FIRST-GENERATION URBAN COLLEGE STUDENTS SPEAKING OUT ABOUT
THEIR SECONDARY SCHOOL PREPARATION
FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

M. Jeanne Reid, MA

The Ohio State University

2007

Dissertation Committee:

James L. Moore III, Ph.D., Advisor

R. Michael Casto, Ph.D. Advisor

Nancy Nestor-Baker, Ph.D. College of Education and Human Ecology
ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the perceptions and attitudes that first-generation, urban college students have of their preparation for postsecondary education. More specifically, the study focused on those individuals, programs, and experiences that the students perceived as influencing their decision to pursue postsecondary education and the experiences that contributed to their successes in postsecondary education. The sample in this study was comprised of 13 first-generation college students (i.e., six males and seven females) who were graduates of the same urban high school. Six major themes emerged from the participants’ responses: (a) people who impacted decisions about college; (b) the influences to attend college; (c) preparation which helped with college success; (d) skills lacking for college success; (e) financing a college education; and (f) the challenges of being different. Practical applications for educators (i.e., school counselors, teachers, administrators, and postsecondary educators) and for parents and family members are included.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to

The First-Generation Students Who Shared Their Stories

And to Those Who Follow Them

On The Journey to College
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A wonderful family, a great career, good friends…my life was full and meaningful. My decision to pursue a doctorate at this stage in my life baffled some people, but the people who know me well have been there for me every step of the way. They understood the importance of realizing a dream and stood behind me. I first would like to acknowledge my parents, Charles and Ruth Shannon. They have given me their unconditional love and support all my life. They encouraged me to work hard and made me feel that I could accomplish anything. Their example helped me develop the work ethic that I needed to accomplish all I have. They were there for me through my journey as a first-generation student and along the way ever since. Most importantly, they taught me how to be a good parent through their loving example.

My children, Nathan and Bethany, have been an inspiration to me, and I consider being their mom my greatest accomplishment. I am proud of them both and the young adults they have become. Nathan has unending patience and is a wonderful problem solver as illustrated when, from thousands of miles away, his technologically challenged mother would call with computer issues and he would help resolve them. Bethany’s love and encouragement throughout this process has been never ending. It is a rare opportunity for a mother and daughter to work together as doctoral students, and her support has made the journey easier. I would like to extend a special thank you to my son-in-law,
Scott, for being there for both of us. And soon there will be a new addition to our family with the birth of their first child.

My family is very special to me. Thank you is not enough to say to my sister, Becky. I feel fortunate that we are not only sisters but also good friends. Our daily early morning conversations helped remind me there is more to life than work and school. And if I forgot, she reminded me! My brother, Rock, is always there to make me laugh. His great sense of humor with his funny emails and calls helped at the end of very long days after work and school. Coming from a large close-knit extended family has given me the good foundation to know I can succeed and to know I am loved no matter what.

Along with a wonderful family, my friends have been a great source of support along the way. Many thanks to all my friends, but I especially want to recognize Sandra, Jan, and Mary. Sandra and Jan have been unwavering in their friendship throughout the years. In a lifetime, we are fortunate to find those special friendships that continue to endure. Theirs is that type of friendship; it is just as strong now from several states away as it was when we lived across the street from each other. I will always be grateful to Mary for listening to me and being a sounding board for ideas…and for taking time out of her busy life to, not just once, but twice, to read through many pages looking for typos and errors.

I wish to acknowledge the college students who took time out of their busy lives to share their experiences. My inspiration for this study came from my experiences as a school counselor, working with students who will be first-generation students. I also wish to thank the members of the high school faculty that helped me track down the graduates
who participated in this study. It is not an easy feat to find people once they have
graduated and moved on with their lives.

I feel fortunate to have worked with the members of my committee and the other
members of the Counselor Education program. It was a wonderful experience to study
with such accomplished teachers. First, I wish to say thank you to Dr. Moore, my advisor.
He first provided me with the encouragement to pursue the Ph.D. which then gave me the
courage I needed to follow through on what had always been my dream. Next, I would
like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Nestor-Baker and Dr. Casto. I admire
Dr. Nestor-Baker’s passion for providing educational opportunities for all children, and
appreciate all that she has shared. Dr. Casto’s insight and thought-provoking questions
helped me grow throughout the entire doctoral process.

There are not enough ways to say thank you to my research team and the time
they spent helping with this study. Kim provided a wonderful insight that helped me look
at the data with fresh eyes. Bethany was with me from early in the process and provided a
never-ending source of expertise and encouragement. They both kept me grounded in
reality. They are exceptional young women with exciting futures ahead of them. Also, a
very special thank you goes to the Kirwan Institute on the Study of Race and Ethnicity.
Their financial support of this research study was invaluable.

At various points in my life, I have realized that God does not give us more than
we can handle. There were times during the past three years that I had my doubts, but He
blessed me with an amazing support system to help me through this truly amazing
journey. Without Him and the others He placed in my life, it would not have been
possible.
VITA

April 8, 1950……………………………… Born, Columbus, Ohio

1972……………………………………… B.S. in Education, Kent State University

1972-1976………………………………… Vocational Home Economics Teacher
Westfall Local Schools, Ohio

1976-1978………………………………… Vocational Home Economics Teacher
West Jefferson Local Schools, Ohio

1984-1988………………………………… Home Economics Teacher
Baltimore County Schools, Maryland

2000……………………………………….. Graduate Research Assistant
The Ohio State University

2000-2001………………………………….. Graduate Teaching Assistant
First Educational Experience Program,
The Ohio State University

2001………………………………………... M.A., The Ohio State University

2001-Present……………………………….. School Counselor
Columbus Public Schools, Ohio

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Significance of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. Research Methodology</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6. Definitions of Terminology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Review of the Literature</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. College Access for First-Generation Students</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. The Planning Process to Pursue Postsecondary Education</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4. Social Support for First-Generation Students</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1. Influence of Family</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2. Influence of Secondary Schools</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.3. Influence of Peers</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5. The Impact of Race, Class, and Gender in the Pursuit of Postsecondary Education</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6. Expectations of College Attendance</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7. Academic Rigor in Preparation for Postsecondary Education</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8. Essential Components for Urban Schools with a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii
College-Going Culture

2.9. Developing a Culture for Attending College

2.10. Impact of School Reforms in Developing a College-Going Culture

2.11. Programs that Support College Access for First-Generation Students

2.12. Experiences of First-Generation Students

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

3.2. Purpose of the Study

3.3. Research Questions


3.5. Research Design

3.5.1. Epistemology

3.5.2. Participants

3.5.3. Interviewing

3.6. Sampling Methods

3.6.1. Sample Selection

3.6.2. Sample Size

3.7. Data Collection

3.8. Data Analysis

3.9. Establishing Trustworthiness

3.9.1. Credibility

3.9.2. Transferability

3.9.3. Dependability

3.9.4. Confirmability

3.10. Researcher Subjectivity

4. Findings

4.1. Introduction

4.2. Demographic Characteristics

4.3. Emerging Themes

4.4. Social Capital as a Framework

4.5. Presentation of Findings

4.6. People Who Impacted Decisions about College

4.6.1. Parental Impact

4.6.2. Family Impact

4.6.3. Impact of School Personnel

4.6.4. Impact of Peers

4.7. The Influences to Attend College

4.7.1. Perceptions and Expectations of Others

4.7.2. Friends Who Did Not Go to College
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Frequencies and percentages of participants by gender, race/ethnicity, and year in college</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Distribution of frequencies and percentages of high school and college grade point averages (GPA)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Comparison of high school and college grade point averages</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Emerging conceptual framework – Critical social support for first-generation, urban college students</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Our nation is no longer well served by an education system that prepares a few to attend college to develop their minds for learned pursuits while the rest are expected to build their muscles for useful labor. In the twenty-first century, all students must meet higher achievement standards in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools and thus be better prepared to meet the challenges of work and citizenship. (Haycock, 1999, p. 11)

In the summer of 1998, during a meeting of university and state Chief Executive Officers from around the country, the above statement was drafted to articulate the future direction for education as the country moved into the twenty-first century. In reviewing the data demonstrating the state of education at all levels, the aforementioned educators determined that, for many students, basic educational needs are not being met. The opportunity to attend postsecondary education is important to the future earning potential and lifestyle of all American students. The job market for high school dropouts is shrinking and the wages are insufficient to support a family, while for high school graduates without postsecondary education, the job market has witnessed a decline in wages and the necessity of passing minimal competency tests as a condition for being hired (Haycock & Huang, 2001). For the college-educated, the job market is growing.

Those students with the most difficulty in accessing college are often those who are first-generation to attend college, immigrant children, and those from low socioeconomic
status homes (ACT, 2004; Choy, 2001; Haycock & Huang, 2001; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). The majority of underserved populations in postsecondary education are from economically depressed urban areas and remote rural locations (Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005). In order to best assist such student populations, it is important that educators—teachers, school counselors, and principals—understand the barriers to accessing a postsecondary education and put into place interventions that will prepare all students for higher education throughout the K-12 educational process.

Too often, first-generation college students are disadvantaged “when it comes to postsecondary access—a disadvantage that persists even after controlling for other important factors such as educational expectations, academic preparation, support from parents and schools in planning and preparing for college, and family income” (Choy, 2001, p. 4). These disadvantages are very common among first-generation students as they proceed into their postsecondary education. Toward this end, the majority of first-generation students are from lower socioeconomic income families, are students of color, and/or are immigrant children (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Like at the K-12 educational levels, many of these disadvantages remain throughout college for those students in pursuit and attainment of a degree; but, once they earn a bachelor’s degree, the gap closes and they are not at a disadvantage in the labor market (Choy, 2001). There are five areas in which first-generation college students differ demographically from their peers whose parents attended college, and these differences create disadvantages for the students (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). The first difference is that prospective first-generation students face the task of applying to college without assistance from their
parents, since most parents have no knowledge of the process (Choy, 2001; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). The second reason is that the college preparation, during high school, provides a greater impact for first-generation students. Unless the secondary school addresses what to expect of college life, the students are disadvantaged (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Third, first-generation students often lack the rigorous academic preparation of their peers with college-educated parents, since their parents do not understand the importance of taking challenging courses (Martinez & Klopot, 2005; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Fourth, first-generation college students often perceive college education as a means to a good job and often chose a college close to home that is not necessarily a good fit for the student which then leads to leaving college before completing the degree (Choy, 2001; Horn & Nevill, 2006). Fifth, many first-generation students often have different personality traits (i.e. differences in self-esteem and social acceptance) and more often live at home and work part-time, while attending college (Horn & Nevill, 2006; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). This information demonstrates the importance of educators helping students develop the skills, during their secondary education, to be successful during postsecondary education.

Many of the statistics for urban and ethnic minority students are disheartening and contribute to the search for effective school reforms that can help prepare all students effectively for postsecondary education. Further, educational statistics suggest that in the 35 largest cities in the United States, less than half of the ninth graders complete high school, an African-American male born today is twice as likely to go to prison as to go to college, and Latino students who have not completed high school have not completed the ninth grade at almost double the rate of their African American and White counterparts.
(National High School Alliance, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) reports that, between 1971 and 2005, the high school completion rate has improved for Black, Latino, and White students and that the completion rate gap has narrowed slightly between Black and White students. However, there has been no change between Latino and White students. Such data also indicated that White students enroll in postsecondary education immediately after high school at greater rates than African American or Latino students. Students from low income households and students whose parents had not attended college also entered college at lower rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

The challenge to educators involved in school reform, by No Child Left Behind, is to raise achievement that is most often reflected in test scores (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). However, it is likely that raising test scores alone is not enough in preparing first-generation students for postsecondary education. It is essential to link what students are doing in the present with their future plans and aspirations so that they can understand the importance of their high school achievement (Roderick, 2006). Roderick also emphasizes the importance of strong guidance programs as a part of school reform to help students and their parents understand the college process and provide them with the support they need in their academic preparation and in the college application process.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and attitudes that first-generation, urban college students have of their preparation for postsecondary education. More specifically, the study focused on those individuals, programs, and experiences that students perceive as influencing their decision to pursue postsecondary education and the
experiences that contributed to their successes in postsecondary education. The study was
designed to provide secondary school counselors, as well as other educators (e.g.
teachers, principals, etc.) with information to assist in the preparation of first-generation,
urban students for postsecondary education.

1.3. Significance of the Study

While there is research available on the success and failure of first-generation
students during postsecondary education in relation to the rigor of their coursework
during high school, there is little research from the perspective of the students, especially
those who have already matriculated and are attending college. By expanding the
understanding of urban, first-generation college students’ experiences and perceptions of
their secondary preparation for postsecondary education, this study can provide
information to school counselors, as well as other educational professionals (i.e. teachers,
principals, college professionals, etc.) and policymakers to prepare these students for
college success.

1.4. Research Questions

While some research is available about first-generation students and their
experiences once they attend college, research on the perceptions first-generation
students have of their secondary school preparation for college is sparse. To further the
information available to school counselors and other educational professionals, this
research investigation explored the following broad research questions:

1. What perceptions and attitudes do first-generation, urban college students
   have of their secondary school preparation for postsecondary education?
a. What were the strengths and weaknesses of their secondary school preparation for postsecondary education?

2. What individuals, programs, or experiences have had the greatest impact on first-generation, urban college students’ decision to pursue postsecondary education?

3. What role do educators, family, peers, and special academic programs or curricula play in the postsecondary educational process for first-generation, urban college students?

1.5. Research Methodology

For this qualitative investigation, the research data were drawn from graduates of a high school of approximately 1100 students, located in a large, urban school district in the Midwest, who are currently enrolled in postsecondary education institutions. The participants had been continuously enrolled in college since high school graduation. All student participants were a minimum of 18-years-old and had the option to choose to or not to participate in the study. To obtain the in-depth data desired, a qualitative research design was determined to be the most appropriate method to explore first-generation, urban college students’ perceptions of their secondary preparation for college. Toward this end, qualitative research methods were used to answer questions about the quality of programs and to understand the participants from their worldview (Janesick, 2000).

Throughout the collection of the data, this study utilized a constructive, grounded theory approach. The analysis of data comprised a two-step coding process that starts the development of the theory, memo writing that aids in linking the analysis with the reality, and writing up the theory (Charmaz, 2000). Within qualitative research, the quantitative
criteria of internal and external validity are replaced by trustworthiness and authenticity and reliability by dependability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The dependability and credibility of the study was enhanced through careful documentation throughout the research process and verifying the accuracy of participant responses through member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking were the methods employed for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was established through a logical audit trail of documents in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

1.6. Definitions of Terminology

American College Test (ACT)

A widely accepted college entrance exam that assesses high school students’ general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work.

Beginning Post Secondary Longitudinal Survey (BPS)

A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education to collect data related to persistence in and completion of postsecondary programs, relationships between work and education efforts, and the effects of postsecondary education on the lives of the individuals involved.

College Access

It refers to the ability of all students, including low-income and minority youth, to enter college and succeed.
First-Generation Students

Those students for whom neither parent had more than a high school education and the student will be a member of the first-generation in the family to attend college (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

The paperwork that must be filed with the federal government in order to be eligible for federal and state aid for college. It is also used for determining need-based aid and scholarships at many colleges and universities.

Higher Education

See postsecondary education

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)

According to the Higher Education Act of 1965, any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation.

I KNOW I CAN™

A non-profit organization that gives every qualified high school graduate the opportunity to go to college by providing grants, financial aid information, and summer enrichment programs. It serves the students in the urban school district that the participants in this study attended.
Postsecondary Education

In this study, it refers to two- and four-year college and university program leading toward an associate’s degree or bachelor’s degree.

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

A widely accepted college entrance exam that is a measure of the critical thinking skills necessary for academic success in college and assesses how well a student analyzes and solves problems.

Secondary Education

Used interchangeably with high school, grades 9 through 12.

TRIO

The federal educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate educationally disadvantaged students from middle through post baccalaureate by providing support to first-generation students. Upward Bound is an example of a TRIO program.

Underrepresented Groups

A group of college students (18-24 year olds) whose college participation rates are less than the proportion of that group’s peers attending college.

Upward Bound

A TRIO support program for high school students to assist in preparation for college. It targets high school students from low socioeconomic homes, students who will be first-generation in their family to attend college, and low-income first-generation military veterans who are preparing to attend college.
 CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

American schools, in the 21st Century, have become a truly diverse arena in which educators need an understanding of the differences in backgrounds and beliefs of their students. The challenge to educators involved in school reform, mandated by No Child Left Behind, is to raise achievement, most often reflected in test scores. But, raising scores is not enough in preparing first-generation students for postsecondary education (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). It is essential to link what students are doing in the present with their future plans and aspirations so they can understand the importance of their high school academic achievement (Roderick, 2006). The expectation of college attendance by the school, parents, and peer group are important indicators for students’ expectation of college attendance and success (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005).

2.2. College Access for First-Generation Students

Using data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) that tracked the experiences of a cohort of students who began their postsecondary education in 1995-96, Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez (2001) concluded that first-generation students were less likely than those students with parents who had attended college to enroll in a 4-year institution. The study reported that those first-generation
students who did enroll in a 4-year institution of higher education were more likely to attend public comprehensive universities (41 percent versus 26 percent) and to attend college part-time (27 percent vs. 22 percent) than their peers whose parents had a bachelor’s degree. First-generation students represented 31 percent of students who began their postsecondary education in 4-year institutions. According to the study, rigorous academic preparation in high school played a significant role in narrowing the gap in postsecondary outcomes between first-generation students and their peers with college educated parents. Academic rigor is defined as the number of courses that students complete in academic subjects; the completion of higher level mathematics and science courses; and the inclusion of honors and Advanced Placement courses in the curriculum. Warburton et al. concluded that, by taking rigorous courses in high school, first-generation students significantly increased their chances of attaining a college degree.

In 2003-04, 47 percent of first-generation students began their education at a community college, and 34 percent started at a four year institution (Horn & Nevill, 2006). This information was reported in a statistical analysis report, based on data collected in the 2003-04 National Postsecondary Aid Study. Further, this study indicated that students at community colleges commonly attend school part-time while working full-time. While 63 percent of 4-year college students attended school full-time, only 31 percent of the community college students did so. The study concluded that students who maintained a strong commitment toward completing a program of study at the community college (i.e. transferring to a 4-year college, obtaining an Associate’s degree, completing a certificate program) were more likely to remain in school.
Statistics about first-generation students attending 4-year institutions from the Beginning Postsecondary Longitudinal Study include the following:

(1.) Ninety-two percent of first-generation students attended public high schools.

(2.) First-generation students were more likely to come from middle- or low-income families. Only 4 percent of first-generation students came from high-income families.

(3.) First-generation students were more likely to attend a high school where three-quarters of the population were underrepresented minority students.

(4.) First-generation students took less rigorous high school coursework than those whose parents had attended college. Only 20 percent of first-generation students took Calculus in high school compared to 34 percent of students whose parents had a college degree.

(5.) First-generation students scored lower on college entrance examinations than those students whose parents had some college. First-generation students scored an average of 858 points on the SAT I compared with an average of 889 points for students whose parents had some college and an average of 1011 points for students whose parents had completed college.

(6.) First-generation students were more likely than students whose parents had bachelor’s degrees to work full time while attending college. Twenty-two percent of first-generation students worked full time compared to nine percent of those whose parents had bachelor’s degrees. (Warburton et al., 2001)

It is essential that school personnel working with students who will be the first-generation in their families to attend college have knowledge of and understand the impact of this
information in order to develop a strong academic and social program within the school that will support college-going behavior in students.

2.3. The Planning Process to Pursue Postsecondary Education

Successful enrollment in postsecondary education is the culmination of a process that begins during middle school and the early high school years or before. Urban students, especially African American and Hispanic students who will be the first in their families to attend college, face numerous challenges in finding and using the resources they need to successfully transition into postsecondary education (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Noeth and Wimberly studied the postsecondary planning of African American and Hispanic high school seniors in five large urban school districts. They surveyed African American and Hispanic seniors just prior to their high school graduation on college planning and conducted focus groups. The findings in this study indicated that most students (84 percent) perceived their mother as being the greatest influence in their college planning. The parents were described by some students as “cheerleaders” but not always having “the necessary tools and resources to help them with postsecondary planning” (Noeth & Wimberly, p. 15). The participants in the study also identified educators as important factors in their postsecondary planning. School counselors (73 percent) and teachers (73 percent) were identified as equally important in assisting the urban students in this study with planning for college. Principals were identified as being helpful by one-quarter of the respondents.

Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, and the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, five steps in the path to college enrollment were identified. It was
also indicated that students whose parents did not attend college were less likely to complete each step than their peers with college-educated parents (Choy, 2001). These steps, according to Choy, include (a) the decision to pursue postsecondary education and the type they wish to pursue, (b) academic preparation for college-level work; (c) taking SAT or ACT entrance exams; (d) choosing and making application to one or more institutions; and (e) gaining acceptance and making arrangements to enroll including financial arrangements. Choy concluded that first-generation college students are less likely to succeed than those whose parents have a bachelor’s degree. Further, these students of color and those from low-income families are disproportionately represented among students whose parents have low education; and that rigorous academic preparation during high school can mitigate, but not completely close, gaps in access and persistence for first-generation students.

According to the research literature, the postsecondary planning process includes ongoing behaviors and actions throughout the P-16 educational process that contribute to “developing college aspirations, acquiring skills and knowledge to become a successful applicant, evaluating information about postsecondary institutions and financial support, matriculating as a college student, and successfully completing postsecondary education” (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002, p. 2). There are a number of factors that occur, during secondary education, that are strong predictors for college attendance and completion, especially for minority and low-income students. These include academic preparation, social support, parental involvement and knowledge about postsecondary opportunities, access to information, and financial aid (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). The postsecondary
process most often starts with the decision to attend college and is impacted by parental involvement in the process (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004).

Long-term educational development is a key component in preparing first-generation students for college and completion of a college degree (Trusty, 2004). Students’ success in college is dependent on their preparation during middle and high school including attendance, intensive course taking, and extra-curricular activities. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Studies, Trusty examined the effects of gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, eight-grade reading and math cognitive ability, high school attendance behavior, positive school behavior, students’ involvement in extracurricular activities, parental involvement, and parental educational expectations for their children. The findings indicated that higher level mathematics coursework increased degree completion. For African Americans and Asian Americans, intensive science course-taking had an even greater effect on degree completion. Trusty further concluded that school counselors need to utilize a variety of data sources to help prepare students for college. This includes the development of an education-career plan, evaluation of consistency between goals and academic effort, ensuring students have information of postsecondary education and career options available, inclusion of parents in the career and postsecondary planning process, and using students’ education-career plans to help them become involved in rewarding extracurricular activities.

2.4. Social Support for First-Generation Students

“Social capital is a form of capital that resides in relationships among individuals that facilitate transaction and the transmission of different resources” (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004, p. 252). Students with college-educated parents frequently
have greater social capital for accessing postsecondary education than those who do not, therefore, giving them a distinct advantage early in the college process. Further, Pascarella et al., using results from the National Study of Student Learning, studied college students to assess the factors that influence students’ learning and cognitive development during college. They concluded that first-generation students as a group attended less competitive educational institutions. While first-generation students more frequently work full-time and take a lower course load, those who persisted to the second and third year of postsecondary education narrowed the gap with their peers with college-educated parents. For first-generation students, extracurricular involvement provided significant positive effects on degree plans, critical thinking and internal locus for academic success.

Merullo (2002) describes the dilemma facing many first-generation college students when they suddenly find themselves in a world very different than that where they grew up. Children who grow up in poverty or working class homes are often raised to believe that “there is an oppressor just on the other side of some invisible border” (p. B11) and that oppressor may take the shape of the well-educated and the wealthy (Merullo, 2002). As they move into postsecondary education, first-generation students often feel that they have moved to the other side and feel alienated from their family and home community, while at the same time feeling out of place in the university community.

In a series of essays written by first-generation college professors, the challenges facing first-generation students as they move from high school to college and beyond are explored. Nainby and Pea (2003) describe the social mobility described in the previous paragraph as the “move from one place, economically, culturally, personally, to another”
(p. 35) and examine how the sense of loss that goes with that social mobility can bring on immobility and the paralysis that goes with fear. It is important that first-generation students develop not only the academic skills but also the social skill to navigate two worlds and bring those worlds together within themselves, to redefine their identity in the context of both worlds (Gerstl-Pepin, 2003). Renne (2003) describes not always understanding the “rules of the game or even what the game is” (p. 85). She discusses her reluctance to claim the title of professor and, instead, of how she refers to herself as a teacher when she is navigating the multiple worlds of her background and her current middle class life. The title of teacher is more acceptable in the working class world than that of professor.

The importance of discussing the dynamics of first-generation students within the university and the changes that accompany education is important in developing a strong social support for students from the university since students may not always be able to have the discussions with their families (Orbe, 2004). This qualitative study utilized the theory of identity as its theoretical foundation and focused on what it is like to be a first-generation student.

2.4.1. Influence of Family

Family involvement in a student’s secondary education and postsecondary planning increases academic success and the decision to attend an institution of higher education (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). The expectations of parents for their children and their expectations for their children influence the children’s educational and occupational successes (Trusty, 2004). Parental involvement and knowledge about college is a strong predictor of college attendance and completion for minority and low-income students.
(Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Often, students who will be the first-generation in their family to attend college do not have an understanding of the academic coursework and the college application processes that are needed to plan and pursue postsecondary education (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). Ethnic minority students and those from low income homes are taught that postsecondary education will lead to improved economic status and success in life (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004).

In an ACT study of 23 urban high schools in five urban districts, African American and Hispanic high school seniors indicated that their parents, especially their mothers, had a great influence in their college planning process. The survey also indicated that parents did not always have the resources and tools necessary to assist their children in the postsecondary planning process (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). Regardless of income or education, families who are involved in their student’s education throughout the K-12 years were more aware of the availability of financial aid and had made plans for paying for their children’s postsecondary education (Horn, Chen, & Chapman, 2003).

2.4.2 *Influence of Secondary Schools*

Studies of urban schools in which most students will be first-generation college students and where over 80 percent of the graduates pursue postsecondary education show that the schools develop strong relationships with parents and work with parents and students from the beginning of high school to develop postsecondary and career goals (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). The administrators, school counselors, and teachers in those schools work closely with parents in the “areas of academic preparation, assessment information, college planning, and financial aid” (p. 11). The collaborative
programs in these schools provide parents with the knowledge they need to help their children with the postsecondary planning process.

Akey (2006), in a study of schools involved in the First Things First school reform initiative, examined the influence of school engagement and perceived academic competence on academic achievement. The findings indicated that student engagement and perceived academic competence had a significant positive influence in math achievement, but the influence of the perception of academic competence was three times larger than that of engagement. Prior achievement also had a significant impact related to perceived competence. Thus, students who perceived themselves as successful in the past continued to perceive themselves as competent.

While high expectations of students to pursue postsecondary education are positive indicators for students’ development, there must also be efforts made to help students who are exerting little effort understand the repercussions and realities that occur as a result (Rosenbaum, 2003). Students need help in developing plans that are consistent with their preparation to achieve success (Trusty, 2004).

2.4.3. Influence of Peers

Peers can support academic achievement or have a negative impact (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). A sense of belonging and caring is important in achievement, and students who feel their peers support their academic achievement are more successful academically (Akey, 2006). According to Akey, if students feel that academic achievement is important to their peers, they are more likely to achieve at a level that will support postsecondary aspirations. First-generation students serious about pursuing their education at the secondary level often distance themselves from peers who do not
support those goals and instead develop a circle of friends that share and support their
desire to continue their education (Cushman, 2005). This is also supported by a study in
which one third of students said their friends were helpful in influencing them to attend
college and in college planning (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002).

2.5. The Impact of Race, Class, and Gender in the Pursuit of Postsecondary Education

The technological advances and industrial demands of today’s society are requiring
increasingly higher levels of education for students to enter the workforce prepared to
compete for high-paying jobs (Valadez, 1998). Valadez studied race, class, and gender
differences that impact whether students apply to college and those factors that can assist
or impede college attendance. His findings were consistent with those of previous
research that showed that “lower SES groups are likely to be selected out of the
educational process leading toward higher education and subsequently higher status
occupations” (p. 19).

An important consideration for school counselors, teachers, and administrators is
the finding that “if groups show fewer resources needed to shape their decisions to apply
to college, they are less likely to follow through on their aspirations” (Valadez, 1998, p.
19). Valadez findings also noted that females have more resources and are better than
males at “converting these resources into the cultural capital needed by groups to persist
in education” (p. 18). White students have greater resources than Non-White students, but
the effects of socioeconomic status complicate the access to college for all students. The
variables that increased the odds of attending college included getting help from schools
in filling out college applications, discussing college with parents, and being a part of a
peer group that plans to attend college while the variables that lowered the odds for
applying to college included attendance of a school with a high minority population, getting help with financial aid forms, discussions with parents about jobs after high school, and being a part of a peer group that plans to work immediately following college.

Valadez (1998) concluded that, although students have aspirations for attending college, outside factors may impede them from following through on their goals. He stated that “counselors, teachers, and parents need to have appropriate information concerning curricula, college entrance exams, and activities that promote and encourage students’ plans for college attendance. All of us involved in education need to be aware that all students do not necessarily have equal access to information that may be critical in guiding their decisions about applying to college” (p. 19). Since first-generation students are those who frequently come from lower socioeconomic status homes and are minority students, school counselors are in a position to provide needed information to help students attain their college aspirations.

Earning good grades in high school is an important factor in the pursuit and acceptance into postsecondary education. The attitude of students toward grades impacts their academic achievement. In the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002), high school sophomores reported that obtaining good grades was important to them (Ingels, Burns, Chen, Cataldi, & Charlston, 2005). Female students were more serious about obtaining good grades than their male counterparts (58 percent of the females compared to 44 percent of the males). Students whose native language was other than English placed a greater emphasis on good grades than did their native-English speaking peers. While White students in the study exhibited higher achievement test scores than
their Black and Hispanic classmates, the White students were less likely to place importance on earning good grades (47 percent of White students versus 62 percent of Black students and 53 percent of Hispanic students).

The history that goes with race and gender can negatively impact student achievement as indicated in studies by Steele (2003) on the detrimental effects of stereotype threat. Steele described stereotype threat as “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (p. 111). Further, he explained that everyone experiences stereotype threat and that it contributes to apprehension, especially in high stress situations. In studies of high ability Stanford University college sophomores while taking the Graduate Record Exam, a standardized test designed for college seniors, Black students performed a full standard deviation lower than White students when they believed the test was measuring intellectual ability even though statistically the two groups were matched for ability, but they performed equally with White students on the same tests when they were told the study was to determine how students solve problems. The same types of tests were performed to determine the impact of gender stereotypes with strong math students with similar results. Strong female math students scored significantly lower than the male students when the test was presented as very difficult, but performed equally as well as the men when the same test was presented as one in which men and women always did equally well. This information is important for educators when working with first-generation students in developing a college access culture and a school culture that is conducive for all students to succeed.
2.6. Expectations of College Attendance

The educational attainment of parents impacts the educational expectations of students (Choy, 2001). Further, Choy found that postsecondary education expectations are formulated between eighth and tenth grades and students whose parents did not attend college show lower expectations of attending college as early as eighth grade in many cases. Students with college educated parents are expected to continue education and the high school graduation is not viewed as the end of education, but rather a step in the educational process. This expectation, along with the knowledge their college-educated parents have about the postsecondary educational process, provides those students with the advantage in preparing for college, high school course selection, the application process, college selection, and academic and social choices while in college (Pascarella et al., 2004).

In a study of schools with large numbers of first-generation students that are successfully preparing those students for postsecondary education, Robinson Stempel, and McCree (2005) found that the schools were focused on preparing students for college, not just high school graduation, and that message was clear in all communications with students, families, and the community. The focus of the culture in these schools was one of high expectations for all the students and a vision of life beyond high school that includes high aspirations (Robinson, et al.).

2.7. Academic Rigor in Preparation for Postsecondary Education

One of the most significant predictors of college success is academic preparation (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Adelman (2006) contends that mastery of high level mathematics courses is the most important variable in describing the academic rigor of a
student’s secondary school curriculum. The more mathematics courses students complete beyond Algebra 2, the greater the chance that students will complete a bachelor’s degree. Utilizing statistics from the High School & Beyond/Sophomore Cohort and NELS:88/2000 Postsecondary Transcript Files, Adelman showed that 83.3 percent of students in the Class of 1992 completing Calculus earned a bachelor’s degree, and 74.6 percent of students completing precalculus earned their bachelor’s degree while only 39.3 percent of those who completed Algebra 2 did so. The data, from the 2004 First Follow-up of the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, support the idea that success in higher levels of mathematics is a positive indicator for students planning to continue their education beyond high school (Ingels, Planty, & Bozick, 2005). A problem is that many first-generation students who are African-American or Latino are from lower socioeconomic status homes and attend schools that do not offer mathematics courses beyond Algebra 2 (Adelman, 2006). This deficiency puts them at a further disadvantage in their ability to access and be successful in postsecondary education.

The ACT and SAT college admissions tests are indicators of whether or not students can succeed at college level work. African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students on the average score lower than their Caucasian and Asian-American counterparts (Black Issues in Higher Education, 2003). According to the results of the 2003 ACT, the average composite ACT score for African-American students was 16.9, for Hispanic students a 19.0, while for Caucasian students the average composite score was 21.7 and for Asian-American students a 21.8 (Black Issues in Higher Education, 2003).
ACT has developed national readiness indicators for postsecondary education, based on student scores on the ACT, called the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. According to the 2003-04 ACT results, only 40 percent of all students tested are prepared for their first course in college Algebra, 68 percent are ready for college English Composition, and only 26 percent are ready for college Biology (ACT, 2004). When scores are broken out by race and ethnicity, Caucasian and Asian-American students scored higher than the total population, but scores for African-American and Hispanic-American students were alarming. Only 38 percent of African-American and 48 percent of Hispanic American students met the college English Composition benchmark. For college Algebra, only 24 percent of Hispanic-Americans and 11 percent of African-Americans met the benchmark; and for college Biology, only 12 percent of Hispanic-Americans and 5 percent of African-Americans met the benchmark (ACT, 2004).

Since greater numbers of African-American and Hispanic American students are first-generation college students, the numbers from the ACT study are critical to educators in schools with high concentrations of first-generation minority students. The impact of the lack of rigor and opportunity for taking higher level courses cited by Adelman (2006) is reinforced by the results of the ACT scores. The ACT research also indicated that students who complete at least one year of foreign language increase their chance for success in college English (ACT, 2005).

2.8. Essential Components for Urban Schools with a College-Going Culture

Developing a college-going culture requires the belief of all stakeholders that the students are capable of going to college. The administration, counselors, teachers, parents, and, most importantly, the students must believe that college is an attainable goal.
(The Education Trust, 2005). The Education Trust recognizes that schools that have changed the culture in their schools have done so by basing those changes on “a few bedrock fundamentals” (p. 24) that are the foundation for successful change. These fundamentals include knowledge of the data, a focus on strong instruction, strong connections between the students and the adults in the building, and a belief that all students can and will learn.

The use of data, as the basis for preparing students for postsecondary education, is a basis for school reform efforts (Choy, 2001; KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2005; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005; The Education Trust, 2005). In a profile of three schools that are successfully educating students and creating a culture where students believe they can go to college, The Education Trust (2005) describes the use of data in the schools. Data are not just numbers and statistics, but also are “information about people that is used with meticulous care” (p. 24), and they are a part of the academic culture of the school. The knowledge of the data is well known by many, not just the select few, and it is what drives the decisions in the schools. Schools that are most successful in helping low performing students improve academically and believe that they can go to college, research the data on every student before they even arrive at high school and put interventions in place to help all students be successful from the first day of high school (Robinson, Stempel & McCree, 2005).

Robinson et al. further explained the necessity of first analyzing data in the traditional sense for students’ reading and math levels, attendance patterns, and behavioral issues; and then, utilizing the data to develop programs that will encourage students to believe that college is the next step beyond high school. One example of this
use of data to help students believe they will go to college is to pair teachers who were first-generation students with students who will be the first-generation in their family to attend college. As Orbe (2004) described the ability of first-generation educators at the postsecondary level to support first-generation students while in college, the secondary teachers’ successes and challenges in navigating the postsecondary process can be shared with students and their families to help develop the college-going beliefs during high school.

High quality teachers providing high quality instruction are important for all students, especially for first-generation students and students with below grade level skills. Along with the high quality instruction, the curriculum must provide the rigor at a level that prepares students for the intensity of college level work (ACT, 2005; Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005). Adelman (2006) describes “the academic intensity of the student’s high school curriculum” (p. xviii) as the most important factor “in precollegiate history providing momentum toward completing a bachelor’s degree” (p. xviii). In order to be successful in the rigorous coursework, students must also receive additional support if they need it (Haycock, 1999; Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005; The Education Trust, 2005). The combination of a challenging curriculum with the extra time and instruction for students who need it along with professional development for teachers to ensure the students are receiving high quality instruction are the key to successfully preparing all students for postsecondary education (Haycock, Jerald, & Huang, 2001). When students feel success in high school, they tend to believe they can be successful in college, thus, developing a college-going culture in the school (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002).
As a part of high quality instruction, transition programs for first-generation students can help them get a head start on college by providing the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school and by exposing them to the academic rigor required of college level work. The six most common transition programs are dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, Tech Prep, International Baccalaureate, Middle College high schools, and Early College high schools (Kleekotka, 2005). The programs are different from each other, but each engages students in rigorous academic work and allows students to receive college credit while still in high school. Opportunities for first-generation students to complete college level coursework while still in high school increases their belief in attending college and their chances for completing their college degree (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). It is important to note that the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school is not just for high achieving students, but for educationally at-risk students as well. However, the students’ success depends on extra support through programs such as academic advising, tutoring study skills workshops, mentoring, and career counseling (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005).

The relationships students have with the adults in the building are important in building a college-going culture. Schools, where all students feel a connection to at least one adult in the building, provide an environment where students feel safe to take the risks necessary to improve their academic skills (Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005). This study examined seven public high schools, four of which were designated “high-impact” (Robinson et al., p. 4). Such schools produced significant growth for students who entered behind. Further, these high-impact schools were compared to three average-impact schools with similar demographics that produced average growth. The relational
component between students and staff was a positive indicator in each high-impact school. The relationship building was achieved through a variety of methods. These included strategies such as (a) small schools or schools-within-schools where students had the opportunity to build relationships with the adults in the school and with each other; (b) advisory systems where each adult in the building served as a mentor to a small group of students and connected with the students and their families; and (c) through the use of clubs, sports, and activities that engaged students as active participants in the school (The Education Trust, 2005). KnowledgeWorks Foundation’s Ohio High School Transformation Initiative, in which large underperforming urban high schools are broken into smaller high schools, provide small learning environments where students and teachers build bonds and connections as a way of helping students achieve success in school and look toward a future in college (Cypher, Turner, Zimon, & Hoke, 2005).

The belief of all members of the school community that students can and will learn is a powerful component to a college-going culture. When teachers believe that their students have “multiple abilities, that ability is malleable, and that all can meet a specified standard, they will feel encouraged to broaden their teaching strategies and offer a wider range of performance opportunities that would measure competencies” (Weinstein, 2002, p. 207). This then provides opportunities for participation that creates an inclusive community with staff, students, and parents.

2.9. Developing a Culture for Attending College

With first-generation college students, it is essential to develop a culture within the school, home, and community that education does not stop at high school graduation, but, instead, one in which the high school diploma is a steppingstone to further education.
and the world of work (Choy, 2001; Pascarella et al, 2004; Robinson et al, 2005; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). Students whose parents attended college are raised with the idea that attending postsecondary education is an expectation and not an option.

Choy (2001), in the study described in section 2.3 of this chapter, stated that first-generation students are more likely to receive help in applying to college from their high schools. The study found that parental involvement in decisions about the students’ curricular decisions and college planning activities was associated with higher college enrollment rates. Choy also found that a rigorous high school curriculum helped reduce the disadvantage of first-generation status. Schools that encourage all students to take a rigorous curriculum help develop a college-attending culture. This was demonstrated in the high achieving schools in the study by Robinson et al. described in the previous section.

