semester here at TCC. I attended Summer Bridge after high school graduation last year to prepare myself for college. I am currently an Opportunity Scholar. I am also currently the president of the Volleyball Club, of which I am a founding member. I started helping the Recreation program last semester and am now a Recreation Leader. Lastly, I joined Man-Up during the summer of 2017 and joined RISE during the fall of 2017, both programs helped me get involved with different meetings/events/etc.

The Student Leadership Conference that I attended this year helped me realize that to be a part of something is both a privilege and a responsibility, and to be a leader is to become the voice of the people. As the President of the Student Government Association I want to create change. I know what it feels like to be in the predicament where I feel that I have no voice, and I want to connect with people in any way that I can, and I would love to stop the separation that people have in their minds as much as I can. My main intentions are to support diversity when it comes to race, gender, age, beliefs, and circumstances, increase communication for and through the students and different clubs/organizations/resources, and build a community among the different campuses. With a passionate heart and sincere drive to serve, I know and believe that I can be an effective leader. The decisions that were and are going to be made are definitely for the good of the people. I am going to do my best to show and be an example to people of how we all should cooperate with each other and how we can work together as a team and as a family.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Opportunity Scholar Recruitment Script

(Used for verbal and written invitation)

Hello, My name is Michelle Wilson and I am a doctoral student at North Carolina State University and I work here at CPCC. Today I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that looks at student experiences in the Opportunity Scholar's program. The purpose of this study is to understand how the program gets implemented and how students experience the program.

Participation in this study is voluntary meaning, it's completely up to you to decide to participate, or not. If you choose not to participate, it will not impact your standing or relationship with the Opportunity Scholars program.

Participation consists of one scheduled, face-to-face interview that will last for approximately 90 minutes.

If selected to participate in the interviews, I will ask you to complete a short demographic questionnaire. Upon completion of the interview, you will receive a $25 Wal-Mart gift card.

You may decide to end the interview at any time without penalty. It is your right to refrain from answering any question you do not want to answer during any part of the interview.

Choosing to participate will provide you the opportunity to share and reflect on your experiences as a participant in the Opportunity Scholars program.

If you are interested in being part of this study, please contact: Michelle Wilson at 240-499-4356 or nmwilso3@ncsu.edu

Appendix B: Opportunity Scholar Participant Interview Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: An Implementation Case Study of Frist-Generation NC Community College
Student Experiences in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital
Principle Investigator: Michelle Wilson   Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Tuere Bowles

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to describe the experiences of
first-generation community college students in a performance-based scholarship program.
Additionally, this research will seek to learn about the ways in which you use and develop
social capital to navigate your college experience.

INFORMATION
If you agree, you will be asked to participate a 90-minute face-to-face interview that will
include a demographic questionnaire. All interviews will be audio recorded. If more
information is needed after the interviews, I may ask you for a follow-up interview. After the
interviews have been transcribed, I will ask you to review the transcripts (delivered via email
to the address you provided) for accuracy. The interviews will commence during the Spring
2018 semester.

RISKS
Anticipated potential risks for are minimal as a participant in this study. I am aware that
during the interview, some sensitive information may be revealed. Your name and any other
identifiers associated with you personally will not be used, only a self-selected pseudonym. I
will remind you before we begin the interview that you can stop at any time or skip a
question you do not want to answer. As stated before, you will have the opportunity to
review the transcripts to ensure your thoughts and words express your intent.

BENEFITS
Although there may be no direct benefit for your participation in this study, it will document
your experiences as a member of the Opportunity Scholars program at your community
college. Your insights will broaden our understanding of the ways in which participation
influences your overall educational journey.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Transcripts will not contain your actual name, just your self-selected pseudonym (a fake
name that you select). Only my dissertation advisor and myself may participate in a review
of these transcripts and my initial coding structure to ensure the accuracy of findings.