Parent involvement between middle and high school was also important across all ethnic and racial groups in helping students develop skills and acquire information about postsecondary education, thus creating a college-attending culture from the beginning of high school. Wimberly and Noeth (2004) used data from ACT in this study. Their findings included the perception of over 90 percent of ninth- and tenth-grade students that their parents were influential in helping with future plans. They recognized parents as an integral part of the school community in building a culture of college attendance.

In a study by Bui (2002) of reasons for attending college, first-generation students gave higher ratings of importance for going to college in the area of gaining respect/status, bringing honor to their family, and helping their family financially after college than did students with parents who had attended college. The first-generation
students’ ratings were similar to all other students attending college in the areas of parents expecting them to go, wanting a college degree to achieve future goals, and high school educators encouraging them to go. The differences first-generation students experienced were feeling less prepared for college and greater worries about financial aid than other students; a greater fear of failing in college than their peers with parents who had a bachelor’s degree; and they felt they had to study more than other students.

Developing an awareness and understanding by school officials of the impact that family socioeconomic status and race can play in college access is necessary in the process of developing a college access culture. Toward this end, it is essential that educators know their students and families and what information they will require to help them navigate the postsecondary process. Aligned with this, Noguera (2003) asserts that the school must form a partnership with parents in order to understand the social reality of the students and help improve academic achievement. This partnership can help overcome the low expectations some schools have when they equate differences in culture, language, or race with intellectual deficiencies.

There are several points that are important for educators to consider when developing a college-going culture to help urban students, especially those who will be the first-generation in their families to attend college, prepare for post-secondary education. The Robinson, Stempel, and McCree (2005) study and the ACT (2005) study both support the first of these – the development of the rigorous curriculum that will provide the academic preparation necessary to succeed in college and develop a culture in which all students expect to pursue higher level coursework during high school. The benefits of the rigorous curriculum are two-fold—students develop strong academic skills
necessary for college success and the need for remedial work in college is reduced. Chen (2005) reported that 55 percent of first-generation students took remedial courses during college as compared with 27 percent of students whose parents had a college degree. Remedial coursework is expensive and draws out the length of time students must spend at the university. Since many first-generation students are from lower income families and must work while attending school, the remedial coursework places an even greater financial burden on the student and can contribute to a student dropping out of college or starting and stopping a number of times resulting in loss of credits and earning potential. The lack of rigorous coursework can also impact the choice of an undergraduate major since weak academic preparation may prevent students from choosing fields requiring skill in mathematics and science and may, therefore, impact earning potential (Chen, 2005).

The second consideration, when building a college access culture in a school, is to provide a support system for students and their families to help them with a thorough understanding of the postsecondary educational process and the importance of high school preparation on students’ successes in postsecondary education (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). First-generation students often do not have the knowledge about the requirements and application process for college that those whose parents have attended college do (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Further, they often lack the knowledge of the importance of rigorous coursework in high school, preparation for college entrance exams, and the application process itself. With this in mind, high schools can provide informational sessions for parents and students. It is also important that these sessions start early in the student’s high school career or even during middle school to
help students and parents understand the process, so they can make informed choices when selecting coursework and activities throughout high school (Choy, 2005; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004). It is also important to develop parent networks with parents who have been through the process helping other parents learn the process. The networks empower the parents and help them realize they are not alone in their questions and uncertainties and establish the trust necessary for them to “take charge of their participation in education on their own terms” (Auerbach, 2002, p. 16).

Developing a culture in which students are strong participants and partners in their education helps develop a college access culture. Schools, where students get to know the staff members and where students feel safe and a contributing member of the school community, provide a culture of strong academic achievement (KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2005). In these settings, students are often more engaged in academic work and motivated to achieve at higher levels when they have a sense of belonging to the school and caring that is a result of strong relationships with the adults in the school and a network of supportive of family and friends (Akey, 2006). Students are also more successful in school when there are clear, high, and consistent expectations that are genuinely achievable and pedagogical strategies that require active participation by students in the learning process (Akey, 2006).

2.10. Impact of School Reforms in Developing a College Going Culture within a School

Many of the statistics for urban and ethnic minority students are disheartening and contribute to the search for effective school reforms. In the 35 largest cities in the United States, less than half of the ninth graders complete high school (National High School
Alliance, 2006). Children in high poverty schools are twice as likely to be taught by inexperienced and under qualified teachers (Haycock, Jerald, & Huang, 2001). An African-American male born today is twice as likely to go to prison as go to college, and Latino students who have not completed high school have not completed the ninth grade at almost double the rate of their African American and White counterparts (National High School Alliance, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) reported that, between 1971 and 2005, (a) the high school completion rate has improved for Black, Latino, and White students; (b) the completion rate gap has narrowed slightly between Black and White students; and (c) there has been no change in the gap between Latino and White students. White students enroll in postsecondary education immediately after high school at greater rates than African American or Hispanic students. Lower socioeconomic status and first-generation students are more likely to enroll in a two-year college instead of a four-year college program (Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005).

In 1998, Congress implemented and funded the Comprehensive School Reform Program to assist failing schools in using multiple sources of funds and to integrate programs from federal, state, and local sources allowing flexibility and enhancing accountability for student learning while collaborating “with expert partners to implement whole-school reform models that had a strong research base and a successful replication record” (Tushnet, Flaherty, & Smith, 2004, p. vii). Any school receiving Comprehensive School Reform funds must integrate the eleven components defined in the legislation. These eleven components include: effective research based methods and strategies; comprehensive design aligned with components; professional development; measurable goals and benchmarks; support within the school by faculty, administrators, and staff;
parental and community involvement; external technical support and assistance; evaluation strategies; coordination of resources; support for teachers, administrators, and staff; and evidence of improved academic achievement (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2006).

Eight high school reform models, studied by Martinez and Klopott (2005), focused on the efforts to provide rigorous curricula and the creation of personalized learning environments. The four practices found to be most successful for low-income and minority students provided all students with a rigorous common core curriculum; personalized learning environments for students; a balance of academic and social support in developing social networks and relationships; and an alignment of curriculum between various levels including the K-12 system and high school and postsecondary education. Martinez and Klopott report that “high school reform efforts that integrate these practices have the greatest potential to improve college access and success for underserved minority and low-income students” (p. 2).

2.11. Programs that Support College Access for First-Generation Students

There are a growing number of options for students to obtain a college education. The Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success (APASS) project, at the University of Illinois with support from the Lumina Foundation, has identified academic pathways for students to access a college education. Kim (2006) defines academic pathways as the “boundary spanning curriculum and organizational structures that link K-12 with higher education to facilitate student transition to college” (p. 1). The academic pathways identified by APASS include Advanced Placement courses; International Baccalaureate programs; College Level Examination Program (CLEP); dual enrollment
programs; distance learning programs through virtual high schools and colleges; Early and Middle College High School programs; Tech Prep and College Tech Prep programs; bridge programs such as TRIO, Upward Bound, and Gear Up; and GED programs that bridge to college. Bragg, Kim, & Rubin (2005) stress the importance of the link between college access and a student’s high school academic preparation, financial resources to attend college, motivation and social support, cultural support for higher education, and political support from governmental entities. The APASS study concluded that underserved populations benefit from the opportunities provided by the various academic pathways but strong partnerships are needed between the secondary and postsecondary institutions and further research is necessary to be certain that college access programs are responsive to student needs (Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005).

In the mid-1990s, the state of Florida implemented a comprehensive dual enrollment system in which students receive both high school and college credit for “Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and college courses completed as part of dual enrollment programs” (Klekotka, 2005, p. 2). All two-year and four-year institutions in the state have a common course-numbering system to facilitate the transfer of postsecondary credit. The Florida Department of Education report indicates that during the ten years of the dual enrollment system, the number of students participating increased by 56 percent and 80 percent of all students participating postsecondary credit and were less likely to take remedial coursework and more likely to return for a second year of college than their peers who were not in the program (Klektotka, 2005). Klekotka emphasizes the importance of a rigorous curriculum for all high school students and access to transition programs and dual enrollment for at-risk high school students.
2.12. Experiences of First-Generation Students

Little information, if any, is found in the research literature from the perspective of the first-generation students themselves. In a study of the postsecondary planning of African American and Hispanic high school seniors in five large urban school districts, nearly 75 percent felt their school counselors and teachers were helpful in the college planning process and about a quarter of them felt their principal was helpful; nearly all of them felt their high school coursework was helpful; most had access to online college planning sources; and over half indicated that college costs and access to financial aid information were a problem (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002).

In a book written from the perspective of first-generation college students giving advice to high school students, the information was presented as a map on the journey to college. The author uses the “three C’s” as a conceptual framework for illustrating this point (Cushman, 2005; p. vii). For example, the three C’s include conversation with other first-generation students, connections between the student stories and the reader’s life, and confidence in working toward the goal of college. As a first-generation student, the following concepts were considered important to be successful on the road to postsecondary education: believing in the right to go to college; understanding why they want to go to college; learning how to find information and set one’s sight on college as the goal; developing a network of support including friends, parents, teachers, and others; defying stereotypes and low expectations; keeping social and emotional balance; and keeping organized and on time (Cushman, 2005).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In examining the research literature on first-generation urban students’ preparation for and transition to postsecondary education, a consistent theme of disconnection between the aspirations and goals of students to attend college and their success in actually matriculating occurs for many students (Adelman, 2006; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). Rigorous academic preparation and a strong social and academic support network are crucial for students to enroll in and complete postsecondary education (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). To prepare urban students for successful transition to postsecondary education, it is essential that districts include college exploration and planning programs throughout middle and high school (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Understanding the link between secondary education preparation and success in postsecondary education requires communication and outreach between the postsecondary educational institutions and the high schools (Adelman, 2006).

Adelman (2006), in a data essay using information from the National Center for Education Statistics longitudinal study (i.e. NELS:88/2000), states that “it is obvious that students are partners in their own education fate, and shouldn’t wait around for someone else to do something to them or for them” (p. 104). An area that is lacking in the research literature is the perceptions of the urban first-generation students who are currently
attending postsecondary education on their preparation for college. This qualitative research study was designed to explore that void. A qualitative approach was deemed necessary to obtain the in-depth information from students of their perceptions of their preparation during high school for postsecondary education.

3.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions first-generation college students have of their preparation during their secondary school years for postsecondary education. More specifically, it explored the people and programs they perceived as having a positive (and negative) impact on their preparation. Another area that was considered is what they felt was lacking in their preparation.

3.3. Research Questions

This study explored the following broad research questions:

1. What perceptions and attitudes do first-generation, urban college students have of their secondary school preparation for postsecondary education?
   a. What were the strengths and weaknesses of their secondary school preparation for postsecondary education?

2. What individuals, programs, or experiences have had the greatest impact on first-generation, urban college students' decision to pursue postsecondary education?

3. What role do educators, family, peers, and special academic programs or curricula play in the postsecondary educational process for first-generation, urban college students?

The accessibility of postsecondary education to first-generation students is dependent on a number of factors, but a consistent theme throughout the research literature is the necessity of strong social and academic support networks for the successful transition from high school to college (Adelman, 2006; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Those social networks are described by a body of research as social capital (Coleman, 1988; Crosnoe, 2004; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; White & Glick, 2004). Social capital theory has been utilized as the conceptual framework for the current study.

White and Glick (2004) identified the interrelationship of the social capital provided to students by the family and that provided by the school in improving the academic achievement of adolescents. Gonzales, Stoner, and Jovel (2003) demonstrated that the social capital Latina first-generation students received from school programs, such as honors classes, gifted and talented programs, and Advanced Placement coursework, had a great impact in moving students toward highly selective four year universities while their peers without the benefits of those programs were not prepared for a university and started their education at a community college and later attended a top tier four year university. The increased social capital gained from the school programs and personnel enhanced the opportunities for underrepresented students who participated in those programs. The acquisition of knowledge about college and the application process encouraged first-generation students to apply to and attend schools that students without the exposure to the information did not realize were possibilities.
3.5. Research Design

3.5.1. Epistemology

Qualitative research is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 2). Typically, qualitative research occurs in natural settings and the researcher attempts to interpret the viewpoints of the participants. Grounded theory “focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content” (Patton, 2002, p. 125). Unlike ethnography which requires long-time immersion into the whole community, the grounded theorist looks at “slices of life” and “moments of time” as a participant-observer in the research process (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522). Grounded theory preserves the realism as it proceeds through inquiry and interpretation followed by further inquiry and interpretation. The viewer creates data and its ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed resulting in a causality that is suggestive and incomplete, therefore, is open to refinement. Data analysis continues throughout the process (Glaser, 2004). Further, Glaser suggests that to be successful in grounded theory, the researcher must have certain personality and temperamental characteristics. It includes the ability to tolerate confusion and trust the process and the ability to conceptualize and organize the data and make abstract connections within the data.

Constructivism assumes the stance that what we believe to be real is based upon our own perspective of reality (Schwandt, 2000). The researcher tries to determine what the research participants define as reality and views each interpretation as one among multiple interpretations. In a constructivist grounded theory research approach, the researcher looks beyond the surface meanings, which requires the development of a
42

relationship with the respondents in which they can “recast their stories in their terms” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 525). This study follows a constructivist paradigm by assuming that the researcher and participants co-create understandings in the natural world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

3.5.2. Participants

The investigator recruited a purposeful sample of 13 students (i.e. 6 men and 7 women) who were currently enrolled in postsecondary education and will be the first-generation in their family to graduate from college. All participants were currently enrolled in a four year university program. One student was in her third year of postsecondary study, five were in their second year, and seven were in their first year. The sample was obtained through an urban public school high school of approximately 1,100 students located in a large Midwestern district. A list of students known to have continued on to postsecondary education was obtained from the school and letters were sent to over 50 perspective participants (see Appendix A). For students with known email addresses, the letters were also emailed to the student as an attachment since many students were away at school.

3.5.3. Interviewing

This study used semi-structured interviews. The original intent was to utilize all face-to-face interviews. There were several students attending schools out of the state who wanted to participate in the study. For those students, telephone interviews were substituted for the face-to-face interview but the same protocol was used. Interviewing in qualitative research allows the researcher to enter the other person’s perspective and begins with the assumption that the perspective is meaningful and important to the
researcher (Patton, 2001). The quality of information that is obtained from the interview is dependent on the skill of the interviewer; therefore, the interviewer should have a direction for the interview before beginning in order to obtain rich data (Patton).

Participants were interviewed and the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. A semi-structured interview approach was used in order to focus the interview, use the interviewee time wisely, and facilitate comparisons during analysis (see Appendix B; Patton, 2001).

When using interviews and transcription as a part of the data collection process, Kvale (1996) emphasizes that the method of analysis must be built into the interview process and determined ahead of time in order to ask questions that help confirm and reject the hypotheses during the questioning. Transcription was done after the interview, and analysis of transcripts occurred throughout the data collection process.

A written biographical questionnaire was administered to each participant before the interviews (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was designed to provide the researcher with demographic information about the participants and to provide the participants with the opportunity for retrospection of their secondary school preparation. It was the intent that the time spent completing the questionnaire prior to the interview would encourage deeper thought into the preparation students had for postsecondary education.

The interviews were conducted by the researcher or a research assistant who was trained in qualitative interviewing. The researcher had a prior relationship with some of the participants in the study. Two of the interviews were conducted by the research assistant. The two participants interviewed by the research assistant were those with a
close relationship with the researcher. This was done to limit distorted responses, due to
the prior relationship in accordance with qualitative procedures (Patton, 2002). After each
interview was conducted by the research assistant, the researcher and assistant met to
debrief and take notes on the interview. The interviews were transcribed by a paid
transcriptionist.

3.6. Sampling Methods

A purposeful sample includes the selection of participants that are “information
rich” (p. 40) and who can offer insight into that which is being studied (Patton, 2001). In
a qualitative study, the sampling is nonrandom and aimed toward insight about the topic,
not an empirical generalization from the sample to a population as in quantitative
research. For this study, participants were chosen for their experiences as first-generation,
urban college students and how they perceived the preparation they received in their
urban secondary schools for that experience. The power of purposeful sampling is
selecting information-rich cases that give in-depth insight into the questions being studied
(Patton, 2001).

3.6.1. Sample Selection

The participants in this study were first-generation college students who were
currently attending a four-year college or university. They were graduates of the same
urban high school located in a large Midwestern urban school district. The researcher
obtained a list of graduates from the high school who were known to be attending post-
secondary education. Both male and female participants were included. The participants
had been enrolled continuously in a four-year university since graduating from high
school. Three of the participants were immigrants to the United States, and the rest of the
participants, except two, received all of their elementary, middle, and high school education in the same urban district. Further, all of the participants, except two students, attended the same high school for all four years. The two exceptions attended the high school for three years. One had attended another high school in the same urban district during her freshman year and the other student had immigrated to the United States from Ghana at the beginning of his sophomore year (see Appendix D).

3.6.2. Sample Size

The purpose of the sample size in a qualitative study is to maximize information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Theoretical sampling is a part of the grounded theory paradigm and is used to develop the emerging categories and make them more useful (Charmaz, 2000). As the theory is emerging, further information may be gathered to fill in the gaps. Often, this involves going back to the participants with further questions, but it can be done through documents. The biographical questionnaires provided further information that helped fill in the gaps throughout the analysis of the data.

3.7. Data Collection

The rich data that is important in a qualitative study is obtained from a variety of sources. The sources of data utilized in this study are semi-structured face-to-face or telephone interviews, biographical questionnaires, and field notes/researcher journal. Data from the varied sources provided more depth and increased richness in the information.

3.8. Data Analysis

The analysis of data in grounded theory tells the story of the people in the study (Charmaz, 2000). The large amounts of data collected can present problems for the
researcher if there is not a plan in place for analysis of the data before the researching begins. The development of a plan before the research begins helps the researcher use time both her time and the participants’ time wisely. Simplifying the collected data involves the use of content analysis and the development of a manageable coding or classification scheme (Patton, 2001). The process of coding the data allows the researcher to analyze information and find the emergent themes and patterns in the data. The themes can be identified before, during, and after data collection (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

As is standard in qualitative research, all interviews in this study were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim (Silverman, 2000). From the beginning of the data collection process, the data were analyzed and comparisons and contrasts in the data were noted. Meetings were held with the research team members (See Appendix E), and the data were coded for emergent themes and patterns utilizing the Code Worksheet (See Appendix F). The codes were categorized and recorded in the codebook (See Appendix G). A good codebook includes detailed descriptions of the codes, criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and exemplars of real text for each theme included (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Members of the research team signed a pledge of confidentiality (See Appendix H).

The information from the biographical questionnaires was coded and compiled. The questionnaire information and the interview transcriptions provided multiple sources necessary for triangulation of the data (see section 3.81. for further information). By including both men and women in the study, the researcher was able to observe themes and patterns that occur within gender and across gender lines. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants in the study. Some participants chose their own
pseudonym and others left it up to the researcher to assign a pseudonym. All were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. Participants signed letters of informed consent and were free to withdraw from the study at any point.

3.9. Establishing Trustworthiness

The extent to which the findings of the study are worth paying attention to is considered its trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In quantitative research, validity, reliability, and objectivity are established through quantitative research methods. In qualitative research, establishing trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which are the equivalent for internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.9.1. Credibility

The credibility in a study is enhanced through the use of triangulation and prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement is the investment of a sufficient amount of time to understand the culture; to be able to detect distortions that might occur in the data; and to discern personal biases that may occur. The researcher has spent six years as a school counselor in urban schools and three years of that time in a high school setting. The high school used in this study, is the high school where the researcher is a school counselor. As such, the researcher had a prior relationship with some of the participants which gave her some information about the participants an outside researcher would not have had. It was important for the researcher to understand the benefits and problems that could arise as a result of the prior relationship. This is further discussed in the ethical considerations section of this chapter.
The researcher is a first-generation college student and, as such, must guard against personal beliefs and biases clouding judgment in analyzing the data.

In conclusion, triangulation is the use of multiple sources and methods in the gathering and analysis of data. In this study, three types of triangulation were employed. These included data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and methodological triangulation.

1. *Data Triangulation.* The researcher investigated the following sources for information:
   A. Male first-generation college students who graduated from urban high schools
   B. Female first-generation college students who graduated from urban high schools
   C. College students from different colleges
   D. College students who were United States citizens
   E. College students who were immigrants to the United States

2. *Investigator Triangulation.* The following techniques were employed to insure investigator triangulation.
   A. A *research team* including members knowledgeable in qualitative research was formed to assist in the interview process and data analysis.
   B. *Peer debriefing* provided the opportunity for a disinterested peer to question the researcher thereby providing an opportunity for the
researcher to clarify thoughts and probe personal biases that might be involved.

*C. Member checking* is the process of checking with the participants in the study to ensure that their thoughts and comments are accurately portrayed in the data. All participants had the opportunity to verify that the information presented was represented in the way they meant it to be said.

3. *Methodological Triangulation.* The following multiple methods were used to gain information for the study:

A. Interviews

B. Biographical questionnaires

C. Researcher journal

3.9.2. *Transferability*

Transferability is the degree to which generalizations can be made from one case to another (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the use of thick description with a wide range of information, an interested party can determine if the data base in this study can be applied to another situation.

3.9.3. *Dependability*

To establish that a qualitative study is dependable, a logical documented audit trail must be established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Included in the audit trail for this study are:

(1.) raw data (i.e. audio recordings, written field notes, biographical questionnaire results);
(2.) data reduction and analysis (i.e. write up of field notes, summaries, working hypotheses);
(3.) data reconstruction and synthesis (i.e. themes, definitions, relationships, interpretations and inferences, connections to the literature and integration of concepts, relationships, and interpretations);
(4.) process notes (i.e. methodological notes including procedures, strategies, decisions and rationale, documentation regarding trustworthiness including peer debriefing, member checking, etc.);
(5.) intentions and disposition (i.e. proposal, personal notes and reflections, expectations and predictions);
(6.) instrument development (i.e. protocols and biographical questionnaires); and
(7.) reflexive journaling were utilized to increase dependability of the study.

3.9.4. Confirmability

To meet the trustworthiness standard of confirmability, the researcher must demonstrate that the findings are grounded in the data, that the inferences based on that data are logical, and that the information is presented objectively and in clear and discernable ways (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was accomplished through the audit trail, triangulation, and reflexive journaling as described above.

3.10. Researcher Subjectivity

Since the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, it is essential that the researcher understand personal biases and theoretical dispositions (Patton, 2002). The researcher must understand that the research is ideologically driven and identifies personal biases and tracks her perspective on the study through the use of the reflexive
journal (Janesick, 2000). More specifically, the researcher in this study has been a school counselor in the urban school district the participants for this study were from for six years. During those six years, she spent three years as a counselor in a middle school for grades 6 through 8 and three years in a high school for students in grades 9 through 12. Her responsibilities at the middle school level included college awareness and preparation activities with all students. At the high school level she was responsible for college awareness and preparation activities for all grade levels and worked closely with juniors and seniors in the college selection and application process, test-taking preparation for ACT/SAT, and financial aid information. She also provided information to parents and family members of first-generation students and worked in tandem with volunteers from I KNOW I CAN in providing information to students. In addition to the aforementioned experience in the schools, the researcher was also the first in her family to graduate from college and the only one of her siblings to attend college.

The participants in this study were graduates of the high school where the researcher was employed as a school counselor; therefore, some of the participants and the researcher had a prior relationship. It was necessary for the researcher to understand the possibility of conflict of interest issues and work to prevent students from feeling any pressure from the prior relationship. Two of the participants who had developed a close relationship with the researcher while they were in high school were interviewed by a member of the research team. Participants were reminded throughout the research of their option to leave the study at any time, the option of passing on any question they did not feel comfortable answering, and that confidentiality would be maintained. This was done both orally and in writing. The information about the study and confidentiality were
outlined in both the letter to the participants (Appendix A) and the IRB consent form (Appendix I).

The ethics of research must always be at the forefront when conducting research. Informed consent, whereby participants agree voluntarily to participate and can withdraw at any time, was explained. Information about the study was presented in a straightforward manner without deception. Privacy and confidentiality of all participants will be maintained and records will be stored in accordance with The Ohio State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies. Approval was obtained for the research from The Ohio State University’s IRB and the research was conducted in compliance with IRB procedures and policies (The IRB approval form is included in Appendix J). Additionally, the CITI course, required of all who do research at The Ohio State University, was completed.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings from the individual interviews, biographical questionnaires, researcher’s journal, and documents collected during this study. Also included is a summary of the demographic information about the participants in the study. As stated previously, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of first-generation, urban college students of their preparation for postsecondary education while in high school. More specifically, the study examined how first-generation students, who graduated from an urban public high school in a large Midwestern city, perceived their academic preparation for college-level coursework. It explored what and who impacted their decision making for postsecondary education, the role that the various people in the students’ lives played in the process, the assistance they and their families received in applying for college and financial aid, and the programs that helped prepare them for college. In order to achieve this, the following research questions were explored:

1. What perceptions and attitudes do first-generation, urban college students have of their secondary school preparation for postsecondary education?
   a. What were the strengths and weaknesses of their secondary school preparation for postsecondary education?
2. What individuals, programs, or experiences have had the greatest impact on first-generation, urban college students’ decision to pursue postsecondary education?

3. What role do educators, family, peers, and special academic programs or curricula play in the postsecondary educational process for first-generation, urban college students?

4.2. Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the participants in this study are outlined in this section. All students in the study were African American or immigrant students. Two of the immigrant students were from Ghana and one was from Haiti. One student emigrated from Ghana after his ninth grade year, while the other two students were in the United States throughout high school. Further, the demographics for the school, according to the 2005-06 school year report card, indicated a school population of 79.5% African-American, 16.1% Caucasian, and 3.4% Hispanic. The economically disadvantaged population was 80.4% and the limited English Proficient population was 9.5% (www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard). All students in the study, except one, qualified for the free and reduced lunch program which placed them below the federal poverty line. Most students contacted who did not qualify for free and reduced lunch had a parent or parents who graduated from college, therefore, placing them outside of the parameters for selection as a participant. When contacting students to participate in the study, it was learned that the few Caucasian students from this high school who had started college had dropped out of college. The specific demographic characteristics outlined are year in college, race/ethnicity, gender, high school GPA, and college GPA.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Immigrant</th>
<th>1st yr</th>
<th>2nd yr</th>
<th>3rd yr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Frequencies and Percentages of Participants by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Year in College
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Grade Point Average (GPA)</th>
<th>High School Number</th>
<th>High School Percentage</th>
<th>College Number</th>
<th>College Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>(3.75-4.0)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>(3.50-3.74)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>(3.25-3.49)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>(2.75-3.24)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>(2.5-2.74)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>(2.25-2.49)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C or lower</td>
<td>(less than 2.25)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Distribution of Frequencies and Percentages of High School and College Grade Point Averages (GPA)

Table 4.2 indicates that all the students had at least a 2.5 or higher GPA during high school, and over half (58.3%) had a 3.5 or higher GPA. During college, approximately one fourth (24.9%) had a GPA of 3.5 or higher while 25% had a GPA of 2.25 or lower. The participants in this study demonstrated a measure of academic success in high school and three fourths of them are showing academic success in college. It is interesting to note that one student who had a GPA in the 2.75-3.24 range in high school shared that she has a 3.9 GPA in college. Another student with a 2.5 GPA in high school has a 3.6 in college. A number of students are performing below their high school GPAs. It should be noted that one student did not share his GPA information (see Appendix H).
Figure 4.1 shows a comparison of the participants’ high school and college grade point averages. Students reported their GPAs as a range as shown in Table 4.1. When comparing the high school and college grade point averages, two had a higher GPA range than they had in high school, eight had a lower GPA range, and three had the same GPA range.

4.3. Emerging Themes

Throughout the data collection process, transcripts of the interviews and the biographical questionnaires were reviewed. This was followed by extensive analysis of all data. During the analysis of the data, the researcher assigned codes to the raw data and began the organization of the data into a codebook (Appendix G) developed from the
research literature. Included in the codebook were description of each code and examples (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

Transcripts were shared with the members of the research team (Appendix D) and the members of the team coded the transcripts individually. The team met and shared their opinions and discussed and debated the various codes they assigned to the transcripts. A 100% agreement was reached on the assignment of codes to the text (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was followed by a discussion of the coded data until the team reached a 100% consensus regarding the themes and assertions that would form the theoretical model for the study.

4.4. Social Capital as a Framework

The results of the study were envisioned within a framework of the concept of social capital theory, as discussed in chapter three. The research literature supports that strong social and academic support networks are necessary for successful transition from high school to college, especially for first-generation students (Adelman, 2006; Martinez & Klopott; Noeth & Wimberly). White and Glick (2004) identified the importance of the interrelationship of the family and school in providing students with the social capital they will need for academic transitions. It is within the context of that interrelationship between family and school as a support network for high school students’ preparation for college that the findings of this study are presented.

4.5. Presentation of Findings

The remainder of chapter four presents the findings of the research from the perspective of the students. The data emerged into six major themes which are elaborated throughout the remainder of the chapter. As often as possible, the information is
presented in the words of the participants allowing them to “speak out about their preparation for postsecondary education” as stated in the title for this study. The participants in the study were open about the people and programs that helped them. They described those things they perceived as being helpful and the impediments that have held them back. They recognized that while they may lack skills in some areas, they also brought great strengths with them to the college experience. Each student had a network of support, the important social capital, that helped them attain their first goal of attending college and that continues to help them persist in their pursuit of their college degree.

4.6. People Who Impacted Decisions about College

While the first-generation college students in this study reported various people impacted their decisions about college, their parents and families were usually cited first as a major influence in their decision to attend college. Other people who influenced the decisions the students made about college included friends, teachers, counselors, and administrators. Throughout the research literature, the involvement of first-generation students’ families in planning for secondary and postsecondary education increases the chance for academic success and college attendance (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). All of the students in this study reported that parents or other family members played an important role in their decision to attend college. The students frequently noted that their parent or relative did not know how to go about the college application process, but that they were encouraged by their families to get the information from the school. They said their parents also contacted school personnel for information and attended workshops provided by the school and I KNOW I CAN.
4.6.1. Parental Impact – “Make something of your life”

The familial influence was a key concept throughout the interviews with all the students. Each student had a story to tell about parents and family members who encouraged them and helped them with their dreams to attend college. A consistent theme in the familial influence was that parents wanted a better life for their children and saw a college education as a way of realizing that dream.

Of the thirteen participants in the study, four lived with both parents during high school, and five lived with their mothers. Of the nine students living with parents, seven of them credited one or both parents as being very influential in their pursuit of postsecondary education. The other two students credited other family members as important in their college decision-making process. Additionally, three students, who lived with relatives, described the influences of their mothers or a mother figure. One student lived with a cousin who she referred to and thought of as her mother. A student, whose mother is deceased, credited her as a great influence in her college decisions. Another student who lived with relatives explained that while his mother did not play an important role in his decision to attend college, she was very helpful in the financial aid process.

Terra, a freshman at a state university, described her mother’s influence in her decision to attend college as follows, “My mom was the most instrumental influence in me wanting to attend college. She is not with me any more, but I’m doing it for her and for me.” She explained that before her mother’s death, her mother always told her she
could do it and encouraged her to make something of her life. Terra said, “She provided love and support.”

Kay, a quiet, soft-spoken, immigrant student in his second year at a state university, describes his parents’ encouragement to attend college as a way to a better life when he said, “My mom and dad, they did not go to college and they told me, ‘look at how I’m struggling to make ends meet and you don’t want to do that with your life. You have your whole life ahead of you.’” Kay went on to explain that his mother has enrolled in school part-time since he started college.

Another immigrant student explained how his father influenced his decision to attend college in the following statement:

Especially my dad because he was not able to make it and he said if he was not able to make it, I can make it. There is a saying in our language—if the father doesn’t do it, the son can do it. That is a good saying that he always keeps telling me—if the father couldn’t do it, the son could do it. I plan to do it and raise the last name, bring it up. They are taking the last name that I have as the new people, so bring it up higher… (Ash, freshman at a state university)

When asked who helped her make the decision to go to college, Jasmine, a current college sophomore with younger siblings still at home, credited her mother, a single parent, with encouraging her.

I decided I was going to attend college ever since I was a child. I’ve always wanted to be a doctor or lawyer. I knew that I had to go to college….My mom always motivated us to do whatever we wanted to do and she talked to us a lot about going to college even though she didn’t go to college.

For some students, the desire to attend college was fueled by their parent’s dream as illustrated by Jenn, a college freshman, in the following:

I decided to attend college probably before I was in kindergarten, that was just because my parents…my mother, she never got to go to college, and my father, he
went and he dropped out when my mom was pregnant with me so they’ve always pushed me to do better than what they did.

Another student shared the influence that his mother, an immigrant to the United States who never had the opportunity to attend school as a child, had on his educational decisions:

I first decided to attend college when I was in the ninth grade because my mom, she’s a very influential person in my life, because she always pushed me to do better because she never had the opportunity to attend school. So I always strived to go beyond what high school had to offer and I thought college was the next level of my life. (JB, college sophomore)

Her mother’s persistence, while in high school, helped Taniya, a college sophomore, with her decisions for college and with her follow through on the college process once her decisions were made.

My mother…She stayed on me. She made sure I had everything signed for the applications. Once I got to college, she was there for me financially and mentally. She has been a great help.

4.6.2. Family Impact – “They always told me to go to college”

Over a quarter of the participants in the study lived with relatives during high school and cited them as influencing their college decisions. For others, the extended family was important in the decision. A student with a large involved extended family described getting input from a number of family members as a part of his decision making process.

I have a large family so a lot of people took part. I sat down with each person and got their take on it, like what they thought I should do, just in case I didn’t want to go. No one had a problem with me not attending so I figured I would do it with me being the first to accomplish something better. (Robert, college freshman)

Older siblings who had already paved the way by attending college were influential in some students’ decisions about college. Will, a college freshman attending
the same school that his older sister had graduated from, described watching her go to
college as impacting his decision to go to college. He stated, “Just watching as she went
through her years of high school and…in college, how she bettered herself and the
opportunities she had in front of her” made him realize the importance of a college
education. Laina, a sophomore, also credited her older sister as influential in her college
decision making as she stated, “My older sister. She was the one I would really talk to
about college and everything.”

Dawn, a freshman at a state university, lived with several different relatives
throughout high school. When asked who outside of school helped her with her college
decisions, she replied without hesitation, “My aunt and my cousin.” She explained that
her aunt was very helpful with the paperwork, especially for the financial aid.

Cam, a freshman at a state university, referred to the importance of his
grandmothers in making the decision to attend college. He said, “My grandmothers, they
always told me to go to college. They push me to do good in it.” As he spoke of his
grandmothers, his tone of voice and demeanor was one of great respect for them. Their
impact on his decision to attend and to do well in college was reflected in his statement
about their encouragement for him to attend college, “I’ve just never been a person that
will let people down.” He has over a 3.6 GPA.

4.6.3. Impact of the School Personnel: Counselors, Teachers, Administrators, and
Others – “You can do it!”

Every participant described how at least one adult at the school impacted their
decision to attend college. Twelve of the thirteen participants (92.3%) reported the school
counselor as playing an important role in their college decision-making process. Ten
participants (76.9%) reported teachers as significant in their decision to attend college.

Four participants (30.8%) described an administrator as helpful in their decision to attend college. One participant (7.7%) cited his coaches, along with others, as playing an important role in making decisions about college. Eleven of the thirteen participants (84.6%) reported that more than one faculty or staff member played an important role in their college-decision making process. Of the eight participants who had taken Advanced Placement classes, five (62.5%) reported that an AP teacher played an important role in their college decision making process.

Shayna, a junior at a private liberal arts college, explained in her biographical questionnaire that she lived with the woman who actually is her cousin, but she thinks of her and refers to her throughout the interviews as her mother. She explained when asked who helped her make her decisions about college as follows:

I don’t know if the decision [to go to college] was all of a sudden, because I always wanted to go. There was no question in my mind that I was going to go. The time that I first knew what colleges were available and what processes were out there was probably around my sophomore, late sophomore year to junior year, that’s when things started to culminate and everything became visible…Pretty much my mom left it up to me because she didn’t know a lot about what was going on and what papers we needed to sign so she left it up to me to ask the counselors and teachers, get help and get advice.

Later in the interview, she described the encouragement her English teacher gave her as she struggled with writing essays to get ready for college as important in moving her toward college, “…she was like, ‘you can do it; you know you can do it.’ She was the person who always told me, ‘okay, think about this, put it in perspective…struggle through it and learn’.”
For some students, a variety of people at the school helped with the college decision making process. One student described how she connected with a number of adults in high school to help her make the decision.

Wow! A lot of people, my teachers – I would talk to them. My counselors – I would talk to them. My principal – I would talk to him. Secretaries – I talked to a lot of people in high school. I talked with everybody. (Laina)

Another student described how his school counselor at the career center he attended gave him information about the college he is currently attending. It is a small private liberal arts college with the reputation of being very selective.

If it wasn’t for…one of the guidance counselors at the career center, I really wouldn’t know as much about [   ] University because she was the one who told me about [it]. It’s a great school…she got me interested and we were talking and stuff like that and she said you should visit the campus. (JB)

Ash, a student who immigrated to the United States at the beginning of his sophomore year in high school, described how his college dreams became a reality as a result of the encouragement from his school counselors and teachers. He explained:

During my junior year because I thought I wouldn’t make it…counselors gave me the confidence to get my grades up…teachers, especially [ESL teacher] because she is always pushing me and saying I can make it. And [math teacher] always tried to encourage me because I hate math and she kept on encouraging me that—don’t say hate because hate is a very strong word. If you say hate, you won’t be able to learn, so always say, I like math. So now I’m using that as encouragement through my college life.

Terra, a freshman, explained that she received help from several teachers and her school counselor in the following ways, “By pretty much helping me pick out my school and the things I needed to do so I could get accepted there. Then with letters I needed and fee waivers and then with financial aid so I could get money.”
Jenn, a freshman, described the help from her counselor in this way:

She was always on me. Every time I turned around, she was giving me scholarship after scholarship application, applications for grants, information on different colleges, telling me here is this deadline. She was on top of me making sure I turned everything in so that anywhere that I did choose to go, I had the money to do it.

Jasmine, a college sophomore who was at the top of her class in high school, also credited a number of people in her high school with assisting in her college decision making.

The counselor, my English teacher, and my administrator. They would talk to me about things, but I think it was more so because of my grades. They would want to know where I expected to attend school so they just kept me thinking I must attend college.

Taniya, a sophomore, expanded on the same theme of support from a number of faculty members that Jasmine expressed above:

It was more or less people were actually pushing us for college. I didn’t go to them for help, but I knew if I needed help I could go to them and ask them for help. There were a lot of teachers that were behind us. They were pushing us to go to school. [My counselor helped me with] what I had to do, how to fill out my application and so forth. She helped me get myself situated.

4.6.4. Impact of Peers – “I wouldn’t be all alone.”

Only two of the participants in the study (15.4%) cited peers as impacting their decision-making process for college. “…I had some friends coming too. I wouldn’t be all alone” was one of Terra’s reasons for choosing her college. Robert described the importance of his friends in deciding to go to college as, “I just feel like maybe a handful of people, we were all focused and knew we were going to college”. Laina, who went to a different school than her friends, described the attitude of most of the participants with her emphatic statement, “As far as actual college, I had to decide it on my own. We
would talk about college together, but as far as the actual college I had to decide it on my own.” While most of the students referred to discussions with friends about college, their families and the adults at school carried a greater weight in their decisions about college. Peers played a much greater role as an influence in attending college as will be discussed in the next section.

4.7. The Influences to Attend College

Throughout the interviews with the college students, a number of factors influenced them to attend college. The factors ranged from how they felt others would perceive them as a person if they did or did not attend college and the expectations they felt people had for them to attend to watching their older friends who had not gone to college and pacts they made with friends to attend. The influences were not as pronounced in the interviews with all participants as were the impact of the people described in the previous section. For those who described the factors they felt were influential, strong feelings about the influences were exhibited.

4.7.1. Perceptions and Expectations of Others – “I knew he was going to be somebody.”

Three of the participants (23.1%) described the influence of how they felt others would perceive them if they did or did not attend college. Along with those perceptions, they also talked about the expectations of others as an influence in deciding to attend college.