COMPENSATION
At the conclusion of the interview, participants will be given a $20 Subway gift card.
Participants not completing the interview will not receive any compensation.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Michelle Wilson, at nmwilso3@ncsu.edu or (240) 499-4356.

If you feel that you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in the research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Jennie Ofstein at the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Subjects, North Carolina State University, at 919-515-8754.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without any penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant Signature _____**Date**_____

Investigator Signature _____**Date**_____

Appendix C: Student Scholar Demographic Questionnaire

What is your age? _____

What is your gender? _____

What is your racial or ethnic identification? _____

Relationship status
☐Single ☐ Dating ☐Committed

Which high school did you graduate from?
☐ Garinger
☐ Harding
☐ Independence
☐ West Mecklenburg
☐ Vance
Current GPA: _____

What is your major? _____

Did either of your parents graduate from college?
☐ no   ☐ yes, mother only
☐ yes, both   ☐ don't know
☐ yes, father only

Do you expect to transfer to a four-year college at the completion of your Associates Degree?
☐ yes   ☐ no

How many credit hours are you taking this term? _____

Most helpful source of information you have used while in college?
☐ My advisor
☐ My academic coach
☐ An instructor
☐ A friend
☐ A family member
☐ Other _____

About how many hours a week do you usually spend outside of class on activities related to school?

☐ 5 of fewer   ☐ 6 to 10
☐ 11 to 15   ☐ 16 to 20
☐ more than 20

About how many hours a week do you usually spend working on a job for pay?

☐ None, I don't have a job
☐ 1 – 10 hours a week
☐ 11 -20 hours a week
☐ 21 – 30 hours a week
☐ More than 30

If you have a job, how does it affect your schoolwork?

☐ I don't have a job
☐ My job does not interfere with my schoolwork
☐ My job takes some time from my schoolwork
☐ My job takes a lot of time from my schoolwork

How do you meet your college expenses?

	None	Very Little	Less Than Half	About Half	More than half	All or Nearly All
Self	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Scholarships and grants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Loans	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other sources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Very Often	Often	Occasionally	Never
Used the library as a quiet place to read or study material you brought with you.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Used email to communicate with an instructor or other students.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Contributed to class discussions.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Worked on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Discussed your academic program or course selection with a faculty.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Worked harder as a result of feedback from an instructor.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Used a campus lounge to relax or study alone.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Met other students at some campus location for a discussion.	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Very Often	Often	Occasionally	Never
Attended a cultural or social event on campus.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Used the learning lab or tutoring center to improve academic skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Asked a friend for help with a personal problem.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Became acquainted with students whose interests were different from yours.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Became acquainted with students family background was different from yours.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Became acquainted with students whose age was different from yours.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Became acquainted with students from another country.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Adapted from: Pace, R & Kuh, G, (1998). College Student Experiences Questionnaire.

Appendix D: Student Scholar's Interview Guide

An Implementation Case Study of First-Generation NC Community College Student
Experiences in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital

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Pseudonym: _____ **Interviewer:** <u>Michelle Wilson</u> **Location:** _____

Date of Interview: _____/_____/_____   Start: ____: _____ End: ____: _____

☐ Written Consent Obtained ☐ Demographic Questionnaire Completed ☐ Gift Card

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Opening Questions (Self and Overall Educational Experience)

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
   a. Family background
   b. Early educational experiences
   c. How would you describe yourself?

2. What role has education played in the lives of your family of origin?

   Probe: are you the first in your family to attend college?

3. What are your family's expectations regarding education?

4. How do family support you during academic pursuits

5. What strengths did you bring with you as you transitioned into a college student?

6. What do you want to be when you grow up? Why?

**RQ: How do first generation NC community college students experience the
performance-based scholar's program during initial program implementation?
(Primary Theories: First Generation Student Experience; First-Year Success;
Academic Resilience)**

7. How did you learn about the scholar's program?

8. What made you interested in applying for the scholar's program?

   Probe: What other options were you seeking out?