For Cam, a college freshman whose college grades are much higher than his high school grades, the way people would perceive him after graduation was an important consideration that influenced his decision to attend college. He described those perceptions as follows:
I went to college because I wanted to and I knew I had to, but also...the perception that people [have] of you...I don't want nobody to look at me like that...When they would see me at basketball or football games. I don't want them to think, “Oh, he’s still [at home].”...everybody’s got potential in high school, but then you hit the real world. Now the only thing that matters is what you’re doing. Either [they are going to think] “he was a good kid in high school and he’s nothing now or he was a good kid in high school and I knew he was going to be somebody.”

Cam also talked about how the perception of a favorite teacher was important when he said, “…if you put that much time into me and you help me out, then I feel a shame in myself if I let you down.”

For Ash, an immigrant student, the perception of being a role model for younger siblings and friends influenced his decision to attend college. He takes that responsibility seriously and said:

They all wanted me to go. Especially my sister, she’s always saying something. If I can do it, she also can do it. Then almost all my junior, sophomore, and freshmen friends...they [say] “if you can do it, we can, too.” So now I have a responsibility to go so I will be their role model...[it] is enough for me to work toward my accomplishments.

Jasmine, a sophomore, reflected on the perceptions she felt that the faculty had of her and how it influenced her decisions to pursue a college education:

I was lucky that the counselors and administrators know who I was because of my grades. They noticed me a lot and they were checking on my status...They were able to bring things to me (i.e. scholarship information and college applications).

4.7.2. Friends Who Did Not Go to College – “I saw their lives and the way they are turning out.”

Observing the lives of those who did not pursue postsecondary education and entered the workforce after graduation was an influence on some students’ decision to attend college. While a number of students made inferences to friends who did not attend
college, two of the participants (15.4%) cited this theme as influential in their decisions to attend college. Jasmine, a high achieving student in both high school and college, describes how peers a year or two older than her influenced her decision to attend college. Her observations of their lives, without a college education, influenced her decision to attend college:

I can say my peers somewhat influenced my decision to go to college because when I look at my peers…and a lot of people did not fill out their college applications…and they’re not doing anything productive. I knew I could not neglect my opportunity to go to college. I did not want to stay at home and I was not going to work in a job I did not like all my life.

Kay, a sophomore at a large state university, also describes how the example of older friends influenced his choice to attend college.

I have some friends that graduated before me and they did not go to college. I saw their lives and the way they are turning out, so I don’t want to end up like them. They kind of influenced me not to go that direction and actually go to school…Some of them [encouraged me to go] and some [encouraged me] by their example.

4.7.3. Pacts with Friends to Attend College – “That was one of our plans.”

Two of the male participants in the study (15.4% of the total population and 33% of the male population) made agreements with friends early in high school to attend college. They took those agreements to heart and felt they were an important influence in attending college. Both of the participants, expressing the agreements they made with friends as an influence in attending college, were athletes in high school and one is a collegiate athlete. It was interesting to note that friends’ opinions did not seem as important to the females in the study. They made mention of discussing college with their friends, but the females in the study cited family members as influential in their college
decisions. The following excerpts illustrate the agreements that Robert and Cam made with friends early in their high school years.

A couple of friends and me, going in to high school…we were all focused and knew that we were all going to be [attending] college. At least that was the plan. (Robert, college freshman at a private college)

My grandma always told me that your friends are who you are. I always try to find good friends. My best friends…we talked about that stuff [college]. That was one of our plans. What do I look like not going to college when my best friends are in college? (Cam, college freshman at a state university)

4.7.4. Outside Influences – “How do I apply?”

Four participants (30.8%) described events and conversations that influenced their decisions about college—for one person it was listening to a motivational speaker, for another it was an event sparked by a friend’s mother, for one student it was a conversation with an older friend already in college, and for the other it was sitting in on a class during a college visit and being encouraged to participate by the professor. These events and conversations, while not large events, made a lasting impression on each of the participants and impacted their decisions about college. The following excerpts are their descriptions of the events in response to the question “Were there people outside of school who helped you with your college choice?”

My friend…her mother actually went to college so her junior year she went on a college tour and she came back and told me about the college tour. I never went on a college tour or anything. My mom sort of tried to talk to me, but she didn’t really know anything about college so I had to be self motivated…if you’re a first-generation college student, it’s really hard for your parents to talk to you. So I would say my friend’s mother, who went to college, and she [the friend] was able to do a tour. She was telling me this school is perfect for you. Their grades are high. Their classes are small. She was telling me all about the school and it was like I had been there. (Jasmine, sophomore at a private Historically Black College)

I do not know his name, but if I ever meet him I would try and stay in contact with him. He’s Fortune 500, commercial real estate. I was doing the Cotillion, he
was the motivational speaker and I cannot remember his name…I’ve been wanting to meet him ever since. He’s got a big firm, complexes here and other places. He was one of the biggest people who made my decision. He was talking about college and how he went to [my high school]…and he was just a regular person. Now he is Fortune 500. (Cam, freshman at a state university)

I came to [this school] for the multicultural visit and the campus was so great. I was at a political science class and the professor engaged me in a conversation and I was comfortable. I was just visiting! A high school student! And he was like, so? And I felt like he cared about what I had to say. Once I left, I was like, okay, how do I apply? (JB, sophomore at a private liberal arts college)

I have a friend who is currently at [a large state university]. I was going to go to a college of nursing because I was a nursing major and she told me, she said, “you’re a very wishy-washy person, if you decide to change your major and you’re stuck at [nursing school] then you’re going to transfer and take all these other classes, so maybe you need to go to a school that has a little bit of everything. [My college] has a really great nursing program which is why I came here…I think that being in a college with a variety of different majors and minors…was a major reason why I chose it, and she helped me with that decision. (Jenn, sophomore at a private liberal arts college, no longer a nursing major)

4.7.5. The Need to Get Away – “Far away, but not too far.”

Over half the participants in the study (53.8%) referenced the need to get away from home as an influence in their decision to attend college. A common thread for several students was the distance of the college from home. Two of the young women talked about their choice of schools about a two hour drive from their homes. Terra described one of her reasons for choosing her college as “[it is] far away, but not too far way from home” and, similarly, Dawn described the reason for selecting her college as “it was not too far from home, but not too close either.” Laina explained that being over an hour from home for college was beneficial for her because at home there is “too much drama.” Robert also expressed a similar desire to be away from home while not too far away, but his reasons also included leaving his neighborhood when he stated, “It was
close enough to home, but also, I was getting away from the inner city life. Out here, it’s like suburban and I think that’s what I needed.”

Another reason that influenced two participants to choose a college at a distance were their responsibilities at home and their fear that if they remained at home and commuted to college, those responsibilities would interfere with their ability to keep up academically. The following excerpts describe those reasons:

[At home] I do house chores like cooking and cleaning and all that stuff. That did not let me concentrate on my high school education. You go home, you cook, and by the time I’m done cooking, I become tired. I wanted to be away from home to see if that would help. (Ash, freshman)

I needed to get away from my family because if I was not away from my family, I don’t think I would still be in college. My family is a close family and we tend to stick together. My mom really wanted me to go to [local colleges] because they were close and I could commute. I think if I would have done that, I wouldn’t have the focus that I need when I’m here…If I was back at home, I’d be more likely to work to help my mom out because she’s a single parent raising three kids. (JB, sophomore)

Jasmine, who graduated from high school in three years, viewed going away to college as an important part of her growth:

I did not want to stay at home. I felt like going out of town would give me the opportunity to mature and learn how to be more independent.

4.8. Preparation Which Helped with College Success

All of the participants in the study articulated certain classes and teachers that helped prepare them academically for college. Two of the participants (15.4%) felt they were well-prepared for college in comparison to their college peers. Three (23.1%) felt they were better prepared than their urban peers, but behind their other college peers. Seven of the participants (53.8%) felt that their preparation was lacking. One student was unable to answer the question because she did not know which of her peers attended
suburban and urban schools, but disclosed that she, along with most of her college peers, were struggling with the college level work. Will and Robert, both high school and college athletes, felt they were better prepared than many of their classmates as they explained in the following excerpts:

I’d say it’s better because going through high school I figured out what my mistakes were and when I got to college I understood I was on my own and it was about my decision making, so I just learned from all my high school mistakes. (Will, attending a state university)

I was more prepared for college because I was told more and I learned more on the way. You’re in middle school and no one gives you pointers to go into high school. I felt like high school gave me that extra help to let me know what was on the way. (Robert, attending a private college)

It should be noted that both Robert and Will identified that, as athletes, they participated in extra tutoring and study tables in college.

The most frequently cited beneficial classes were English classes. The participants felt they were challenged in their English classes and developed good writing skills for the work they would be doing in college. The participants who only took English as a Second Language classes and not regular English classes, however, cited writing as a weakness, and that will be discussed in the section on skills lacking for college success. In addition to high school coursework, the participants discussed the encouragement they received from faculty, programs that helped them succeed, and the impact of high school activities.

4.8.1. High School Courses That Enhanced College Success – “I should have taken...”

Over half of the participants (61.5%) in the study took at least one AP class during high school and about 30% took more than one AP class. The school offered courses in AP English Literature, AP English Language, and AP Calculus each year and
either AP Chemistry or AP Biology during the years the participants of this study attended there. All eight of the students who participated in the AP program felt it was beneficial. Jasmine and Taniya (both sophomores at HBCUs) described how their two AP classes helped them as freshmen in college in the following excerpts:

The AP Biology, even though it was kind of a breeze in high school, I could remember the charts when I got in my first level biology. I remembered seeing the things so that when I took general biology it was fairly remedial. As far as AP Literature was concerned, we all have to take an English course, and I blew straight through that English course. (Jasmine)

My AP English class and my AP Biology class. That was because when I first came to college I was majoring in biology. Taking that class prepared me well with a lot of things that I had to know once I got to biology. Once I got in there, people were like, “how do you know this?” I already had experience with that stuff. And AP English, with Mrs. [ ]! The way we were taught to write. My teachers were saying, “What school did you just come from?” The AP classes helped out a lot. (Taniya)

All participants who took AP English felt that the level of writing required in that class helped them develop the skills they needed for college. The AP English class was described as “a workload similar to what we might encounter in college” (Shayna, junior). Laina, a sophomore, described the AP English class as “the class I actually had to study for. It forced me to learn the material or I was going to get a bad grade.” Those who did not take AP English also cited their English teachers as providing them with writing skills that are helping them as college students. Dawn, a freshman, explained that her AP English class “made me a better critical thinker for the most part. We have a lot of reading that we have to do and I am able to pick out and analyze quicker.” Robert described the feeling of being “one step ahead” of others in his college classes because of the strength of his preparation in AP English.
None of the three immigrant students took AP classes in high school, but viewed them as valuable as they were asked the advice they would give to incoming high school freshmen. JB, a sophomore who did not take any AP classes in high school, but did take physics and precalculus, gave the following advice to high school freshmen:

Take AP Classes and take the post-secondary courses. Get some college credits because colleges are accepting college credits [you earn] while you are in high school. Take AP classes. TAKE THEM! TAKE THEM! TAKE THEM! It will help you so much. And take a foreign language, too!

Kay, a college sophomore who participated in postsecondary options, but did not take any AP classes also talked about the importance of AP coursework and said: “I should have taken some AP classes because that would have helped a lot.” Ash, a freshman who was only in the United States for three years during high school, also encouraged high school students to “try their best and take higher classes like AP courses.”

Some math courses were also perceived as helpful in college level work by students not needing higher level college mathematics courses for their majors. All participants except one took math at a level of Algebra 2 or higher and over half (53.8%) took precalculus or higher. Three students described their math preparation as helpful (23.1%).

The school offers a college preparatory math class for students who struggled in Algebra 2 and do not feel ready for precalculus. The two students who took that class said it helped them get ready for their college math classes. Cam, a college freshman, described his experience with the teacher in college preparatory math as one where, “It was not the math class that would get me to college, but she took me from a different
place from where I was.” Will, also a freshman, explained his experience in college prep math as follows:

It was like a mixture of algebra and trigonometry. Being a business major, you go through a lot of math classes. I thing that [college prep] math class helped me out with different math problems. It is different courses all combined into one and that helped me with my major.

Will recommended that seniors who are not ready for precalculus, should not skip taking math during their senior year, but instead, take college prep math to be better prepared for college-level mathematics.

Jasmine, a sophomore who felt that precalculus helped her advance in college mathematics, described her experience:

When we first came (to college), we had to take a placement test for math, and I tested out of the first math class. So I only had to take three math classes instead of four. That definitely helped my schedule.

Others did not feel prepared for college level math and that will be discussed in the section on skills lacking for college success.

4.8.2. Drawing on Encouragement – “Take advantage of those opportunities.”

The research literature supports that close connections with the adults in a school helps students achieve academic success (Adelman, 2006; Martinez & Klopott, 2005, Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). All the participants (100%) in this study shared that the relationships they had with certain high school teachers, counselors, and administrators helped them prepare for college. Nine of the participants (69.2%) mentioned by name, one or two adults in their school that they felt encouraged them to attend college and made them believe they could succeed. The other four participants talked about a person
in the high school by their role (i.e. teacher, counselor, coach) who helped them prepare for college.

JB described the impact that the encouragement he received from his school counselors at both the high school and the career center in his pursuit of a college education. He said, “They would offer you a lot of pamphlets and would say, ‘here look at these college.”’ He continued to describe how his teachers reinforced the encouragement of his counselors, especially his math teacher, in the following excerpt:

There were teachers, especially [teacher’s name], a teacher there, she always tried to tell me, “If they are sending you to colleges, take it. Take advantage of those opportunities.

Ash recalls his ESL teacher’s encouragement in the statement, “She is always pushing me and saying I can make it.” Jenn describes her school counselor’s encouragement to apply for financial aid since she knew that her parent’s income was just high enough to disqualify her from obtaining a number of government subsidized grants but not high enough to provide significant contributions to her college education:

Every scholarship you could possibly think of, grants, loans. She gave me information on the loans with the lowest interest rates. Websites. I got everything on all of it. Literally, I got applications every day for scholarships. Even if sometimes they didn’t apply to me, I got them.

Excerpts by participants in previous sections also refer to the encouragement that various individuals in the school provided to them.

4.8.3. High School Programs – “It helped me become more well-rounded.”

Every one of the participants in this study participated in some type of program designed to help them prepare for college. About half of the participants (53.8%) were involved with Bank One/Chase Leadership Academy (the name changed with the
takeover of Bank One by Chase Bank during the three years the participants in the study attended high school, but the program remained the same). It is a leadership/mentoring program for a select group of high school seniors with the executives at Chase Bank. The seniors meet with their mentors several times a month throughout their senior year for presentations on a variety of things from opening and maintaining a checking account to interviewing skills and techniques to networking and professionalism. The high school faculty member in charge of the program reported that some of the graduates of the program remain in contact with their mentors after graduation.

Every participant (100%) who was involved in this program referred to it as a significant help in preparing them with important skills for college. Dawn, a freshman, described her experience with Chase Leadership Academy as the high school program that prepared her for college. She stated, “Chase taught us how to network. We had a couple of sessions on checkbook keeping and even a couple on taxes.” One of the participants said she regrets not taking advantage of this opportunity, and another student said the program helped make her a better-rounded person. Further, Ash, a freshman, mentioned that receiving a scholarship from Chase Leadership Academy was helpful during his first semester in school.

Jasmine, a sophomore, noted that the Bank One Academy was a special program that helped her prepare for college in the following excerpt:

Bank One Academy helped because every time we had our meetings, they told us almost everything about networking and professionalism. We had speakers. There was a millionaire who came one time. We did service, so it helped me become well-rounded.
The I KNOW I CAN organization plays a significant role within the school. There are two volunteers who work at the school in conjunction with the school counselors to provide assistance with college applications for all students, disseminate information about summer camp opportunities for underclassmen, and provide fee waivers for college applications and ACT/SAT exam fees for students on free or reduced lunch. They also work closely with the school counselors to provide assistance to students and their families in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Every participant (100%) in the study commended the help they received from the I KNOW I CAN volunteers as being influential in getting their financial aid for college. Cam (freshman at a state university), when asked what program helped him in college, quickly answered, “I KNOW I CAN is a great program, especially the two ladies we’ve got. I’m not even in high school and they are still helping me.” Kay (a sophomore at a state university), also talked about the help that the I KNOW I CAN volunteers gave him in high school in obtaining financial aid and then shared, that on his campus, “I KNOW I CAN has math help. They have study rooms where there are TA’s there so if you need help in any subject. They have different rooms where you can go and it helps.” Further information about the I KNOW I CAN program will be reported in the section on financing a college education.

One student, JB, an immigrant student, was the only participant in this study who took part in the Upward Bound program. He credits them with helping him explore his options as a first-generation college student. He stated, “I would say Upward Bound was very influential. They have a program that helps first-generation students get to a four
year college.” They provided him with the skills and knowledge about a variety of colleges and gave him the courage to apply to a selective private school.

4.8.4. High School Activities – “Go out and expand your horizons.”

The high school the participants in this study attended has a strong athletic history and over half of the group participated in at least one sport and two are attending college on athletic scholarships. They talked about the importance of being a part of an athletic team in their connection to school. Will, a freshman athlete, explained that “Athletics can be good to help prepare [for postsecondary education]. It makes you work harder when you have something to look forward to.” He was referring to the necessity of making grades in order to participate and working toward possible college scholarships. He also cited the importance of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes to him during high school. Every person in the study participated in at least one extra curricular activity and most participated in three or four. When asked to give advice to high school freshmen about preparing in high school to be successful in college, many of the students encouraged them to be involved and to try new things. Laina, a sophomore, encouraged them to be individuals through their activities and said, “Don’t always try to stick with your friends. You have to go out and expand your horizons.”

4.9. Skills Lacking for College Success

When asked about their preparation for college, some felt they were prepared for college and others felt unprepared. As stated previously, seven of the thirteen participants (53.8%) felt unprepared for college, while three others (23.1%) felt as well prepared as their urban peers, but behind their other college peers. Interestingly, six of the seven who felt unprepared had the highest high school GPAs of the group. The three students
attending private liberal arts colleges and the student attending the most selective of the state universities all felt unprepared for the rigor of the coursework at their colleges.

Shayna, a 4.0 student in high school attending a selective private liberal arts college, eloquently stated her feelings about her preparation for college in comparison to many of her college classmates.

I felt like I was so cheated, because there were questions being asked in the classroom, like “who’s been to this place?” And I could always say I know where it is on the map. I wouldn’t know how the environment is so it would be kind of hard for me to discuss something even though I’m the type of person that makes it so I can be in the discussion. It was kind of difficult to say from a first person point of view or experience, so sometimes when it came to…where you come from, sometimes it made it hard for me to understand the culture of the school and the way the subjects are talked about.

Jasmine, another 4.0 student in high school attending a private HBCU, described her preparation in comparison to her classmates from suburban schools.

I feel like I was less prepared than those who attended [suburban] schools because they have different resources…They have ACT/SAT preparation. They had a lot of experience dealing with computers…They knew what to expect once they got to college…They already had the opportunity to dissect in a laboratory. We didn’t have resources to dissect or do anything of that nature in biology class.

Terra described her feelings of frustration about her preparation for the expectations of college level work as follows:

They prepared us with the information, but we weren’t prepared for classes that are really big. There’s no one-on-one with the teacher unless you go to their office hours and half the time, you don’t have time for that. There’s no [daily] homework. You take notes and take an exam. [In high school] you have homework every day. You have papers and projects and a whole bunch of stuff to learn it better. You take quizzes and then you have an exam. We don’t have all that in college.

The participants explained that they lacked academic skills in some coursework, lacked study skills needed for college level work, had poor time management skills,
had missed out on opportunities that would have helped them be better prepared for college.

4.9.1. Sub-Par Academic Skills – “Why don’t you know this?”

While most of the participants in this study felt prepared by their high school English classes for college work, the same was not true for math and sciences, especially for students interested in majors requiring strong math and science skills such as pre-medicine, nursing, and pre-pharmacy. The exception to students reporting feeling well prepared for college level English were students who had been in English as a Second Language English classes throughout most of high school. The following are excerpts from students’ conversations about their lack of preparation for some of their college level courses.

Jenn (former nursing major at a private liberal arts college) described her feeling of inadequacy compared to that of her college classmates in her Chemistry class.