9. What plans did you have prior to learning about the scholar's program?

10. What is your understanding of the purpose of the scholar's program?

11. What do you like the *most* about participating in the scholar's program?

12. Tell me a story about the best experience you've had as a college student.

13. What do you like the *least* about participating in the scholar's program?

14. Tell me a story about the biggest challenge you've overcome during your time as a college student.

    Probes: What happened? Who was involved? How did you navigate the situation? Who helped you? What did you learn from that experience?

15. Finish this statement: Being part of the scholar's program is like _____.

16. If you had a magic wand and can change anything about the scholar's program, what would it be?

17. Have you ever questioned your choice to participate in the Opportunity Scholars program? If so, why?

18. What is the biggest motivator that keeps you moving forward as a college student?

RQ: How do personal, social, and environmental factors shape the development of social capital for first generation NC community college students in a performance-based scholar's program? (Primary Theory: Social Capital)

19. Walk me through what a typical day is like for you (on campus and off campus)?

    Dimension 1: Groups and Networks

20. Who would you say within the college supports your educational endeavors the most?

    Dimension 2: Trust and Solidarity

21. How do friends support you during your academic pursuits? Dimension 2: Trust and Solidarity

22. How do mentors support you during your academic pursuits? Dimension 2: Trust and Solidarity

23. What clubs and or organizations are you involved in (on campus and off campus)?

Dimension 1: Groups and Networks

24. What, if any, factors keep you from engaging in campus activities? Dimension 2: Trust and Solidarity

25. Please describe any activities or personal responsibilities outside of the college that have positively influenced your academic pursuits? Dimension 3: Collective Actions and Corporation

27. Tell me about your experience with service learning projects? Dimension 3: Collective Actions and Corporation

28. Think back to your time in the Summer Bridge program, in what ways did that program prepare you for college? Dimension 5: Social Cohesion and Inclusion

   Probe: Can you think of any other ways you would have gained the knowledge and skills if you hadn't participated in Summer Bridge?

29. Think for a moment about your peers in the Scholars program. In what ways do you support one another? Dimension 4: Information and Communication

30. How do you communicate with program staff in the Opportunity Scholars program? Peers? Faculty? Dimension 4: Information and Communication

31. How do you learn about campus events and activities? Dimension 4: Information and Communication

32. Thinking back over your time as a Scholar, what activities made you feel connected to the Scholars program? CPCC? Dimension 5: Social Cohesion and Inclusion

33. What, if anything, could a Scholar peer do, that would upset the group? Dimension 5: Social Cohesion

34. Do you feel comfortable discussing any concerns you might have about the program with program staff? Why or why not? Dimension 6: Empowerment and Political Action

35. As a Scholar, how comfortable do you feel negotiating or advocating on your behalf about issues that are important to you? Dimension 6: Empowerment and Political Action

Closing Questions

36. What will your life look like this time next year?

37. Name three goals you have for the next 12 months of your life

38. What else would you like to add that has not been covered?

39. Thank you for your time and we are just about done. Here's how I would like to end our conversation today. Think for a moment about your all time favorite song? A song, or a rap, or even a poem maybe that you feel most represents who you are as a person, or inspires you, or motivates you. If you don't mind sharing, I would be honored to hear it.

    Once again, thank you so much for time. This concludes our interview unless you have any questions for me.   If not, I'll be in touch when the interview transcript is ready for your review. Have a great rest of the semester!

Appendix E: Institutional Agent Invitation Email

Dear _____,

Greetings. I am Michelle Wilson, a doctoral student the in Adult and Community College Education program at North Carolina State University and a fellow colleague at CPCC. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research that examines the implementation of the Opportunity Scholars program. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program designed to build capital in first-generation community college students and to examine how students respond to the intervention. You have been identified as a resource that could provide valuable insight to the study.

I would like to conduct a 90-minute face-to-face interview with you at the campus library in a private study room. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed. After the interview is transcribed, I would like to provide you a copy of the transcript for your review (via email to the address you provide) that may take an additional hour to review. To protect your privacy, your name will not be used in the transcript or in the research report.