…the school I was at, I literally did nothing. I had a few classes maybe my senior and junior year that I was challenged with but other than that, I could go to class a few days out of the week and get by. I can’t recall half of the things that I learned and it’s catching up with me now. I had a chemistry class my first quarter here…and I was in that class with a lot of people that went to [suburban school districts] and they knew it. They were like, “Wow! This was easy. Why don’t you know this?” And I felt like I was dumb. And I knew I wasn’t. I worked so hard for a C when in high school I was in AP Chemistry and I got straight A’s…So it’s like I’m having to catch up and it’s hard. I wish I would have had someone to push me more in my advanced classes. Not saying that all my teachers didn’t push me, some of my teachers did push me, but a select few. It seemed like at that point, they were so frustrated that they just didn’t care anymore…And now I’m paying for it.

Kay (pre-med major at state university on a full scholarship) also struggled in his college chemistry classes even after taking Chemistry through Post Secondary Education Options at the community college his senior year in high school. He also described a
similar experience to Jenn’s in his math classes as he shared, “It seemed that they covered a lot more in classes and everything than we did…I took precalc in high school and they took the same class, but they knew stuff that I still don’t know.”

For JB (sophomore immigrant student at selective liberal arts college), writing has posed the challenge. He expressed concern that students planning to attend college and taking English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in high school as opposed to regular English classes are not being challenged to write at a level necessary to succeed at the college level.

This was one of the most difficult things I have ever experienced. To have the chance to do more writing and writing about topics that are more academic. I would definitely change my curriculum back in high school. If I would have known that being in ESL until my junior year…I should’ve done it earlier…when I was a senior, I took a regular English class. [The senior English teacher] did emphasize the writing, but for me it was kind of late because I had spent three years in ESL where we didn’t do as much writing…writing little essays, not a big research paper. Last semester I had to write three research papers. One was 20 pages, one was 15 pages, and one was 12 pages. They were all due back to back.

He continued to explain that the writing is a majority of his grade and his inadequate writing skills have impacted his college grades. He utilizes the peer tutors in the writing lab and a writing tutor. He also works closely with his professors and writes papers early and makes appointments a week before they are due to meet with the professors to review what he has written. When talking about the support in place to help him he said, “for me if I were not here [at the college he attends], I don’t thing I would be in college…because of the amount of support that the school has. Telling me…Keep it up!”

Another immigrant student also expressed concern about the challenge of his ESL English class in preparing him for the challenge of writing in college. He too has
connected with tutors and the writing lab at his college, but worries about the repercussions of his poor writing skills.

I think in high school you always play around. [The ESL teacher] always said write a one page essay, I’d write half. But in college, they say three pages – three pages! Less than that and you get a very low score. (Ash, freshman at a state university)

Terra, a freshman, expressed concern that in high school teachers gave the answers to students’ questions too quickly instead of encouraging them to become independent learners and find answers for themselves, an important skill for college level work.

A lot of kids, when they don’t understand something, they go straight to the teacher…. but in college you’re not going to be able to go straight to your professor and ask for help. You’re going to have to figure it out on your own. …tell the student, “Keep looking, when you find the answer you come and show me the answer.” If you automatically go to the teacher and they give you the answer, when you hit college, you’re going to want the answer and go to your professor, and they’re just going to look at you and tell you to go find the answer.

4.9.2. Study Skills – “Study habits in high school? I didn’t study!”

A consistent theme with the participants when asked what aspect of their preparation for college they would do differently if they could go back in time was to develop good study habits. Ten of the participants (76.9%) found they had not been challenged enough in high school to develop the study skills they would need in college. They specifically discussed how their lack of good study skills made college more difficult.

Terra (freshman at a state university with below a 2.25 GPA in college) did not even think when asked this question, but immediately replied:
Study habits in high school. I didn’t study. It was so easy not to study because we had the worksheets. If I could go back, I’d study more and make my own notes so that when I got to college, I’d be prepared to study already…

The same sentiment was echoed by Kay (sophomore at a state university) who said “I would have prepared better in academics. I would have studied more and gotten used to ways of studying.”

Laina (sophomore at a state university) shared the following:

I would definitely make myself study more. Even if I didn’t feel like I had to. Study more, read the material…learn how to study. Sit down and actually read the material and understand it instead of just remembering it while taking a quiz.

Cam (freshman at a state university) talked about knowing what to do as far as good study skills, but not studying in high school and developing those skills. He works two jobs while in college and his GPA in college is far higher than his GPA in high school.

I already knew what to do. I knew what to do in high school, but I would just cheat myself. I knew how to cheat the system…I was just cutting all the corners and I knew what to do in high school, but then I got to college, and it’s not the same.

4.9.3. Time Management Skills – “It seemed like I was the only one who didn’t know how to manage my time.”

Along with study skills, a common theme among the participants’ responses was a lack of good time management skills. Over three quarters (76.9%) specifically stated that time management was an obstacle in doing their best in college. Laina (sophomore at a state university) described her experience in the statement, “As far as the time management – it seemed like I was the only one who didn’t know how to manage my
time.” She also talked about learning to use a planner and how her lack of time management skills “made the academic work a little harder”.

Robert (a freshman at a private college) described time management as the most difficult part of the transition from high school to college for him:

Time management is probably the hardest to get used to. You’re used to someone waking you. You are used to being reminded and constantly told about different stuff that now you have to do on your own. I think that’s the hardest part. Taking over from someone already having that structure for you and now you are having to be functional for your own self.

Kay (sophomore at a state university) explained how he developed better time management skills after getting a 15 hour a week job during his sophomore year and as a result improved his study skills.

I think it’s about time management. When I was in high school, I didn’t study so I didn’t know how to. Now I can sit down and study for like two hours, take a break and study again. At first I would sit down all night and try to cram everything and it wasn’t helping. I was still not getting everything in. So studying [over time] was good. I leaned that now and that’s helping me.

Several freshmen who have not worked while they are in college talked about the time they wasted and how they feel working will help with their time management skills.

Terra’s (freshman at state university) statement below sums up what a number of participants said about wasting time and working as a way to get organized:

I think it [working] will help me more because… I have so much free time that I should be studying, but I’m not. I’m hanging with my friends. I feel like maybe if I have a job, making money, I won’t have to worry about anything…I could have a job and do my schoolwork. I feel better doing it like that, than having a whole bunch of free time and then not doing it.

4.9.4. Missed Opportunities

A consistent theme with a number of the participants in the study was the lament for opportunities that they missed while in high school because they did not realize how
important it would be in college – the time wasted in high school, not taking challenging courses that would have helped them in college, not filling out scholarship applications, not starting the application process soon enough, and not taking coursework seriously enough. For Jenn (freshman at a private liberal arts college), it was the scholarship opportunity to attend a highly selective private girls’ high school that she passed on in order to attend a public urban high school with a good athletic program. When asked what she would have done differently if she could have changed one aspect of her preparation in high school for college she responded:

I would have been in a different school. I remember when I was in middle school; I had an offer to go to CSG. Somebody was going to pay – a full scholarship. I was like, “No, I don’t want to go to an all girls’ school.” I was big on sports. That was the main reason for me to go to my high school because of sports. You know, the education wasn’t terrible, but I wish I would have went more toward the education because I’m not doing sports now, and it’s not helping me now. I wish I would have gone to that different high school.

4.10. Financing a College Education

Noeth and Wimberly (2002) reported that over half of first-generation low income students expressed difficulties with accessing financial aid for college. The students in this study shared that the FAFSA was a challenge for many of them, but they felt they had good support from their school through the I KNOW I CAN program. Most of them attended workshops with their parents where they received assistance in completing and submitting the paperwork. All of the students received government grants, one is attending school on a Gates Millennium Scholarship, another has a full scholarship at a large state university, two are receiving athletic scholarships, two are receiving tuition scholarships at a selective private liberal arts college, and others have partial scholarship monies. Two of the students have no loans and others have small loans. Two students
have larger government subsidized loans and one has private loans in addition to scholarships. While most students reported that with the assistance of their school counselors and the I KNOW I CAN volunteers, they were able to successfully navigate the FAFSA process, there were difficulties for students with special circumstances.

4.10.1. Difficulties in Accessing Financial Aid – “They don’t know the option is there.”

For students with family circumstances that did not fit the parameters of the FAFSA, accessing financial aid for college was a challenge. Dawn (freshman at a state university) explained how she worried about how she would pay for her education. She lived with various relatives throughout her senior year and her parents were deceased. She did not realize that would put her in the status of an independent student and that she would qualify for a large amount of federal aid for college. She explained how there are many independent students like her that are not in college because they did not know about the aid they could receive.

A lot of people I know don’t know about the independent status. There are people that live with their grandparents, aunts, or cousins and don’t know that they could get their schooling paid for through FAFSA. They don’t know the option is there…There were a lot of people in my [high school] classes who lived with extended family members. They are at home now because they don’t know that there are resources to pay for their schooling.

One participant shared how his parents’ separation during his senior year almost derailed his dream of attending college. Due to difficulties in getting signatures and reporting parental incomes for the FAFSA, he almost did not receive the financial aid package to start at the state university he attends. He shared that through the help of I KNOW I CAN, his father, the high school faculty, and the university financial aid office,
his aid package came through at the last minute and he was able to begin school on schedule.

4.10.2. Assistance in High School about Financial Aid- “I KNOW I CAN!”

The support system in place through the school personnel and the I KNOW I CAN volunteers at the high school in this study was reported by all students as a positive factor in their successful matriculation to college from high school. One hundred percent of the participants reported receiving some type of assistance from the high school about financial aid. The staff from I KNOW I CAN and the school counselors provided information sessions in the classrooms for every senior. Parents were invited to attend workshops in the evenings with community volunteers to help them complete their FAFSA. The majority of the families of the participants took advantage of the workshops. Administrators and counselors held regular meetings with seniors that students noted as being helpful. The following are excerpts of student comments about financial aid in answer to the question, what type of financial aid information for college did you receive at your high school?

We had a workshop administered through I KNOW I CAN. The people that came and talked with us about FAFSA was good preparation because I did not know what that was. They handed out forms [about workshops] and where they would be. I attended the site closest to me and it was very good. (Jasmine, sophomore)

The I KNOW I CAN people…both of them helped me. I always go to them and asked questions about how I will be able to get what I need. They gave me a number to call and I called. I was lucky when they sent me the letter that said, “Congratulations, you are now an I KNOW I CAN scholar.” (Ash, freshman)

[The I KNOW I CAN evening with the FAFSA], that was a big help. They helped you fill out the forms that night. Most of the people filled out everything that night. (Kay, sophomore)
I went to and I KNOW I CAN meeting and they showed us how to fill it out. I ended up filling it out online. My mom doesn’t like doing that kind of stuff so I had to end up getting her information and filling it out online. (Laina, sophomore)

A lot, and it was a lot! Scholarship posters were everywhere. Personally, I took advantage of some of them, but once I got the grants and things and saw what [my college] would offer me, I didn’t need anything else because my first year was paid for. (JB, sophomore)

4.10.3. Attitudes toward Loans – “Just remember, you’re going to have to pay it back.”

The attitudes of the participants toward loans varied. None of them wanted to borrow money, and most expressed concern about the need to borrow money. Eleven of the thirteen participants (84.6%) have borrowed money for their college education. For some, loans were necessary for school, and, although they were not happy about it, they knew they would have to take out loans to meet their college education goals. Most families were also concerned about loans, but supported their students in borrowing money for their education. When asked about taking out loans, Shayna, who has a sizeable scholarship and grant monies toward her education at a private liberal arts college, explained:

I was so opposed! I really wanted to get the maximum amount of grants and scholarships so I wouldn’t have to pay it back. I was just thinking of my mom and how she despises having to pay back any sort of loan back so I just really didn’t want to have that hanging over my head and possibly getting me in debt…But I realized it was better to just get it now and deal with it in the future. [My mom said] just remember you’re going to have to pay it back.

Taniya said her attitude toward loans has evolved from a carefree attitude to one of more concern. She described how she has become more careful in her spending.

At first I didn’t care because I’m trying to go to school, eventually I’ll be paying it back and I started getting refund checks [from financial aid]. I was liking those; I was just spending away. Then the more I got, I got a little wiser and understood that eventually, when I get out of school, I’m going to have to pay those back. So that’s a lot of money.
JB describes his willingness to live on a tight budget in order to limit his debt liability at the end of college.

I really don’t want to take out more than I need to. My personal life, my financial life right now is really tight, but I don’t care. I’m not going to indulge myself with loans if I don’t need to.

Laina describes her fear of taking out loans, but the need to do so to continue her education.

I was afraid. My mom talked about her loans all the time which she had to pay back. I really didn’t want to [take out loans], but if I didn’t, I wouldn’t be able to come back. I didn’t have a cosigner for my loan so I had to search long and hard to find a loan without a cosigner.

4.11. The Challenges of Being Different

For some students, being “different” from their college classmates was an adjustment. Being “different” manifested in many ways – race, socioeconomic status, personal values, and first-generation status were some of those mentioned by the students. Four of the participants (30.8%) reported that they felt different than their college peers, and they shared that they did not realize what was ahead when they chose their colleges. They did not realize that they would feel different. They are happy with the colleges they are attending, but shared that, at times, their differences can make them feel isolated from some of their peers. The students at predominately White, middle and upper middle class colleges elaborated on this issue. Shayna reflected this in her statement:

I wish that I would have known that most times I would be the only (blank) in my class or certain atmospheres; blank referring to my socioeconomic status, my race, and my social choices. For example, not drinking when everyone around you talks about it like it’s a necessity. It’s not horrible, but it can make one lonely and second guess his or her achievements, goals, and sacrifices.
JB, a sophomore at a private liberal arts college, explained his frustration in his Black Studies class at being expected to be the expert because he is Black as he said, “I have a Black studies class and when they would talk about race, they would expect me to know stuff! I’m like, I don’t know, I’m here to learn just like you are.” He reflected on how his education in an urban school gave him advantages of understanding people from different backgrounds and socioeconomic levels that many of his college classmates from more affluent families did not experience. He expressed frustration at the discomfort of others in discussions about racism and stereotyping, but concluded that “…people don’t know about it if you don’t experience it”.

Like many low-income, first-generation students, Laina did not visit the state university located in a small Appalachian town, before her arrival to begin classes. She describes her first day of class and the adjustment as follows:

Before I got here, I didn’t do a visitation or anything. I just came and had a map and went to my first class. Once I got here, like the whole environment, I had to adjust to it because, of course, coming from an almost all Black high school to a majority White college. But I adjusted. As far as the environment, [it] was real easy cause everyone was friendly and waving and smiling.

Taniya, a sophomore at a private HBCU, talked about being different because of her first-generation status when asked what advice she would give to educators to help them prepare first-generation students as she explained, “Explain what college is going to be about. Give them a brief understanding. That type of stuff I didn’t catch at home.” She talked about how her classmates with parents who had graduated from college knew things about the college experience while she did not. She explained the challenges she faced as a new college student and how as a sophomore she is finally feeling
knowledgeable about college in her statement, “It was all so new to me because no one had ever explained to me what college was about. I’m just now catching on because I am first-generation.”

For Ash, the opposite effect occurred. After feeling “different” in high school, he now feels like he fits in with his college peers. He explained this in the following excerpt:

I thought I would not be able to make friends immediately, but when I went, everyone was friendly. When I was in high school, they would always make fun of the way I dress and stuff. In college, no one cares. You can even wear your PJs to class and no one cares. That was a surprise. I thought it would be like high school. In high school they change their shoes almost every day. Because I am from a poor family, I always wear the same shoes to high school. They always make fun of it. I thought in college, it would be the same, but it is not.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Overview of the Study

This qualitative study explored the perceptions and attitudes that first-generation urban college students had of their preparation for postsecondary education. It examined how graduates from one urban high school perceived their academic preparation for high school. It also explored the people and programs that impacted their decisions for postsecondary education, the roles various people in their lives played in their decision making, and the academic coursework and programs that helped them prepare for postsecondary education. It included a purposeful sample of 13 first-generation, urban college students, including seven females and six males. All participants had been continuously enrolled in college since graduating from high school. Ten of the participants were African American, and three were immigrant students.

Through an in-depth analysis of the transcripts of the individual interviews and biographical questionnaires, six overarching themes emerged from the data. These included: (a) people who impacted decisions about college; (b) influences to attend college; (c) preparation which helped with college success; (d) skills lacking for college success; (e) financing a college education; and (f) challenges of being different. The following section discusses how these themes answer the research questions set forth in this study.
5.1.1. Research Question 1

What perceptions and attitudes do first-generation, urban college students have of their secondary preparation for postsecondary education?

a. What were the strengths and weaknesses of their secondary school preparation for postsecondary education?

In the findings from the interview transcripts and the biographical questionnaires, the students identified both strengths and weaknesses in their preparation for postsecondary education. When they compared their education to their college peers, most perceived that they were equally or better prepared than many of their peers who attended other urban schools, but behind their peers from suburban schools. One student described it as “the suburban students learned to be focused sooner”. Another student compared his preparation and that of other college friends who were educated in urban schools to those who received their high school preparation in suburban schools as “not so good”.

Students who were attending private liberal arts colleges expressed the greatest concern about their preparation. One student described the feeling of being behind academically as “I feel like I’m running ten times harder” to keep up with other students. Another student at another private liberal arts college expressed her feelings of frustration in the statement, “So it’s like I’m having to catch up and it is hard.” Both were top students in high school. Each one talked about knowing they are as “smart” as their college classmates, but feeling that they must do far more studying and research to “catch
up” with others. One said “I still haven’t achieved at the level they have and it makes me second guess my abilities”.

Some participants were concerned that in a number of their high school classes, they were given information too readily instead of being challenged to work for it. Teachers would immediately give them answers when they asked questions. The students said that the teachers should instead require that students search for answers on their own and then report back to the teacher with their findings. The students felt that learning those research skills in high school were important skills for being successful in the college arena.

The most frequent response related to weakness in their preparation was poor time management skills. Throughout the interviews, the participants described their lack of time management skills as an impediment in postsecondary education, especially in their first terms as a college student. They felt they wasted valuable time during both high school and college because they did not understand how to manage their time. The lack of study skills related directly to poor time management skills. Of concern to some of the participants was the change from high school where they were given worksheets instead of being required to listen, process, and take notes at the level that is required of college students.

The lack of laboratory work in science classes provided obstacles for the participants in their college chemistry and biology classes. They described not having the experience of dissecting in biology and chemistry lab experiments when their college classmates were well-versed in laboratory procedures from their high school coursework. Even those students who had taken AP Chemistry and AP Biology had not had the
laboratory experiences that students from more affluent districts had. This was of particular concern for those who were interested in careers in the medical fields. They reported that the lack of those skills directly impacted their grades in those classes.

The students described a number of areas in which they felt prepared for postsecondary education. The most common strength reported by the students was the rigor of the reading and writing skills required in the AP English classes. Every participant who had taken an AP English class described it as the class which best prepared them for college. One student described it as “the work load a little bit similar to what we might encounter in college” and another said “that was the class I actually had to study for. Where I actually had to read all the material, or else.” Students in regular English classes also credited those classes with preparing them for college level writing. The exception was students who took the majority of their English classes in the ESL program. For those students, the level of writing in the ESL classes was not the level they needed for college level writing.

The students who took the college preparatory math course cited it as helpful in their preparation for college math. The course is designed for students who struggled in Algebra 2 and are not ready for precalculus. They explained that the course allowed them to build on their Algebra 2 skills, start a foundation in trigonometry, and enter college with a better understanding of math. The same teacher taught the class to all students who reported it as helping and they credited her with improving their attitude toward math, improving their math skills, and feeling better prepared in their first math class in college.

A number of participants reported that the opportunity for academic preparation for postsecondary education was available, but they did not take advantage of it to the
fullest extent. Some of the students reported not taking advantage of higher level courses that were offered at the school. In hindsight, they said that they now realize that they would have been better prepared for college level coursework if they had challenged themselves more in high school. One participant said he would advise younger students to take more AP classes and stated emphatically, “AP is good!” A number of participants reported that not studying and “getting by” in high school classes has been detrimental to their college grades. When asked what they would do differently, they replied that they would “work harder” and “make sure I was more motivated”.

In the area of financial aid, the participants reported that there was help available in accessing financial aid. They credited their school counselors with providing opportunities to apply for scholarships, their English teachers with helping them write essays for those scholarships, and the I KNOW I CAN volunteers with helping with the FAFSA application. For many students, their parents or family members helped with the paperwork for financial aid. An area of concern was that there were independent students who did not understand the resources available for them to attend college and who are not attending college as a result.

5.1.2. Research question 2

What individuals, programs or experiences have had the greatest impact on first-generation, urban college students’ decision to pursue postsecondary education?

Two emerging themes were identified as relating to Research Question 2. The first of these is People Who Impacted Decisions about College and the second is Influences to Attend College. The participants reported that family members, school personnel, and peers all had an impact on their decision to pursue postsecondary
education. For most students, it was not just one person or experience that helped them decide to attend college, but instead, it was a number of people and events over time that propelled them toward postsecondary education.

First and foremost, the participants credited their parents and close family members with encouraging them to pursue a postsecondary education. Several reported that their families saw a college education as the way to a better life and wanted that life for them. Others related how their parents’ lack of education or discontinuation of their own education resulted in parents pushing them “to do better than what they did”. The familial influence was a driving force behind the participants’ decision to pursue postsecondary education.

For some participants, parents and families lacked the knowledge to help them with decisions about college and they encouraged them to seek out help from their counselors and teachers. The participants shared how the encouragement from faculty members gave them the courage and knowledge they needed to apply for college. The students recalled comments such as “you can do it” from their teachers as influential in their decision making. In many cases, it was encouragement that might have seemed small, but to the person on the receiving end, it made a great impact.

The peer group had a number of influences on the decision to attend college, but was not reported to be as important as the influence of family and high school faculty members. The females in the study reported that they talked about college with friends, but that their friends did not directly influence their college decisions. For several males in the study, a reference was made to agreements/pacts with friends early in high school to attend college and the influence that played in their decision. One student explained
the importance of his friends in his decision to attend college in the question, “What do I look like not going to college when my best friends are in college?” A different peer influence impact the decision to pursue postsecondary education was the older peers who did not attend college. The students described how watching older friends who did not go to college struggle in jobs they did not like provided a picture of what their life would be like if they did not attend college.

The example of those who attended college before them was helpful to some students in their decision making. The Alumni Day sponsored by I KNOW I CAN, in which graduates who were currently enrolled in college came to speak, provided the students with an opportunity to talk with previous graduates about college. They felt that the time spent with college students was helpful in learning more about college life and what to expect. Hearing about college from older peers who were experiencing college made a postsecondary education seem like an attainable goal. In one student’s case, listening to a motivational speaker describe his experiences as a student at the same high school followed by his experiences and successes in college and in the business world made a great impact on his decision to attend college.

5.1.3. Research Question 3

What role do educators, family, peers, and special academic programs or curricula play in the postsecondary educational process for first-generation, urban college students?

The participants in the study described social networks with their families, the school, and their peers that helped them successfully matriculate to postsecondary education. Those social networks align with the conceptual framework utilized for this
study – social capital theory. It is the interrelationship described by White and Glick
(2004) as the social capital that is important in improving academic achievement in
adolescents. The participants in the study reported strong relationships with family and
high school faculty members. Those relationships gave them confidence that they could
be successful in college. The family support was influential in fostering resiliency and
determination in the students that was important in developing a belief that they could
attend college. The encouragement by the school personnel further developed that belief.
Participants referred to their “hard work and effort” as important in getting them to
college and the belief of others that they could do it as instrumental in their success.

When asked what advice they have for high school counselors, teachers, and
administrators that would help them prepare students who will be the first-generation in
their families to attend college for the postsecondary experience, many of the participants
talked about the necessity of high expectations. They encouraged teachers and school
counselors to “push them”, “to give students a push”, and acknowledged that students
might not be appreciative of the push at that time, but they will come to realize that it is
“in their best interests” when they reach college. They talked of the importance of
helping students be focused. They also responded that developing good time management
skills and strong study skills before college were very important to being successful in
postsecondary education. Other suggestions by the participants were to monitor who the
first-generation and independent students are and to provide small group meetings for
them. Topics they suggested for the meetings were what to expect of life in college, how
to fill out paperwork, scholarships, majors (beyond medicine, law, and business), and
scheduling.
The participants responded that as first-generation students they needed extra help from the school in completing the process for college entrance – ACT/SAT, college applications, scholarship applications, and FAFSA. They stated that their school counselors were helpful in providing information about colleges and scholarships and that their English teachers assisted them with essays for colleges and scholarships. The I KNOW I CAN program provided help with college information and FAFSA. Many of the participants also credited their parents and family members with helping with the FAFSA.

Programs that help students connect with school were also mentioned as important in the postsecondary educational process. Every participant in the study connected with the I KNOW I CAN program in some way during their high school years. The most common response was that I KNOW I CAN helped them with their college applications and with completing the FAFSA. The student athletes reported that participation in high school athletics helped them stay focused on school. Others credited activities such as Bank One/Chase Leadership Academy as important in providing knowledge about skills such as management, negotiation, networking, and leadership.

The students in this study took advantage of numerous opportunities in high school to help prepare for postsecondary education. They reached out and developed a network of support including family, faculty, peers, and programs that supported their college aspirations. They used their social capital to attain their goal of postsecondary education. They expressed concern about classmates who are not in college and reported that some “did not know” what was available to help them if they wanted to attend college.
5.2. Conclusions

Throughout the research literature, as discussed in Chapter 2, there was a consistent pattern that included the importance of: (a) the family and school personnel in helping first-generation students prepare for college (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Trusty, 2004; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004); (b) a social support system that moves the student toward postsecondary education (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005); (c) the participation in a rigorous academic curriculum (ACT, 2004; Adelman, 2006; Choy, 2001; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001), and (d) assistance in the college application and financial aid process (Choy, 2001; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). The findings of this study supported the research literature as follows:

1. The first-generation urban students in this study developed a strong social network, including both the family members and the school personnel that assisted them in accessing postsecondary education. The description by one participant of her mother’s support through the college application process in the statement, “My mother…she stayed on me”, summed up similar comments by a number of participants. Teachers were an important part of the social network for several participants as exhibited by teacher comments of “you can do it, you know you can.”

2. The participants developed positive relationships with significant individuals who assisted them in setting and attaining goals for postsecondary education. For example, a student described how when he doubted his abilities, his counselor
“gave me the confidence to get my grades up” and his teacher was “always pushing me and saying I can make it.”

3. These first-generation urban students perceived that there were both strengths and weaknesses in their preparation for postsecondary education. AP classes were described as “a workload similar to what we might experience in college” and the course that “made be a better critical thinker”. Most felt they did not develop the study skills in high school that would have helped them in college. The statements “Study habits in high school! I didn’t study” and “I knew what to do in high school, but I would just cheat myself” were reflective of the lack of study skill development in high school.

4. Many of the participants felt they were behind academically as they entered postsecondary education. They described their frustration of feeling behind many of their college classmates in statements such as “It seemed they covered a lot more in classes than we did” and “I felt like I was dumb and I knew I wasn’t.”

5. Programs such as I KNOW I CAN and Bank One/Chase Leadership Academy were beneficial in preparing the students for postsecondary education and assisting them with financial aid. The I KNOW I CAN financial aid evening was cited as important to a number of the participants in getting assistance to “fill out the forms” and “filling it out online” during the workshop.

The first-generation urban students who participated in this study consistently expressed the importance of their families and the school faculty in assisting them in accessing postsecondary education. They discussed the support that family members gave them (e.g., encouragement, emotional, and financial) as they navigated high school, the
college application process, and the transition to postsecondary education. They acknowledged that there were school counselors, teachers, and administrators who were instrumental in providing the academic support, encouragement, and challenging curriculum in certain areas (e.g., AP English was identified most frequently as providing the rigor that prepared them for postsecondary education). The school personnel also provided support in the college application process and help in applying for financial aid. Peers and other individuals were also identified as relational components that impacted the students’ decisions to pursue postsecondary education.

As students moved to the postsecondary level of their education, they recognized academic deficits that created challenges. Most notable of these were in the sciences, especially laboratory work, and higher level mathematics. Poor time management and inadequate study skills were identified as problematic in postsecondary education. They expressed concern that their academic deficits and poor time management and study skills placed them behind many of their college peers and required them to work far harder and still not get as good of grades.

The participants identified the I KNOW I CAN program and Bank One/Chase Leadership Academy as positive forces in moving them toward postsecondary education. They commended the I KNOW I CAN volunteers for assisting them with a variety of college access issues including college applications, FAFSA, and financial support (through the I KNOW I CAN Last Dollar Grant). Those who participated in the Bank One/Chase Leadership Academy articulated that it was important in providing them with a broad base of skills (i.e. setting up a checking account, interviewing skills, networking).
As stated previously, the interrelationship of the members of the social network is a key component in the support for these first-generation urban students’ access to postsecondary education. “It takes a village” is a commonly used phrase and in these students’ lives, they acknowledge that the village helped them attain their dream of college. For many of their high school classmates, a part of the social network may have been missing resulting in them being denied access to postsecondary education. The following section presents an emerging framework that depicts the relationships of the social network for college access.

5.3. Emerging Conceptual Framework

The social networks, as reported by the participants in the study, were an essential ingredient in these first-generation urban students’ access to college. Using the data collected from the interviews and biographical questionnaires, an emerging conceptual framework was developed to depict the social support network that the participants reported as important to them. As illustrated in Figure 5.1, four groups interacted with the participants to enable them to successfully gain access to college. These four groups included family members, peers, school personnel, and community. Each group provided support of some type that the participants reported as important to them.

Within each box are the types of support that were reported as important. The family provided encouragement, emotional and financial support, and information (i.e. for FAFSA, college applications, etc.) to the students. The familial support extended for the participants from the college access process and continued as they progressed through college. While their parents and/or families could not always give them direct information about the college application process or the college experience, they
provided emotional support that bridged the high school and postsecondary experiences. Participants described “unconditional love” and “motivation” as examples of emotional support from their families.

While peers were not reported as important in impacting college choices, they provided encouragement and shared information when they learned something that other first-generation students might need to know. The example set by peers who did not attend college influenced the decision of several participants to attend college. They observed older friends “working in jobs they did not like.” Such individuals provided the participants with the motivation to persist in the pursuit of a college degree. Also, for some participants, being a role model for younger peers was influential in them attending college.

For most of the participants, the school was the primary source of information for accessing college. The school provided encouragement, academic rigor (in some areas; other areas were lacking), college access information (applications, scholarships, financial aid), and the opportunity for activities that helped students develop leadership and social skills. The participants in the study developed relationships with members of the faculty that they cited as important in their college decision-making process. The faculty members also provided the participants with encouragement that made them feel they could succeed in college.

Organizations from the community (i.e. I KNOW I CAN, Bank One/Chase Leadership Academy) provided financial support through grants and scholarships, informational programs, and college access information (applications, scholarships,
financial aid, etc.). Information was provided to family members as well as the students in accessing financial aid.

The arrows from each of the four groups toward the first-generation college students represent the direct link with the student. The double arrows connecting the four support groups to each other pictorially represent the connections between the groups in supporting the students. There are connections between all four support groups to varying degrees. For some students, one area of support may have been stronger than another, but all reported support from each group to a varying degree. When one area was not as strong, another group provided more support.

This conceptual framework suggests that the social networks surrounding the first-generation student provide support in their quest to access postsecondary education. Additionally, the participants in the study used this support system in moving from high school to postsecondary education. Once in college, most students took advantage of tutoring, writing labs, math labs, study groups, and other academic support activities.
Figure 5.1: Emerging Conceptual Framework – Critical Social Support for First-Generation Urban Students in Accessing College
5.4. Discussion and Implications

“The key to achievement for students from poverty is creating relationships with them” (Payne, 1998). The participants in this study had an extensive network of caring adults in their lives as they progressed through high school toward postsecondary education. They had strong connections with family members and with adult members of the faculty at their high school. They were involved in activities that helped them develop positive relationships with other adults and their peers. There were people from outside of the school who played a significant role in helping them access college.

The postsecondary educational process for first-generation, urban college students starts long before their first day in college. There is a poster in the researcher’s office with pictures of five year olds in oversized caps and gowns with the caption, “College Begins in Kindergarten.” For first-generation urban college students, there must be an ongoing process of information dissemination about college throughout their education for both the students and their families. Research shows that low-income and ethnic minority students are two years behind by the end of 4th grade, three years behind in reading and math by the end of 8th grade, and four years behind if they reach 12th grade (KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2007). The findings in this study indicated that all of the participants, most of whom were excellent students in high school, encountered challenges in college of varying degrees. To provide an equal opportunity for postsecondary education for low income first-generation urban students, the family and school must work together to support the education of the students. In addition, the K-12 school system must work closely with the postsecondary system to ensure alignment of
curriculum. It is through this type of alignment that all students, including urban first-generation students, will be prepared to enter college ready to perform at college level.

One participant in the study while reflecting on his preparation said that “it’s not the teachers, it’s the environment” as he explained a school culture where many students were not focused on their education. He observed that his college classmates from suburban schools were “focused sooner”. The findings in this study point toward the necessity of all stakeholders maintaining high expectations to develop an environment of learning and working together to create it. Parents must have high expectations of their children and the school; the school must have high expectations of the students and expect support from their parents; the students must have high expectations of their school and of themselves. According to the findings, part of the students did not have the high expectations of themselves in high school that would have made them better prepared for college. They recognized that by not pushing themselves in high school, that college was harder. The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of early planning for postsecondary education, working hard in school, reading for pleasure, developing good study and time management skills early in the educational process, and striving for excellence.

The voices missing in this study are those who planned to attend college and did not go and those who started and left. The participants in this study expressed their concern for those former classmates who are not attending college and in many cases “working in a job I did not like all my life” as one participant described it when explaining why attending college was important to her. Of concern to educators and
parents of potential first-generation urban college students must be the answer to the question: what prevented them from accessing postsecondary education?

5.5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are suggestions for the various stakeholders who prepare first-generation urban students for postsecondary education including parents, teachers, administrators, and school counselors. There are also recommendations for postsecondary educators who will be interacting with the students as they transition from high school to college.

5.5.1. Recommendations for Teachers

The powerful influence of the family is evident with each participant in this study as well as the influence of teachers and other school personnel. Therefore, development of positive relationships with the family and the school is important in preparing students for postsecondary education. Frequent communication with the family of the students can foster the home/school connection that will empower parents to be an integral part of the educational process for their students. This is especially significant for parents who have not attended college. According to Choy (2001), if the parents of first-generation students are involved with the secondary school, the students are more likely to pursue postsecondary education. Participants in this study described that their parents did not have a good understanding of the college application process and appreciated any information they received from the school.

The relationships that students in this study developed with teachers were cited as important in the decisions the students made to attend college. They felt that the encouragement they received from certain teachers about their abilities moved them
toward college. Furthermore, the relationships the students had with one or more teachers gave them people they trusted to go to for information.

The college students in this study verbalized that a lack of time management and study skills impacted their college grades. Providing instruction in both time management and study skills early and embedding it as an ongoing part of the curriculum can have a positive impact on students’ achievement both in high school and college. Students expressed the need for high expectations of them by all of their teachers. They encouraged teachers to expect students to develop and use higher level thinking and problem solving skills. They acknowledged that there would be resistance on the part of the student, but that becoming better independent learners in high school would have benefited them in college. The participants encouraged teachers to require students to search for answers if they do not understand instead of automatically giving answers. They should then bring their results back to the teacher and discuss the process with the teacher. High expectations by teachers of all students result in improved academic achievement, and that results in students who are prepared for college (Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005).

The use of technology as a part of learning was mentioned by some of the students. Integrating technology into the classroom and providing opportunities for research via the internet, submission of assignments online, and communication between teacher and student was suggested as ways of helping students develop the skills they will need in postsecondary education.
5.5.2. Recommendations for Administrators

The need for academic rigor in all high school courses was expressed by the students in this study. Administrators have a responsibility to ensure that students have access to and are encouraged to engage in coursework that provides them with the foundational knowledge that will ensure success in postsecondary education. Providing opportunities to educate parents of first-generation students about the importance of a rigorous curriculum, as prescribed throughout the research literature, is essential in encouraging that students take the coursework that will prepare them for college. Providing information at parent meetings and all communications to the home, from the beginning of high school, is important in establishing a culture in which students are encouraged by their families to take rigorous coursework.

Students in the study described a lack of science laboratory work as an impediment in their success in college level science coursework. The need for the equipment and supplies to provide this experience is important. ACT (2004) cites that by taking higher level science coursework (i.e. Chemistry and Physics), students ACT scores increase and their chances of academic success in college also increases. Technological knowledge was a challenge for some of the participants and they suggested more in-depth experience in high school with using technology for research, submitting assignments, and communicating with faculty. Providing funds in the budget for the equipment and supplies for both science and technology is important in providing the rigor that students need to succeed in college.
5.5.3. Recommendations for Parents and Family Members

Parents play a major role in helping their children attain postsecondary education as evidenced in the findings of this study. They should provide encouragement to their children to work at a high level throughout their school years and maintain a close relationship with the school. It is important for the family to learn who in the school to contact about college information. Parents should ask the school for important deadlines in the college and scholarship application process if they are not provided with the deadlines. By working closely with the school, parents can ensure that they and their student understand the process for applying to college.

5.5.4. Recommendations for School Counselors

The participants in the study identified the school counselor as an important connection in providing them with information about colleges, the college application process, scholarship information, and financial aid information. It is important for the school counselor to be knowledgeable in the process and have a system in place to disseminate the information to interested parties including students, parents, and faculty members. This can be accomplished through classroom guidance lessons, small group presentations, presentations at parent meetings, presentations to the faculty, newsletters, and bulletin boards.

The school counselor is in a position to provide to students and families, early in the high school years, the information the students will need to make course selections throughout high school that will prepare them for college. Some participants in the study reported regrets that they did not take higher level courses that would have helped them in college while others reported that they did not work as hard in high school as they
should have. The development of an academic plan that is consistent with the students’ academic and career goals is essential in providing them with the skills they will need to be successful as they transition to postsecondary education (Trusty, 2004).

As a part of developing an academic plan, the school counselor’s role also includes providing information about careers and assisting in selection of courses that will prepare the students for postsecondary education and attaining their career goals. The counselor can collaborate with other faculty members to provide instruction in the time management skills and study skills the participants of this study identified as important to develop at the secondary level.

5.5.5. Recommendations for Postsecondary Educators

First-generation urban college students arrive at college with the challenge of not having someone at home to call upon for direction when they have questions. They are in uncharted territory that no one in their family has experienced. Therefore, they need additional support and guidance from the college or university personnel. It is essential that first-generation students be identified and be offered opportunities to participate in groups with other first-generation students where they feel comfortable in asking questions. They also need information about the types of academic and social support systems in place on the campus such as math labs, writing centers, counseling centers, etc. Connecting first-generation freshmen with upper class first-generation students as mentors would be beneficial. According to Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004), universities that link first-generation freshmen with upperclassmen and faculty provide an atmosphere for students to integrate socially into the institution. This, in turn, results in
persistence that results in completion of postsecondary education for first-generation students.

5.6. Limitations of the Study

There are limitations within any research method. For this study, a qualitative research method was chosen to answer the aforementioned research questions concerning the perceptions of first-generation, urban students of their secondary school preparation for postsecondary education. The qualitative research methodology allowed the in-depth questioning “to understand the meaning of participants’ lives in the participants’ own terms” (Janesick, 2000, p. 382). Further, this study reflects the perceptions of a select group of students who received their secondary education at one high school in an urban Midwestern metropolitan area.

A major limitation of qualitative research is that it cannot be generalized to another population. This study focuses on the experiences of graduates of the same urban high school and examines their perceptions of their preparation for postsecondary education. While the results cannot be generalized to another population, there is information that can be learned from the stories of these first-generation college students.

5.7. Suggestions for Future Research

There are several areas in which future research would be of interest. The challenges of college level writing were problematic for the English as Second Language (ESL) students in this study. The participants concern was the lack of experience with the extensive writing required in college coursework that was not addressed in the curriculum for ESL classes. Further, studying ESL students and their writing preparation for
postsecondary education would be of benefit for both secondary and postsecondary educators and policy makers.