Please be assured that your responses during the interview will be held in the strictest of confidence. The identity of the community college and your individual identity will be kept confidential when published in any reports. All data collected during this process will be stored and locked in my home office when not in use.

I would like to conduct interviews during the Spring 2018 semester. Please let me know as soon as possible your interest in participating in an interview.

For questions regarding the rights of research participants, any complaints, or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, you may contact Jennie Ofstein at the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Subjects, North Carolina State University, at 919-515-8754.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:
Michelle Wilson   Dr. Tuere Bowles
240-499-4356 (cell)   919-513-4871
nmwilso3@ncsu.edu   tuere_bowles@ncsu.edu

Thank you for your time, and I hope to speak with you in the future.

Michelle Wilson, M.A.A.
Doctoral Candidate, Adult and Community College Education
North Carolina State University

Appendix F: Opportunity Scholar Institutional Agent Interview Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: An Implementation Case Study of Frist-Generation NC Community College Student Experiences in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital
Principle Investigator: Michelle Wilson   Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Tuere Bowles

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to describe the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program at your community college. Additionally, this research will also seek to learn about the ways in which the program builds capital among program participants, specifically, first-generation students.

INFORMATION
If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate a 90-minute face-to-face interview that will include a demographic questionnaire. All interviews will be audio recorded. If more information is needed after the interview, I may ask you for a follow-up interview. After the interviews have been transcribed, I will ask you to review the transcripts (via email to the address you provided) for accuracy. The interviews will commence during the Spring 2018 semester.

RISKS
Although you will be assigned a pseudonym and every precaution will be employed to ensure that your identity is protected, there is a slight possibility that someone you know could read this dissertation and may be able to identify you in this research.

BENEFITS
There are no known benefits to you for participating in this study. However, the information gained from this study will add to the body of knowledge on postsecondary programs designed to support first-generation community college students.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's private home office and your responses will not be associated with your name. No reference to you will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you the study. All transcripts will be kept on my computer and the file will be password protected.

COMPENSATION
You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Michelle Wilson, at nmwilso3@ncsu.edu or (240)499-4356.

If you feel that you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in the research have been violated during the course of this project, you

may contact Jennie Ofstein at the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Subjects, North Carolina State University, at 919-515-8754.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without any penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant Signature _____**Date**_____

Investigator Signature _____**Date**_____

Appendix G: Institutional Agent Demographic Questionnaire

n Implementation Case Study of First-Generation NC Community College Student
Experiences in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital

Institutional Agent's Pseudonym: _____

Background Information

What is your current title and position?

What are your major responsibilities in this position?

How long have held this position?

How long have you been at this institution?

What specific components of the Scholar's Program do you participate in implementing?

Importance

- How important do you believe it is to *your organization* to implement the Scholars

  program?

Not at all ⟷ Moderately ⟷Very					
Important		Important		Important	
1	2	3	4	5	6

- How important is it to *you personally* to implement the Scholars program?

Not at all ⟷ Moderately ⟷Very					
Important		Important		Important	
1	2	3	4	5	6

Readiness (@ Initial Implementation)

- When initially implemented, how ready was your *organization* to begin the Scholars

  program at the time?

Not at all ⟷ Moderately ⟷Very					
Ready		Ready		Ready	
1	2	3	4	5	6

- When initially implemented, how ready were you to begin the Scholars program at the time?

Not at all ↔ Moderately ↔Very					
Ready		Ready			Ready
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

Confidence (@ Sustainability with Fidelity)

- How confident do you believe *your organization* will be able to sustain commitment to the ideals and principles of the Scholars program as originally envisioned over time?

Not at all ↔ Moderately ↔ Very					
Confident		Confident			
Confident					
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

- In your role, how confident do you *personally* believe you will be able to sustain commitment to the ideals and principles of the Scholars program as originally envisioned over time?