The current study’s population was those urban students who had successfully matriculated to college and were currently attending. They spoke frequently of their high school peers who had grades and abilities equal to or better than theirs, but did not, for a variety of reasons, pursue postsecondary education. Of interest would be a study with first-generation urban students who had indicated in high school that they planned to attend college, but did not follow through with those plans. In a similar vein, it was learned while contacting potential participants for this study that a number of first-generation students had started and then left college. Further, conducting more research into their reasons for leaving postsecondary education and comparison to their peers who were successfully completing college would be of benefit to secondary educators in preparing students for postsecondary education and to postsecondary educators interested in college retention issues.

During the interviews for this study, there were a number of references by the participants to the family as a powerful influence on their decision making for college. As a part of those responses, the participants frequently explained that their parents had little or no knowledge of how to help them through the process even though they provided encouragement and emotional support. There is a small amount of research available in the area of parents of first-generation students, but it is an area that needs further exploration to assist both secondary and postsecondary educators who work with first-generation students and their families.
Finally, the school in this study is a part of the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative and has changed to three small schools within the large high school. The purpose is to raise student achievement, graduation rates, and college attendance. This is done through a rigorous and relevant curriculum centered on relationships between students, families, and faculty (KnowledgeWorks Foundation – High School Initiatives, 2007). The first-year college students in this study were the last graduates of the high school before the transformation. The timing of this study provides a baseline of information about the perceptions of the students before the transformation. It would be beneficial to study college students who are graduates of the “transformed” high school three years from now using this study as a baseline to determine if there are differences in students’ perceptions of their preparation for postsecondary education and, if there are, what those perceptions are.

5.8. Giving Back

Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) emphasize the importance of the qualitative researcher “giving back” (p. 124) to the community in which research is done. The administration and staff at the high school provided the connections necessary to contact the students who participated in this study. The time the college students and the high school faculty members gave to the study was of their own free will and without any compensation. Qualitative research by its very nature is intrusive with the interviewing and questioning of the participants. It is, therefore, important that the knowledge gained by the researcher in this study be offered back to the school community. To this end, the information will be presented to the faculty of the high school in a written summary detailing the major findings and recommendations. It will also be offered as a
presentation to the staff. It is the hope of the researcher that the information and insights gained from this research can assist the faculty as they plan curriculum and programs for future first-generation students who will be pursuing postsecondary education.

5.9. Final Thoughts

It is rare for a practicing high school counselor to have the opportunity to follow up with students once they have left the confines of the high school and moved into the world of postsecondary education. Other than a fleeting moment as they stop in for a quick moment during their first breaks from school or to pick up their yearbook, there is little contact with them. The chance to sit down with students and ask questions about their experiences in college and how they were prepared for those experiences in the depth of this study provided a unique experience for the researcher and, hopefully, for the students. The openness of the students in this study in sharing their experiences has provided a new perspective into the importance of the role that educators and families play in helping first-generation students achieve their postsecondary education goals.
REFERENCES

ACT. (2004). *Crisis at the core: Preparing all students for college and work* (Rep.). Iowa City, IA: ACT, Inc.


Auerbach, S. (2002). "Why do they give the good classes to some and not to others?" Latino parent narratives of struggle in a college access program. *Teachers College Record, 104*, 1369-1392.


Trusty, J. (2004). Effects of students’ middle-school and high-school experiences on completion of the bachelor’s degree. [Monograph]. *Center for School Counseling Outcome Research, 1*, 1-46.


March 1, 2007

Dear Columbus Public Schools Graduate:

Your expertise is needed! I am a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University in the Counselor Education Program. I invite you to participate in my research entitled “First-Generation Urban College Students Speaking Out about Their Secondary School Preparation for Postsecondary Education.” You are one of many first-generation college students who are being asked to share your perceptions and experiences of your preparation for college, during your high school years. You are the expert, and your knowledge can help others. As a student who is the first-generation in your family to attend college, your experiences can aid school counselors, administrators, and teachers in urban schools in preparing other students who will be first-generation college students. The information can also assist higher education professionals and educational policymakers in developing curricula and programs to assist future first-generation students.

Participating in this study will take between 1 and 2 hours of your time. You will be asked to complete a biographical questionnaire and participate in one face-to-face interview that will be audio taped and transcribed. A pseudonym of your choice will be used on both the questionnaire and face-to-face interview to protect your identity.

Your participation in this research project is strictly voluntary. You may discontinue your participation in the project at any time, without penalty. All information generated will be treated confidentially, and all information obtained from your participation in the study will be stored in a secured file cabinet in my office.

If you are a first-generation college student and interested in participating, please review the attached form, sign the form and provide your information, and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Please feel free to contact me via email (reid.152@osu.edu) or my dissertation adviser, Dr. James L. Moore III (moore.1408@osu.edu), if you would like additional information.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Jeanne Reid, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
The Ohio State University
First-Generation Urban College Students Speaking Out about Their Secondary School Preparation for Postsecondary Education

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Home Address
Information: ___________________________________________________________

Street Address: _________________________________________________________

City, State, & Zip Code: _________________________________________________

School Address Information
School: ________________________________________________________________

Street Address: _________________________________________________________

City, State, & Zip Code: _________________________________________________

Email address: __________________________________________________________

Telephone Number _____________________________________________________

_________________________________________                     ________________________
Signature                  Date

Return in the enclosed envelope to:
Ms. Jeanne Reid, M.A.
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXX, OH  43XXX
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Individual Interview Protocol

1. Where are you attending school and what year are you?

2. When did you first decide to attend college and what or who helped you make that decision?

3. How do your high school and college grades compare to your peers?

4. What do you plan to do with your degree?

5. Who in your high school, if anyone, helped you with your decision to attend college? 
   Probes: Teachers? School Counselor? Principal? Other?

6. Who outside of school helped you with your college decision? 
   Probes: Family? Friend(s)? Others?

7. What are the three most important reasons you chose the college you are currently attending?

8. Is the college you are attending your first choice? If not, why?

9. What was the most difficult part of the college application process for you and why?

10. How would you compare your preparation in high school for college to that of your classmates in college? 
    Probes: Those who attended urban public schools? Those who attended rural public schools? Those who attended suburban public schools? Those who attended private schools?

11. If you could change one aspect of your preparation in high school for college, what would you do differently and why?

12. What courses or special programs in high school best helped you prepare for college and why?

13. What has been the most difficult part of the transition from high school to college for you? 
    Probes: The academic work? Being away from family? Other?

14. Is there anything that you thought would be more difficult during the transition than it has been?
15. How are you paying for your education?

16. What type of financial aid information for college did you receive at your high school?

17. Who helped you with completing the paperwork to obtain financial aid and what type of help did they give you?

18. If you are working while attending school, describe the type of work you are doing and how much time you work each week? How does your work schedule impact your school work, if at all?

19. If you have taken out loans for college, how did you feel about doing so?
   *Probe: What were the reactions of your family members about taking out loans for your education?*

20. Did you or your family receive any information about borrowing money for college while in high school, and if yes, what type of information?
   *Probes: Pamphlets? Workshops? I Know I Can? Other? And how useful was this information?*

21. What advice do you have for current high school freshmen about preparing in high school to be successful in college?

22. What advice do you have for current high school seniors about preparing for college during their senior year that will make them better prepared for their first year in college?

23. What advice do you have for high school counselors, teacher, and administrators that would help them prepare students who will be the first generation in their families to attend college for the postsecondary experience?
APPENDIX C

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE
First-Generation Urban College Students
Speaking Out about Their Secondary School Preparation for Postsecondary Education

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Please answer the following questions. Feel free to skip any questions that you may feel uncomfortable answering.

Pseudonym___________________________________________

Place of Birth _________________________________________

Gender ____________ Age ____________ High School Graduation Year ___________

How many years did you attend Columbus Public Schools? ______________

Did you attend the same high school from 9th grade through graduation?  Yes    No
If not, which schools did you attend and during what grades?
________________________________________________________________________

If you attended high schools outside of Columbus Public, where did you attend? And which grade levels?
________________________________________________________________________ Grade(s)________________

During high school, did you receive free lunch? Yes    No
During high school, did you receive reduced price lunch?  Yes    No

Parents’ educational background (Check the highest level completed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No school</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/Junior high school</td>
<td>____</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business or trade school</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate or professional school</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which one best describes your family living arrangement while in high school?

   _____ Lived with both parents
   _____ Lived with mother only
   _____ Lived with father only
   _____ Parents were not together, but shared custody
   _____ Lived with a relative
   _____ Lived in foster care
   _____ Emancipated minor
   _____ Other (please describe)_______________________________________

How many brothers and sisters do you have older than you? _______ Younger? _______

How many are attending or attended college? ____________

What is the highest level of math you took in high school?

   _____ Integrated Algebra
   _____ Algebra 2
   _____ College Prep Math
   _____ Pre-calculus
   _____ Calculus
   _____ Other (please specify) _______________________________________

How many years of foreign language did you take before entering college?

   a. none
   b. 1 year
   c. 2 years
   d. 3 years
   e. 4 years or more

How many AP classes did you take in high school?

   a. None
   b. One
   c. Two
   d. Three or more

If you took AP classes, what were they?

_______________________________________________________________________

Did you attend Post Secondary Education Options while in high school?

   a. Yes Which courses? _____________________________________________
   b. No

If you received college credit during high school, how many hours did you receive?

   a. Less than 5
   b. 5-10
   c. Greater than 10 Were they quarter hours or semester hours? ___________
If you took the following tests, at what grade levels did you take them (7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th) and what was your highest scores?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Grade Level Taken</th>
<th>Highest Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSAT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check which best reflects your high school cumulative grade point average:

- A (3.75-4.0)
- A- (3.50-3.74)
- B+ (3.25-3.49)
- B (2.75-3.24)
- B- (2.5 – 2.74)
- C+ (2.25-2.49)
- C or lower (less than 2.25)

During high school, what activities did you participate in?

- Athletics  What sports?__________________________
- Cheerleading
- Chess Club
- Class Officer
- Choir
- Concert Band
- Dance Team
- Debate Team
- Drama Club
- Fellowship of Christian Athletes
- In The Know
- Marching Band
- Mentor/Tutor for other students
- National Honor Society
- Senior Cabinet
- Student Council
- Church Youth Group
- Volunteer Work outside of school (number of hours per week ______)
- Worked for pay (number of hours per week ______)
- Other ________________________________
Check which best reflects your college cumulative grade point average:

- A  (3.75-4.0)
- A- (3.50-3.74)
- B+ (3.25-3.49)
- B  (2.75-3.24)
- B- (2.5 – 2.74)
- C+ (2.25-2.49)
- C or lower (less than 2.25)

Which of the following best describes the college/university you attend (check all that apply)?

- State supported university
- Private college or university
- Single gender college or university
- Historically Black College or University
- Enrollment over 25,000 students
- Enrollment between 15,000 and 25,000 students
- Enrollment between 5,000 and 14,999 students
- Enrollment between 2,000 and 4,999 students
- Enrollment of less than 2,000 students

Where did you live during your first year in college?

a. At home
b. Dormitory
c. Apartment
d. Rooming house
e. Other ________________________________________

If you are beyond your first year of college, where do you currently live?

a. This is my first year
b. At home
c. Dormitory
d. Apartment
e. Rooming house
f. Other ________________________________________

What type of financial aid do you receive? (circle all that apply)

a. None
b. Scholarships
c. Grants
d. Work study
e. I Know I Can Last Dollar Grant
f. Loans
How many hours a week do you work during the school year?
   a. None
   b. Less than 10 hours per week
   c. 10-15 hours per week
   d. 16-20 hours per week
   e. 21-25 hours per week
   f. More than 25 hours per week

Who were the most instrumental persons and programs to influence your decision to attend college?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What kind of support did these persons and programs provide?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What kind of support do these individuals provide to you in college?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Reflecting back, what support or resources do you wish you had while in high school to help you be successful in college? And, why?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANTS’ DEMOGRAPHIC RESPONSES

FROM BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>HS Grad Yr</th>
<th>HS GPA</th>
<th>College GPA</th>
<th>Mother’s Education</th>
<th>Father’s Education</th>
<th>Who lived with in HS</th>
<th># Yrs Foreign Language</th>
<th>Highest Level Math</th>
<th># AP Classes</th>
<th>PS EO</th>
<th>Worked in College</th>
<th>Free/Reduced Lunch in HS</th>
<th>Yrs at BH HS</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taniya</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2.75-3.24</td>
<td>3.75-4.0</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Alg. 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shayna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>3.75-4.0</td>
<td>2.75-3.24</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>AP Calculus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3.75-4.0</td>
<td>3.25-3.49</td>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td>Both Parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pre-calculus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3.75-4.0</td>
<td>3.75-4.0</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>MS/Jr. High</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pre-calculus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3.75-4.0</td>
<td>2.5-2.74</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Both Parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pre-calculus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cam</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2.5-2.74</td>
<td>3.5-3.74</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>College Prep Math</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3.5-3.74</td>
<td>2.5-2.74</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>AP Calculus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terra</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3.5-3.74</td>
<td>Below 2.25</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>MS/Jr. High</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Algebra 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JB</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3.75-4.0</td>
<td>Below 2.25</td>
<td>No School</td>
<td>No School</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pre-Calculus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3.25-3.49</td>
<td>Below 2.25</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Both Parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>English is 4th language</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2.5-2.74</td>
<td>2.5-2.74</td>
<td>Business School</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Both Parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Algebra 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2.75-3.24</td>
<td>2.75-3.24</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Multiple Relative s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Integrated Algebra</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Algebra 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

RESEARCH TEAM DESCRIPTION
Description of Research Team Members

**Researcher: M. Jeanne Reid**

The researcher in the current study is a Caucasian female. She is a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University (OSU) and a full time Licensed Professional School Counselor in Columbus Public Schools, Columbus, Ohio. She has supervised master’s level practicum and internship students. In addition, she has co-instructed the internship, practicum, and guidance and counseling courses at OSU. She has completed courses in both the qualitative and quantitative research series. Her major area is Counselor Education and her cognate area is Educational Leadership.

**Research Team Member #1:**

Research Team Member #1 is a Caucasian female. She is in her first year as a doctoral student in Higher Education at Ohio University. She has three years work experience in college admissions and has worked extensively with first-generation college students. In addition, she has experience in qualitative research methodology.

**Research Team Member #2:**

Research Team Member #2 is a Caucasian female. She is a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and School Psychology at The Ohio State University. She is a counselor at the Younkin Success Center at OSU and works with students in career planning. She has experience in qualitative research methodology.
APPENDIX F

CODE WORKSHEET
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Category or Subcode</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
<th>Key Quote(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

CODEBOOK
Emerging Codes: Categories and Subcode Definitions

People Who Impacted Decisions about College (PID)
Students’ perceptions of those who helped them with college decisions
- **Support of Parents (SOP)**
  Responses related to parent impact on college decisions
- **Extended Family (FAM)**
  Responses related to impact of extended family on college decisions
- **Peers (PEER)**
  Responses related to impact of peers on college decisions
- **Teachers (TCH)**
  Responses related to impact of teachers on college decisions
- **School Counselors (SC)**
  Responses related to impact of school counselors on college decisions
- **Administrators (ADM)**
  Responses related to impact of administrators on college decisions
- **Others (OTH)**
  Responses related to impact of other people on college decisions

Influences to Attend College (IAC)
Students’ perceptions of what influenced them to attend college
- **Career Opportunities (COP)**
  Responses related to career opportunities resulting from college education
- **Concern about Perceptions of Others (CAP)**
  Responses related to how others would perceive them if they did or did not attend college
- **High Expectations (HEX)**
  Responses related to high expectations – both self and others’ expectations
- **Role Models – Those Who Went to College (RM – TWW)**
  Influences related to older peers who attended college
- **Role Models – Those Who Did Not Go to college (RM – DNG)**
  Influences related to older peers who did not go to college
- **Being a Role Model for Others (BRM)**
  Responses related to being a role model for younger siblings and friends
- **Impact of Random Comments and Events (RCE)**
  Responses related to comments and events that influenced students to attend college
- **Getting Away from the Inner City (AIC)**
  Responses related to leaving the neighborhood
- **Getting Away from Family (AFF)**
  Responses related to leaving family
- **Distance from Home (DFH)**
  Responses related to distance of the college from home
- **Pacts with Friends to Attend College (PAC)**
Influence of agreements with friends on college attendance

High School Preparation for Success (HSS)
Students’ perceptions of their high school preparation that helped them successfully attend college

- Caring Teachers (CT)
  Responses related to the importance of caring teachers
- Teachers with High Expectations (THE)
  Responses related to the importance of teachers having high expectations
- Rigorous Courses (RIG)
  Responses related to the importance of rigorous courses
- AP Classes (APC)
  Responses related to the impact of AP classes
- I KNOW I CAN Program (IKIC)
  Responses related to the impact of the I KNOW I CAN program
- Bank One/Chase Leadership Academy (CLA)
  Responses related to the influence of the Bank One/Chase Leadership Academy
- Upward Bound (UPB)
  Responses related to the influence of Upward Bound
- Writing in English Classes (WEC)
  Responses related to the impact of writing skills learned in English classes
- Help with Applications (HWA)
  Responses related to help received with applications
- Athletics (ATH)
  Responses related to the impact of athletic participation
- School Counselors as a Resource (SCR)
  Responses related to the school counselor as a resource for information

Barriers to College Success (BCS)
Students’ perceptions of the aspects of their high school preparation that are barriers to success in college

- Sub-par Academic Skills (SAS)
  Responses related to academic skills below what is needed for success
- Study Skills (SSK)
  Responses related to study skills
- Time Management Skills (TMS)
  Responses related to ability to manage time
- Writing Skills in ESL Classes (ESL)
  Responses related to writing skills for those in ESL classes
- Lack of Challenging Coursework (LCC)
  Responses related to the lack of rigor of the coursework
- Disinterest in Doing Well in High School (DDW)
  Responses related to students lack of interest during high school
- Getting by in High School (GBH)
  Responses related to doing the minimum to get by in high school
• Lack of Science Labs (LSL)
  Responses related to the lack of lab experiences in high school science classes

Financing College (FIN)
Students’ perceptions of their successes and challenges in financing their education
• FAFSA (FAF)
  Responses related to completing the FAFSA
• Scholarship Applications (SAP)
  Responses related to completing scholarship applications
• Fear of Loans (FOL)
  Responses related to student and family fears of loans
• Understanding Loans (UNL)
  Responses related to understanding types of loans
• Independent Students (IND)
  Responses related to challenges for independent students
• Parental Involvement in Finances for College (PIF)
  Responses related to parent involvement in financing education

Knowing What to Expect in College (WTE)
Students’ perceptions of what they knew and did not know about the college experience and how they could have been prepared to know
• What Students Did Not Know (DNK)
  Responses related to what they did not know about the college experience
• Need for Information about What College Is Like (INF)
  Responses about what information they needed to know about what college is like
• Who Could Provide Knowledge (WPK)
  Responses about who could have provided them with knowledge about college and who did give them information
• First-Generation as Different (FGD)
  Responses related to the differences of being a first generation student
• Impact of One’s Socioeconomic Status (SES)
  Responses related to their socioeconomic status
• Challenge of Being Different (CBD)
  Responses related to being different than classmates
• Being a Minority (BAM)
  Responses related to being a minority
APPENDIX H

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS’ PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER’S

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

As a member of this research team, I understand that I will be provided access to transcriptions of confidential interviews and biographical questionnaires. The information in these documents has been revealed by the research participants in this project who agreed in good faith that their interviews would remain confidential. I understand that as a member of this research team that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement and hereby agree not to share the information in the aforementioned documents with anyone except M. Jeanne Reid, the primary researcher of this project, and other members of the research team. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a breach of ethical standards and I pledge not to do so.

Research Team Member ______________________________

Signature

Date __________________________
APPENDIX I

IRB CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in the project research entitled: “First-Generation Urban College Students Speaking Out about Their Secondary School Preparation for Postsecondary Education.”

Dr. James L. Moore III, Principal Investigator, or his authorized representative, Ms. Jeanne Reid, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

I understand that the interview will be audiotaped and give my consent for taping. ☐Yes ☐No

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ___________________________________  Signed: ___________________________________

(Participant)

Signed: ___________________________________

Witness: ___________________________________
APPENDIX J

IRB APPROVAL