Not at all ↔ Moderately ↔ Very					
Confident		Confident			
Confident					
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

Guide Co-Developed with Tuere Bowles

Appendix H: Institutional Agent Interview Guide

An Implementation Case Study of First-Generation NC Community College Student
Experiences in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital

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Pseudonym: _____ **Interviewer:** <u>Michelle Wilson</u> **Location:** _____
Date of Interview: _____/_____/_____   Start: ____: _____ End: ____:_____
☐ Written Consent Obtained   ☐ Demographic Questionnaire Completed

Background Information on Institutional Agent
1. How did you come to be in your current role?
2. Walk me through what a typical day is like for you working with the Scholars program?

RQ: What factors shape the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program for first-generation NC community college students? (Primary theories: Organizational Ecology; Implementation)
Defining the Innovation and Reflections on the Implementation Process
3. In your own words, please describe the purpose of the Scholars Program?
   Probes: What is it? Who does it serve? Who comprises the team to implement the project? What are the expected outcomes?
4. What do you consider to be the most innovative elements of the Scholars program?
5. How did you first learn about the Scholars Program as a new initiative on campus?
6. As you think back during this time, where you *ready* for the new Scholars program or a bit r*esistant* to the change? Please explain.
   Pre-Implementation (Exploration, Preparation and Early Adoption)
7. Please summarize and share the rationale for the *institution* implementing the Scholars program?
   Probe: Why do you, specifically, think the program is needed on campus?
8. How did the institution (or team/unit) prepare for the implementation of the Scholars program?
   Probe: How did <u>you</u>, specifically, prepare for the implementation of the Scholars program?
9. How does the Scholars program fit with current initiatives serving first generation students to foster social capital on campus?
10. Please describe the types of resources that have been invested in the Scholars program?
    Probe: Curricula, staffing, training, etc.
11. What is the role of the Scholars advisory board?
    Implementation
12. Describe the factors that have contributed the most to the implementation of the Scholar's Program?
13. What are the biggest challenges so far in the implementation of the Scholar's Program?
14. What adjustments have you had to make? Why?

15. If you had the opportunity for a do-over with regard to any of the implementation activities, what would it be? Why?
16. What has been the biggest surprise in how the students have responded to the program?
17. As an institution, what do you need to do more of? Less of?
18. In what concrete ways do you believe the program is making a difference in the lives of the Scholars?
    Sustainability
19. Share your beliefs regarding the extent to which your organization has the capacity to sustain the Scholar's program over time?
20. Over time, how would you know if what you are promising to students is actually being delivered?

Additional Reflections on Implementation & Intersections (First Generation and Forms of Capital)
21. What factors build cohesion among the Opportunity Scholar participants?
22. How do you believe the Opportunity Scholar program supports the development of capital (social, economic, cultural) for the students?
    Probe: How do you define capital (social, economic, cultural)?
23. How does the Scholars program fit within the priorities of the institution?
24. To your knowledge, are there any social, cultural, or economic constraints that limit Scholars from participating in the campus community? If so, what are they?
25. From your observations, are there some Scholars who are more likely to exclude themselves from program or campus activities? If so, please describe.

Vignettes, Metaphors, and Critical Incidents
26. Without revealing any names, please tell me a story about a student who you think has *transformed the most* since being in the Opportunity Scholars program.
27. How has implementing this program changed you, if at all?
28. Please finish the prompt (fill in the blank): Implementing the Opportunity Scholars program has been like _____. Please explain.
29. Please identify and rank (1 = most important, 5 = least important) the top five main challenges to implementing the Opportunity Scholars program?
    Probe: What actions have been taken to address these challenges?

Closing Questions
30. How would you *hope* the Scholars would describe their experience in the program?
31. What do you suspect is the *reality* of how the Scholars describe their experience in the program?
32. What advice would you give other colleagues who may wish to implement a similar program on their community college campus?
33. What else would you like to mention that has not been covered?
    Thank you for sharing your story and participating in this interview!

The following are probes that will be employed as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003):

What do you mean?	What were you thinking at the time?
I'm not sure that I am following you.	Give me an example.
Would you explain that?	Tell me about it.
What did you say then?	Take me through the experience

*Guide Co-Developed with Tuere Bowles

Appendix I: Observation Guide

An Implementation Case Study of First-Generation NC Community College Student
Experiences in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital

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Participants present (pseudonyms): _____
Purpose of Observation: _____
Observer: Michelle Wilson   **Setting/Location:** _____
Date: ____/____/____ Start: ____: _____am/pm End: ____:_____am/pm

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1. What were the main issues or themes that struck me in my observations at this setting?

2. What questions could be asked concerning the place I observed?

3. What questions could be asked concerning the actors I observed?

4. What questions could be asked concerning the activities I observed?

5. For each of the elements of the social situation (i.e., place, actors, activities) I observed, identify the main information I acquired (or failed to acquire) for the questions above.

6. Was there anything else that struck me as salient, interesting, illuminating or important?

7. If I were to undertake another observation in this setting, what new questions would I consider?

Adapted from:
Miles, M. B. and Huberman (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (p. 53).

Appendix J: Aligning Field Notes with Interviews

An Implementation Case Study of First-Generation NC Community College Student
Experiences in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital

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Participants (pseudonyms):_____
Purpose of Observation: _____
Observer: Michelle Wilson   Setting/Location: _____
Date: _____/_____/_____ Start: ____: _____am/pm End: _____:_____am/pm

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1. What were my impressions during the interview?

2. What were the key events or incidents that occurred during the interview?

3. What were my reactions to the events and/or setting?

4. What did I learn from this observation regarding my research questions?

Appendix K: Document Analysis Guide

An Implementation Case Study of First-Generation NC Community College Student
Experiences in a Performance-Based Scholarship Program: Building Social Capital

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Document Title:
Document Source/Author:
Document Type: ☐Program Materials ☐Marketing/Outreach ☐Reports ☐
Other_____
How was the Document Obtained?
Date Reviewed:

Summary of the Document:

Implementation Review Elements:

Content on Pre- Implementation (Preparation, and Early Adoption)

Content on Implementation

Content on Sustainability

Importance of Document to Study:

Appendix L: Participant Contact Information

Directions: The purpose of this form is to gather information that might be utilized in member checking. For all the information that you'll be providing, the researcher will ensure that it will be protected at the highest confidential level.

Contact information

Pseudonym:
Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____

Preferred contact method:

☐ **Email**   ☐ **Phone**   ☐ **Text**   ☐ **Mail**

<center>**Appendix M: Bias and Limitations**</center>

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

Researcher bias and subjectivity are part of the research process as is articulating them for the reader to establish transparency. A primary bias that I enter into this study with is my status and experience as a first-generation college student. I am also an employee at the college that is implementing the performance-based scholarship program. My work as a program evaluator is external to the college, which means I have no day-to-day interactions with faculty and students but still that as a researcher that I acknowledge this in full transparency. A primary assumption that I hold questions the readiness of students just out of high school in taking on the responsibility of becoming wage earning adults in two years. Is it realistic or even fair to ask students to be workforce ready at the age of twenty? This assumption is rooted in my own experience as a twenty-year-old college students and not having a clue about my career goals.

Study Limitations

This study was designed to explore how first-generation NC community college students experience the implementation of a performance-based scholarship program designed to build multiple forms of capital. The scholarship model was designed to respond a specific need of a city that was in the midst of a community crisis. A key limitation of this study is the inability to see the program outcomes due to the time constraints associated with the study.

Appendix N: Excerpts of Data Analysis

	Excerpts of Participants'	Codes	Concepts	Themes
Essay 1	For me, it was going to some of the strategies I used previously in K through 12 as a teacher, and just trying to recognize 17 to 18 versus 17 to 20-year-olds.	Recognizing Strategizing identifying	Institutional Agent Personal Preparation	Facilitating Factors
	Just trying to recognize this new generation of student and just trying to figure out	Recognizing		
	Trying to have those things in place, also trying to have calendars in place where we can put these things on the calendars that the students could have access to electronically.	Organizing Strategizing		
	I have to make sure not only that I'm prepare mentally and physically	Grounding Reflecting		
	Making sure that my relationships with those department deans and campus deans are in working process or strong and fluid	Bonding Engaging connecting		
	I'll just go back to prayer, because I pray about everything. I know it's more of the spiritual.	Praying Reflecting grounding		
	Most minority high school students who have a 2.6 or better are encouraged by their guidance counselor to go to a four-year college versus a two-year college. What we weren't ready for initially, probably was the fact that the pool was a little smaller than we thought it would be.	Recruiting Competing for talent Understanding challenging	Recruitment Issues	Challenging Factors
	When you're 2.6 or above, you're either pushed to go to a four-year, or you're pushed to go to a community college, but you're pushed to do career, to do college transfer.	Competing for talent		
	I know this directly from a recruiter that works in our department. He goes out to West Charlotte High School and they'll tell you, "Yes, we're directing them to four-year schools."	Competing for talent		
	We get access to some of them but not all of them.	Accessing Competing for talent		
	Our challenge became, "Wow! We've got to identify the student who is a 2.6 or above student that actually really wants to go straight into the career and technical field." That was a challenge.	Accessing Identifying Recruiting matching		

Essay 2	"Hey, you're doing a great job. You're still in here. Great job, keep doing you."	Recognition	Being valued/ackn owledged/co nnected	Lived Experience
	When they gave us our awards.	Recognition		
	Just getting the recognition.	Recognition		
	The check-ups and meetings and trying to see how you are academically	Embraced Recognition		
	the group maybe post pictures of achievements, or something. For example, one of them got a job and was like, "Guys look what I got. I got a job," and we all were like, "That's awesome.	Recognition Acknowledge- ment Connected bonding		
	…being recognized for the scholarship	Recognition		
	I learned about myself. I learned about how to be a leader. I learned a lot about other people, and what they're going through, and not judge people.	Self-awareness Self-discovery	Personal Growth/Self Discovery	
	The people there and the people who were a part of my group, they were encouraging me to keep going. I kept going even though I was scared	Trusting Bonding		
Essay 3	I try to have breakfast with my family because that's mostly the only time other than dinner that we usually all hang out. Then it's the drive. I drop all my brothers off and then I drive to campus, and I'm in class by 8:20.	Bonding Connecting grounding	Family/non- monetized capital	Groups and Networks
	On a typical day, my mom will usually drop me off at school	Family capital/NM		
	They're just encouraging, pushing me to keep going and don't stop.	Family capital/NM		
	My mom, she takes me to school because I currently don't drive, so she helping me get to school, making sure that I have what I need, and completing everything that I need to get done.	Family support Family as resource		
	My dad's always off on Thursdays, so he'll take me to school on Thursdays and he'll pick me up on Thursdays.	Family support Family as resource		
	Whenever I'm having a breakdown on one of the works or pretty much anything at CPCC, they're always an email away mentoring	Mentors Supporting trusting	Accessing human capital/resou rces	
	…not only the support but the fact that I also can meet peers like myself who also have the same problem with self-discovery	OS peer group Trusting Bonding connecting		

…we refer ourselves as, "The fellow architects." We basically help each other out with our projects in the morning	Networking Supporting		
I like that I'm able to see that there are places that do different things that normally you don't really hear about on the news. Organizations, there special in their own way.	Learning Engaging contributing	Service Learning	Collective Action
…going to the homeless shelter to play board games and stuff with the homeless people	Contributing Connecting engaging		
…it definitely changes your perspective on volunteer work	learning		